

# Upton: Dredge work never a sure thing

By **TONY WITTKOWSKI - HP Staff Writer** | Posted: Tuesday, June 6, 2017 6:00 am

ST. JOSEPH — Standing next to a large gravel pile that will someday be used for I-94, U.S. Rep. Fred Upton praised everybody who helped to secure funds to dredge the St. Joseph Harbor.

Upton, R-St. Joseph, held a press conference Monday to discuss his recent work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, area dock owners, and community leaders. He was joined by state Sen. John Proos, St. Joseph Mayor Mike Garey and others involved in the effort.

“Frankly, this is about jobs. This is about keeping commercial harbors like this one open,” Upton said. “Dredging ensures our harbors remain properly maintained and benefits commercial shipping, recreational boating and jobs.”

Cargo coming into St. Joseph Harbor normally includes limestone, sand, gravel, cement, slag, salt and petroleum products.

The Detroit District of U.S. Army Corps of Engineers previously awarded a contract for dredging the St. Joseph Harbor to a Holland-based company. The contract pays about \$374,000 to dredge about 30,000 cubic yards of material from the St. Joseph Outer Harbor.

Work in the Holland and St. Joseph harbors will begin in June or July.

Last year, Berrien County officials turned over responsibility for managing the dredging of the harbor to St. Joseph and Benton Harbor. At the time, city officials were tepid to the county’s decision to dissolve the St. Joseph River Harbor Authority, which oversaw the commercial harbor.

Despite this, a new harbor authority is expected to be formed to handle further harbor maintenance issues.

Garey said Monday that Benton Harbor, St. Joseph and St. Joseph Township have been in constant communication regarding the formation of an authority.

“We are finalizing some paperwork and are talking about the number of people on the board, how the harbor authority will be formed and its purpose,” Garey said. “The initial focus will be how we will support the recreational boating side of the river.”

The last boat to arrive at the St. Joseph Harbor brought in 400 truckloads – which amounts to nearly 20,000 tons of material.



## Upton: Dredge work never a sure thing

U.S. Rep. Fred Upton, left, speaks Monday about dredging funds that will keep the harbor open for commercial shipping and recreational boating. He was joined by, from left, Pete Berghoff, owner of Dock 63, Tom O’Bryan, with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and St. Joseph Mayor Mike Garey.

Jack Kinney, owner of Central Dock, has been through two or three congressmen in his time with the dock. On Monday, Kinney tipped his hat to Upton for his efforts in helping keep the harbor afloat.

“We are going through a transition now with the county backing out of the (Harbor Authority),” Kinney said. “Anyone who has a boat should care about dredging. We are a small harbor and I know it’s not easy for Fred to prove to the governor that we need the funding.”

When asked how difficult it has become to advocate for the funding, Upton said the state ranks its harbors based on the tonnage that is brought in.

If a harbor has a down year, it might get a lower rating the next year.

“About 15 or 20 years ago you could get an earmark, and I sought an earmark for this,” Upton said in relation to dredge funding. “That was the only way you could get dredging. Every year the Upton language was approved, but we eventually lost those earmarks. So, we have to rely on the Corps. However, sometimes I’m not in the majority on that.”

The press conference was held down on the dock near the St. Joseph River, across from the Inn at Harbor Shores and within view of the Blossomtime Bridge. Unfortunately, the timing of the meeting with local media affiliates didn’t pan out as expected.

“We thought they would be dredging today, which is why we called for this conference,” Upton said Monday. “But we were given late notice it would be another week or two.”

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