

The Plan to Solve the Dredging Crisis



by American for Dredging, July 2022

America's dredge fleet is tiny, undersized, outdated and vastly more costly and inefficient compared to 31 modern and massive dredges that handle virtually all of the rest of the free world's significant port deepening and coastal protection projects, completing such projects at less than half the cost and requiring less than one-third the time of comparable projects done by the current American fleet. These 31 newer, larger, cleaner and more efficient vessels are all owned and operated by companies headquartered in Belgium or The Netherlands, but which all already have American-based subsidiaries that all already perform extensive maritime construction work in America building American offshore wind farms, using unionized American labor and pursuant to American union project labor agreements. Some of these 31 are more than four times as large as any American vessel. Yet, because of an arcane 116-year-old law, The Foreign Dredge Act of 1906, none of these 31 vessels can today operate in the U.S. in the same waters in which the same companies are already undertaking major American maritime construction projects.

Indeed, because of the arcane law, the United States is the only country in the world that does not allow the dredges of NATO-headquartered companies to operate in its waters. For this reason, critical American coastal protection or port deepening projects are hopelessly delayed or never scheduled to be undertaken and, where projects can go forward, American taxpayers pay almost double the job cost taking three times as long to complete compared to their NATO counterparts.

The result is that American cities and communities are 100 times more vulnerable to catastrophic storms than comparable cities in Europe and Asia. America's supply chain is significantly compromised because fully loaded modern container vessels and tankers are too big for our ports. The World Bank recently reported that our two largest ports are the least efficient of the 360 ports it surveyed around the world.

Legislators, policymakers, and concerned groups, such as Dredging for America, have begun to pursue and must finally realize solutions to expand the American dredging fleet, addressing our country's pressing problems and helping build for the future. But how?

The is our plan:

Amend the Foreign Dredge Act of 1906 to allow the U.S.-subsidiaries who own NATO-built and NATO-operated dredges to bid for work, while guaranteeing that American labor fill at least 85% of the jobs on the vessels.

- NATO companies have union project labor agreements for all offshore wind work in the US, including with the Seafarers and Operating Engineers. These project labor agreements should carry forward to cover all American dredging projects.
- Adding the near unlimited new dredging capacity to the American fleet while lowering costs around 50% will allow numerous additional port expansion and deepening projects to be undertaken and be completed in 1/3rd the time. Expanding our port capacity lowers the costs of exports and creates more income for American farmers and jobs for American manufacturers and energy providers.
- Adding the near unlimited capacity to the American dredging fleet will also enable the US to pursue coastal protection projects, save lives, protect property, and protect the American real estate market. Coastal protection projects are needed among others off the coast of Houston, Florida, New York, Massachusetts and more. Building coastal defenses protect vulnerable ecosystems and populations - particularly disadvantaged, lower-income groups.

