

Protecting Our Wildlife and Shorelines While Ensuring the Safety of Vessels, Crews, and Cargo

Domestic maritime cargo, the majority of which is transported by barge via the Gulf Intrastate Waterway, is critical to creating and supporting thousands of Coastal Bend jobs and contributing billions of dollars to the local economy.

Between 2011 and 2015, barge traffic into and out of the Port of Corpus Christi increased by 44 percent, and with many new Port projects and commercial operations commencing, barge traffic and congestion will continue to grow. LAC Fleet provides the best way to ensure the safety of these vessels, their crews, their cargo, and our shorelines.

The Advantages Fleeting Over Grounding Barges

The Lydia Ann Channel Fleet is located on the route used by 85 percent of inland mariners traveling to the Port of Corpus Christi. Until the LAC Fleet began operations, barges awaiting dock space in the Port were “grounded,” which means each year, thousands of barges were pushed up against shorelines along the channel by tow boats, often for days at a time.

Grounding barges is far less safe for personnel, cargo, or the environment than mooring the barges using a fleet. Grounding a barge against the shore requires constant attention and vigilance by tow boat captains who must constantly “steer” and push the barge to prevent it from drifting and becoming a navigational hazard. While grounded, the hull of the barge grinds against the shore, contributing to accelerated deterioration and erosion, and tow boats constantly churn the sand and seagrass beneath their props.

In addition, weather, high winds, currents, tides, channel traffic, and human error are all variables that must be constantly managed while a barge is grounded – variables that increase the potential for an accident or a spill.

LAC Fleet provides moorings located in a minimum of 12 feet of water, which allows barges to “tie up,” and tow boats to turn off their engines, rather than expend the 1,000 gallons of fuel per day required to ground a barge. The fleet also keeps moored vessels away from San Jose Island, protecting the sea grasses and shoreline. In addition, because the moorings are located at least 200 feet from shore, the shoreline and the channel remain available for fishing and recreational use.

The Aransas County Navigation District, which is responsible for the conservation of natural resources and wildlife habitats of the area where the fleet is located, has expressed its official

support for the operations of the LAC Fleet as a far preferable alternative to grounding barges against the shorelines.

Our Location

LAC Fleet evaluated 10 potential sites and selected the Ann Channel because it is the only location that satisfies a series of critical standards, including a sufficient length and depth, an ability to operate without impeding the navigation of other vessels, the ability to moor vessels at least 200 feet from shore, convenient access to the Port of Corpus Christi, sufficient protection from hazardous weather, and minimal impact on wetlands, wildlife habitat, or the shoreline.

Emergency Response Preparedness

LAC Fleet is prepared to offer first-responder assistance to distressed vessels or in the event of an accident or spill. Since our operations commenced less than 2 years ago, LAC Fleet has provided aid and assistance to many vessels, avoiding what otherwise would have been major accidents. In addition, we are prepared to deploy thousands of feet of containment boom and absorbent materials which we keep on site, should a spill occur. Such services were not available before LAC Fleet began operations.

Grounding vs. Fleeting: Photos

The photos below provide an illustration of how tow boats grounded waiting barges along the shorelines of the channel (above photo from Dec. 2014) and how LAC Fleet allows barges to safely moor away from the shore without a need for constantly running tow boats (below photo from April 2015). LAC Fleet provides a far safer alternative for the vessels, crews, cargo and shorelines.

December 2014 vs. April 2015



Below, is a photo of barges grounded along the shorelines of the channel in November 2014. Clearly visible is the “prop wash” from the tow boats, as they constantly grind the hulls of the barges into the shore to prevent them from drifting. As a result, the props churn the bottom while burning approximately 1,000 gallons of fuel per day, potentially damaging the shorelines and seagrasses.

