

Shoal may block port to ships

by Bob Peterson
Times Writer

A rapidly drifting sand-and-gravel shoal in upper Cook Inlet is balanced on the edge of the natural ship channel leading to the Port of Anchorage. If Fire Island Shoal threatens to fill in the waterway, it would cost the Army Corps of Engineers up to \$50 million to remove, a Corps official predicts.

To study the effect the 2½-mile-long shoal will have on the channel, the Army Corps wants to build a scale model of Cook

Army Corps says removing it could take \$50 million

Inlet, Knik Arm and Turnagain Arm.

If the U.S. Army approves a requested \$625,000 for the sediment and navigation study, a scale model would be built at an Army Corps facility possibly in Vicksburg, Miss., Joseph T. Weber Jr., the Corps' Alaska District hydrologist and project

manager for Navigation and Coastal Planning.

"We are in the feasibility stage of a study authorized by Congress in 1970 and we are working with city and port authority officials on cost projections and future needs of the Port of Anchorage," Weber said Tuesday. "This sedimentation thing is

adding a whole lot more time to the project than was first anticipated.

"Originally, we were supposed to file a draft of our report to the Army Corps Division Engineer in Portland in January 1987 and a final in July of that year. But we are definitely not going to meet those dates," said Weber.

The Port of Anchorage wages a relentless battle against the forces of nature — siltation, shoaling and fierce currents, but

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A-12 Saturday, January 18, 1986, The Anchorage Times

Sandbar

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the Corps presently has the equipment to keep the basin at its guaranteed 35-foot depth at low mean tide, said Stephen Boardman, chief of Navigation and Flood Control. Boardman said that the cost of dredging is escalating due to an increase in siltation (solids being carried in the water and left at the bottom of the turning basin). The possibility exists that the natural channel leading to the basin may require dredging to keep it open to shipping. The Corps has only been dredging the turning basin located north of Eagle River.

Corps Public Affairs Officer Bruce Batten said Tuesday that more than \$1 million annually is being spent dredging the turning basin.

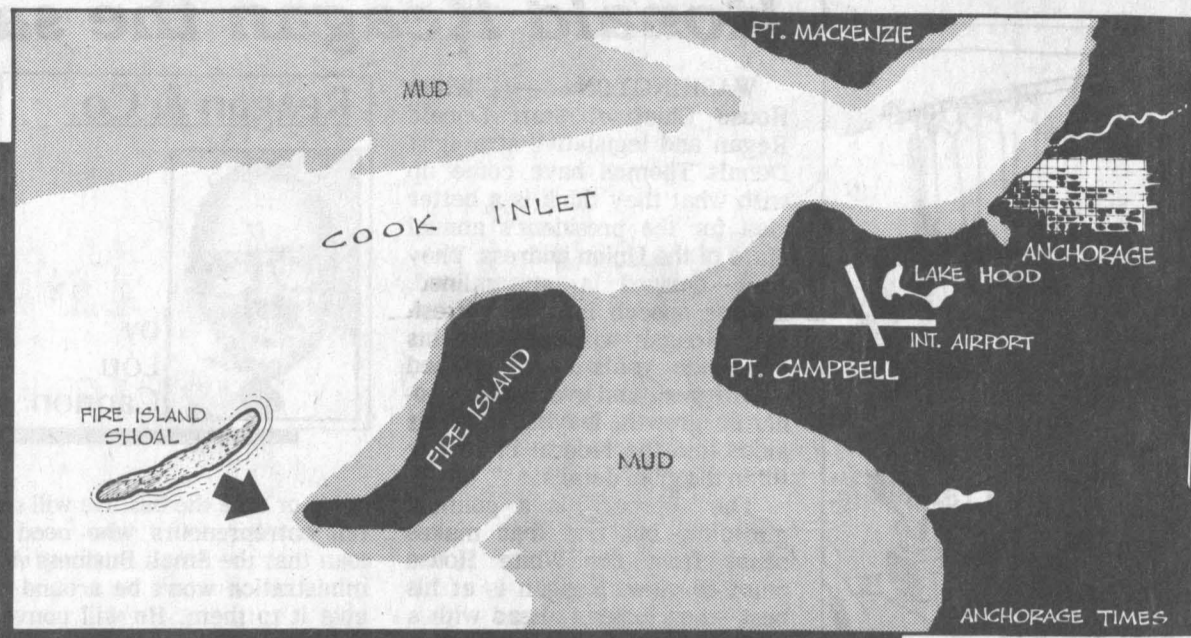
"Anchorage harbor is not built in the best spot as it receives a large accumulation of waterborne material," said Boardman. "Fire Island Shoal began moving in 1941 and is now at the edge of the channel and moving 125 feet a year. And, Knik Arm Shoal has a high rock outcropping with a gravel-sand bar that presents a hazard to ships, especially the longer and wider containerized ships that soon will be using the port."

