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Corps agrees to halt plans for risky spring, summer dredging off Georgia coast

BRUNSWICK, GA—The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers [has agreed it](#) will not use hopper dredges in Brunswick Harbor during spring or summer months until it conducts a [rigorous environmental review](#) of potential impacts, One Hundred Miles and the Southern Environmental Law Center announced today.

Since 2021, OHM and SELC have fought against efforts by the Corps to remove longstanding restrictions that prohibited maintenance dredging between April 1 and December 14, including during spring and summer nesting season for when there are more sea turtles, especially nesting females, in Georgia's shipping channels.

In December 2022, OHM and SELC filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Georgia, arguing that the Corps failed to conduct a sufficient environmental review of year-round dredging, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

As a result of the lawsuit, the Corps announced it would not move forward with year-round hopper dredging in Brunswick Harbor at this time and would instead undertake a thorough review of the environmental impacts to sea turtles, fisheries, and other wildlife—a significant victory for Georgia's loggerhead sea turtles.

Hopper dredging uses suction pumps to suck up sediment from the bottom of the harbor, and marine life—including female turtles that are present during spring and summer nesting season—are often killed or maimed in the process. To avoid these impacts, the Corps has restricted hopper dredging in Georgia's harbors to winter months for the past three decades—a practice OHM and SELC's lawsuit sought to preserve.

"We're pleased that the Corps has committed to go back and fully review the science. And the science is clear—spring and summer dredging puts Georgia's sea turtles, and decades of conservation progress, at risk," said Catherine Ridley, Vice President of Education and Communications for One Hundred Miles. "This harmful practice would have gone against the strenuous objections of state biologists and defied more than 30 years of precedent. It's a dangerous and unnecessary risk—one that we cannot afford to take if we want to recover loggerheads and other sea turtle species."

"We are relieved that the Corps has agreed to abandon plans for year-round dredging in Brunswick Harbor this spring—a move that, according to state biologists, would have almost certainly killed and injured federally threatened sea turtles, as well as fish and other important wildlife off Georgia's coast," said Megan Huynh, Senior Attorney at SELC. "While dredging plays an essential role in keeping Georgia's harbors safe and navigable, these benefits can be safely and effectively met by adhering to established winter dredging windows — as has been done for more than three decades."

Several times in recent years, conservation groups and wildlife advocates have taken action across the region to enforce seasonal dredging windows that have effectively protected marine life since 1991. In response to an earlier lawsuit by OHM and SELC, a Georgia federal judge temporarily halted the Corps' plans for spring and summer dredging in 2021. Last September, a North Carolina federal judge blocked a similar plan for spring and summer maintenance dredging in North Carolina's harbors. Click here to read previously submitted comments from [OHM and SELC on year-round dredging](#).

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One Hundred Miles is a nonprofit conservation organization with a mission of protecting and preserving Georgia's 100-mile coast through advocacy, education, and public engagement. Founded in 2013, OHM is the only organization focused on combatting the multiple threats to Georgia's entire 100-mile coast and promoting the significance of its robust wildlife, vast landscapes, and vibrant communities. Our team of ten employees works out of offices in Savannah and Brunswick to empower citizens to fight poor decision-making that threatens our coast and to participate in important community dialogues about growth, sea level rise, economic development, and conservation. OneHundredMiles.org