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New site considered for dredging spoils

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ASTORIA, Ore. (AP) — A potential new disposal site for Port of Astoria dredging spoils is expected to keep Columbia River dredging on schedule.

The Lower Columbia Solutions Group, a regional think tank, has zeroed in on a promising upland disposal site for contaminated sediment in Astoria's mooring basins.

The city of Warrenton's north sewer lagoon, decommissioned after the new sewer treatment plant opened in 2006, has the space, proper zoning and the access to the river that the Port needs for dredge material storage, said Jay Flint, a member of the group.

And the Warrenton site is big enough to serve the Port of Astoria and other lower Columbia ports such as Ilwaco and Chinook in Washington state, should they need it.

The Lower Columbia Solutions Group was formed in 2002 by the governors of Oregon and Washington to manage sediment in the Columbia, including sediment that has been contaminated by pollution. The group includes 30 local, state and federal stakeholders.

The Port of Astoria has been struggling to keep the riverfront deep enough for boats to moor at its docks since 2001, when tests in the East Mooring Basin showed levels of the banned pesticide DDT were higher than the limit for in-water disposal.

The Port of Ilwaco encountered the same problem with DDT in 2001.

Flint has ranked all the possible storage sites in the region and believes the Warrenton site is the best bet, partly because the city wants to fill the lagoon to create land for the future expansion of its public works facilities.

"The site's already built like a dredge material storage site," said Flint. "It's the only one that looks like it has any real potential. Most of the sites we've looked at are too small to be regional."

In 2005, contamination problems complicated and prolonged the dredge permitting process and left the Port of Astoria with little time to complete riverfront deepening work.

In its haste to finish dredging before the work window closed, the Port violated its permit and wound up with steep federal and state fines that cost the agency more than \$800,000 of its savings and still haven't been settled.

Flint said the Lower Columbia Solutions Group will need to test the Warrenton site's feasibility and find an estimated \$4 million to \$5 million in funding to turn the lagoon into a storage facility.

"It's a huge deal for us," said Port of Astoria Executive Director Jack Crider.

"We've been looking for a site for quite a few years," Crider said. "Most sites you find don't have this kind of capacity or are up so far that it costs you a lot of money to transport the material there."