

State scraps Falmouth dredge dumping

By **DAVID KIBBE**
TIMES BOSTON BUREAU

BOSTON - State environmental officials have withdrawn their proposal to reopen an offshore dredge dumping site one mile off the West Falmouth coast.

The decision was spurred by, strong opposition to the dumping from the Falmouth Conservation Commission, environmentalists and state lawmakers.

"They are basically surrendering," said state Rep. Eric Turkington, D-Falmouth, who opposed the project.

The dumping site in Buzzards Bay could have been used for so-called "clean" dredge spoils from harbor navigational projects in Southeastern Massachusetts

The state Legislature's Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture will still hold a public hearing today on a bill filed by Turkington and Sen. Therese Murray, D-Plymouth, to ban dredge disposal in all of Buzzards Bay. The dumping ban has broad support from the Cape and SouthCoast legislative delegations. The hearing begins at 1 p.m. in Room B-2 at the Statehouse.

In a letter dated April 27 and made public yesterday, Susan Snow-Cotter, the director of the Office of Coastal Zone Management, cited opposition to reopening the dumping area as one of the reasons the project was being scrapped.

The decision was also based on the limited number of comments from Buzzards Bay municipalities and private interests that there is a need for an open-water disposal site, Snow-Cotter wrote to Environmental Affairs Secretary Stephen Pritchard. She also noted that it would take a significant amount of work to address comments received on the project's draft environmental impact statement

Ben Bryant, a marine policy specialist at the Coalition for Buzzards Bay, said it was still important to ban all dredge dumping in the bay in case a new proposal is made in the future.

"Had this proposal been allowed, the animals that make up the bay bottom community, (such as) lobster, flounder and conch, would have been smothered, and productive habitat, necessary to sustain the health of the bay's diverse plant and animal species, would have been lost," Bryant said.

State environmental officials had said the proposal would not cause any long-term impact on water quality, fish or habitat. Short-term effects would have included the burial of the existing sea bottom and potential damage to fish eggs and larvae, according to the draft environmental impact statement.

The area, next to Cleveland Light, was closed to dredge dumping in 1989.

It is still a mystery why CZM suddenly began pursuing the dumping site again, Turkington said. CZM officials could not be reached for comment late yesterday afternoon.

PCB-contaminated sediment that is being dredged from New Bedford's inner harbor would not have been brought to the disposal site. It is being buried in a deep hole in the inner harbor and capped with clean sediment. David Kibbe can be reached at dkottaway@aol.com.

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