



# Cape Fear Firebird

*The Light of Save the Cape*

August 3, 2012

*If you find yourself in a hole, the first thing to do is stop digging.*  
–Will Rogers

## More for the Corps

On Tuesday, August 7, the Wilmington District of the US Army Corps of Engineers will hold a “scoping meeting” for the Wilmington Harbor Improvements Feasibility Study, a \$4.6 million study for a \$41 million project to address mistakes in the \$384 million Wilmington Harbor Project.

The Wilmington Harbor Project involves deepening the channel in the Cape Fear River from 38 to 42 feet. The project was started in 1998, the deeper channel was opened in 2004, but parts of the project are not yet complete. When the deeper channel was opened, these problems emerged:

- The turning basin at Wilmington is 1200 feet wide, approximately the width of the river, and the minimum for the 965-foot long design vessel. Turning such a vessel requires ideal conditions and extra tug assistance. *The Corps proposes extending the turning basin upriver and enlarging it to 1450 feet by removing 37 acres of marine and wildlife habitat on one side and penetrating an area contaminated with PCPs and creosote on the other.*
- The channel near the river mouth executes a sharp S-turn that does not comply with Corps standards. In 2000, a simulation study showed that the design vessel could not be navigated through the turn within the marked channel; the Corps went ahead with the project anyway. The river pilots must use the limits of maneuverability for some vessels, and impose draft restrictions. *A channel complying with the standards cannot fit within the banks of the river.*
- The channel through the river mouth, 500 feet wide and 44 feet deep in an area where the historic natural depth is 12 feet, captures sand in its normal littoral drift along the shore. The channel rapidly fills, and the interruption of the littoral drift results in erosion of the beaches, particularly at Bald Head. This problem was anticipated and a sand management plan was adopted in 2000 requiring biennial dredging and beach nourishment at Federal expense. *The necessary funds must be appropriated by Congress each time--that does not always happen.*

The problems have common elements: each was known at the time the project was started; none have a satisfactory solution. Yet the State will spend \$1.9 million for its share of this study.

The study, and the State’s commitment, is based on a Corps “Section 905(b) Analysis” that fills us with dread. Besides the cooked benefit/cost analysis to justify the project, the Corps report includes as an alternative for study a \$1.2 billion project to dredge for the megaport at Southport.

The meeting will be held at the Coastline Convention Center, Room D, in Wilmington from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Comments can be made orally, with a five-minute limit, or in writing.

Save the Cape, Inc

Post Office Box 10542  
[www.savethecape.org](http://www.savethecape.org)

Southport, NC 28461