

Pinole Shoal Channel; further reduce the risk of groundings and collisions by expanding the RNA in the Southampton Shoal to encompass the federally maintained waterway; and correct the coordinates for the northern boundary of the Oakland Harbor RNA that is inaccurately listed in the current RNA regulation.

**DATES:** Comments and related material must reach the Coast Guard on or before November 17, 2003.

**ADDRESSES:** You may mail comments and related material to Commanding Officer, District Eleven Marine Safety Division, Waterways Management Section, Coast Guard Island, Building 51-1, Alameda, CA, 94501-5100, Attn: LTJG Michael Boyes. District Eleven Marine Safety Division, Waterways Management Section maintains the public docket for these rulemakings. Comments and material received from the public, as well as documents indicated in this preamble as being available in the docket, will become part of this docket and will be available for inspection or copying at District Eleven Marine Safety Division, Waterways Management Section, Coast Guard Island, Building 51-1, Alameda, CA, 94501-5100, between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Monday through Friday, except Federal holidays.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** LTJG Michael Boyes, District Eleven Marine Safety Division, Waterways Management Section, at (510) 437-2940.

**SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:**

**Request for Comments**

We encourage you to participate in this rulemaking by submitting comments and related material. If you do so, please include your name and address, identify the docket number for this rulemaking [CGD11-03-001], indicate the specific section of this document to which each comment applies, and give the reason for each comment. Please submit all comments and related material in an unbound format, no larger than 8½ by 11 inches, suitable for copying. If you would like to know your submission reached us, please enclose a stamped, self-addressed postcard or envelope. We will consider all comments and material received during the comment period. We may change this proposed rule in view of them.

**Public Meeting**

We do not plan to hold a public meeting for this rule. But you may submit a request for a meeting in writing to District Eleven Marine Safety Division, Waterways Management

Section at the address under **ADDRESSES** explaining why one would be beneficial. If we determine that one would aid this rulemaking, we will hold one at a time and place announced by a separate notice in the **Federal Register**.

**Background and Purpose**

*Benicia-Martinez Railroad Drawbridge regulated navigation area (RNA):* The purpose is to revise the RNA at the Benicia-Martinez Railroad Drawbridge at the entrance to Suisun Bay. The revision would refer to the bridge that is the focus of the RNA in terms of geographic locality to remove any reference to corporate naming methods. The revision would convert the distance measurement from 1000 yards to ½ nautical mile. Lastly, the revision would clarify and expand the boundaries of the RNA and clarify the procedures for vessels intending to transit through the Benicia-Martinez Railroad Drawbridge that are either moored or anchored within the boundaries of the proposed revised RNA.

*Pinole Shoal Channel RNA:* Revision of this regulation would update the current Pinole Shoal Channel RNA that currently restricts vessels drawing a draft less than 20 feet from operating within the channel. Instead of the draft requirement, the new regulations would restrict vessels less than 1600 gross tons from entering the Pinole Shoal Channel RNA. This change will allow vessels of 1600 gross tons or a tug with a tow of 1600 gross tons that may not necessarily draw 20 feet of draft to utilize the marked channel. The RNA will continue to benefit vessels based on their maneuverability and keep smaller vessels out of the channel.

*Southampton/Richmond Harbor RNA:* In 1995, the Coast Guard established several RNA's in the San Francisco Bay, including the Southampton Shoal Channel/Richmond Harbor RNA, under 33 CFR 165.1114. In 2001, this section was redesignated as section 165.1181. The RNA encompasses Southampton Shoal Channel, the Richmond Long Wharf Maneuvering Area, the Richmond Harbor Entrance Channel and Point Potrero Reach. These are dredged channels and areas within which maneuvering room is severely limited. Close-quarters situations between deep draft vessels in these channels were eliminated with the implementation of the RNA, reducing the risk of grounding and collisions.

In October 1999 a major Bay Area shipping company participated in a week of simulation exercises to test the

feasibility of bringing in new, double hull, very large crude carriers (VLCCs) into the Richmond Long Wharf. The class of vessel tested was a 306,000 dead weight tons (DWT) tank vessel.

Part of the study was to see what, if any, improvements would be needed, including channel widening, dredging, berth improvements, and aids to navigation. Using large scale Army Corps of Engineers survey charts it was determined that the buoys, as previously positioned, did not accurately indicate the federally maintained channel. Buoy #1 was located 175 feet outside the channel, Buoy #2 was right on the channel line, Buoy #4 was 150 feet outside the channel, and Buoy #5 was 275 feet outside the channel. Also, the distances between North Channel Buoy #8 and Southampton Shoal Channel Buoys #1 and #2 were considerable. Vessels approaching Southampton Shoal Channel from the south are subject to a cross current that is sometimes difficult to detect right away due to the distance between navigational aids. Inbound deep draft vessels have to proceed at a relatively slow speed through this area, allowing greater influence by the current. A closer spacing between navigational aids would allow quicker detection of current set and a better delineation of the dredged channel.

In order to enhance navigation safety, it was proposed to change the buoys in Southampton Shoal Channel. Buoys #1 and #2 have been moved to the bottom corner of Anchorage #5. A new set of buoys has been added halfway to the top of the channel. Buoy #5 has been moved down to be adjacent to Buoy #4 (re-numbered as #6). The green Buoy #1 off Red Rock has been moved to the top corner of the turning basin (and has been renumbered #7). All buoys have been located 50 feet outside the channel limit to facilitate dredging and allow full use of the entire channel width. The line of green buoys helps delineate the shallow water to the west of the channel and approaches.

The federally maintained channel used to extend almost all the way to North Channel Buoy A and did not stop at Southampton Shoal Buoys #1 and #2. The water on both sides of the channel continues to shoal, so clear delineation of the entire length of the channel is critical for deep draft vessels. Waterways Analysis and Management Study number 11-00-020 was started on January 27, 2000. The San Francisco Bar Pilots notified the Coast Guard and NOAA that Southampton Shoal Channel is dredged by the ACOE to North Channel Lighted Buoy A (LLNR-5410). At the time of the study, the channel