



“To protect and improve the water quality of the Lower Cape Fear River Basin through education, advocacy, and action.”

August 4, 2010

Resolution: Cape Fear River Watch (CFRW) resolves to oppose the construction of the North Carolina International Terminal located near Southport North Carolina as proposed due to significant anticipated environmental impacts to the River, associated habitats, and the Castle Hayne Aquifer. Additionally, CFRW would oppose any similar construction along the river which would lead to the same magnitude of environmental impacts to the natural resources within the area.

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Cape Fear River Watch Position on the Proposed North Carolina International Terminal

Cape Fear River Watch (CFRW) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and improvement of the water quality of the Lower Cape Fear River Basin through education, advocacy, and action. With this mission in mind, we have taken careful consideration in evaluating the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposal to construct an international terminal along the banks of the Cape Fear River. The North Carolina State Ports Authority purchased a 600-acre site along the west side of the Cape Fear River, north of Southport, with plans to construct a large deepwater container terminal. After careful review of the proposed construction plans, CFRW has determined a port at this ecologically sensitive location would cause irreparable harm to the important natural resources in and around this site. Our goal is to minimize the impact and maximize the health of the river through no or low impact development that minimizes the potential damage to both the river and the surrounding onshore areas. Clearly the proposed international terminal will not comply with this goal and therefore CFRW has taken a strong position opposing the development of this project and is in agreement with the North Carolina Ports Authority decision to suspend the project. Furthermore, CFRW applauds Representative Mike McIntyre's vocal concern with the potential environmental impacts the planned port would bring to the Cape Fear River and associated habitats.

Of utmost concern to the members of this community are the many acres of wetlands that would be lost and or degraded during construction and with site placement. The site is separated from the Cape Fear River by approximately 86 acres of ecologically significant estuarine wetlands (No Port Southport, 2010). An additional 413 acres of the site have been designated as "marsh" by the Brunswick County assessor (Rising Water Associates, 2009). This area also includes 27 acres of inland wetlands and ponds. The North Carolina Coastal Habitat Protection Plan describes these habitats as significant as they offer refuge, foraging areas, and nursery habitat for many species of fish, invertebrates, birds, and mammals. Any loss of these habitats would lead to the degradation of the lower Cape Fear River.

In order to accommodate vessels with a 50-foot draft, the depth of the river will be increased from a depth of merely several feet at the location of the terminal to a depth of 54.5 feet below sea level. Blasting and dredging will not only occur at the terminal site, but will extend from the river channel into state and federal waters offshore. The Castle Hayne aquifer, which is an important local source of drinking water, lies under the terminal site and extends under the Cape Fear River. At the terminal site, test wells place the top of the aquifer at 43 feet below sea level. Dredging to more than 54 feet would penetrate the aquifer over a large area creating a hydraulic connection between the aquifer

place the top of the aquifer at 43 feet below sea level. Dredging to more than 54 feet would penetrate the aquifer over a large area creating a hydraulic connection between the aquifer and the Cape Fear River. The effects of directly connecting brackish to normal salinity seawater from the river to the aquifer are unknown but may be potentially damaging. Furthermore, the effects of dredging to this depth will promote the encroachment of salt water further up the river leading to potential detrimental impacts to anadromous fish species including striped bass and the shortnose sturgeon.

Along with contaminating the aquifer, the extensive dredging will effectively destroy shallow soft bottom habitat as well as shellfish beds and hardbottom habitats found within the river as well as offshore. In the Army Corps report Section 905(b) Analysis they state that "dredging may impact ~202 acres of shallow water habitat and 442 acres of deep water habitat within the Cape Fear River". The offshore habitats are recognized by National Marine Fisheries Service as Essential Fish Habitats and, similar, the wetlands are considered to be important for the health of scores of species.

Upon review of the proposed project, the US Fish and Wildlife Service stated "while direct adverse environmental impacts would be substantial, the most significant environmental damage would result from long-term secondary impacts. Examples of such secondary impacts include increased disposal of dredged materials on nearby beaches... and changes to the hydrology of the Cape Fear River and local groundwater resources... The project, when considered in its entirety, is very likely to result in substantial permanent loss of environmental value...". Part of that loss would be attributable to increased stormwater runoff both during construction and with the site itself. And even if controlled, the loss of the wetlands and replacement with impervious surfaces removes a valuable buffer to the riverine system.

Based on the above mentioned environmental impacts, Cape Fear River Watch has significant concerns with the proposed North Carolina International Terminal, and formally opposes the development of the proposed North Carolina International Terminal project. Furthermore, not only do we agree with the suspension of plans for the project as proposed but that we oppose any port or other facility of that size that would remove and/or impact the important wetland sites, bottom communities, aquatic resources, aquifer, and the other potential impacts that the US Army Corps of Engineers states are important environmental considerations in their February 2010 Analysis of the NC International Terminal Site.