Long Beach Breakwater:
City Administrators and Public Policy

By:
Randy Colón

For:
Dr. Adrian Novotny
Honors Physical Anthropology
T-Th 9-10:15AM
M206

Fall 2009
Long Beach City College
Long Beach, CA
December 17, 2009
# Table of Contents

**INTRODUCTION** ................................................................. page 1

**HISTORY** ............................................................................. 1

**RECONNAISSANCE STUDY** .................................................. 3

**ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS** ............................................. 4

**PUBLIC REPRESENTATIVES** ............................................... 5

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION** ........................................... 6

**REFERENCES CITED** ............................................................. 8
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to further understand the implications of the Long Beach breakwater in regards to the policy implemented by the city representatives both from the local and federal government. Because the breakwater is federally owned by the Army Corps of Engineers, the federal government must approve any proposals made by the city administration. Therefore, this study attempts to discover how the federal government’s policies affect the residents of Long Beach with respect to the breakwater.

The Breakwater Reconnaissance Study conducted by a local engineering firm, Moffatt & Nichol, was completed in July of 2009 (Long). The impact of it was to survey the benefits and detriments of the breakwater and to find potential interest for the federal government. Because the city of Long Beach is sharing half the cost of the reconnaissance study, the public interest is definitely an important matter. Benefits for the public would begin with an improvement in water quality, water-related recreation, and tourism. The ecosystem was a main concern of the reconnaissance study, seeing as it would be the best way to attract the attention of the federal government. In order to further understand the current state of the Long Beach breakwater, one would have to look at the history of its development.

HISTORY

The San Pedro Breakwater began construction just before the turn of the century in 1899, and was completed in 1910. A three mile long extension to the San Pedro Breakwater was first authorized under the federal Rivers and Harbor Act of 1930. Construction began in 1941, but stopped because of the war effort. Work resumed in 1946, and in 1949, the eight-mile long breakwater was completed (Long). The original intent of the breakwater was to protect the U.S. Navy’s Pacific Fleet from strong weather and foreign attack.
Although public support seems to lean towards eliminating the breakwater, either part of it or entirely, the city council and federal government have yet to make a decision. Recently, more funding has been permitted for more information on the breakwater. In July of 2007, the City Council authorized and approved up to $100,000 for the reconnaissance study. Over the summer of 2009, Rep. Laura Richardson secured $100,000 in the Energy and Water Development and Related Agencies Appropriations Act (HR 3183), which was passed and signed into law by the President on the 28th of October. HR 3183 made appropriations for the fiscal year of 2010; the funding would be

“expended under the direction of the Secretary of the Army and the supervision of the Chief of Engineers for authorized civil functions of the Department of the Army pertaining to rivers and harbors, flood and storm damage reduction, shore protection, aquatic ecosystem restoration, and related efforts” (HR 3183).

The bill also listed The Mackinac Island Harbor breakwater in Michigan to receive funding.

Although the Long Beach Breakwater has been the most controversial, other states’ breakwaters have undergone complex repairs. In Alaska, the Bar Point Harbor’s two floating breakwaters, which is also managed by the Army Corps of Engineers, were completed in April of 1980. It recently underwent repairs such as replacing old wires with stronger ones, changing the anchor chain, repair cracking on the surface, and other jobs that would only sound difficult because it is in Alaska. First Lieutenant Jonpaul Navarro, the execute officer, said that the job “not only serves the Corps of Engineers and the local community, but it provides divers with an opportunity to improve their diving skills and gain valuable experience in a cold water location” (Bar Point). The Army Corps of Engineers does repair breakwaters and contributes to the larger community, but mostly when the jobs are small, the Army Corps is willing to do the work and the contributing. When the Reconnaissance Study’s intent is reviewed, one continues to see why
the Army Corps is so significant in the decision for the Long Beach Breakwater’s reconfiguration.

RECONNAISSANCE STUDY

The Long Beach Breakwater Reconnaissance Study’s main purpose was to determine federal interest, and Moffatt & Nichol concluded with five main Army Corps missions. The first is commercial navigation, which they concluded was not detrimental. The next few are urban flood damage reduction, hurricane and storm damage, comprehensive watershed planning, and ecosystem restoration. Moffatt & Nichol decided to center on the ecosystem restoration as an important issue that would attract federal interest, so they changed the name of the study to the East San Pedro Bay Ecosystem Restoration Study.

The ecosystem restoration study would proceed with a feasibility study to provide to the Corps of Engineers. Then, the Corps would be able to determine whether or not there is federal interest. The feasibility study is meant to

“evaluate opportunities for providing ecosystem restoration (including restoration of habitat areas which historically existed in the region), increased recreational opportunities and other improvements to the near shore area off the City of Long Beach, within East San Pedro Bay” (Long).

The study also lists “critical assumptions” that the feasibility study could restore rocky reef and kelp habitats, however, adding that the “LA River will continue to discharge pollutants into East San Pedro Bay” (Ibid).

The study’s plan to sway Congress into passing legislation to reconfigure the breakwater, which would ultimately generate larger waves and cleaner water for a cleaner beach, resulting in better surf tourism for the city of Long Beach, is contributing to a continuing debate about the breakwater. Reconfiguration could allow the city to gain in local spending, $52 million annually,
and in taxes and fees, $7 million a year. The concerns of reconfiguration are how offshore loading and navigation would be affected for Los Angeles and Long Beach. The solutions proposed by the reconnaissance study does not acknowledge complete removal of the breakwater, however, it does provide five options that range in expenses from $10 million to $310 million (Long 2). But because the study aims to sway the Army Corps of Engineers, it would be appropriate to comprehend the Army Corps’ motives and history.

ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

In August of 2005, a storm formed over the Bahamas. It traveled across southern Florida, prompting flooding and some lives to end before it would quickly become stronger into the Gulf of Mexico. Several days later, it weakened as it went towards southern Louisiana. Its power remained severe as destruction became inevitable, reaching west into Texas, but it was in New Orleans that the loss of life was exacerbated and property was harmed copiously. We know this storm as Hurricane Katrina. The seriousness and injustice of the hurricane lead people to prompt investigations into the failure of the levees. These levees were constructed and designed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (Hurricane). The Corps functions in the United States as a third-party entity to develop civil works in accordance to the public interest. However, their buried history provides a different picture of overestimated costs and navigation obstructions in developments such as the St. Louis Eads Bridge, and miscalculations and false reports during the construction of the Mississippi River Jetties (Morgan).

Recently, U.S. District Judge Stanwood Duval Jr. of the Eastern District of Louisiana ruled that the Mississippi River-Gulf Outlet (MRGO) was mismanaged by the Army Corps, thus resulting in the flood damage of Hurricane Katrina occurring in the Lower 9th Ward and the St. Bernard Parish. Duval wrote in his ruling, “the Corps’ lassitude and failure to fulfill its duties
resulted in a catastrophic loss of human life and property in unprecedented proportions” (Duval). He also importantly added, “the Corps not only knew, but admitted by 1988, that the MRGO threatened human life... and yet it did not act in time to prevent the catastrophic disaster that ensued with the onslaught of Hurricane Katrina” (Ibid). When such evidence proves the Army Corps to be dysfunctional for society, the notion to hold those who manage these civil works accountable, and not as a public entity that must advise the citizens on its decisions, becomes more evident and necessary.

CITY ADMINISTRATORS

Although the decision is ultimately left up to the federal government, city officials have also opined on the issue. Since the reconnaissance study was released, it has provided more information and facts about the breakwater, allowing the discussion to move forward. Second District Councilmember Suja Lowenthal “supports the study of and ultimately, the reconfiguring or removal of the breakwater should the evidence reveal that water quality would be improved” (e-mail from Broc Coward, Dec. 4, 2009). According to the reconnaissance study, the alternatives provided would impact the water quality in a positive manner, which is proving to be a major concern as it echoes in the city council discussions.

During a City Council meeting in July of 2009, several Councilmembers acknowledged the need to improve water quality, however, some also opined other concerns. First District Councilmember Robert Garcia said, “having waves would be the best possible stimulus plan for Long Beach” (Breakwater). Similarly, Fifth District Councilmember Gerrie Schipske also recognized that reconfiguring the breakwater “would be a fantastic economic stimulus plan for Long Beach” (Ibid). The breakwater’s reconfiguration has awakened the city to great discussion, but as these comments echo in City Hall, little debate has occurred in Congress.
The discussion being given by members of Congress has been in support of reconfiguration. Representative Laura Richardson of the 37th district of California has said it is her “hope and goal” to see completion of the project within the next ten years. She stated that “we are excited about the prospect of returning waves to Long Beach, but also committed to ensuring that any such project protects homes and the economic vitality of the largest port complex in the United States” (Long 2). Her excitement about proceeding with the project became evident when she concluded, “if it is determined that we can do those two things and return the waves, then let the waters roll. We’re ready” (Ibid).

In June, Rep. Laura Richardson secured federal funding of $100,000 for the Army Corps to assess federal interest in the breakwater’s reconfiguration to “improve water quality, promote navigation, preserve coastal zones, and protect property” (Laura). In her press release, she issued the following statement,

“This $100,000 allocation for the Army Corps’ reconnaissance report is one of the most vital allocations this region will receive and it is particularly vital in these economic times to ensure an objective evaluation is made so that all resident, business and government issues and concerns are considered” (Ibid).

The effort of Rep. Laura Richardson has shown that her stance is with her constituency, and this allocation is a step closer to achieving the city’s goal of solving the breakwater problem. Whether it is exactly what the masses support has yet to be seen, but the fact that Congress knows about the problem and acknowledges it financially is evidence of change in public policy.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

Most public representatives support the reconfiguration of the Long Beach Breakwater to improve water quality, but with less of an emphasis on bringing back waves to Long Beach. Based on the research obtained about the federal government and their position on
reconfiguration, the overall opinion seems bleak as some members of congress refuse to acknowledge the issue as vital, so they would receive the overall grade of a C. The generosity of this grade is thanks to Representative Laura Richardson because she brings hope to the city of Long Beach, as she pushed for necessary appropriations to pass in the House of Representatives. The Army Corps of Engineers will be given a grade of D for its failure to provide adequate and prompt assistance as well as response to the people of Long Beach. Finally, the Long Beach City Council will receive a B for sharing the opinion of the public, recognizing both that water quality is greatly important to the city and that bringing waves back would allow the city to succeed economically.
REFERENCES CITED

alaskan-breakwater/

council-and-citizens/

“Duval Consolidated Litigation.” In Re Katrina Canal Breaches Consolidated Litigation,
   Document 19415.

   http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?
dbname=111_cong_bills&docid=f:h3183rh.txt.pdf

“Hurricane Katrina.” Hurricane Katrina - Most Destructive Hurricane Ever to Strike the U.S.
   http://www.katrina.noaa.gov/

“Laura Richardson.” Richardson Makes Waves in Long Beach and Washington.

“Long Beach City Breakwater.” East San Pedro Bay Ecosystem Restoration Study.

“Long Beach City Breakwater.” (2) Study Offers 5 Options to Reshape Long Beach’s Breakwater.