

Lower Columbia Region Harbor Safety Committee
Harbor Safety Plan | Chapter 8

NAVIGATION PRACTICES

CHANGE LOG:

Changes Made	Sub-Committee	Date Approved
Updated logo. No content changes.	N/A	4/4/23

A. Purpose

To describe customary navigation practices on the Columbia River in order to reduce the number of close quarter situations within the channel the Corps of Engineers is federally authorized to maintain.

B. Definitions

The federally maintained channel is depicted on the NOAA charts by dashed black lines. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is authorized to maintain a 600-foot wide channel in the Lower Columbia River designed for deep draft ship traffic by dredging restrictive shoaling to provide an authorized depth of 43 feet below CRD or MLLW from River Mile (RM) 3 to 105.5. On the Mouth of the Columbia River (MCR) the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is authorized to maintain a channel 2,640-foot wide to depths of 55 and 48 feet below MLLW from RM -3 to +3.

The natural navigable channel is the width of the river where there is sufficient water for navigation outside the federally maintained channel. For most shallow draft vessels this may be the 18 or 30 foot contours on the NOAA charts.

C. Problem

As navigation with electronic charts became more commonplace, there was an increasing trend of shallow draft vessels navigating within the confines of the federally maintained channel. Whether for ease of navigation, or the mistaken belief that navigating outside the dashed lines on the chart borders on negligence, this causes more close quarter situations with deep draft ships and is a hazard to safe navigation. While this trend doesn't seem to be increasing, it is still a continuous safety issue.

D. Procedure

Shallow draft vessels not requiring the additional dredged depth are reminded that navigation outside the federally maintained channel where there is sufficient water depth is a customary practice on the Columbia River. This practice is often the most prudent one when navigating near deep draft vessels that require the dredged channel depth.

In some cases, a tug and barge or ship in ballast may leave the federally maintained channel to allow more room when meeting a deeply loaded ship.