According to Boardman, the shoals are the key to ships navigating into the Port of Anchorage. Many of the ships coming to and leaving port must time their arrivals or departures with the incoming times in order to clear Knik Arm Shoal. From NOAA radio-satellite pictures, Knik Arm Shoal appears to be stable, said Boardman.

The Port Assistant Director Eric Morrison was not alarmed at the prospect that siltation and drifting shoals could affect shipping.

"I've never seen things like siltation get so bad that we would consider moving the port," said Assistant Port Director Eric Morrison.

The port is considering adding onto its existing 2,000-linear-foot wharf located at the lower end of



Knik Arm as well as building a causeway to Fire Island with docking facilities on the island's west end, he said.

The Army Corps' hired dredger keeps the basin at its required depth, but just barely, according to Boardman, who oversees the Corps dredging projects in Alaska.

"There is 9,000 cubic yards of sediment falling into the turning basin daily, and many days we are not even gaining ground but just maintaining the status quo," he said. "The dynamics of the area makes it hard to predict what is coming, but based on dredging records over a 20-year period, there has been a marked increase in sediment over the last six years."

Coast Guard moves ships' range line

Times Staff

Fire Island Shoal has given the U.S. Coast Guard some problems, but Lt. Cmd. Bob Winter said Wednesday that the shoal continues to "dissipate and recede" as it moves eastward towards the Port of Anchorage main ship channel.

A range line used by navigators had its reference point — a light — on Point MacKenzie moved eastward by the Coast Guard to give shippers "extra confidence" in plying the chan-

The Port of Anchorage is at the lower end of Knik Arm, near its narrowest point. The shipping channel is a short distance away near a point where Knik Arm joins Cook Inlet.

Knik Arm, which has the second highest tide range in North America, is shallow except for two deep pockets near the port. A large volume of water surging back and forth through the opening keeps the pockets and the natural channel from silting in.

Weber pointed out that sediments are carried into the area by fresh water coming from the Matanuska, Knik and Susitna rivers. Most of these sediments eventually find their way to the west end of Turnagain Arm. Earlier in this century, vessels with

six- and eight-foot drafts sailed up Turnagain to the community of Hope. This is no longer possible due to siltation.

"Shippers are also concerned about the shoal migrating toward the direction of Fire Island," Boardman declared. "The area is rather unique, in that for 80 to 85 percent of the time you have a flood current."

By act of Congress, the Army Corps in 1964 dredged the turning basin for a Army dock. The facility later became the Port of Anchorage, and the Corps continued to dredge the turning basin using a clam-type dredge. Sediment from the turning basin is barged to and dumped only a short distance away to the west in a deep depression.

nel, Winter said.

A range line marks the center of a channel on Coast Guard charts.

The recent change in range line moved ships closer to Fire Island. According to Winter, the center channel is now 0.95 miles from West Point on Fire Island, and the change has increased the distance to the shoal to 1,500 yards, he said.

"I don't see the shoal as being a navigation problem," said Winter. Winter, who is stationed at

the 17th Coast Guard District Office in Juneau, said that nautical charts dating back to 1946 show a much larger shoal.

Although the Susitna River discharged an "incredible amount of silt per year into Cook Inlet," the solid material apparently is not affecting the depth of the ship channel.

Report on Cook Inlet shoal labeled off-base by port director

Dear Editor:

Both reporter Bob Peterson and your anonymous headline writer pushed the panic button prematurely in the front page article headlined "Shoal may block port to ships," in Saturday's paper. Three important points need to be made to put in proper perspective the story that wasn't told but which deserved telling.

First and foremost it has to be recognized that the vast quantities of sedimentation in Cook Inlet dictate constant vigilance. For 25 years the Port

Letters to the editor

of Anchorage and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have monitored and responded to the condition of the shipping channels to insure uninterrupted vessel service. We will continue to do so.

Second, if the shoal moves toward Fire Island, as the article erroneously said is happening rapidly, it creates a new channel elsewhere. The likely response to significant southeasterly movement of the Fire Island

shoal will be establishment of a new channel northwest of the shoal. It can be relocated easily using surveys and by repositioning navigation aids, a bargain compared to the \$50 million option the article offered as the only hope.

