

## **CORPS DETAILS PLAN TO OPEN RIVER MOUTH**

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Corps details plan to open river mouth

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**BRAZORIA** — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dug deep into its coffers and found the funds to increase the size of a planned channel to open the San Bernard River mouth.

Senior Corps officials updated their \$4.5 million plan Friday before a crowd in the Brazoria Civic Center. The project will include dredging a channel 100 feet wide and 10 feet deep to open the blocked river mouth to the Gulf of Mexico.

The Corps will award the contract in September and start the 45- to 60-day project in the next month, according to their tentative schedule.

The project will be paid for under the operations and management part of the Corps budget, Corps Galveston District commander Col. David Weston said.

"We turned the key in the lock, and it gave us a great opportunity to attack this project," Weston said.

The primary reason for the Corps' interest in opening the San Bernard is alleviating the fast flow of water at the Brazos River floodgates, he said. After silt choked off the San Bernard from the Gulf, the river was funneled through the Intracoastal Waterway and into the Brazos River, creating a dangerously violent current at the narrow floodgates.

"What we are hearing from barge operators is they are having trouble crossing the river," said Ben Boren, Corps operations manager. "It's a navigation safety hazard."

Weston said in a typical shipping cycle, it is common to have an average of 35 ship collisions in a waterway. Because of the combined currents of the San Bernard and Brazos River meeting at that gate, there are more than 160, he said.

Area residents and members of the Friends of the River San Bernard were excited by the project, but for different reasons. Many look forward to being able to use the San Bernard for recreational boating, with a straight shot into gulf waters. There also might be a reduced flood risk upstream by the unrestricted flow of the river, said Nancy Kanter, director of Friends of the River.

"This is great news, we never realized they were going to dredge it so deep and wide," Kanter said.

The Corps plan goes further than a \$300,000 Texas Department of Transportation plan to dredge a smaller channel. The plan had called for a channel 50 feet wide and 4 feet deep.

The state will add an extra \$500,000 to help the Corps project, said Texas Department of Transportation engineer Scott Sullivan.

Weston said with the Texas agency's help they fulfill the Corps' need for a local governmental sponsor. He added that it is better for them to take on the project rather than the state because they would spend a large chunk of money just getting a Corps permit for the underwater work.

"The nice thing about us taking this on is we dont have to go through us to get a permit," Weston said. "Which is nice because we're not easy to get a permit from."

Hunter Sauls reports for The Facts. Contact him at (979) 237-0153.

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