



TOWN OF CHILMARK CHILMARK, MASSACHUSETTS

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TO: US Army Corps of Engineers
FR: Chilmark Selectmen
Warren Doty, Chairman
DT: April 22, 2014
RE: Hurricane Sandy Dredging of Menemsha Creek Federal Navigation Project

The Chilmark Selectmen were disappointed with the content of your letter of April 7, 2014. The Board of Selectmen continues to support your maintenance of the Menemsha Federal Project up to the Red Nun off of West Basin. The town agrees that the jetties and seawalls are in need of repair and that the Menemsha Basin, Menemsha Channel and West Basin are in need of dredging. We oppose the dredging of the Menemsha Channel south of the Red Nun.

Your letter says that Menemsha Creek is a Harbor of Refuge for Ships. We disagree. The Menemsha Pond is a coastal pond that is actively used by small recreational vessels and commercial fishermen. The public makes almost constant use of this pristine resource throughout the season with kayaks, canoes, paddle boards, sunfish, lasers, skiffs, and runabouts. The largest commercial fishing boats are the lobstermen at 36' and they represent a small fraction of the traffic. None could even be generously described as ships.

The Menemsha Pond is home to a successful shellfish habitat. Many families make their living or supplement it by harvesting Bay Scallops, Quahogs, and Lobsters. The Wampanoag Tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) has a shellfish hatchery and an active Herring run in this pond. Members of the Tribe, and permittees of the Towns of Aquinnah & Chilmark have a number of Oyster grants spread across the Western half of Menemsha Pond. They are successful oyster farms providing high quality animals to market.

The technical review of hydrodynamic models by the Woods Hole Group concluded that the dredging proposed by the Corps would have marginal, if any, ecologically beneficial impacts on the habitat. The report said that the impact would be within that of a naturally occurring meteorological event (storm). Local experts are also concerned that a deep straight channel will cause the flushing of shellfish spat/seed out of the pond system before it settles out of the water column, as was observed after the last dredging project.

In the wake of the last dredging of Menemsha Pond by the Corps the pond saw a substantial increase in recreational traffic during the summer of 1976. The Towns of Chilmark & Gay Head, in conjunction with the Wampanoag Fisheries Project, established a Designated Anchorage Area in the center of the pond to try and minimize the negative impact of the increased intensity of use by recreational vessels. Nine hundred and sixty five recreational vessels anchored overnight between July and September. One hundred and seventy six failed to cooperate with the posted regulations and anchored outside the area designed to protect shellfish beds.

The increased traffic from larger recreational vessels and "ships" that overnight could negatively impact the ecological health of Menemsha Pond again today if the proposed dredging is allowed.

The town agrees to provide the Corps with access to accomplish the needed repairs to the east jetty and revetment. We consent to allowing the Corps to pursue permits to place the dredge spoils seaward of the Menemsha revetments to nourish the bathing beach and protect the stone works.

The Board of Selectmen opposes dredging South of West Basin and requests that the US Army Corps of Engineers hold a joint public hearing with the Mass DEP during the public comment period in Chilmark.