

information

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DAUPHIN ISLAND STUDY NOT CONCLUSIVE

Mobile, Ala. -- The Coastal Processes of Dauphin Island Study released by the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs (ADECA) today raises some interesting points and draws conclusions designed to assist responsible agencies in dealing with erosion problems on the Gulf Island in the future.

"We found that the study by Scott Douglas and Daniel Haubner of the University of South Alabama appears to have merit on a theoretical basis," said E. Patrick Robbins, Chief, Public Affairs of the Mobile District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The study states in the Executive Summary that "dredging of the Fort Gaines channel, through simple sand starvation, probably caused the erosion of both the shoals around the lighthouse and the Dixie Bar shoals in the last two decades." It also states that "proper data have not been collected to fully evaluate the environmental impacts of the dredging of the Mobile Ship Channel on the littoral system including the shoals and the adjacent beaches."

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Dauphin Island Study

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"There are provisions in the law for us to do studies to determine if our operations are causing environmental problems," said Robbins. "While there is merit to what this study says, it does not provide the detail that would be required for us to get authorization to conduct such a study. Some previous studies have indicated much the same thing and others have indicated the erosion problems are more of a natural occurrence than man-made. However, to properly calculate the multitude of influences that occur in a bay the size of Mobile Bay and the shifting sandbars and islands along the Gulf Coast would require a large, detailed and expensive study. It is difficult to determine just what level of influence the dredging operations have on erosion to the west of Mobile Bay.

"It should be noted," continued Robbins, "that we have two Section 14 studies authorized. Section 14 studies look at emergency protection of public property. One of the studies is for the erosion around the pier at the public park and the other is to address erosion at the fort. Both of these studies were requested and authorized before the current ADECA study was finalized."

A Section 14 study would determine what is required to provide an immediate solution to the problem. The solution must meet the criteria of being economically feasible and environmentally sustainable. If the criteria are met and we can do something, then the local sponsor must be willing to provide all future maintenance and upkeep to the project.

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Dauphin Island Study
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The Environmental Assessment that was done for the maintenance dredging project in the channel indicated the dredging could have an influence on erosion at Dauphin Island. That is why the dredged material was placed in a feeder berm off shore rather than use deep ocean disposal.

"It should also be noted that there are provisions in the law that allow us to place the dredged sand on the beaches," said Robbins. "However, that same law requires a non-federal sponsor to pay the difference between the cost of placing the material in the feeder berm - the most economically feasible and environmentally sustainable method - and placing it on the beach. At the time of the dredging operation there was no non-federal sponsor willing to pay that difference which was estimated at approximately \$600,000.

"The Mobile District is not unsympathetic to the problems at Dauphin Island," Robbins stated. "It is a problem that must be addressed at a variety of levels and with cooperation among agencies involved."