COLUMBIA RIVER CHANNEL MAINTENANCE

Maintenance dredging critical to protecting investments in the Northwest

After nearly 20 years of work, the Columbia River channel improvement project was completed in November 2010. The 110-mile lower Columbia River navigation channel was deepened to 43 feet, and the Pacific Northwest and the nation are reaping the benefits with significant new public and private investments.

Within six months of the channel deepening completion, high river flows and channel stabilization resulted in severe shoaling above the authorized 43-foot depth, forcing draft restrictions as low as 40 feet. While restrictions are currently lifted, the possibility of additional draft restrictions puts both current and future public and private investments at risk.

Draft restrictions on the Columbia Snake River System cost stakeholders millions of dollars, affect millions of tons of cargo, and have rippling impacts throughout the economy. For example, a grain elevator that is not able to load the last foot of contracted cargo can pay over $60,000 in dead freight and loses the ability to bid on subsequent business. With draft restrictions, these numbers add up very quickly for our river system, the top U.S. wheat export gateway, the second largest U.S. soy export gateway, and the third largest grain export gateway in the world. For every foot of draft restriction, cargo valued at $1 million or more per ship is left at the dock. At a time when the region and nation are poised to take advantage of the channel, inadequate maintenance dredging can stunt economic growth.

PNWA leads the charge in support of funding to maintain the Lower Columbia River to ensure the main navigation channel, as well as our side channels and turning basins, can be dredged. Funding also supports continued work on the Lower Columbia River channel maintenance plan and repairs to the pile dike systems. The project received $120.887 million in FY2023 for maintenance and funding for the Cottonwood and Skamokawa-Price Island pile dike repairs. The funding also included $6.241M in FY2023 IIJA to address additional maintenance dredging to increase reliability and availability of authorized depth and increased upland placement consistent with the dredge material management plan. The FY2025 workplan included $80.681 million for operations and maintenance. PNWA will work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Portland District to understand additional capabilities for FY2026. With adequate funding, the Columbia Snake River System will remain a competitive U.S. trade gateway for years to come.

Direct investment since channel deepening completion

- Longview: $230M export grain terminal, the first new grain facility built in North America in 25 years. At full capacity, the terminal is expected to generate an additional 200 vessels calling on the Columbia River each year.
- Kalama: $200M Port of Kalama/TEMCO grain terminal improvements and $36M improvements at Kalama Export's grain terminal.
- Vancouver: Port of Vancouver made $451M in new investment, including $251 rail freight access and capacity, $200+M in private investments for their grain elevator and infrastructure for international trade.
- Portland: $140M in increasing ship loading efficiencies at Terminal 5 at the bulk terminal and $44M in upgraded storage and handling at the grain facility. $10M investment in Terminal 6 increasing auto storage and processing capabilities and $12M for Terminal 4 improvements including new ship loader, storage and rail improvements.