Summer 2025

Port of Newport Harbor News

Unexpected and Expensive:

Surprising circumstances can prove costly

Every organization withstands unanticipated events, but the past year at the Port of Newport has been particularly challenging for the most unexpected of reasons. Sunken vessels in both marinas, a flame-engulfed pleasure craft, and a fishing boat's collision with Port Dock 5 all demanded the time, attention, and financial resources of the port. They are also the reason why the port is enforcing strict adherence to its insurance requirements for all users.

The most current and pressing of these incidents is the sinking of the F/V Ashtella Rhelyn at Port Dock 7 in June. Port officials had to contend with how to manage the immediate concerns of a vessel with fuel and other potential pollutants, as well as plan for the removal of 36 -foot vessel and the extensive amount of gear that had been on deck before the sinking. Thankfully, the U.S. Coast Guard assisted in securing any pollutants, but port staff were left to deal with the sunken vessel.

Earlier in the same month, a recreational boat caught fire in the middle of Yaquina Bay and drifted into the port-owned pier at the NOAA dock. Ultimately the damage from the fire is minimal, but port personnel spent time and resources assessing the damage and arranging the necessary repairs.

Late last year, a 62-foot F/V Western Hunter collided with Port Dock 5, breaking six pilings and several water lines, as well as damaging whalers and rub boards, and throwing the gangway out of alignment.

Photo by Nick Edmundson

Addressing these issues is costly, and while the port attempts to recover costs from the vessel owner or their insurance, that isn't always successful. These incidents accrue unanticipated costs beyond what insurance claims, when available, will cover.

The removal of the F/V Ashtella Rhelyn is expected to cost up to $200,000, since a salvage operation like this one requires specialized contractors and equipment. Port Dock 5 repairs topped $223,000 after the F/V Western Hunter incident. While insurance coverage will help offset most of the repair and salvage costs related to these two incidents, there is no compensation to the port for the extensive staff time spent dealing with the issues, including the extensive process of applying for permits from a variety of agencies before repairs can be made or a salvage operation can occur. There are also deductibles that must be paid and lost income when moorage space is rendered unusable for a period of time.

Finally, abandoned and derelict vessels continue to be a challenge, not only in Newport but at marinas around the state. With five sport vessels that sunk in the recreational marina in the past year and 16 currently in derelict status, the cost to address each can range as high as $50,000. The port is hopeful that some federal funds provided to the state will help with the cost of addressing these vessels, but there are no guarantees.

Sharing the challenges faced by the organization is another way the port strives to be transparent with customers and port district residents.

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POSTAL CUSTOMER

Recreational boaters alerted to dredging setback

Nearly 30 years of silt, sand, and sediment accumulation in the South Beach recreational marina means dredging is necessary to keep the slips at the desired depths. But with a cost exceeding $1.5 million and no immediate funding assistance in sight, port officials say recreational mariners may have to make some adjustments.

For more than two years, the Port of Newport has pursued funding, seeking federal dollars through grant applications and congressionally-directed spending requests. At the state level, legislators considered a bill in the most recent session that would provide funds to six Oregon ports, including $750,000 to the Port of Newport, but the bill didn't make it beyond the Joint Ways and Means committee, presumably because there was no money available.

> ***"All users of the marina are advised to be mindful of tide schedules and slip depths."***

Although the port has obtained the necessary permits to move forward with the project, the timeline has now been pushed back.

"Unfortunately, the lack of funding means we have to postpone dredging the South Beach marina for another year," said Executive Director Paula Miranda. "Lacking some kind of grant or funding to cover half of the $1.5 million budget, we don't have another pot of money to draw upon."

