

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4705

February 7, 2012

The Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy
Office of the Assistant Secretary
Civil Works
108 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0108

Dear Assistant Secretary Darcy:

I write today in support of the Army Corps of Engineers dredging of the navigational channels of the Port of Chinook, Baker Bay, Swinomish Channel, and the Kenmore Navigation Channel in Washington state and the Westport Slew which supports the ferry to Puget Island. While these navigation channels do not support large cargo tonnages, they provide critical economic and safety functions to the communities that rely on them.

In the House Report 112-331 accompanying the Fiscal Year 2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 112-74), Congress saw fit to include \$30 million of funding designated for small/“low use” dredging projects nationwide under Title I, “Additional Funding for Ongoing Work.” Congress specified that funding should be prioritized to projects where there is “a U.S. Coast Guard presence, that will enhance national, regional, or local economic development; or that will promote job growth or international competitiveness.”

All five of the authorized channels referenced above are important economic engines for the communities they serve and – for some – are important to the Coast Guard’s ability to quickly and safely perform their required duties. Baker Bay and the Port of Chinook navigation channels provide critical river access to the largest Coast Guard search and rescue station on the Northwest Coast, USCG Station Cape Disappointment, which is home to five search and rescue boats and the National Motor Lifeboat School. This station responds to 300-400 assistance calls every year and having adequate river access is critical to the safety of oceangoing ships and commercial and recreational fish and crab boats. In 2010, 40 million pounds of fish were landed at the Port of Ilwaco (Baker Bay) – worth \$14 million. There is also an 850-slip marina and 25 channel-dependent businesses and commercial fish processing and sport fishing operations.

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The Swinomish channel provides a critical link for the Coast Guard, commercial, and private vessels between Saratoga passage and the San Juan Islands area, by a faster and safer route than Deception Pass or around Whidbey Island. Deception Pass is a narrow waterway with very strong currents that – during winter – often is too hazardous to navigate, which would require the Coast Guard and others to travel a significantly longer distance around the south end of Whidbey Island. Further, marine businesses and boaters utilizing the channel generate approximately \$92 million each year.

The Kenmore Navigation Channel on Lake Washington generates substantial revenue from seaplane and gravel barge services that operate in the area, and will also play an important role in the construction of the new Interstate 520 Bridge.

While Westport Slew is part of the Larger Lower Columbia River & Lower Willamette Project and not covered by the referenced funding it is none-the less important to the people living on Puget Island and in Wahkiakum County. This ferry is the only way to cross the Columbia River for fifty miles; if the ferry is not able to traverse the Slew safely because the channel has not been dredged it will amount to an extreme hardship for people living on Puget Island. All four of these navigation channels have aspects that fit squarely within the points of emphasis selected by Congress for areas to target funding. As well, Westport Slew provides an important link across the Columbia River. I would appreciate your fullest attention to this matter and encourage you to consider these worthy navigation channels for funding.

Sincerely,



Maria Cantwell
United States Senate

CC: OMB Deputy Director Heather Higginbottom