

NYSG Focuses on Resolving Dredging Windows Issues

Navigation dredging is vital to New York's economically-important commercial shipping and recreational boating activity. Regulators set windows when dredging is allowed to minimize environmental impacts. Concern for a growing number of fish species has caused these windows to shrink to a point where the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, New York District, (USACENYD) found it did not have time to complete necessary projects. USACE and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) requested New York Sea Grant (NYSG) assistance in resolving this long-standing, complex, and costly problem.

With funding from USACENYD, NYSG worked with Stony Brook University to evaluate the technical basis for the windows and the feasibility of adjusting them to allow work to occur while protecting fisheries.

NYSG developed a comprehensive matrix to organize information regulatory agencies used to set windows. NYSDEC and other agencies filled in the matrix with biological data on abundance, distribution by habitat life stage and timing, and dredging stressors for 17 species of concern.

Using this matrix as a basis, NYSG brought academic experts together with representatives of USACE, NYSDEC, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service at a workshop to review and update the information, examine the feasibility of modifying the windows based on the updated information, and identify processes that could improve permitting procedures.



Dredging in Fire Island Inlet, New York. Photo: Jay Tanski, NYSG

As a result of this effort:

- the state is using the matrix to streamline and facilitate permitting and setting of the dredging windows, and
- USACE is using technical information and processes to improve coordination identified at the workshop on a proposed \$25 million dredging project for Fire Island Inlet.

This has allowed USACE to work with the NYSDEC to expand the dredging window, giving them time to complete the project while protecting important resources.

This project is one more example of how New York Sea Grant helps resolve complex problems by bringing people together and providing the technical information needed to make informed decisions.

This project meets the performance measures of Sea Grant's Sustainable New York Coastal Development focus area. Sea Grant Extension administration is located at 112 Rice Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.

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