Finally, it should be recognized that a tremendous effort has been made by all parties to anticipate and plan for the rigors of Cook Inlet navigation. The three federal

agencies involved in navigation (the Corps of Engineers, the Coast Guard and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) have contributed heavily to the Port's navigation committee. They have solicited from the carriers reports of channel conditions. They have proposed studies and instrumentation which insure that shipping to Anchorage will not only be continued, but that marine safety will be enhanced as well.

The real story concerns the war we wage against the silt of

Cook Inlet. It's a story of a community insistent on ocean freight service; mariners both competent and committed to plying waters previously deemed unsafe; and the steps taken by local, state and federal agencies to fulfill those goals.

Aside from the story you missed there were numerous factual errors in your Saturday story. I won't attempt to list them here. But I do wish to go on record asserting that The Anchorage Times did a distinct disservice printing the article with the chosen headline. Together they imply the Port of Anchorage could be inaccessible unless the \$50 million shoal removal project is funded. That

is music to the ears in the port communities which cover Port of Anchorage freight. It is a nightmare to those who believe in Anchorage and its role as a world-class seaport.

The Fire Island shoal is not the calamity your article implies. It's just one of the conditions of living in this region to which we have successfully adapted. Anyone seriously interested in understanding the issue and how we have addressed it for 25 years is welcome to attend Port Navigation Committee meetings. I can be reached at 272-1531 for information.

Tyler Jones
Port Director

Wednesday, January 22, 1986, The Anchorage Times A-11

Cruise ships to increase Anchorage stops

by Bob Peterson
Times Writer

The Port of Anchorage is expecting 14 cruise ship stops next summer, five more than in the summer of 1985, according to Assistant Port Director Eric Morrison.

The increase in ship traffic is a right step in the direction of making Anchorage a major port of call for the passenger ship industry, said Reyn Bowman, president of Anchorage Convention and Visitor Bureau.

But a significant impact from cruise ships on the local economy will not be felt until amendments are made to the Jones Act, a federal act that restricts passenger activity by foreign ships at U.S. ports.

"The real story," Bowman said, "is what we can do in the future. The captain of the Saga Fjord last summer said that

Anchorage is being tested by the shipping industry." The Saga Fjord and Cunard Princess, both owned by Cunard Lines Ltd., made nine stops in Anchorage during 1985, the first year in port for the ocean liners.

Morrison pointed out that facilities at the Anchorage port were developed for commercial trade and not for passenger convenience.

"We do not have the facilities to meet the needs of cruise ships or for their operations," Morrison said. "Our plan calls for increasing the commercial dock space. We are looking into facilities for cruise ships."

Two million tons of cargo passed through the port last year. Most of the tonnage was containerized as dry goods, but a heavy flow of petroleum products also

found its way between tanker and shore. Morrison said 532,000 tons, or 3.8 million barrels of petroleum products moved across the docks in 1985.

In 1985, 850,000 visitors came to Anchorage, 400,000 during the summer. There were 50,000 visitors last summer that came from cruise tours and cruise ships docked at Seward, Whittier, Homer and the Port of Anchorage, according to Convention and Visitor Bureau figures.

Most of the foreign cruise ship tours of Alaska originate from Vancouver, British Columbia, rather than from U.S. ports. Americans boarding Cunard, Holland-American or other cruise ships bound for Alaska must fly, drive or sail to Vancouver to board their ship.

