



Cape Fear Firebird

The Light of Save the Cape

May 1, 2011

L'environnement! C'est une chose trop grave pour la confier à des militaires.

Reconnaissance Released

Last December the Secretary of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources issued a letter of intent to the Wilmington District of the US Army Corps of Engineers committing the State to share the costs of a feasibility study for navigation improvements in the Cape Fear River. Other than listing three problems to be addressed, no details were provided—nothing about the nature of the proposed solutions, the size of the vessels to be accommodated, or the cost of the study or the improvements contemplated by be financed, in part, by the State.

That information was in a draft “Section 905(b) analysis,” part of a Corps of Engineers reconnaissance study that is a necessary prerequisite for a feasibility study. The Corps would not release the draft to us. NCDENR did not have it. The Governor’s office did not have it. The State Ports Authority denied having it. But they did, as we later discovered. That is another story.

The final Section 905(b) Analysis was released on April 28. And a dreadful, dangerous piece of work it is. It is a revision of the analysis originally prepared over a year ago for the North Carolina International Terminal. We had found that document to be without compeer in awfulness—shallow, incomplete, bearing no resemblance to orderly technical inquiry. This version is worse:

- The analysis does not follow the Corps six-step procedure prescribed for these studies.
- The report retains as an option the North Carolina International Terminal, contrary to the specific instruction of the Secretary of DENR in the letter of intent.
- The economic analysis of the NCIT counts benefits “captured” from other ports, which is not only faulty analysis but is specifically prohibited by law.
- The economic analysis of the navigation improvements requested by the Secretary overstates the benefits by a factor of at least ten in order to achieve a conclusion of feasibility.
- The analysis proposes going forward with a plan to widen the river by cutting into a site contaminated with PCBs, creosote and dioxins, to dredge closer to Battery Island, exacerbating an erosion problem at this important white ibis rookery, and to enlarge the controversial channel at Bald Head, which now captures sand moving along the beaches, requiring constant replenishment.

Meanwhile, back in Raleigh, the General Assembly is being asked to contribute \$2.5 million for the study. Then if the project is pursued, another \$14.4 million. In addition to the \$174 million the State has contributed to create this mess. Details to follow.