

Steven D. Babcock

Management of Contaminated Marine Sediment from Puget Sound – The Multi-User Disposal Site (MUDS) Project

Biography

Steven Babcock is a water resources planner with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Seattle. He has a BA in Geography (1971) and an MS in City and Regional Planning (1973) from Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. His Corps career began in Chicago in 1969 and he has been with the Seattle District office since 1979. In between he was a criminal justice planner for the State of Illinois and a Peace Corps Volunteer in Morocco. Mr. Babcock is a 1984 graduate of the Corps' Water Resources Planning Associates Program, and completed a leadership program conducted by Antioch University in 1993. Steve has a diverse water resources planning and project management background, which includes commercial and recreational navigation, coastal erosion and storm damage reduction, and dredged material and contaminated sediment management. Steve is the Corps' Project Manager for the Puget Sound Multi-user Disposal Site (MUDS) project jointly sponsored by the State of Washington. He is also Program Manager for Congressionally authorized General Investigations studies.

Presentation Abstract

The need for a multi-user disposal site (MUDS) to provide a central, common, cost-effective and environmentally acceptable location for the management of contaminated marine sediment from Puget Sound was first recognized in the mid-1980's. Many navigation dredging and environmental cleanup projects have been delayed or abandoned because there was no feasible or affordable means to dispose of or otherwise manage marine sediments that are not acceptable for unconfined open-water disposal at existing regional sites. This affects not only dredging of Federal and non-Federal navigation channels and berthing areas, but cleanup of state aquatic lands as well. In 1994, a number of State and Federal agencies (Corps of Engineers, Environmental Protection Agency, State of Washington departments of Ecology and Natural Resources, and Puget Sound Water Quality Action Team) jointly recommended that formulating and establishing a MUDS facility to meet this need should be a regional priority. In July 1997 these agencies, together with the Washington Public Ports Association and

the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, began a collaborative effort to evaluate and develop a MUDS facility.

A Final Programmatic EIS (PEIS) was completed in October 1999 to facilitate the development of any site-specific confined disposal or sediment treatment EIS that might follow. The PEIS provided an environmental review and cost analysis of available alternatives. No preferred alternative was identified in the final PEIS. The PEIS confirmed that:

Regional capacity is needed to manage contaminated marine sediment. All disposal alternatives are technically feasible (i.e., constructed upland, nearshore or in-water disposal facility, as well as use of existing solid waste landfills).

Sediment treatment (decontamination) is very promising and should be fully integrated into the planning process.

All alternatives result in significant trade-offs.

"No action" – i.e., business as usual – is not an acceptable alternative.

The MUDS agency directors met in October 1999 and requested that a siting phase study precede selection of a MUDS alternative. The goals of this "siting" phase were to: 1) determine who should own and operate a MUDS facility; 2) evaluate the feasibility of developing regional capacity to treat contaminated sediment; 3) develop a siting process and criteria to identify and select preferred sites for a MUDS; and 4) establish a process to actively engage the public. The siting phase was completed in July 2001. Useful outputs include a report on management options (including public-private partnerships), a facility siting process with site screening and evaluative criteria, reports on the feasibility of a large-scale facility for sediment treatment, and a public participation strategy.

The goal of this project has always been to provide at least one cost-effective, readily available and acceptable contaminated sediment management option to dredgers. The original belief was that a publicly financed and owned/operated facility was most likely to be required. This thinking began to change during the siting phase study. Establishment of a public-private partnership to accomplish the MUDS objective is now the preferred option. Recent indications are that the immediate (5-10 year or longer) need for a MUDS can be met by the private sector without the need for any appreciable public investment. A number of private sector "volunteer" opportunities are currently being evaluated.

Establishment of a MUDS will reduce the contaminated sediment disposal cost and uncertainty associated with navigation dredging and environmental cleanup projects in the Puget Sound region. The significant progress towards a regional solution is clearly the result of a strong interagency commitment to the collaborative planning process. Recent interest and involvement of the private sector in the identification of MUDS alternatives is a favorable and welcome development. Implementation of a MUDS will benefit both the environment and the regional economy.