



Cape Fear Firebird

The Light of Save the Cape

July 10, 2011

Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest.
–Psalm 11:6

An Absence of Accountability

The people of Morehead City are probably not wicked, or at least not any more than most, so perhaps they are not worried about the State Ports Authority's plans for melting brimstone (a.k.a. sulfur) at the State Port at the east end of town. But then, they did not know. It was just disclosed by the *Carteret County News Times* for July 8. But it is unwelcome news to some, especially the people at the yacht basin next to the port. There might be more wickedness there.

The State Ports Authority will be leasing space, now a grassy area, to PCS Phosphate Company to receive solid sulfur from ships, melt it on site, and ship the molten sulfur by barge to its facility at Aurora in Beaufort County. Management of the State Ports Authority has assured its Board of Directors that the emissions of hydrogen sulfide, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen oxide, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, and metals associated with fossil-fuel combustion would not smell. No, indeed. Your faithful editor, who was present at the meeting, does not recall any concern expressed by the directors, but then they were not told about the yacht basin or the five significant natural heritage areas within a mile of the place where the sulfur will be cooked. No one asked what the City thought, or even if the City had been consulted. The Ports Authority does not do that.

This is the same gang who listened in silence a year ago when management recited the tale of the containers of PETN, the most powerful chemical explosive on earth, being punctured by a fork lift when being handled at the port, causing Morehead City to be evacuated. Well, the Marines came down and took care of things, and we'll be more careful next time. One wonders why PETN going to the Midwest was being handled at Morehead City, but if any directors wondered the same thing, they did not speak. Nor did they ask about the community's views of being blown to smithereens.

Perhaps it is the role of political appointees sitting on such a board of directors to be gulled by management, but the interests of the State of North Carolina are at stake here, not some private investors. This is the process that produced the purchase, for \$30 million, of a site for a deepwater port where the water is not deep. A site between a nuclear plant and the largest ammunition terminal in the world. A site nearly inaccessible and far from any significant commerce. And the same process of gulling the Board of Directors was used to gull the communities affected. That's us, folks.

The North Carolina House of Representatives recognizes that the State Ports Authority needs to be made accountable. In H200, the budget bill, the House put the Ports Authority into the Department of Transportation in a "Type I" transfer. That would have given the Secretary authority over port decisions. Alas, the Senate changed the transfer to "Type II," preserving the autonomy that has fostered poor decisions. The General Assembly reconvenes this week. We are asking them to restore the House version on this point. Oversight. Accountability. It is a State agency, is it not?