# *How Many Harbors?  How Deep to Dredge?*

The US Army Corps of Engineers, responsible for maintenance of navigation channels, has projects under way or under study for deepening nearly all harbors on the East Coast:

New York:           Project under way to increase depth of channel to Port Elizabeth and Port Newark container terminals from 45 to 50 feet.

Philadelphia:       Project approved to deepen channel in Delaware River to 45 feet.

Baltimore:          Channel maintained at 50 feet.

Hampton Roads:      Channel maintained at 50 feet.

Wilmington, NC:     Channel maintained at 42 feet.  Planned container terminal at Southport would require a channel 50 feet deep.

Charleston:         Study commenced for increasing depth of harbor to  45 feet

Savannah:           Study in final stages for increasing depth of harbor to 48 feet

Jacksonville:       Study in progress for increasing depth of channel to 45 feet.

How many of these projects are necessary?  Each of the channel deepening projects was justified by an analysis conducted in the District in question, and driven by considerations of perceived local needs, without regard to regional or national priorities.

In a report to Congress in 2006 on Corps of Engineers planning and project management processes,  the General Accountability Office reported that

> The recurring themes throughout the five studies that are highlighted in our testimony clearly indicate that the Corps' planning and project management processes cannot ensure that national priorities are appropriately established across the hundreds of civil works projects that are competing for scarce federal resources.

The last comprehensive study of national harbor dredging needs was authorized by the Water Resources Development Act of 1992 and completed in 2000.  The study investigated trends in container vessel size, international trade, port financing mechanisms, and the then current inventory of deep water ports.  All of those trends and circumstances have changed and must be reexamined.  National and regional needs must drive dredging decisions, not local political muscle.

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