

SOUTHEAST TEXAS WATERWAY ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes for April 24, 2025, Full-Committee Meeting

A meeting of the Southeast Texas Waterway Advisory Council (SETWAC) was held on April 24th, 2025, at MSU Port Arthur in Port Arthur, TX. The current SETWAC Charter is dated January 29th, 2019. Meeting information and power point presentations are available electronically through the SETWAC website www.setwac.org.

1. Call to Order:

- SETWAC Chair, Daniel Plumley, called the meeting to order at 10:02 A.M. Mr. Plumley welcomed those in attendance. 60 members and guests attended in person at MSU Port Arthur.
- Everyone then went around the room introducing themselves. Mr. Plumley discussed how the introductions did not just serve as introductions, but also to keep an accurate head count.
- Dan Plumley expressed gratitude to the administrative assistant for her excellent work keeping minutes and tracking attendance. Furthermore, going on to discuss that the meeting setup was reverted to the original arrangement by popular demand.
- The floor was then handed over to Commander Kelly to begin the main discussion.

2. Remarks by the Captain of the Port:

- Commander Kelly noted she had only a few updates to share, as Capt. Migliorini, CO of MSU Port Arthur, was in training and couldn't attend the meeting. The Change of Command ceremony is scheduled for May 30th at 10:00 AM at the Bob Bowers Civic Center. Attendees are welcome, and those who haven't received an email invitation should notify the organizers to receive one.
- LCDR Kimberly Gates of USCG Marine Safety Unit Port Arthur presented a Certificate of Merit to the crew of the tug Hailey Moran for their meritorious efforts on December 28, 2024. During a severe weather event, the crew expertly assisted the LPG carrier Sunny Vista, which was hit by an F3 tornado with winds up to 165 mph for about 10 minutes. Despite extreme conditions, the Hailey Moran crew-maintained control, ensured the safety of both vessels, and helped protect the third-largest petrochemical port complex. Their professionalism and skill allowed minimal damage and enabled the Sunny Vista to safely continue its voyage, earning commendation for decisive action and dedication to life-saving traditions of the Coast Guard.

3. Approval of the January 23rd, 2025, Minutes:

- A motion was made and seconded to vote to approve the January 23rd, 2025, meeting minutes without edit. A vote was conducted; the minutes were approved. Mrs. Lorrie Taylor made the motion to accept, and Mr. Sean Marchant seconded the motion.

4. Committee Reports:

Navigation Sub-Committee Report:

- Captain Andrew Guidry, Sabine Pilots, opened by stating that the discussion was for information only, not related to navigation or immediate operational decisions. He announced that a 5-year contract was signed with HeliServices USA in February 2025, beginning June 1, 2025. The current provider, Brim Aviation, will continue servicing until May 31, 2025, and has performed well. The decision to switch to HeliServices USA was based on. Immediate availability of two new helicopters (which usually require a 24-month lead time), and a strong safety record.
- Captain Guidry then discussed the current helicopter, the MD 902:
 - Operates with three Sabine pilots and three crew.
 - Flotation equipment was removed to reduce crew requirements.
 - While reliable, the model is aging and less suited for future needs.
- He introduced the AW169, selected for future operations:
 - Can carry up to six Sabine pilots.
 - Equipped with flotation systems and 210-man life rafts.
 - Has modern avionics, including 4-axis autopilot and IFR weather radar.
 - Includes a Health & Usage Monitoring System to detect and alert maintenance teams of component issues before failure.
 - Unlike the MD 902, the AW169 floats on water after impact, a major safety upgrade.
- Captain Guidry also touched on upcoming air gap and visibility sensor systems. He mentioned multiple phases and components for each system. Detailing the cost breakdowns and technical specs (Slides on SETWAC website). He concluded by noting that a follow-up meeting will take place after this one to continue the discussion with the Navigation District.
- Mr. Plumley then chimed in with the current plan regarding the air gap and visibility sensor systems. Stating that the plan is to meet with the Sabine Neches Navigation District to discuss how to integrate our project with the ongoing deepening project, similar to how Corpus Christi linked their upgrades to their court system and deepening efforts. Our first step is to secure a meeting with the Sabine Neches Navigation District and its sponsors, who handle all port maintenance once the initial setup is complete. We aim to discuss a path forward during lunch after this meeting and possibly present at their May 4th board meeting. Our focus is on improving waterway safety and efficiency, especially through technology upgrades like fog detection and air gap sensors, which were not available when the system was initially set up. We have prioritized these upgrades, with the air gap sensor as our top priority, followed by improvements in visibility. Prioritizing these safety tools is critical as we prepare for the deeper channel. Additionally, NOAA is exploring a subscription model for port data access, which may impact efficiency. We hope to clarify this with NOAA representatives today. Overall, significant progress is being made toward tangible improvements in safety and efficiency for the port.

