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Ports say new buoys would improve river efficiency

Marissa Luck mluck@tdn.com 8 hrs ago

The Port of Longview commissioners Monday agreed to contribute \$168,000 toward the construction of three additional “stern” buoys to help prevent shipping bottlenecks in the lower Columbia River.

The contribution will help provide local matching money to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which has received a \$1.4 million grant to add the buoys at Vancouver, Kalama and Rainier. The Port of Kalama last week agreed to pitch in up to \$200,000 toward the effort, and the ports of Vancouver and Portland are expected to contribute as well, said Port of Longview spokeswoman Ashley Helenberg.

Stern buoys are made of metal pilings driven deep into the river bed. They can hold massive cargo ships awaiting an open dock, and they will be particularly helpful for Export Grain Terminal in Longview during the busy grain harvest season in fall and winter. A recent corps analysis said the lower Columbia needs more capacity to anchor ships while they are awaiting open docks to load or unload.

“Additional deep draft buoys at the anchorages ... will help cut down on vessel turn times during busy periods and allow more flexibility to our loading rotation,” wrote Matthew Kerrigan, EGT general manager, in an email to the Port of Longview.

Kerrigan said without a place to anchor, it creates “a lot of uncertainty with the vessels that we need to bring in and load next.”

The original anchorage system along the river was designed decades ago, when ships were shallower and could be parked closer to shore without swinging into the deep-draft channel, according to the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association.

“Without stern buoys, ships at anchor may need tug assists to keep from swinging into the channel, costing hundreds of dollars per hour and increasing (air pollution) emissions in the river system,” according to PNWA briefing paper. Tied up freighters can cause ripple effects across the entire system, idling “dozens of trains all the way to the Rocky Mountains,” the association adds.

Port of Longview officials did not know when the new buoys will be built.

The Daily News, Longview, Wash.

Editor's Note

Saturday's story about the Port of Longview listed an incorrect meeting date. The special commission meeting was held Monday, and there will not be a meeting Tuesday.

Marissa Luck

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