

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 13, 2020

Lieutenant General Todd T. Semonite
54th Chief of Engineers and Commanding General
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20314-1000

RE: Coos Bay Federal Navigation Project (Charleston Channel)

Dear Lt. Gen. Semonite:

I am writing to seek your cooperation and partnership to address the heavy shoaling at the entrance of the Charleston Marina (Point Adams facility, Coos Bay, Oregon). The current situation is unacceptable and demands urgent action. Just weeks ago, this shoaling resulted in a tragic accident that nearly cost the lives of three crew members on a commercial crabbing boat.

The Charleston Marina is home to the third largest commercial fishing fleet in the State of Oregon. According to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, over 25 million pounds of fish valued at over \$34 million were commercially landed in Charleston in 2018. The Charleston Marina Complex is a primary economic driver for the community and region, supporting over 200 commercial fishing vessels with crews ranging from two to five people.

The northern boundary of the Marina is defined and protected by a federal breakwater, which was built to protect the Marina and South Slough entrance during heavy storms. The Jetty runs 2,000 feet east to west, where it takes a northerly turn for approximately 700 feet. Twice in the past five years, the Marina has experienced heavy shoaling at the entrance to the Marina, adjacent to the federal navigation channel.

In 2017, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) diligently removed a large portion of this material within the federal project, which protrudes into the marina entrance. In 2017, the Port of Coos Bay paid the Corps contractor to remove approximately 14,000 cubic yards of material from the eastern portion of the entrance, adjacent to the federal navigation channel. As quickly as the material was removed, it began to move back in. In the winter of 2019, the shoal was encroaching well into the federal channel and the Marina entrance. Once again, in the summer of 2019, the USACE removed the shoaling within the federal channel, but a substantial amount of material remains within the Charleston Marina dredge prism adjacent to the federal channel.

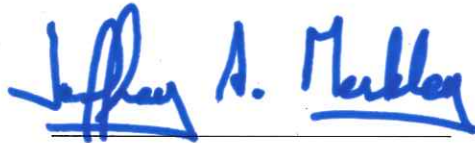
The access channel to the Marina provides safe transit to a six-lane boat launch, the inner boat basin (federal project), the former Point Adams fish processing plant, and the only dockside fueling facility for commercial and recreational vessels in Coos Bay. This shoaling has impacted the fuel dock significantly over the past five years. Shoaling around the dock causes the dock to

ground and list severely during periods of low water. The shoaling also restricts larger vessel fueling to periods of high water.

In December 2019, a commercial crab fishing boat ran aground and capsized on the shoal. Were it not for the quick actions of a heroic dockhand nearby, the three crew members would certainly have died as water rushed into the cabin.

Given the known but dangerous shoaling situation, I urge you to consider expanding the footprint of the existing federal navigation channel to include the shoaling area or, if an expansion is not possible, evaluate opportunities to modify the existing Corps project to divert the flow of material from this area of the harbor. I also urge you to work with the International Port of Coos Bay to find a viable solution to this ongoing and often dangerous situation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jeffrey A. Merkley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Jeffrey A. Merkley
U.S. Senator