

Stockton Record

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*STOCKTON* - Federal officials this week announced \$4.5 million for dredging to maintain access to and shipping operations at the Port of Stockton.

The port also will receive \$800,000 for an ongoing study of deepening the ship channel between Stockton and the San Francisco Bay.

The port annually taps federal funds, provided by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, to remove silt from the Deep Water Shipping Channel and other nearby areas.

"These funds will allow the port to run efficiently and will allow us to bring more business to the Central Valley," said Richard Aschieris, port director.

"You have to maintain the ship channel every year."

Dredge work is done between Aug. 1 and Nov. 30, a period chosen to be least disruptive to fish and other wildlife in the channel.

Aschieris also welcomed funding for the channel deepening study, a project begun in 2008. It concerns extending the minimum depth of the channel to 40 feet, from the current 35 feet.

That could allow larger ships or ships carrying heavier loads to reach Stockton, possibly bringing more maritime trade directly to the inland port.

Port officials have said much of the channel is already 40 feet deep or deeper. Setting that as the new minimum depth would involve shaving just the shallowest portions of the channel. Environmentalists have raised concerns about the move.

Rep. Jerry McNerney, D-Pleasanton, who has been arguing for more funding for the study, welcomed the announcement.

"Construction and infrastructure jobs are vital to our regional economic health just as our infrastructure is vital to commerce, and this project will help put our community back to work," McNerney said in a statement.

In addition, the Army Corps will provide \$300,000 to continue the Lower San Joaquin River Study, a multiyear effort to help San Joaquin County determine the improvements needed to reach and exceed a 200-year level of flood protection.