WEDA’s Lifetime Achievement Award Acceptance Remarks by Craig Vogt

June 6, 2019

I’m shocked and amazed and thrilled. Incredible. Wow. Totally cool. Thanks WEDA.

Should I say more? My wife, Nancy, right here at this table, says “No, that is enough.” She is right, of course. But, I will say more.

My first meeting at WEDA was in 1991. I was EPA. The meeting was in Las Vegas. My boss’s boss asked me to give his talk he was scheduled to give. He asked: Las Vegas, center of the dredging world?

I did the presentation, and Bill Murden, Chief Dredger at the Corps of Engineers HQ, sucked me in. Asked me to come back, be on the Board of Directors and to establish a WEDA Environmental Commission.

The late 1980s and early 1990s were a time of great conflict in the dredging community. EPA and the Corps were at essentially at war with each other. Times were changing, as EPA was beginning to implement and require that regulations under the Clean Water Act and Ocean Dumping Act were to be followed.

This was not in keeping with the Corps philosophy at the time of “this is the way we always have done it and this is the way we are going to keep doing it.” Mudlock, dredgelock. Channels and projects were not getting dredged in anything close to a timely manner.

In steps the AAPA in Washington, DC., going to the US DOT. Solve this thing. We gotta have a national dredging policy that says get the job done. Set up a Federal Committee with all the agencies to assess and solve the problem. Yep, the Washington way….set up a Committee. I was part of that effort. We did create a national dredging policy which the President signed. The Policy said:

* Ports and harbors are vital to our national economic and security interests and shipping channels must be dredged in a timely and cost-effective manner.
* The nation’s marine and freshwater environmental resources are critical assets which must be protected, conserved, and restored.
* The existing laws and regulations are sufficient to meet the above goals and economic and environmental interests should work together to achieve these goals.

You know what else the Policy said? It says that dredged material is a resource and beneficial use of dredged material should be encouraged. 1994. 25 years ago. We are moving in that direction. Good.

The recommendations from that Committee also were to establish a National Dredging Team of federal agencies that would work together to meet the directives of the National Dredging Policy. I co-chaired that team with the Corps of Engineers from its initiation in 1995 to 2008 when I departed EPA. Nothing magical happened.

But we did get to know our counterparts in the other agencies, which was actually a big deal, knowing who to call when there was an issue. Things got better. We helped to establish and facilitate Regional Dredging Teams. The Great Lakes Dredging Team is one great example of working together and getting things done.

One of the products of the National Dredging Team by EPA and the Corps was the 2007 Beneficial Use Manual. Still an excellent resource today.

My time as Chair of the WEDA Environmental Commission has been challenging and very rewarding personally, and I hope has contributed to the betterment of the dredging community in addressing environmental issues associated with dredging and dredged material management.

* Pleased to say I and the Environmental Commission helped write the WODA Environmental Policy, the WODA Policy on Sustainable Dredging, the WODA Policy on Mitigation and Adaptation to Climate Change.
* I am particularly proud of the WEDA Environmental Excellence Awards.
* I am very happy about Dredging 101, the short course, which was initiated by the WEDA Environmental Commission to address the obvious shortfall in understanding the basics of dredging by the regulators, but is serving a broader audience as well.
* As of this week, we are initiating WEDA-TechNotes. Stay tuned on that one, but it hopefully will contribute to WEDA being recognized as a center of excellence in knowledge and experience. The place to go.

WEDA itself has made great strides in becoming an outstanding organization to support the dredging community. I have watched and participated in this movement since my arrival at WEDA in 1991. I give a shout out to our current Executive Director, Tom Cappellino. He is doing an outstanding job. Keep going Tom.

What’s next? Environmental issues have not gone away. There has been some shifting from basic issues, like recognizing that dredged materials are contaminated and need to be managed accordingly, to tougher issues such as endangered species, environmental windows, and climate change. Over the last 20 years or so, environmental dredging and remediation has become an integral part of WEDA. Remediation of past waste disposal is not anywhere near complete.

Climate change and sea level rise---looking not too far into the future, these issues are mind-boggling. The dredging community has to step forward and help build the resilient coastlines that are needed today and will be needed even more so in the future.

OK, that is enough. Nancy is waving at me to cut it off. I say big thank you to the WEDA Board of Directors and Marcel Hermans and Alan Alcorn, and thanks to all of you in WEDA.

Like all great speeches, I want to end with a famous quote. This quote expresses precisely how I feel about receiving this great honor from WEDA. In the words of Howard Dean in 2004 while running for President of the United States:

“Yaaaay!”