

33 1/3 Years of Beachfront Management in South Carolina

The State of South Carolina's coastal zone management program was created by the South Carolina General Assembly in July 1977. From 1977 to 1988 the state had limited jurisdiction on oceanfront property, but passage of the 1988 Beachfront Management Act physically expanded the extent of the state's beachfront jurisdiction and also implemented stronger controls on beachfront construction. The state uses two lines of beachfront jurisdiction to regulate beachfront construction – the more seaward line is called the baseline, and the more landward line is called the 40-year setback line. For beaches near unstabilized inlets the baseline is drawn at the most landward shoreline during the past 40-years, in recognition of the dynamic nature of these areas. For stabilized inlets or beaches not directly impacted by inlet dynamics, the baseline is drawn at the crest of the present-day primary sand dune. For sections of beach that have been armored and lack a natural sand dune, a theoretical dune crest position is calculated based on the measured volume of sand on the beach seaward of the erosion control structure. Once the baseline position is established, a setback line is drawn landward of the baseline at a distance equal to 40 x the annual erosion rate. For stable or accretional beaches, the setback line is located 20 feet landward of the baseline.

Construction is allowed seaward of the setback line, but new construction is limited to 5,000 square feet of heated space and new erosion control structures are not permitted, although the emergency use of sandbags can be allowed under limited circumstances. The original version of the Beachfront Management Act did not allow construction seaward of the baseline, but was amended in 1990 to allow construction of habitable structures and thereby provide reasonable use of property located wholly seaward of the baseline.

With a significantly developed coastline, much of which is erosional, and a ban on new erosion control structures, the state generally considers beach renourishment to be a mid-range (decadal) solution to chronic erosion problems. Lacking a dedicated funding source for beach renourishment, the availability of state renourishment funding varies from year to year and is largely dependent on the relative condition of the state's economy.

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Speaker Biography:

Bill Eiser is staff oceanographer with the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, a state agency formerly known as the South Carolina Coastal Council. Mr. Eiser has worked for the agency since 1989. His job duties include establishing the positions of the agency's beachfront jurisdictional lines, called the baseline and setback line; reviewing all beachfront permit applications, from residential construction to beach renourishment projects; and managing the state's beach erosion monitoring program. Mr. Eiser holds a bachelors and masters degree in Marine Science from the University of South Carolina.