



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel photos

A harbor worker steps back aboard the dredge tender as preparations began Thursday morning to get the dredge back in action to open the harbor.

Dredgers clear the way for harbor boats

Harbor - 2000
Vessels trapped after sediment from storms blocks harbor mouth

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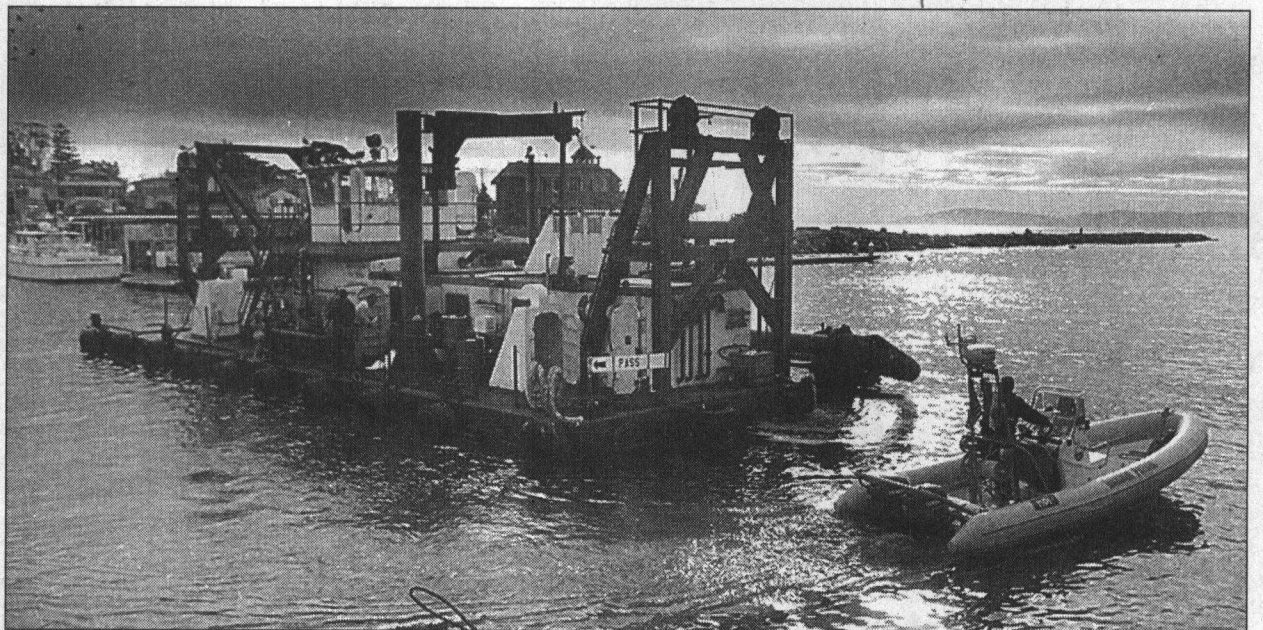
A sandbar plugged the Santa Cruz harbor mouth two weeks ago after a series of winter storms, trapping the roughly 1,000 boats docked in the harbor. On Thursday the fight began to clear it out again.

Kimbra Eldridge, operations manager for the Santa Cruz Port District, said she hopes the five-man dredging crew can clear a slot in the next four days so at least some boats can get out.

SANTA CRUZ About a thousand boats are at the harbor. Most are pleasure crafts, though there are some commercial vessels. Last week, a group of eight crab fishermen said they were losing thousands of dollars a week because of the closure.

Eldridge could not estimate how much sand swept down the San Lorenzo River, entered the ocean and plugged the nearby harbor mouth. But she said it will take dredgers all season to deal with it. "We could be dredging from now until April."

In a light sediment year, the district must dredge about 100,000 cubic yards of sand from the harbor mouth. In an especially stormy year, in which lots of sediment flushes out of area creeks and rivers, it's closer to 300,000 yards. That's the rough equivalent of 300,000 pickup truck loads of sand.



The harbor dredge should soon be at work opening the harbor's channel.

"The problem is, we are on the wrong side of the San Lorenzo River," Eldridge said.

The harbor opened in 1964, after the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers decided it was a good location because there was a lagoon there close to the ocean.

But she said the engineers did not predict the tremendous problem with sand plugging the harbor mouth.

Two weeks ago some crab fishermen complained about being landlocked, and said the district should find a tem-

porary replacement for its contracted dredging crew, whose members said they couldn't start work until Thursday.

Eldridge, however, said that it is typical of most businesses to have some days off in the holiday season, and that even if the crew worked selected days prior to Christmas and New Year's, it wouldn't have done any good because of the enormous volume of sand.

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