



## **SHORELINES – June 2008**

As presented to the *Island Review* magazine

### **- Sandbag Redux -**

This is the 77<sup>th</sup> consecutive edition of *Shorelines* and while we try to keep the redundancy factor to a minimum, a recent announcement by the N.C. Division of Coastal Management (NCDCM) warrants a little review of the State's policy concerning sandbags, which are considered as a temporary erosion control measure. More permanent oceanfront erosion control measures including hard structures such as jetties, groins, seawalls, and breakwaters are currently banned by the State.

On April 30<sup>th</sup> of this year, NCDCM announced a new initiative to inventory sandbag structures protecting oceanfront property in North Carolina. Under normal circumstances, sandbags are allowed to remain in place for two years after the date of approval if protecting a structure <5,000 square feet or five years if the structure exceeds 5,000 square feet or a road/bridge is being protected. However in 2000, an amendment was adopted allowing sandbags to remain in place for five years or until May 2008, whichever is later, regardless of the structure size if a community is actively seeking a beach nourishment project as of October 1, 2001. The sandbag inventory announced in late April is aimed to identify and prioritize the removal of sandbag structures that are subject to this May 2008 removal clause.

NCDCM estimates that roughly 150 of the 370 sandbag structures along the State's oceanfront may be subject to the May 2008 removal provision. However and importantly, if the sandbags are covered with sand and natural vegetation, then they do not have to be removed. This adds another complexity to identifying exactly how many of the 150 potential sites may actually require removal.

The roughly 220 other sandbag structures in the State simply don't fall under the May 2008 clause and have a 2- or 5-year permit life, notwithstanding future variance requests by individual property owners. These sandbags are located in areas of the oceanfront where communities are not actively seeking beach nourishment, or most likely, are located near the margins of inlets where beach nourishment in most cases is not allowed or is ineffective.

So for some local application and as an attempt to de-mystify the issue at hand, let's discuss the sandbags at the Point, Emerald Isle. Because these sandbags were placed in an area that will not directly receive sand as part of any beach nourishment project, the May 2008 deadline has no consequence. These sandbags are simply permitted for 2 or 5 years. Actually a cluster of the sandbags at the Point were just granted a 2-year variance earlier this year.

The sandbags at the Point are different than those that were/are positioned along the oceanfront of Bogue Banks. The permits for these sandbags were issued several years ago and the area was part of a planned beach nourishment project. Therefore, these sandbags fall under the May 2008 removal clause. But wait - the sand bags are no longer visible, and have been buried by sand and are vegetated. Following the letter of the rules then, they do not have to be removed.



This is where the NCDCM's inventory will come into play – it will catalog the properties where sandbags have been permitted, determine which ones fall under the May 2008 removal clause, and determine which sandbags structures that have to be physically removed.

Our guess is that at the end of the day, very few if any sandbags will need to be removed along Bogue Banks. Any sandbags that were permitted along the oceanfront have long been buried thanks predominantly to the infusion of sand by various beach nourishment projects this decade (see attached photos).

And one last parting thought – the May 2008 removal date has also sparked a dialogue concerning the future of shore protection along the State's coast. Presently, the only "long-term" options are beach nourishment or retreat, and sandbags are very much frowned upon although allowed, and don't offer a long-term solution. If property owners are required to remove sandbags, then they may demand other options to protect their property. These "other options" may include hard structures, which has opened a lively debate once again.



**Sandbags protecting a home near 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Emerald Isle days after hurricane *Floyd* in 1999.**



**Picture of the same home in May 2008 with no sandbags to be found. The sandbags are likely buried and vegetated, and therefore won't be required to be removed according to the May 2008 clause.**