

Gathering at Port Salerno waterfront celebrates start of Manatee Pocket dredging

By Jim Mayfield
Wednesday, July 28, 2010

PORT SALERNO — A diverse group of politicians, engineers, business leaders, marine conservationists and locals gathered at the Port Salerno waterfront Tuesday to celebrate the long-awaited beginning of the Manatee Pocket dredging project.

Originally approved by the county in January 2006, the two-year, \$12 million dredging operation got underway last Thursday to remove some 280,000 cubic yards of sediment from the Manatee Pocket in Port Salerno and four surrounding creeks and tributaries to deepen and improve navigation channels and water quality there.

"I'm thrilled," said Kathy Fitzpatrick, Martin County coastal engineer, who described the enterprise as "an intricate project with a lot of moving parts."

Upon completion, there will be a deepened, 100-foot-wide navigational channel that will allow larger boats into the pocket and improve navigation for smaller vessels. In addition to removing muck sediments, five new bottom habitats will be established, planners said.

"This is going to be a very big benefit for us," said Port Salerno businessman John Hennesse, owner of the Fish House Art Center Gallery. "It's going to help the boat yards by increasing the size of the boats that can be hauled out, and it's going to help the restaurants and businesses on the waterfront by making it easier to navigate. We sit here every weekend and watch someone get stuck in the mud," Hennesse said.

"Probably the biggest benefit will be to improve the water quality. We won't have (boats) stirring up the bottom once it's dredged," he said.

The dredged bottom material is piped from the pocket to a 25-acre site between Southeast Slater Street and Gran Park Way along U.S. 1 in Stuart. There, it will be dried and hauled away by Fort Pierce-based dredging contractor Dickerson Florida Inc.

"The site on U.S. 1 looks good and is well managed," said Martin County Engineering Director Don Donaldson. "There's a 15-foot berm that's sodded, and we're not talking about anything hazardous," he said. "That material is suitable for the site that it is on."

