

Tuesday, December 6, 2016

I fully support the Coast Guard proposal to establish 10 designated anchorage areas in the Hudson River, based on the belief that there is a real need for the anchorages and that the negative implications of this proposal are largely exaggerated. I think the need for safe anchorage areas for commercial vessels is inherent in their role of transporting goods between the New York Port area and upstate ports; the need to anchor for various reasons is obvious.

My understanding of the current rules is that commercial vessels are prohibited from anchoring in non-designated areas, but there are not sufficient designated areas between NYC and Albany to meet the need for commercial anchoring. This has resulted in the use of many non-designated anchorages due to necessity. This proposal should alleviate that problem, providing safer areas to anchor when required. It may also reduce many of the “quality of life” complaints about visual impact resulting from use of non-designated anchorage areas.

The apparent resistance to this proposal in the media and by conservative environmental groups is, in my view, fueled by hysteria based on a lack of understanding of how and why commercial anchorages are needed and used. The public has not been adequately educated on the matter, and false claims have led to the belief that such anchorage areas will represent long-term holding or stock-piling areas. If this is an intended usage, I believe it is inappropriate. The press has implied that they involve “building” or some type of construction process, which I believe is not true and furthers public anxiety.

Failing to provide more designated anchorages available in order to make the transportation of those products safer is no more helpful than eliminating rest areas on our highways to make roads safer. It doesn't make sense. Certainly the transport of Bakken crude oil by barge or tanker seems safer than using rail tankers which are not certified for that type of product. And preventing more designated anchorages is not the way to reduce the shipping of oil, even if that might be a reasonable outcome. Nor do I believe that controlling the level of commerce is the responsibility of the Coast Guard. It is the safety of that commerce.

My understanding of the matter is based on over 40 years of boating on the Hudson, and an interest in the operation of commercial traffic which can affect my activities. I have attended several presentations by River Keeper and other environmental protection advocates, whose basic principles are laudable, but may be misdirected in this case. I am also friends with a senior Hudson River Pilot with whom I have had many conversations on the subject in order to become informed about it.

As Past Commodore of the Poughkeepsie Yacht Club in Hyde Park, NY, I am near the Hudson almost daily and deeply concerned about its welfare. We established the first AIS receiving station between Albany and Lower Westchester, filling a geographical gap in the collection of data for monitoring ship positions remotely. The data generated by our station is used by the MarineTraffic.com web site. We also monitor the Hyde Park anchorage with web cams at the club. Keeping a watch on Hudson River traffic is a daily activity for many of us who enjoy and respect the river.

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