



Collaboration Results in Sustainable Dredge-Material Projects

In Spring 2002, the governors of Oregon and Washington asked the National Policy Consensus Center (NPCC) to help convene a group of key government, fishing industry, and environmental stakeholders to deal with contentious issues relating to dredge material disposal in the Columbia River.

Among the biggest challenges was finding positive economic and environmentally sensitive ways to dispose of dredge material from the Columbia's shipping channel.

Each year, the Corps of Engineers removes 11 million cubic yards of dredge material from the shipping channel to maintain its 40-foot depth. Additional dredging will occur with channel deepening that is scheduled to begin next year. Many of the stakeholders had concerns about maintenance dredging and channel deepening.

After an initial meeting with stakeholders in March 2002, the Lower Columbia Solutions Group (LCSG) was formed.

LCSG participants include the major ports, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, local government representatives, fishing interests, environmental groups, and representatives of the Oregon and Washington governors' offices. The group strives to build relationships through cooperative planning and implementation of sustainable, beneficial-use projects in the lower river.

Operating by consensus, the LCSG adopted an agreement document in December 2002 identifying potential projects and policy issues. Since that time, project teams have been convened to investigate four separate dredge material disposal projects. Each team includes representatives of key stakeholders, a community leader serving as chair, and a staff person to support and guide the process. These collaborative project teams work to develop plans of action that will meet multiple community, environmental and economic objectives. When agreement is reached, a "Declaration of Cooperation" is signed by each member of the team, committing to steps that will be taken to move the project forward. The LCSG monitors the work of the project teams and addresses policy issues that may be barriers to success.

According to Greg Wolf, NPCC Director and facilitator of the Solutions group, "the LCSG and its project teams have improved communication and helped to build trust among the participants." Wolf said he hopes this project will serve as a model for dredging projects in other parts of the country.

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