

Small Boat Harbor Planning Sub-Center of Expertise Overview

June 25, 2020

Q&A Session

This webinar provided an overview of the Small Boat Harbor Planning Sub-Center of Expertise (SBH-PSCX) and the nuances of SBH planning. This sub-center of expertise functions collaboratively as a sub-unit of the Deep Draft Navigation Planning Center of Expertise, with a specific focus on harbors that serve vessels that are primarily 14-foot draft or less. Presenters Cindy Upah (Planning Chief, Alaska District and Technical Deputy, SBH-PSCX), Eric Johnson (Economist, Alaska District), Russell Iwamura (Planning Chief, POD and Deputy Director SBH-PSCX), and Jason Norris (Economist, POD) discussed planning for these multi-use harbors, which entails special considerations for a mix of commercial, recreation, subsistence, government, and research vessels.



The emphasis on small boat harbor planning recognizes the specialization of technical analyses that is generally not found in inland or deep draft navigation planning analyses. The presenters also detailed the range of services offered by the SBH-PSCX, from production to review management to consultation with PDTs. Any of the presenters can be contacted for additional information on the SBH-PSCX or to discuss an upcoming study.

This summary of the Question / Answer session of the webinar is not a transcription; questions and responses have been edited and reordered for clarity.

Does the study economist need to be identified before the Federal Interest Determination (FID) is made under Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) Section 107 (Small Navigation Project Studies)?

The FID is made at the beginning of the study, at which stage the lead economist does not necessarily need to be identified. Once the MSC approves the FID fact sheet and the project delivery team (PDT) moves out with the study, the SBH-PSCX should be engaged and the economist identified.

Note: This does not mean PDTs cannot contact the SBH-PSCX as soon as a study is received if there are questions about the proper level of analysis required for an FID. PDTs are encouraged to reach out to the PSCX with questions anytime.

What criteria need to be met for a harbor to be considered “remote and subsistence”?

Under The Water Resources Development Act of 2007, Section 2006, the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works (ASA(CW)) may recommend a project without the need to demonstrate that the project is justified solely by national economic development benefits if the Assistant Secretary determines that:

1. The community to be served by the project is at least 70 miles from the nearest surface accessible commercial port and has no direct rail or highway link to another community served by a surface accessible port or harbor (OR the project would be located in the State of Hawaii, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the United States Virgin Islands, or American Samoa);
2. The harbor is economically critical such that over 80 percent of the goods transported through the harbor would be consumed within the community served by the harbor and navigation improvement; and

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3. The long-term viability of the community would be threatened without the harbor and navigation improvement.

These three specific requirements must be met in order for a harbor to qualify as “remote and subsistence.” The Section 2006 provision also allows the ASA(CW) to consider other factors such as public health and safety of the local community, access to natural resources for subsistence purposes, economic opportunities, welfare of the local population, and social and cultural value of the community when providing justification – but only if the three specified criteria are met first.

What are some examples of recreational benefits that can be quantified and captured as NED benefits for a small boat harbor study? (Reference Slide 21 of the webinar presentation).

The USACE [Planning Guidance Notebook \(Engineer Regulation 1105-2-100\)](#), Appendix E, provides several methods for valuing recreational benefits. However, the unit day value method is the most accepted for quantifying such benefits. An [Economic Guidance Memorandum](#) is issued for each fiscal year which details the application of unit day values to both individuals and fleets of recreational users based on whether a benefit is considered to be general recreation or specialized recreation. Note: unit day values differ from calculated future without project conditions to future with project conditions.

Do slack water harbors continue to be low on the USACE priority list?

Slack water harbors – which are generally inland systems created from dredging into streambanks or old oxbows – can be studied under the CAP Section 107 program, but are typically not studied under the General Investigations account.

Are boat simulation studies ever conducted for small boat harbor projects?

Boat simulation studies can be conducted for small boat harbor projects. They are generally not done in CAP studies due to the time and cost, but can be reasonably incorporated into a General Investigations study if scoped correctly at the beginning of the project. PDTs should keep in mind that ship or boat simulations may not be necessary for a small boat harbor project in that they may not reduce uncertainty enough to justify the cost and time required for a simulation.

Do small boat harbor projects generally compete well for construction funding? How can a District best support a small boat harbor project through the USACE budget development process?

Whether or not a small boat harbor project receives construction funding depends on the net annual benefits and benefit-cost ratio. Forthcoming changes as a result of the ASA(CW)'s recent memo, [Comprehensive Documentation of Benefits in Feasibility Studies](#), will also direct PDTs to articulate the benefits of small boat harbors through all four accounts, which may help in the justification of these types of projects.

The SBH-PSCX has found that one of the most effective ways to support small boat harbor projects in the USACE budget is to clearly explain the distinctions between small boat harbors and other navigation projects. For example, the SBH-PSCX has had to explain in the past that small boat harbors are not just for luxury yachts and recreation. They are typically extremely important for the communities who rely on them, with most small boat harbors serving as working facilities for commercial fisherman or as commercial good lifelines for residents.