

SHORELINES – July 2002

As presented to the Island Review Magazine.

A lot of discussion lately has been centered around the issue of beach access. This topic receives special attention this time of year as our population swells to summertime levels and our beaches are full of people enjoying the sun and surf. Last month's Memorial Day weekend was no exception. Many of the local merchants and long-time residents agree that this was one of the largest and busiest tourism weekends they have experienced in many years. What bearing does the access issue have upon both the locally-funded and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Projects that our municipalities and the County are participating in?

In terms of the locally-funded "non-Corps" projects, otherwise known as the Pine Knoll Shores/Indian Beach Joint Restoration and Emerald Isle Projects, the Corps and State Division of Coastal Management have determined that commitments made to secure additional points of public access and parking spaces in Pine Knoll Shores will have to be fulfilled in order to achieve federal consistency. Pine Knoll Shores has worked diligently to secure these access and parking spaces, and accordingly, have been updating the Division of Coastal Management of their progress. Indian Beach and Emerald Isle have no discrepancies in terms of their access requirements.

The Corps' 50-year Shore Protection and Section 933 Projects have a fairly strict provision requiring that public access shall be provided approximately every half mile, and parking should be within a reasonable walking distance of the beach. All the municipalities are working towards this goal and will be explaining their public use patterns (large parking lots for day visitors, walkways for rental units and hotels, etc.) to the Corps. There are some serious implications if these requirements are not met. For one, it will deprive tourists and residents from accessing our beautiful (and hopefully wider) beaches in a comfortable fashion. From a fiscal standpoint, the non-federal sponsor (County, State, and municipalities) will be responsible for providing 100%, rather than 35%, of the costs to restore the beach in areas where public access is deficient.

As a hypothetical example, let's say that a mile of restored beach for the Shore Protection Project will cost \$3 million. The current cost formula, if access is consistent with federal regulations, would be 65% federal, ~26% State, and ~9% County which would equate to a contribution of \$1.95 million, \$780,000, and \$270,000, respectively. Compare these amounts to a scenario where public access is deficient and the County would be responsible for 100% of the costs. That's right, \$3 million compared to \$270,000!!! Needless to say, our current fiscal projections to fund the Shore Protection project do not accommodate such a large swing in costs, and could jeopardize our ability to restore the beach in these areas.

The Corps, our local municipalities, and the Shore Protection Office will continue to work together in fulfilling the access requirement for the sake of residents, tourists, and for the future health our beaches. There are many issues at hand that will have to be resolved in the not-to-distant future if we are to achieve our access objectives. Complexities including restrictive covenants, deed restrictions, lack of town-owned oceanfront property, donation, condemnation, and purchase issues will require time and cooperation to resolve. I hope everyone will show their patience and support as we work through these issues and as always, your comments and suggestions regarding this or any other topic are welcomed.

Beach Commission Update

Legislative items regarding the Morehead City Harbor Navigation Project remained the hot topic at the May 2002 Beach Commission meeting. Congressman Walter B. Jones has introduced "beneficial uses of dredged material" language that would enable the Corps to pursue dredge disposal alternatives that are not necessarily the least-cost option. This could predicate the disposal of beach-quality sand along the

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shorelines of Bogue Banks rather than in offshore disposal sites. The Shore Protection Manager recently returned from Washington, D.C. and was pleased to report that there is support among the congressional delegation to introduce a second provision that would congressionally authorize a Sand Management Plan for the Morehead City Harbor. Both legislative items are being pursued in the Water Resource Development Act of 2002. The Beach Commission also decided to move their monthly meetings from the fourth Friday of the month to the fourth Monday of the month, at 2:00 pm, Pine Knoll Shores Town Hall.