

By: Bonnen

H.R. No. 942

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, Rising in Austin County southwest of Bellville, the
2 San Bernard River crosses the Texas coastal plain, traveling
3 approximately 120 miles toward the Gulf of Mexico along a route
4 sandwiched between the Brazos and Colorado Rivers to the east and
5 west, respectively; and

6 WHEREAS, As they approach the coastline, all three of these
7 rivers intersect the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway (GIWW), which links
8 ports from Brownsville to Florida and serves as an artery for
9 commercial transport of bulk commodities and as a means for
10 inland-based fishing fleets to obtain outlets to Gulf waters; and

11 WHEREAS, Modifications to the Brazos River channel, made by
12 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1929 to enhance navigation in
13 and around Freeport, have had increasingly adverse effects on the
14 natural flow of the nearby San Bernard River, changing the
15 direction and pattern of its water movement and silt distribution;
16 and

17 WHEREAS, Over the next several decades, these changes caused
18 the formation of a Brazos River delta; the resulting altered Gulf
19 currents dumped coastal sediment in the direction of the San
20 Bernard until the discharge reached that river and created a
21 sandbar, forcing the river to swerve ever westward and downcoast
22 from its original mouth to find an opening to the sea; and

23 WHEREAS, The river grew increasingly sluggish as more of its
24 water was diverted to the GIWW or to the Cedar Lakes area in the

1 vicinity of the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge; as less water
2 emptied into the Gulf, the decelerating and obstructed watercourse
3 became clogged and blockaded until, presently, there is not much of
4 a river mouth at all; and

5 WHEREAS, Upriver of the GIWW, in the vicinity of Sweeny, is
6 the ConocoPhillips refinery complex whose barge traffic, along with
7 other industrial freight shipments in that upriver segment, have
8 been affected by the San Bernard's increased siltation, requiring
9 frequent passageway maintenance measures; and

10 WHEREAS, Altered flow patterns and redirected water volumes
11 slow San Bernard basin drainage in the aftermath of flood events,
12 compared to years ago; moreover, they have generated serious
13 nautical hazards both at the GIWW intersection and in
14 capacity-stressed Brazos River floodgate areas; and

15 WHEREAS, In addition, recreational boat and fishing vessel
16 operators, who used to have a straight shot down the river to its
17 original mouth, are now thwarted and what once was a bustling hub at
18 the mouth has been almost completely boarded up as restaurants,
19 convenience stores, bait shops, and other businesses closed and the
20 formerly thriving population of shrimpers headquartered elsewhere;
21 and

22 WHEREAS, In 2002, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers published
23 the results of its study of the science of, and reasons for, these
24 various impacts and suggested that river closure could be reversed
25 by periodically dredging a conduit through the sand accumulation,
26 thereby reestablishing a mouth to the San Bernard River at its
27 original location; and

1 WHEREAS, Doing so would produce renewable supplies of sand
2 for beach replenishment at other Texas locations where erosion
3 rather than buildup is occurring, while restoring the San Bernard
4 River to its natural state and averting the economic consequences
5 and potential for flooding brought on by the waterway's current
6 condition; now, therefore, be it

7 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 80th Texas
8 Legislature, endorsing the suggestions of the U.S. Army Corps of
9 Engineers, hereby join with local, state, and federal officials in
10 supporting efforts and pursuing funding to open the mouth of the San
11 Bernard River.