Tug Utilization Sub-Committee (Ad Hoc)

- Mr. Plumley introduced Sean Marchant the head of the Tug Utilization Sub-Committee. Sean then proceeded to welcome everyone and give a brief insight into why the tug utilization sub-committee was formed. An outcome of the Tug Utilization Group was the idea to broaden efforts to improve overall efficiency at the port, leading to the introduction of a port wide efficiency study. To move this forward, we have engaged Lamar University to contribute their expertise and are currently drafting a proposal for stakeholders to review. The goal is to identify ways to optimize port operations by anticipating future needs rather than reacting to past patterns. We expect to receive the proposal from Lamar within the next couple of weeks and plan to begin the process of seeking grant funding to support the study. The study will follow a phased approach, with the initial phase estimated at around \$100,000. While that cost is relatively modest when shared among partners, we are first approaching state entities to explore their interest in participating before engaging with plant managers and other stakeholders. We believe this is a valuable use of local resources, particularly the capabilities of Lamar University, to conduct an objective analysis of port operations and generate practical, actionable recommendations. Further updates will be shared in the coming weeks.

Education, Research & Workforce Development Sub-Committee Report:

- Rob Dubois, Lamar University, began by providing feedback on the recent OT Cybersecurity Conference held at Lamar University and hosted by CISA. The event was initially planned for 100 participants but ended up with 110 attendees. Rob expressed appreciation to the U.S. Coast Guard and all others who helped fill the sessions. He noted the relevance of cybersecurity in today's world and highlighted a valuable workshop led by Dr. Helen Lou.
- He then provided a brief update on the Master of Science program at Lamar University. The program now consists of ten courses and offers students more flexibility and choices. New additions include civil engineering electives such as a dredging course and an engineering-with-nature course, alongside expanded cybersecurity options.
- Rob continued by discussing a shift in the university's research approach. In the past, Lamar Port Management funded small internal research grants, which generated papers but did not always result in practical outcomes. Administrators are now encouraging collaboration across the university's three centers—Resiliency, Ministry, and Port Management—to pool resources and focus on projects with greater impact. One focus being beneficial use, particularly in connection to dredging activities. Preliminary meetings have been held with Ducks Unlimited, local contractors, biologists, and engineers involved in habitat restoration. The goal is to develop community-driven projects that protect against hurricanes, restore habitats, and maintain navigational waterways. The vision is aligned with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' goal of achieving 70 to 80 percent beneficial use of dredged material.
- Robert Koch, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, then chimed in that the goal for beneficial use is 70% by 2030.

- Rob Dubois then continued noting that while the goal is to achieve 70% beneficial use of dredged material, current reports indicate that the actual rate in the area is only about 15%. He emphasized that there is significant room for improvement since dredging will continue indefinitely. Rob acknowledged ongoing projects like Hickory Cove and Port Arthur, mentioning Lorrie's involvement, and stressed the importance of focusing on long-term solutions.
- Next, he passed it over to Sade Chick, to discuss work-force development. She provided an update on two key items. First, she announced that the job board on the SETWAC website is now officially live. The purpose of the job board is to connect interested individuals with maritime industry opportunities. Posting a job is simple. Employers just email their job listings and SETWAC creates an application button that routes directly to the employer.
- Second, Sade discussed the draft feasibility report for the reconstruction of the MLK and Veterans Memorial Bridges, which was received a few months ago. The final report shows a benefit-cost ratio of approximately 1.7, indicating a strong case for the \$800 million project. The cost was considered good but a little lower than expected compared to other local bridge projects. The next step is to inform Councilman Weber's office to raise awareness that this reconstruction will be important for keeping the waterway competitive. The goal is to get the bridge reconstruction included in the TXDOT plan so that federal funding can be accessed and administered through TXDOT when the project moves forward.

Port Welfare Public Ad-Hoc:

- Fr. Sinclair Oubre, spoke to several points. Starting an overview of upcoming maritime-related events taking place throughout May, emphasizing community involvement and outreach. The first event being the Propeller Club Annual Golf Tournament, scheduled for May 2 at 7:30 AM. The tournament raises scholarship funds for students pursuing maritime studies.
- The second event is the Neches River Eucharistic Flotilla on Saturday, May 10, beginning at Port Neches Park. The flotilla will sail down the Neches River, culminating in a blessing of the waters by Bishop Tubes in preparation for hurricane season. Participants with boats are encouraged to join, and more details are available on Facebook and the Beaumont website.
- The 87th Cigar Evening, hosted by the Port Arthur Seafarers Center, will be held on May 16 as a fundraiser. This event occurs four times a year and is a social gathering for supporters of the maritime community.
- On May 17 at 10:00 AM, the Port Arthur Public Library will hold a Maritime Celebration organized by Jessica Migliorini. The event will include local organizations hosting tables and offering craft activities to engage the community in maritime heritage.
- National Maritime Day will be observed on May 22, 2025. The day will begin with a memorial observance at the Texaco Oklahoma Sundial in Port Arthur at 10:00 AM, recognizing the Sabine Pilots for their service. Following the ceremony, the Port of Port Arthur will sponsor a BBQ lunch at 11:30 AM at the Seafarers' Center, featuring BBQ chicken and traditional sides. (Slides on SETWAC website)

Commercial Fisheries Report:

- Nikki Fitzgerald, Commercial Fisheries, begin by providing positive feedback on the Commercial Fisheries meeting that was held in January. One of the main accomplishments was the Drill Conductor courses, which was organized with the help of Nate. Seventeen captains participated in the two-day training, and all of them received their Drill Conductor certification cards.
- There is concern about the loss of federal funding from AMC and NIOSH, which also impacts the wellness checks that have been offered to fishermen. As a result, alternative funding sources will need to be explored to continue these important programs. A grant application has been submitted through LNG in an effort to support new safety initiatives for our fishermen.
- The next Commercial Fisheries meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, July 2. The agenda has not yet been finalized. If you have any topics to suggest, such as hurricane safety, navigation safety, or other concerns relevant to fishermen, please contact me, Father Saint Claire, Kyle, or Nate to be added to the agenda.
- Nikki also briefly mentioned, Camp Seaport. She has been working with the Port of Port Arthur on organizing this event, which will take place from July 7 to July 11. 30 kids have already been registered, and the number continues to grow.

Waterway Maintenance and Improvement Sub-committee:

- Kyle Reed, SNND, provided an update on the Deepening Project, slides on SETWAC website provide a visual update (as of April 24th) of the current dredging projects. The slides also provide a visual representation of the schedule for the pipeline removals.
- Kylee opened with an update on target pipeline removal, currently projected for late May to June 2025. The team is exploring alternative approaches, including the development of a temporary channel around the pipeline removal site. This measure is aimed at minimizing channel closures during the operation. Follow-up meetings are scheduled with the Coast Guard and Sabine Pilots to further evaluate this concept.
- Regarding the Kinetica pipeline segment, Kylee mentioned that additional agency coordination is required before moving forward. The removal for that area is anticipated to occur in the third quarter of this year.
- Dan interjected to clarify whether the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers needed to be involved in the survey work for areas outside the navigation channel. Kylee confirmed that the necessary surveys have already been completed. These survey results will be submitted to the Coast Guard and Sabine Pilots, and a larger meeting will be organized to determine if lighter-draft vessels could safely navigate outside the channel during the removal period.
- Shifting the discussion to dredging progress, Kylee stated that Crosby is performing well and is expected to complete dredging by the end of May 2025. The next major effort, Contract 4, will be the first cut and extend from Texaco Island to the Port of Beaumont. The contract award is targeted for October 2025.

- Dan asked for clarification on which pipeline is scheduled for removal in May. Kim responded that it is the 10-inch Targa line. Dan confirmed that this is the only pipeline currently with a tentative removal date, which Kylee affirmed.

Dredge Operations Report:

- Robert Koch, USACE acting Sabine-Neches Waterway Operations Manager, then spoke to future dredge projects, including deepening and widening plans, SNWW Maintenance, the offshore channel extension, Coastal Storm Risk Management Projects, and the Taylor's Bayou Channel improvement (Slides on SETWAC website).
- Robert also introduced Ramon Navarro, the new Project Manager for the Sabine Neches Waterway. Attendees were encouraged to contact Ramon with any questions. A QR code was provided in the slides linking to the Operations Dashboard and beneficial use website for project details.

Area Maritime Security Report:

- Michael Hiatt, USCG Port Security, provided an update on the Port Security Grant Program. He noted that following the passage of the Continuing Resolution, FEMA has 60 days to release the grant, with an anticipated announcement date around May 14th or 15th. The total funding appears to be approximately \$90 million, with a potential increase to \$100 million. The proposal is currently on the DHS Secretary's desk awaiting approval.
- Mike reminded everyone to complete the FEMA grant training. He emphasized that if participants haven't submitted their project proposals, they should do so soon. So far, he has received briefings on approximately 17 projects from various ports, including additional ones from Lake Charles. He expects to see about 33 projects total this year, competing for approximately \$4.2 million out of the \$30 million in requested funding. This level of participation is a positive sign that current efforts are working.
- The SFO Subcommittee meeting is scheduled for June 17th at the Orange County Expo Center. A new cybersecurity specialist will be onboard to provide training. The enforcement team will also provide a brief 15–20-minute training session. Mike encouraged attendees to attend these meetings and build connections, noting it's better to meet key people in these settings than during a crisis.
- He recapped the recent SFO Subcommittee meeting held the previous week, which included drone protection training. The session lasted about an hour, and a few attendees even received free drones. Relatedly, a new drone reporting sheet has been distributed to ensure standardized information collection from facilities. While the NRC contact number remains the same, this new form will help streamline reporting and improve the intelligence team's effectiveness.

- Drafts of the Port Security Resiliency Assessment have been distributed to participating facilities, with a final version expected by mid-May. Mike recommended using the information in the assessment when preparing grant applications. The assessment includes valuable insights, not only for the five directly involved facilities but also for emergency management departments, local law enforcement, and the ports themselves. Two ports were visited during this process, and the team plans to return for another assessment in 2026.
- Looking ahead, the FY25 Area Maritime Security Training and Exercise Program is scheduled for September 17th. A planning meeting will be held on May 21st, and emails regarding that will be sent out this week. The upcoming exercise will simulate a combined cyber and physical attack across the region, including Southwest Louisiana. Mike emphasized the importance of preparedness by referencing past events like the Baltimore bridge collapse, the attacks on the World Trade Center, and the Pentagon. These exercises are designed to prevent complacency and reinforce the need for constant vigilance.
- He encouraged anyone interested in participating in the May 21st planning meeting to contact him directly. For questions related to the Port Security Grant Program, Mike advised reaching out to Renee, who is typically very responsive and well-informed. He also reminded everyone that once the grant is officially announced, Coast Guard communication becomes limited so, now is the best time to ask questions or seek guidance.

ATON Status/Projects Report:

- BMC Sistrunk, ANT Sabine, gave an ATON Report. Stating that on May 9th, the Port Arthur Canal Delta range was upgraded with the newest range light technology available to the Coast Guard. This marks the first time this new model has been deployed in the field. A similar upgrade is planned for early May on the Sabine Charlie Range front and rear lights to improve visibility and provide pilots with a stronger signal.
- The next major ATON project is at the Sabine Neches November Range Front Light. Teardown is scheduled to begin on May 12th, during which time the range will be non-operational. A Marine Safety Information Bulletin (MSIB) will be issued, and the team will be on site to begin reconstruction on May 19th. The total project duration is expected to be approximately two weeks.
- Dan Plumley took a moment to recognize the Coast Guard team, announcing that Chief and his unit were awarded the Master Chief Jack Downey Aids to Navigation Unit of the Year Award the previous day. He praised their outstanding work, saying it was great to see the unit continuing the legacy of Dan Plumley, and noted that Sabine continues to perform exceptionally well. The room responded with a round of applause.

5. 2025 Hurricane Brief:

- LCDR Gates, MSU Port Arthur, presented the 2025 hurricane brief and the new website guidance. (Slides on SETWAC website).

6. New Business:

- Mr. Plumley reminded attendees to send upcoming events and job postings to Sade, Giuseppe, or himself for posting on the SETWAC website. The meeting presentation will also be uploaded there shortly.
- He highlighted the importance of keeping the group informed about vacancies and term expirations, especially as succession planning begins. Members were encouraged to step into active roles as terms end.

7. Next Meetings:

- The next working group meeting will be held at the Sabine-Neches Navigation District offices on Thursday, July 10th, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.
- The next full committee meeting will be held at MSU Port Arthur on Thursday, July 24th, 2025, at 10:00 a.m.

8. Adjourn:

- Mr. Plumley adjourned the meeting at 10:53 A.M.