

Sampson's Island Dredging Proposal Raises Concerns

By JAMES KINSELLA

A proposal to widen the channel into Cotuit Bay by slicing hundreds of feet off the western end of Sampson's Island has drawn the opposition of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, which owns part of the island.

Three Bays Preservation Inc., a non-profit organization based in Osterville, has put forward the proposal to dredge and widen the channel by up to 1,000 feet.

Lindsey Counsell, executive director of the organization, said the widening would return the channel to its width in 1967, around the time of the last significant dredging of the channel.

Mr. Counsell said widening the channel would dramatically improve the natural flushing of Cotuit Bay, helping to offset nutrient loading in that body of water.

He said the dredging also would improve navigation in the channel, which he said has shrunk to 200 to 225 feet, and it would discourage swimmers from trying to swim from the Cotuit shore to the island, which he said is dangerous.

The Three Bays plan calls for taking the spoils from the dredging and adding it to Dead Neck, at the eastern end of the island, where Three Bays owns about 85 acres.

But Rebecca Harris, director of Mass Audubon's coastal watershed program, said the organization objects to the dredging proposal on a number of grounds.

For one, Ms. Harris said, Mass Audubon does not typically allow its land to be taken away, either through sale or outright elimination. Mass Audubon owns about 35 acres on the western end of Sampson's Island.

For another, she said, the proposal would take away bird habitat. Ms. Harris estimates that 60 to 70 percent of the nesting piping plovers and least terns on the island are clustered in the western section on Mass Audubon land that would be carved off by the proposed dredging.

Mr. Counsell said his organization would create more habitat farther east on the island for the shorebirds. Ms. Harris, however, said tidal flows along that section of the island tend to carve cliffs that are problematic for young birds trying to fledge.

Ms. Harris said the Three Bays plan as it stands likely will not receive the necessary state and federal permits to go forward.

But she also said that Mass Audubon may be willing to discuss a less extensive widening of the channel, which she agrees is shrinking.



PAUL RIFKIN

A sailboat rounds the point of Sampson's Island off Cotuit, as two fishermen try their luck on the beach. A major dredging proposal to widen the entrance to Cotuit Harbor has run into controversy.

"It's not just up to Mass Audubon," she said of the future of the channel and the island.

Meanwhile, a Cotuit resident said she and other village residents were taken aback by the size of the Three Bays proposal, which was presented to a July meeting of the Cotuit-San-

tuit Civic Association.