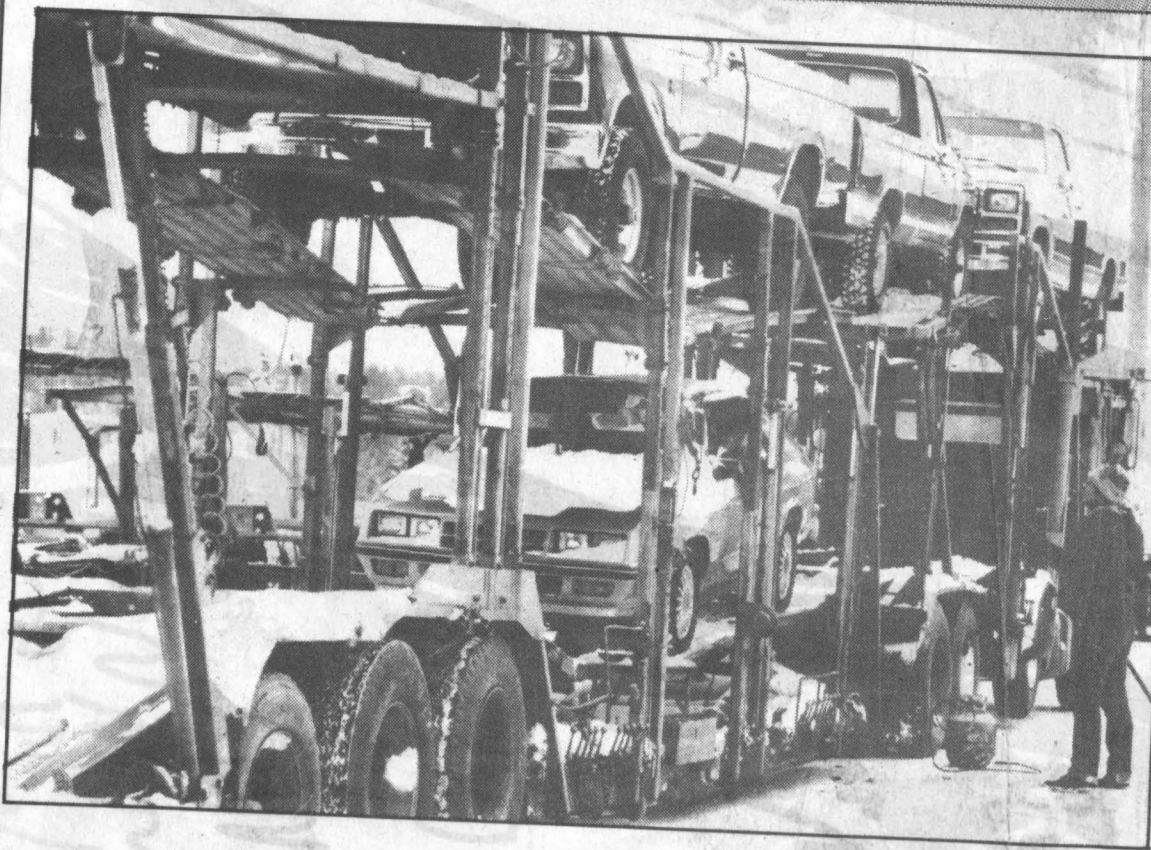
"There isn't that much impact on the

local economy as being (in Anchorage) is presently just a change in logistics for Cunard," Bowman said. "The Cunard ships are here for a short time to pick up overland tourists that don't fly back or let passengers off for other trips. A lot of the passengers have spent their money and spend less time on land and more time aboard ship."

"The really true benefit is down the line when the Jones Act is changed," Morrison said. If the act is amended passengers could start cruise ship voyages from Anchorage and other Alaska ports, such as to the Aleutian Islands, Morrison added.

Friday, January 31, 1986, The Anchorage Times B-3

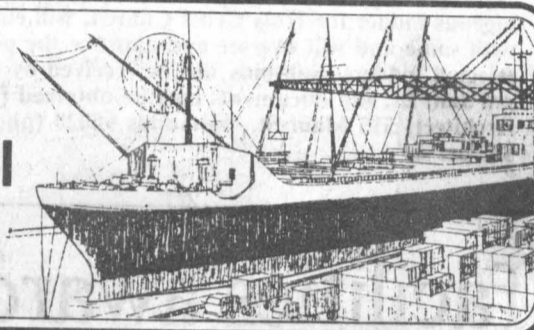
Vehicles bound for Kenai



Jim Durant directs the loading of an automobile transport carrier Thursday afternoon at the Port of Anchorage. The rig is owned by Wright-

way Auto Carriers. The new, snow-covered vehicles are headed for an automobile dealership in Kenai.

Ports of Call



Portland extends guard's lease

PORTLAND — The Port of Portland recently agreed to amend a lease with the US Government extending for eight months the return to the port of the western 160 acres of the Oregon Air National Guard leased property.

Oregon Air National Guard is currently completing construction of new facilities on another portion of its leased property. It will participate in construction cost for a water line estimated at \$120,000 and 50% of the cost of constructing a military perimeter road with an estimated cost of \$270,000.

The guard will continue to occupy the full western 160 acres now leased from the port until September 1986. Currently, port officials are negotiating with Horizon Airlines for the lease of four buildings on this property to be used for aircraft maintenance and office space.

Anchorage plans improvements

ANCHORAGE — The Port of Anchorage is planning a major refurbishment.

Improvements, to be financed by a \$30 million general revenue bond package approved by the Anchorage Assembly last fall, include the following:

\$9.7 million for land development adjacent to the port; \$7 million for a railroad extension to Terminal 1; \$6 million for installation of a 40-ton Mitsubishi crane at Terminal 2 and modifications to increase the lifting capacity of two 27.5-ton Paccoco cranes to 30-ton capacity; \$3.5 million for waterfront improvements to encourage marine-related businesses to locate in the port area; \$3.2 million for a rail/trailer transfer yard to be built on existing port property; \$1 million to modify the Sea-Land dock to accommodate Sea-Land's new ships.

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