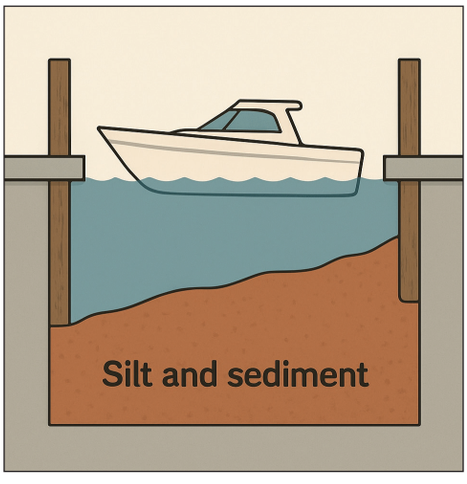
Boaters can expect to see the impact of overdue dredging and the need for funding in a couple of ways. Firstly, all users of the marina are advised to be mindful of tide schedules and slip depths when entering the marina. Consistent with the facilities code, boaters utilize the marina at their own risk, and it is every mariner's responsibility to know what depths they need to safely navigate in any area, including the marina.

"It is the Port's goal to keep these slips open, knowing that as long as boaters are keeping an eye on the tides and the charts, they can be used. Should the problem get worse before dredging can occur, closure of some of the slips could occur in the future," Miranda noted.

Starting in July, recreational boaters were more directly connected to a funding solution, when the port enacted a two-percent surcharge for moorage and added a $2.00 fee to using the boat launch. The resulting revenue will be earmarked specifically for future dredging.

"We know that boaters are frustrated by these marina challenges and the associated costs, but the dramatic increase in the cost of maintaining the marina is just a reality we all must deal with. We are hopeful that users see the benefit of our marina, its close proximity to the ocean, and the many conveniences offered by its location, and work with us as we try to get the dredging done as soon as funds are available," Miranda said.

On a different dredging note, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is in the final stages of a plan that would deepen access to the west entrance of the commercial marina, as well as all of the channels within the marina, including the hoist dock area. This has been a multi-year consideration and, if approved, would not only include the initial dredging, but a commitment by the USACE to maintain those channels in the future. The final report is expected this fall and, if successful, design and construction will occur over the next few years.



Unexpected and expensive, *continued from front cover*

"Through this challenging year, our employees have addressed each of these unique situations in a way that I am proud of," said Port Executive Director Paula Miranda. "We share this information to give community members a better understanding of the work we do at the Port. We also want people to understand that, when we adhere strictly to our policies regarding user insurance, it is for the benefit of all users."

Port of Newport At-A-Glance

Port Commission

- *Gil Sylvia, President*
- *Kelley Retherford, Vice President*
- *Jeff Lackey, Secretary/Treasurer*
- *Pat Ruddiman, Commissioner*
- *Bob Dziak, Commissioner*

Management

- *Paula Miranda, Executive Director*
- *Aaron Bretz, Deputy Director/ Director of Operations*
- *Mark Brown, Director of Finance*

Port Facilities

- *North Commercial Marina*
- *International Terminal*
- *RV Parks (South Beach)*
- *Recreational Marina (South Beach)*
- *NOAA Facilities*
- *Properties leased to Rogue, OSU, Aquarium*

Invasive Species Vs. Drought:
Guidance for using the improved rinse area

Boaters using the South Beach marina this summer have a more convenient option for rinsing down their boats, thanks to a grant from the Oregon State Marine Board (OSMB).

As one tool to address the threat of invasive species, Oregon boaters are urged by the State to rinse down a vessel after removing it from the water. To aid that effort, the Port of Newport has a designated area of the SB marina parking lot outfitted with water spigots for just that purpose. In June, that area was improved and enlarged using grant funding from OSMB.

The rinse down area is designated solely for the purpose of rinsing the hull of the boat to prevent the transfer of invasive species. It should not be used to fully wash a boat, flush outboard motors, or rinse the inside of the vessel.

The Port of Newport cautions boaters against using excessive amounts of water to do more than a quick rinse down. Although addressing invasive species is still important during times of drought, the water resource must be used thoughtfully. Additionally, much like local residents, the Port of Newport must pay for the water it uses. In fact, commercial users like the Port pay a higher rate for water. Across the board, water rates have increased dramatically since the rinse down lane was first implemented around 2004.

Dennis Rupp, of Yachats, rinses his boat after a morning of salmon fishing.

