

# Guard may extend Wrightsville pier

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Worried that it was running out of time, the Coast Guard has scrapped plans to dredge its boat basin at Wrightsville Beach.

Instead, the agency will now look to extend its roughly 90-foot pier farther out into Banks Channel.

"We think this is a better long-term plan because once we've absorbed the initial costs to build it, we shouldn't have too many maintenance costs after that," said Chief Petty Officer Ross Fowle.

But adding a 40-foot extension to the L-shaped pier wasn't the agency's first option for the station's shoaling woes.

The Coast Guard had said sand clogging the basin was causing problems for the base's boats, threatening the service's ability to perform search-and-rescue and law enforcement missions.

Chief Petty Officer Fowle said the station's larger boats, which include 47- and 41-foot craft,

## UPDATE

**THE ISSUE:** The boat basin at Wrightsville Beach Coast Guard station is shoaling up.

**WHAT'S NEW:** Coast Guard has scrapped plans to dredge basin after neighbors complained.

**WHAT'S NEXT:** Coast Guard will extend its 90-foot pier by 40 feet.

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were running out of draft. "We can still use it, but we're getting pretty close," he said, adding that the station conducts about 200 search-and-rescue missions and 600 law enforcement boardings a year.

To remedy the situation, the Coast Guard was pushing to dredge the basin back to a depth of 10 feet — pumping roughly 2,000 cubic yards of sand onto a spoil island on the other side of Banks Channel — before its 10-year permit expires later this year.

The basin, which includes a floating dock, is roughly 80 feet wide by 170 feet long.

But some neighbors near the facility, perched on the southern tip of the New Hanover County barrier island, opposed the dredging.

They claimed the basin, along with the station's bulkhead, has modified the natural transport of sand north of Banks Channel, resulting in disappearing beaches.

Cleaning out the basin, they said, would simply allow the station to trap more sand destined for the island's soundside beaches.

But the Army Corps of Engineers had said there wasn't enough proof that the station was the cause of the lost sand.

For their part, Coast Guard officials had argued that other factors — ranging from the region's rash of hurricanes in the late 1990s to the large jetties in Masonboro channel — were contributing to the beach erosion.

But earlier this year the parties appeared edging toward a compromise solution that would have seen the dredged sand deposited on the eroded beaches north of the Coast Guard station.

Worries about increased shoaling, however, coupled with new homeland security requirements, appear to have convinced the Coast Guard to opt for the pier-extension solution.

Chief Petty Officer Fowle said he expects construction, which requires approvals from several federal and state agencies, to start next year.