

Public Meeting
Minutes

Discussion of Senate Joint Resolution No. 309 – requesting the Virginia Marine Resources Commission to study the feasibility of creating protection zones for submerged fiber optic cables located along Virginia’s shores.

May 30, 2019
10:00AM

Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Fort Monroe Office
Commission Meeting Room

Commission Staff present: Tony Watkinson and Justin Worrell

The meeting was attended by 18 representatives from the Navy, Army Corps of Engineers, City of Virginia Beach, Department of Environmental Quality, Department of Minerals, Mines and Energy, and private industry.

Commission staff provided a PowerPoint presentation that provided a quick summary of previous Habitat Management permit actions related to three fiber optic projects and one energy project, all designed to tie into Virginia Beach by way of submerged connections through the Atlantic Ocean.

Commission staff explained that none of the recent applications for the installation of fiber optic lines required any formal designation of such protection zones, however we felt that the City, nearby military bases, and the nearby public at large were sufficiently made aware of the requests and given the opportunity to comment or protest. All of the applications were ultimately permitted by the Commission with the requirement for post-installation surveys.

An open forum discussion commenced – with the following points identified and brainstormed:

- What are protection zones for submerged fiber optic cables?
- Are protection zones necessary for regulatory permitting?
- If necessary, how should protection zones be designated?
- Should existing permitted cables be identified?
- Would an established protection zone expedite the regulatory permitting process?

Open discussion also centered around the selection process of the “preferred corridor” that most projects seem to be following. Questions were raised regarding a maximum limit of installations in a bundled area, and how close individual lines could be installed adjacent to one another. Discussion also included ideas that clustering lines in one preferred corridor may help de-conflict from other nearby uses. There were also concerns expressed about the safety of installed lines after publically identifying such a corridor or protection zone.

Commission staff advised that a second public meeting would be scheduled later in the summer to continue the discussion and ensure that additional parties could participate.