

June 8, 2006

Ms. Elizabeth Gillen
Environmental Supervisor
Submerged Lands and Environmental Resources Permitting
Florida Department of Environmental Protection
28,000 A-10 Airport Road
Punta Gorda, FL 33982

RE: Pirate Harbor Inner Channel and Alligator Creek Entrance Channel Dredging Applications

Dear Ms. Gillen,

This letter is to request information and participation in the review process of Charlotte County's Pirate Harbor Inner Channel and Alligator Creek Entrance Channel Dredging permit applications. The Charlotte Harbor National Estuary Program (NEP) is a partnership program, created by Section 320 of the Clean Water Act, to protect and preserve the Charlotte Harbor estuary, recognized as an estuary of national significance and one of the most productive estuaries in the State. Protecting the natural hydraulics, water quality and ecological integrity of the eastern shore of Charlotte Harbor is of great importance to the Charlotte Harbor NEP. The Charlotte Harbor NEP adopted a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) for the estuary and its watershed. This plan was developed utilizing four committees of citizens, scientists, resource managers, industry representatives and policy makers. Our partnership includes, among others, Lee, Hardee, DeSoto, Manatee and Charlotte Counties; the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service; the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission; the Florida Department of Environmental Protection; and both the South and the Southwest Florida Water Management Districts. A part of the implementation of this CCMP is determining the consistency of proposed actions in the Charlotte Harbor watershed with the CCMP.

On August 15, 2005 the Policy Committee of the Charlotte Harbor NEP, after reviewing similar motions by the Citizens Advisory, Technical Advisory and Management Committees, requested the following:

“(1) Acknowledge entirely new dredging in the Aquatic Preserves as a major issue of concern for the Charlotte Harbor NEP and direct (the Technical Advisory Committee) to identify technical information and CCMP policies, which would assist in review of future proposals...” and

“(2) to review the Pirate Harbor dredging application when it is received.”

New dredging in Charlotte Harbor may impact our ability to implement the following Objectives and Actions of our current CCMP (and proposed update):

FW-2: Meet the stated objectives for the target extent, location, and quality of the following habitats in the Charlotte Harbor NEP study area: a) native submerged

aquatic vegetation should be maintained and restored at a total extent and quality no less than caused by natural variation; b) maintain the existing extent and location within range of natural variability of intertidal un-vegetated habitats (especially mud flats and salt flats) and improve the habitat quality; c) manage natural mangrove habitats to their historic extent (1980) to enhance and improve their ecological functions and, where feasible, restore mangrove habitats in urban areas;...f) restore, manage, and improve the habitat quality of oyster bars in the Charlotte Harbor NEP area based on the existing historic data...

FW-B/FW-P: Enhance fish and wildlife habitat along shorelines including canals, lakes, riverine system, and artificial waterbodies.

(WQ-2: Develop and meet site specific alternative criteria which are protective of living resources for dissolved oxygen, chlorophyll *a*, turbidity/total suspended solids, salinity, and pesticides by 2015.)

(HA-O: Discourage the dredging of new navigation and drainage canals.)

Therefore, we wish to participate in the review process, including site visits and biological resource data reviews, and be kept informed of the permitting process progress for the 2 applications. It is our understanding that the Pirate Harbor Inner Channel may be combined with an Outer Channel dredge application in the future. We wish to be kept apprised of this application also. Please let us know if we can provide any support, such as data or community meetings, to the Department to aid in your efforts.

We thank you in advance for your input and efforts to address these concerns. If you have any questions, please contact me at (239) 338-2556 extension 235 or lbeever@swfrpc.org.

Sincerely,

Lisa B. Beever, PhD, AICP
Director
LBB/CAC/cac

CC: Mr. Tom Welborn, U.S. EPA, Region 4, CHNEP Policy Committee Co-Chair
Mr. Adam Cummings, Charlotte County, Board of County Commissioners
Mr. Larry Evans, Chief of Regulatory Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers