

## **Spud Point Marina and the Bodega Bay Dream**

On Bodega Harbor, the building of Spud Point Marina meanders through a maze of 52 years of bureaucracy on the County, State and Federal levels. It began in 1933 and ended with the opening of the Marina in 1985. Unfortunately, the opening was followed immediately by the collapse of the local fishing industry. A picture emerges of the tremendous effort it took to get Spud Point Marina built and the despair of watching the bottom fall out of the commercial Fishing Industry and its impact on the Marina and the Bodega Bay Community.

Commercial fishing was the primary industry in Bodega Bay for at least 100 years, with the Smith Brothers selling fish to Paladini, a fish marketing company in San Francisco in 1919. Sport fishing has always been popular as well and has brought visitors to the Sonoma coast since the 1920s. Over the next 25 years, the inner bay was developed with wharves, small private marinas, fish canneries, restaurants, cafes, motels, gas stations and markets to provide the necessary services to Bodega Bay residents, fishermen and visitors. These included the Smith Brothers, the Tides, Shaw's Marina (Porto Bodega), Mason's Marina, Meredith Fisheries (defunct) and Lazio Fish Company (defunct) to name just a few. Bodega Bay was also becoming a tourist and weekend destination.

In the 1930's the salmon and crab catch off Bodega Bay was one of the most plentiful in the state and commercial fishing was booming. The inner harbor was basically a mud flat, navigable only at high tide, and most boats anchored in the bay or lined up around Campbell Cove. Many boats were destroyed in the bay during storms because of a lack of safe moorings and no breakwater. At the height of fishing season there could be as many as 400 commercial boats tied up in the bay. As early as 1933 the Santa Rosa Chamber of Commerce sent a letter to the State Division of Fish and Game endorsing a proposal to dredge a safe channel at the entrance to Bodega Harbor and urged them to recognize the importance of the project in the interest of the fishing industry in the County. Three years later in 1936, The North Coast Council of California State Chamber of Commerce formed a

committee to gather data for a proposed development of the harbor at Bodega Bay to convince the Army Corps of Engineers of the importance of the project. The Committee's final report asked for the construction of a landing wharf, facilities for icing and packaging the catch and dredging a channel. The County's request for Federal assistance was finally answered in 1938, with authorization for the US Army Corps of Engineers to dredge a three mile channel with turning basins and to build jetties to make the harbor usable by small craft. The project was completed in 1943.

**The dream of a fully functioning port marina** in the harbor to serve the needs of the fishing industry, which is the backbone of Bodega Bay, stayed in the hearts and souls of the local fishermen. They did not give up their dream even though, after the original dredging in 1943, development stalled.

In 1951 the State granted 1200+ acres of Bodega Harbor tidal and submerged lands in trust to Sonoma County with the condition that the harbor be substantially improved within 10 years or it would revert to the State. This produced conflicts over tideland rentals between lessees. The County was supposed to establish rental fees and other policies for tidelands use, but it never did address this issue.

In May of 1952, a meeting was held at Roy Faught's boat shop attended by some 25 local fishermen. They voted on three actions that needed to be taken in order for them to make a living. "1) dredge the channel, 2) establish protective tariffs to protect local fishermen from their competition, 3) immediate investigation of apparent price-fixing by dealers."

The Bodega Bay Grange was instrumental in fostering the development of the harbor and the fishing industry. It is also a community service organization and has contributed to the Bodega Bay community as a whole in many ways. In 1953, the year after it was formed, they held the first Grange Cioppino Crab Dinner as a community fund raiser. It continues today as an annual event, and provides funding for local High School student scholarships.

## FROM THE ARCHIVES by Sue Tichava



There were no more improvements and nothing moved forward on a public marina in Bodega Bay until 1956 when the Sonoma County Planning Commission approved a master plan to develop harbors at Bodega Bay, Petaluma River and Sonoma Creek. Bodega Bay received a high priority and was the only plan authorized.

Two years later in January 1958 The Press Democrat ran an award-winning series by Fred Fletcher, called **“The Bodega Bay Dream”** in which he blasted the County for sitting on the master plan for two years and “allowing it to gather dust.” Now, time was running out. In 1961 the tidelands would revert to the State and any opportunity for local development would be lost. Fletcher’s series had a tremendous impact on Sonoma County. Within a year, the University of California announced interest in locating a marine lab on Bodega Head, County Supervisors established a harbor commission to activate the Master Plan for Bodega Bay, PG&E announced interest in placing a nuclear power plant at Bodega Bay, U.S. Coast Guard announced plans for a station at Bodega Bay, and the County received a grant for small craft development. Local fishermen and their wives realized the need to get themselves organized to help their industry

prosper. One of the first steps happened when the Bodega Bay Grange was organized on Feb. 28, 1952 with a membership of 115. The Grange was now part of a national organization through which it would have a political voice in matters pertaining to the harvest of the ocean and the need to improve the economic conditions of the fishing industry. It was the 4th fishing Grange organized on the Coast.