"We have five spigots in the rinse down area and, when a hose is running, each will push out 11 gallons of water per minute," explained Director of Operations Aaron Bretz. "If someone runs a hose for just five minutes, that's 55 gallons of water used. On a busy day, when all 5 are in use, that's 275 gallons gone in just five minutes. What is concerning is that many people use considerably more than 5 minutes worth of water and we need to change that," he added.

The Port of Newport urges all recreational boaters to use the rinse down area to combat against invasive species, but please keep water consumption to a minimum and only rinse the boat's hull.

The Complexity of Port Management

By Port Commission President Gil Sylvia

Gil Sylvia

I have learned in my four years as Commissioner that local citizens as well as direct users of Port services share our aspirations for success. They recognize the direct and indirect benefits the Port provides. They are proud of the diverse family of users including our commercial fishing and seafood industry, the NOAA research fleet, our tourist and recreation industry, and core tenants including Rogue, HMSC, and the Aquarium. It is not an accident that Newport is considered one of the most diverse and successful small ports and working waterfronts on the West Coast.

But I have also learned that achieving success, particularly from a financial perspective, is extremely challenging. Although we are a public entity, public tax funds support less than 2% of Port operations. While the diversity of users reflects Newport's economy, it creates significant challenges in managing our operations. The Port has more than 50 ongoing projects that support these operations. Each core operation must generate enough funds via user fees to cover operational costs such as labor and materials but also items such as overhead, depreciation, and regulatory costs. Government grants may cover some portion of costs for large infrastructure projects –for example docks and dredging —but they do not cover operations, and they are not guaranteed.

We recognize that users of Port services also face difficult financial challenges. It is imperative that we have honest discussions so we understand respective needs and find collaborative solutions. I have every confidence that our commissioners and staff are dedicated to finding these solutions and meeting our mission to advance community economic development.

McCommons takes command at Coast Guard Station Yaquina Bay

On June 20, 2025, a familiar face returned to U.S. Coast Guard Station Yaquina Bay, when Chief Warrant Officer Jason McCommons took over as the commanding officer. Some may recognize him from his time as the station's Executive Petty Officer, the base's second in command, from 2015-2019.

McCommons first stint in Newport came early in his career in 2004, just one year after he joined the Coast Guard. During his first six-year stint, he earned his Surfman certification – a highly-specialized qualification for the elite few who operate rescue boats in heavy breaking seas. Since that time, he has worked his way up the ranks in time to return to Newport for a third stint.

"It felt exciting to return and a little bit surreal. The last time I was here, I was number two in command. The first time I was standing duty and running search and rescue. Now I'm able to relate to those different positions and the general operations of the unit, while also understanding the importance of involvement in the community," said McCommons.

Approximately 45 people make up Station Yaquina Bay, spending most of their efforts on search and rescue, maritime safety and enforcement, and public education. Search and rescue occupy the bulk of that time, as they provide aid to commercial fishermen largely in the winter months and recreational boaters in the summer season.

"We are also a watchful eye on the entrance of the river and communicating the bar conditions over VHF radio every three hours, from sunrise to sunset," he added. The nature of the work means the station is operational 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. At any given time, a dozen men and women will be on watch.

This year, the U.S. Coast Guard celebrates its 235th anniversary. Although it is one of the six branches of the U.S. military, it is operated under the Department of Homeland Security – not the Department of Defense. With roughly 40,000 active-duty members, McCommons said it has more of a "small town" feel, which appealed to him.

"Many of the young men and women of Coast Guard Station Yaquina Bay are straight out of boot camp. They may be 19 or 20 years old and super eager to serve the public. They've joined because they want that sense of helping. We are saving lives and educating people, and they are eager to do that," he added.

Newly back in Newport and now at the helm, McCommons said he is eager to reestablish relationships with key stakeholders, including commercial fishermen, community leaders, port officials, and influential groups like the Newport Fishermen's Wives.

"The Coast Guard is smack dab in the middle of the community. This is a Coast Guard city and we want everyone to know that we are always here standing watch and ready to respond," he added.

When he's not on base, McCommons is looking forward to getting his wife and two daughters settled into the community and his oldest daughter ready for her freshman year at Newport High School.