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## **Citizens' group offers scathing review of plan to deal with metal shards left on Park Point beach**

A draft mitigation and cleanup plan from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has drawn sharp criticism.

Written By: Peter Passi | 2:21 pm, Mar. 20, 2021



Shredded metal cans were deposited on a section of Park Point beach last year along with other dredge spoils. Here is some of the metal refuse residents had collected from the area as of Feb. 2. (Jed Carlson / [jcarlson@superiortelegam.com](mailto:jcarlson@superiortelegam.com))

When the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers stepped in to rebuild Park Point's quickly eroding shoreline using dredge spoils, it ran into a snag.

Instead of retrieving clean sand from the harbor entry, the dredging equipment encountered pockets of trash, including old tin and aluminum cans that were sucked up and torn to pieces, likely as they passed through the transfer box grating. The shredded metal, intermixed with hundreds of tons of sand, was then spit onto the shore to create new beach, providing a buffer for Park Point's previously receding shoreline.

On March 1, the Corps sent a letter to the city of Duluth that described its plans to clean up the metal shards and laid out some steps that could be taken to ensure the mistake won't be repeated this coming summer, as it resumes its beach nourishment efforts on Park Point.

That four-page mitigation plan has met with some withering criticism from a citizens' coalition that aired its grievances this week.

A letter from that coalition, penned by Willis Mattison, an advocate and technical adviser for the group, said the Corps was slow to recognize, much less address the issue, which was brought to its attention soon after the beach nourishment occurred.

"But not until January of this year, after three months of the coalition's haggling with these citizen groups, did the Corps finally admit that the can shards on the beach were their fault," Mattison wrote.

"Now, some three months later, the Corps finally produced a plan that only promises to continue surveying the situation and only begins to consider various methods for cleaning up the beach. The coalition has criticized the plan as being too little, too late, and as inadequate to solve the larger problems," he said.



Jan Karon, left, holds a bag of can shards she collected along the beach of Lake Superior on Park Point in October, while Sally Rauschenfels shows examples of some of the pieces she's found, including ring-tab beer cans from the 1960s and '70s, while the pair stand on the now snow-covered beach just down from the dredge area of Park Point on Feb. 2. (Jed Carlson / [jcarlson@superiortelegam.com](mailto:jcarlson@superiortelegam.com))

When asked about the group's criticisms, Kate Van Daele, a public information officer for the city of Duluth, said it would be premature to comment on the plan, which is still developing.

However, she did issue a brief statement: "It is unfortunate that the plan was made public ahead of the document being finalized. The city and the Army Corps of Engineers look forward to presenting the final plan to the public as soon as we are able."

Likewise, Bill Dowell, public affairs chief for the Detroit District of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, characterized the document as a work in progress.

“There’s always a back and forth when you do a plan, and that’s where we’re at,” he said. “We’re working with the city. They’re our partner, and we want to make sure they’re happy with what we plan on doing, and we want to make sure they have realistic expectations of what might be able to be done, when it might be able to be done and that kind of thing.”

The Corps placed about 49,000 cubic yards of dredged materials on the lakeshore between Seventh and 10th streets, in an area described as “among the most popular beaches on Park Point,” by Jim Filby Williams, Duluth’s director of property, parks and libraries, in a March 15 letter to the Corps.

He noted that more than 6 million visitors come to Duluth each year, with most calling on the city between May and October, and many of those visitors are drawn to Park Point’s beaches. Stressing the importance of a swift and thorough remediation, Filby Williams wrote: “The city cannot accept the risk of any remaining hazards to people and pets on the beach.”

Filby Williams asked the Corps for a more detailed accounting of what the cleanup would look like and the timeline to which it would adhere. He suggested warning signs should go up at beach entrances no later than April 1, a thorough assessment of how much metal scrap is present be completed by April 15, and that all metal debris be removed by May 31.

Dowling explained that the Corps should be able to get to work soon, as winter fades to spring.



“Part of it is everything has been frozen, and you can’t really do much while it’s frozen,” he said. “We have been patrolling along with the citizens of the Park Point community to help monitor and pick up the debris out there. But it hasn’t been that much, because things have been frozen. It’s starting to thaw out though.”

Dowling stressed that the Corps takes the issue of the shredded cans on Park Point seriously.

“From the beginning, the Corps of Engineers has taken responsibility,” he said. “We said we’re going to clean it up, and we’ve been working with the city to develop that plan and move forward.”



Multiple ring-top beer cans found on the beach at Park Point, indicate that dredging machinery must of encountered an older cache of trash. (Jed Carlson / [jcarlson@superiortelegam.com](mailto:jcarlson@superiortelegam.com))

Mattison called for further testing of the dredge materials deposited on the beach to see if other contaminants may also be present and questioned if it was even legal for the Corps to be placing harbor dredge spoils along the shoreline.

But not all members of the citizens' coalition share Mattison's level of distrust. Some still see value in using dredged materials to combat erosion on Park Point and protect private property, as well.

"They face a real threat. The local chapter of the Ikes recognizes that, and we support the beneficial use of clean dredge material to bolster the shore of Park Point," said Rich Staffon, president of the McCabe Chapter of the Izaak Walton League, a coalition member organization.

"I think we were all under the assumption that what was being put on there was safe, clean sand, and of course the cans kind of opened everybody's eyes to the fact that maybe it's not as clean as we think," he said, calling for closer monitoring and testing of the dredge materials as beach nourishment efforts on Park Point continue.

The Park Point Community Club issued a statement, saying: "Because the erosion situation on Park Point, especially in the area between Ninth and 13th streets, poses an emergency level of risk of storm damage, we strongly encourage the city of Duluth and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to complete the beach nourishment project in 2021."

But the community club also called for closer scrutiny and continuous analysis of dredge materials.

In his letter responding to the Corps' initial draft plan, Filby Williams, expressed the city's desire to see the work continue as well but said: "City consent for the discussed 2021 beach nourishment project is contingent upon Corps commitment to perform the 2020 project cleanup to the standards just outlined." He suggested that cleanup include the beach stretching south to the 3600 block of Minnesota Avenue to account for shards of metal that have migrated due to wind and wave action.

Staffon said he gives the Corps credit for accepting responsibility for promising to clean up the shredded metal deposited on the beach.

"Basically, we need to partner with the city; we need to partner with the Corps; we need to partner with HTAC (Harbor Technical Advisory Committee); with the Park Point Community Club. Everybody needs to work together to solve this problem," he said.

Dowling said the Corps intends to learn from the issues it encountered last year on Park Point.

"We found out what the problem was, and we've come up with solutions," he said. "That's what we do. We're the Corps of Engineers."





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Jan Karon, left, holds a bag of can shards she collected along the beach of Lake Superior on Park Point in October, while Sally Rauschenfels shows examples of some of the pieces she's found, including ring-tab beer cans from the 1960s and '70s, while the pair stand on the now snow-covered beach just down from the dredge area of Park Point on Feb. 2. (Jed Carlson / jcarlson@superiortelegam.com)

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