

Hudson River Editorial

Today, as announced by press release, I have suspended future rulemaking decisions regarding additional anchorages on the Hudson River until we more fully understand the safety and environmental risks associated with the myriad waterway uses of the Hudson River. To improve our understanding of those risks, I am directing a formal study through a longstanding Coast Guard process called a ports and waterways safety assessment (PAWSA). The PAWSA includes structured meetings of workgroups comprised of waterway users appointed by the Coast Guard, including but not limited to industry and commercial interests, environmental organizations, academia, recreational groups, and community representatives. We are still shaping the PAWSA, but it will help us identify major waterway risks and evaluate potential mitigation measures.

The Hudson River is a beautiful national treasure. It also serves as a source of drinking water, recreation, tourism and economic prosperity. The river historically has been and will remain a vital corridor for maritime commerce. The Coast Guard's role on the river includes protecting the environment and promoting navigational safety. These are complementary objectives, as safer navigation inherently improves environmental protection. It is for these stewardship reasons that we published an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (ANPRM) in June 2016 to better understand the need for and potential locations of anchorages that could help improve navigation safety and environmental protection. In examining whether there is a need for a proposed rule, we selected the pre-rulemaking ANPRM from many possible tools because it provided public participation at the earliest possible opportunity.

Currently, only one seasonal anchorage ground exists on the Hudson River from Yonkers to Kingston, New York. We published the ANPRM to seek public comment regarding if and where additional anchorage grounds may be needed to mitigate safety and environmental risks concerning current and future maritime traffic, especially barges that regularly traverse the Hudson River. Anchorage grounds allow commercial maritime traffic to temporarily stop in designated areas for various reasons, such as crew rest, to await better weather conditions, to avoid traffic congestion, or to rectify mechanical issues.

We received more than 10,200 comments on the ANPRM. The comments generally fell into one of the following three categories: 1. those opposed to creating anchorage grounds (94%) 2. those in support (3%), and 3. those reflecting a neutral opinion (3%). About half of the oppose comments cited interest in the public engagement process and requests for increased transparency (e.g. requests for public meetings, National Environmental Policy Act requirements). Almost all of the supporting comments emphasized improving navigation safety as reasons for support, especially in impaired weather conditions which limits visibility. The neutral comments sought more information and/or requested public meetings. The comment summary can be found in the docket for the ANPRM. This robust public participation gave us excellent insights that are helping shape the way forward. Importantly, the comments convinced me of the necessity to do the PAWSA. Thank you for taking the time to provide us with your concerns.

We will continue to update the public on the PAWSA process as it proceeds. To be clear, the PAWSA is not a substitute for the rulemaking process. The results of the PAWSA will help us determine what the next steps might be, after a more comprehensive assessment of risks. Any subsequent rulemaking regarding

maritime commerce on the Hudson River will continue to be conducted through a transparent process of public notice and comment.

Steven D. Poulin, Rear Admiral, U.S. Coast Guard, Commander First Coast Guard District

Rear Admiral Steven Poulin oversees all Coast Guard missions across eight states in the Northeast including over 2,000 miles of coastline from the U.S.-Canadian border to northern New Jersey and 1300 miles offshore. The First District is comprised of more than 11,000 active duty, reserve, civilian and auxiliary personnel, 30 cutters, 200 boats and seven aircraft.