



Cape Fear Firebird

The Light of Save the Cape

May 15, 2011

Before it fell over the edge, that tree was probably full of white ibis nests.
-Walker Golder, National Audubon Society

Where have all the ibis gone?



The tree that Walker Golder was speaking of in 2000 was a cedar at the edge of the beach at Battery Island. It had just toppled over due to erosion of that beach—erosion attributed to the wakes from ships in the nearby channel. The occasion was the installation by the Corps of Engineers of large sand-filled tubes on the beach, to retain the sand to be placed to restore the beach. That would protect the trees, essential to the habitat of the site of North Carolina’s largest gathering of wading birds—herons, egrets, and ibis. The island, maintained by the Audubon Society as a sanctuary, is most famous for the flocks of

white ibis that have visited each Spring for breeding. 14,000 in one year.

Also in 2000, the Corps began widening and deepening the channel past Battery Island. In 2004 larger ships with bigger wakes began to use the river. The tubes have long since collapsed; only their remains are visible at low tide. For whatever reason, the white ibis have taken their annual congregation to North Pelican Island. Egrets, we have a few, but on the whole too few to mention.

Now the State Ports Authority wants bigger ships. More powerful. Able to carry many more sneakers from China. And the Corps of Engineers is advancing plans to widen the troublesome turn at Battery Island to accommodate them. Cutting closer to the island and those beaches and trees.

That’s what the “section 905(b) analysis” recently released by the Corps and bashed in our last newsletter is all about. That and NCDENR’s letter expressing intent to share the costs of a \$5.3 million dollar study leading to a \$41 million dredging project to enlarge the channel in the Cape Fear River.

The budget bill now in the General Assembly, H200, has a line item for that study, the Wilmington Harbor Feasibility Study, and \$250,000 to get the project started . Section 30.3(a), item (8).



The white ibis cannot speak for themselves. We must do that.