

## Hart-Miller Island site is filled

Posted: 6:57 pm Tue, December 29, 2009

By **Nicholas Sohr**

Daily Record Business Writer



A dredge lifts silt from the harbor bottom into a barge for shipment to Hart-Miller.

Hart-Miller Island took delivery last week of its final load of dredge material from the Baltimore harbor, ending the 25-year practice that occasionally drew the ire of environmentalists and community groups.

The manmade island off Baltimore County, while still a work in progress, is a state park. Plans call for it to be converted entirely into a wetland wildlife habitat.

"While controversial at the outset, this facility that has been critical to the prosperity of the Port of Baltimore is now an asset to the community," said James White, executive director of the Maryland Port Administration, in a written statement.

Hart-Miller began as Hart and Miller, two islands eroded down to a few acres each. About 100 million cubic yards of material dredged from the harbor and Chesapeake Bay shipping channels later, the island sprawls over 1,100 acres and rises 45 feet tall at its highest point.

Community activists protested the development of the dump site when state officials identified the Hart-Miller location north of the entrance to the harbor. The state began construction of the dike — a barrier surrounding the island, designed to keep the contaminants in the material dredged from under shipping channels — in 1981.

Environmentalists worried that the barrier would not be enough to stop the toxic metals and other substances from leaching into the bay.

Today, opposition on both fronts appears to have cooled.

Beth McGee, senior water quality scientist at the Chesapeake Bay Foundation, said she was concerned by the height of the island and the surrounding dike, but said projects such as Hart-Miller and Poplar Island, a more recent dredge spoil site 34 miles south of Baltimore, can have a positive effect on the bay and the wildlife that calls it home.

"We're losing a lot of our bay islands, so we see the beneficial use of dredge materials as a good thing," she said.

Tom Kroen, then a Dundalk resident, was adamantly opposed to the project when it was proposed. But, as plans moved forward and eventually included a citizen oversight committee, Kroen came around.

"I opposed it at first," he said. "Then when it became fait accompli, I just said 'If it's going to be it's going to be something that's worthwhile.' "

Kroen is now the president of the 10-member committee.

The southern portion of the island was filled in 1990 and was groomed as a wildlife habitat. The remaining 800 acres remained an active dredge dumpsite until Dec. 22, nine days shy of the deadline set by the General Assembly.

The port administration said it will begin developing the northern section of the island in 2010. Spokesman J.B. Hanson said dredge material will now be deposited on two newer sites — the Masonville terminal and another at Cox Creek.

"That's the major issue with all the ports in the world — there's just not enough space," Hanson said. "We have to dredge, and we have to put it someplace."