

Dredging ends, but not debate

An environmentalist said she "felt sick" over dumping at nature park

By Alex Seise

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The monthlong emergency deepening of the Delaware River shipping channel finished this week and tons of dredge spoil have been dumped in a park at the foot of the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge.



DAVID M WARREN / Inquirer Staff Photographer
A barge in the Delaware River used in the dredging project. In all, a total of 50,000 cubic yards of river bottom were removed.

The controversial project, which environmentalists feared would harm Palmyra Cove Nature Park in Burlington County, ends with more than 10 park acres covered with muck pulled from the river bottom. The spoil, surrounded by earthen berms, covers a park wetlands area near Dragonfly Pond with a thick layer of sandy soil specked with small shells and rocks.

Even now, with the dredge spoil dry to the touch, the project remains controversial.

Park executive director Clara Ruvolo said the dredging project "had a very limited effect" on the park.



DAVID M WARREN / Inquirer Staff Photographer
Tons of muck pulled from the Delaware in a controversial dredging project cover about 10 acres of the Palmyra Cove Nature Park.

"Our goal was to save the Nature Park," she said. "And we have."

But Courtney McLaughlin, a member of the Cove Action Network environmental group, said she "felt sick to see how drastically the terrain had changed on the 20 acres of park now packed with dredge soils."

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which maintains the river's 40-foot channel, dredged several spots that were interfering with shipping. Under an agreement with various government agencies, the park was selected as the dumping spot for the dredge spoil.

Environmentalists protested last summer. In the end, the state Department of Environmental Protection agreed to confine the dredge spoil to a 20-acre portion of the 250-acre park.

The Corps of Engineers dredged about 50,000 cubic yards of river bottom - about 3,000 dump-truck loads - from two spots

north of the park. Dredging equipment mounted on a barge sucked the river-bottom muck into a ship. The ship hauled the material south to Palmyra, where another barge pumped it into the park.

McLaughlin and State Sen. Diane Allen (R., Burlington) said other issues also could threaten the park.

McLaughlin said her group would press DEP to find alternative sites for the next dredging project.

Allen agreed.

"The big issue here is that the DEP needs to come up with a plan for dredge materials. We don't have that plan now," she said.

She said she considered the dredging project "a success," adding, "So now we need to just protect what we have."

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