Around 1960 developing the harbor got complicated, mired down in political, environmental, and bureaucratic policies involving multiple local, State and Federal agencies, who seemed to be working against each other. Progress was at a crawl, with activity parsed about 10 years.

In 1963, Alfred Hitchcock’s famous film, *The Bird’s*, was filmed in Bodega Harbor drawing attention to the scenic port.

In 1970 a feasibility study was funded by the US Economic Development Administration (EDA) to study the employment opportunities in commercial and sports fishing in Bodega Bay. The results of the study recommended building a marina with 200 berths and associated services to meet the current (1970) and

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future needs of fishermen in Bodega Bay.

**First Catch-22:** In 1970 there was no sewer system nor adequate water supply around the Bay. Up until this time, raw sewage was dumped right into the bay. This was solved with the development and building of Bodega Harbour Estates. The developers were required to put in a sewer system and expand both water and sewer hookups to include the Harbor and Bodega Head.

In 1976 County Supervisors applied as lead agency for State and Federal funds to construct a \$4.7 million small craft commercial harbor at Bodega Bay. In 1977 President Carter approved \$100,000 to study 14 small craft harbors in California and Bodega Bay was one of them. In 1978 Gov. Edmund Brown approved construction of Spud Point Marina for commercial and sports fishing berths.

**Second Catch-22:** the new Marina must include pleasure crafts in order to get funds from the State Department of Navigation and Ocean Development. Under (then) current law, the California Coastal Commission could not permit harbor expansion unless it was exclusively for commercial boats. This required a bill in the State Assembly to amend the Coastal Act to allow Spud Point to be developed. It passed.

In 1979 funds were again jeopardized when the State Boating and Waterways Commission raised the interest rates on harbor projects. Berthing rates would have to be raised. In 1980 The Commission approved a \$60,000 planning loan for environmental studies regarding dredging spoils, and the EIR was approved which cleared the path to apply for a construction loan.

**Third Catch-22:** what to do with dredging spoils. Not only would there be the dredging spoils from the project, but the channel was (is) on an 11 year schedule for maintenance dredging. Up until this time, the spoils were dumped around the Bay at various sites on shore. In 1980 the North Central Coast Commission gave its approval for the marina to be built, but they required a feasibility report on off-shore dumping sites. The County did not comply and continued dumping the dredging spoils on-shore. It was not until the 2004 dredging that the issue was resolved and the spoils were approved for off-shore

dumping in a San Francisco Deep Ocean Disposal Site. **Spud Point Marina was finally built and opened in 1985** at the cost of \$8 million, financed by State and federal grants.

**Fourth Catch-22:** Spud Point Marina has never been able to pay its bills. Since 1985 it has been under threat to be taken over by the State. In 1987 the future looked rosy for the Marina but that was soon to change as the west coast fisheries began to decline from which it still hasn't recovered.

By 1989 the Marina had a budget deficit and the salmon season was poor. In 1990 the Marina had to raise its berthing fees. By 1994 Spud Point was \$8 million in debt and the State wanted to take over title to the Marina. By 1997 the debt had risen to \$11 million. In 2000 a new business plan for the operation of Spud Point Marina was introduced but the County rejected the plan claiming that even when berths were full and they were selling ice and fuel, the Marina still couldn't pay its monthly bills and state loan obligations. By the 1990's the fishing industry had shrunk because of drought, poor seasons and new restrictions to protect fish populations and the County refused to underwrite the operation. In 1998, California suspended interest on the (then) \$12 million loan.

In 2007 Spud Point Marina and the State Department of Boating & Waterways finalized a settlement agreement, by which the State agreed to a one-time payment and 15 annual payments.

Today, Sonoma County Regional Parks manages not only Spud Point Marina, Doran and Westside parks and campgrounds, in 2012 it took over Mason's Marina and the Sport Fishing Center at Porto Bodega.

In 2017, The US Army Corps of Engineers paid \$4.285 million for maintenance dredging of the interior channel of Bodega Bay. The Marina continues to be in debt. Its future is unknown and the County is still undecided what to do to with this gem of Bodega Harbor. The newest Catch-22 is to how make Spud Point and Mason's Marinas pay for themselves without jeopardizing the fragile environment. Is there a new dream for the future of Bodega Bay?