

Ship Breaking Facility

By Jean Olson

Surfrider activists in Newport have recently been introduced to a potentially devastating project being proposed for Yaquina Bay. The Port of Newport Commission is currently in the process of considering signing a letter of agreement with Bay Bridge Enterprises to develop a ship breaking facility on port owned land across from the Hatfield Marine Science Center and the Oregon Coast Aquarium. Talks had been on-going for a few months and local media had implied that commissioners were going to approve the project. Public notice was given approximately 1 week before public comment was due. Information on the project was released in mid to late November and a decision was expected the first week of December. Responding to public pressure, the commissioners scheduled a public meeting on December 6, 2005. An estimated 300 to 400 people attended the meeting. Seventy-eight people gave testimony. Thirty-eight people were against, 17 were for and 23 stated they had too many questions about the project to make a decision at the time of the meeting. The commission had initially proposed that a decision on the letter of agreement would be made on December 14. Due to the overwhelming public interest and questions regarding the project, the commission delayed their decision to allow for further review of the project. The Port favors this project because it has the potential to bring 120 jobs to the community and increased dredging to Yaquina Bay. The land is zoned heavy industrial, but currently sits empty.

Following is some background on the ship breaking industry. The US government needs to scrap decommissioned ships currently stored in San Francisco Bay. The US government is no longer allowed to send ships overseas (due to EPA laws) to be dismantled and scrapped. Currently large ships are only being broken in Brownsville, Texas and Chesapeake Bay, Virginia. There are no facilities of this type currently breaking ships on the West Coast. It costs about \$1 million dollars to tow the ships to Texas, so companies are looking to save money by breaking them closer to San Francisco Bay. During the breaking process, ships are cleared of all non-metal materials, including any toxic materials, and then cut apart.

Concerns for Newport:

1. San Francisco Bay has over a hundred invasive species, which could be devastating to Yaquina Bay's oyster industry and wildlife.
2. The proposed area is near residential areas and tourism destinations.
3. The proposed area is just upstream from the Hatfield Marine Science Center and Oregon Coast Aquarium water intakes and facilities.
4. The entrance to Yaquina Bay is narrow; the bar can be very rough and subject to high winds.
5. There is no guarantee of consistent employment for local people. The ship breaking industry does not have a good track record in other places.
6. Hazardous materials removed from the ship must be transported elsewhere.

7. Bay Bridge has not released a plan to the public for controlling the toxic runoff from the site.

Postscript (by Markus Mead):

Many people and groups came together to show the Port Commissioners that they could not, in the interest of the local residents, approve this project. Many Surfrider volunteers were influential in preparing public comment and involving others in this activity. Below is an article from the Newport News Times. There's a website to learn lots more about how this project quite nearly came about. It just goes to show, that Margaret Mead was right: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

Thanks everybody for their hard work. Because of the environmental affects, this project would've jeopardized hundreds of existing family wage, professional jobs at the Hatfield Center, the Aquarium in exchange for a handful of new jobs. It also could've incurred potential environmental hazards for sport fishermen, crabbers, surfers and wildlife. In sum, not good for anybody except the ship salvage company....

<http://www.orednet.org/~rbayer/salvage/>

<http://www.newportnewstimes.com/articles/2006/01/25/news/news05.txt>

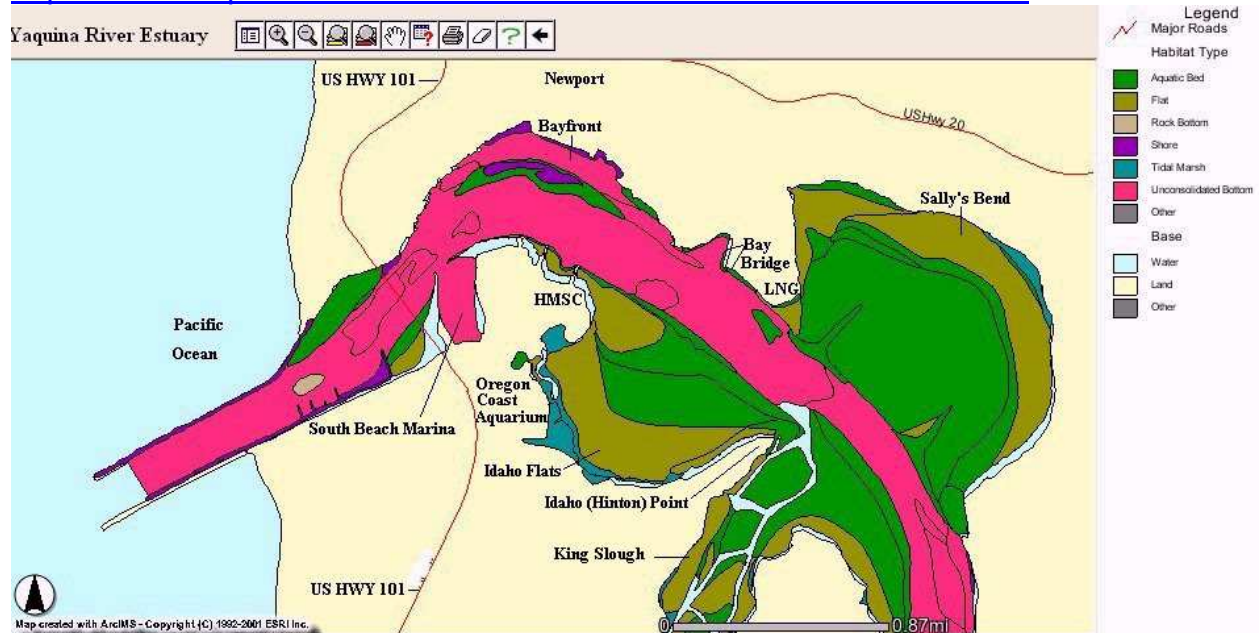


Figure 1: Ship during Early Stages of the Scrapping Process



Source: MARAD.

Figure 2: Partially Scrapped Ship in a Firm's Scrapping Facility



Source: MARAD.

Figure 3: Ship Near End of the Scrapping Process



Source: MARAD.