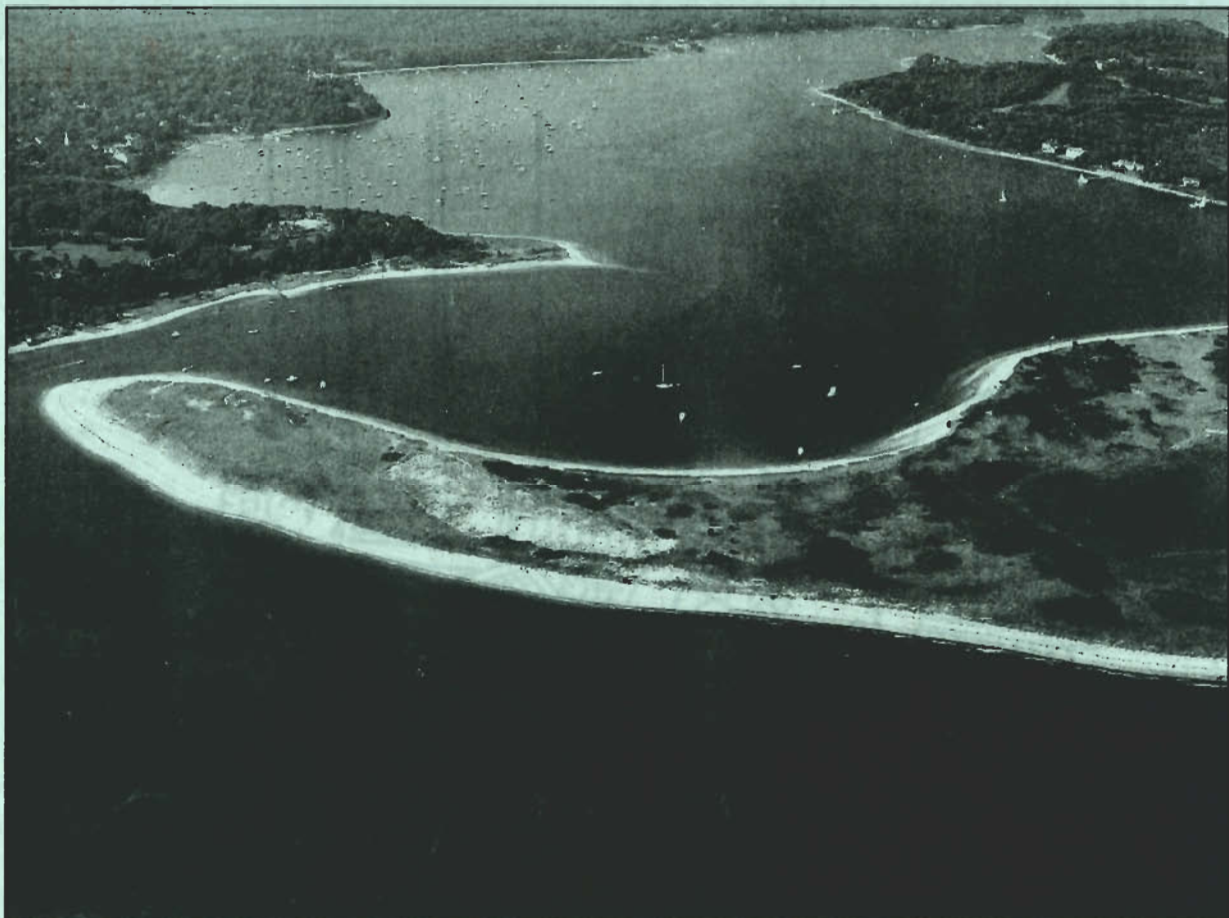
In that presentation, Carol Lyall of Popponesset Road said, Mr. Counsell defined the take as 600 feet off the western side of Sampson's Island.

Ms. Lyall said she and other Cotuit residents who have been swimming

from the village shore to the island over the past 20 years or so have not noticed much difference in the size of the channel.

She also questioned the effect of the dredging on shorebirds that already use that part of the island, as

Continued on Page 3



PAUL RIFKIN

An aerial view of Sampson's Island.

Sampson's Island Dredging Proposal

Continued from Page 1

well as whether vessels with deeper drafts should be encouraged to go in and out of Cotuit Bay.

"We were kind of blown away," Ms. Lyall said of the presentation. "It didn't make a whole lot of sense."

Meanwhile, Three Bays is on schedule to pursue a more modest dredging project that likely will get under way late this year.

Mr. Counsell said the organization wants to counteract shoaling near the island that resulted from the 2007 Patriots Day storm.

Working with the Town of Barnstable and the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Three Bays

is helping organize an effort to dredge 15,850 yards, which would be placed on Three Bays land on Dead Neck farther east on the island.

Tim Dugan, a spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, wrote in an e-mail, "The proposal is to dredge an approximately 128,775 square-foot area to a depth of 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11 feet below [mean low water] at Cotuit Bay and Nantucket Sound in Osterville.... Approximately 15,850 cubic yards of gravel and sand will be removed by hydraulic means and disposed of at Dead Neck as beach nourishment. The corps performed a suitability

determination and found the material to be suitable to be disposed of as proposed."

Mr. Counsell said state environmental officials also must sign off on the plan before it goes forward.

He said the work will cost about \$200,000, which the town would fund, and then receive reimbursement from the federal emergency agency. Three Bays paid for the acquisition of permits, which he said cost about \$50,000.

Mr. Counsell anticipates the dredging, if approved, will occur in an eight-week window later this year between mid-November and mid-January.