

BEACH NEWS

American Shore & Beach Preservation Association

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To be or not to be: Beach renourishment after a nor'easter

FORT MYERS, FL - Nor'easters - those wild winter weather events that are notorious for producing heavy snow and rain - also produce enormous waves that crash onto Atlantic beaches and cause severe beach erosion. Some storms are strong enough to take out an entire beach in one fell swoop, while others cause beaches to accelerate their natural erosion rates.

"Engineered beaches are designed to provide a certain level of protection to the structures and infrastructure behind them," says Tom Herrington, Ph.D., assistant director of the Center for Maritime Systems at the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, N.J. "Once a beach gets below a specific width, a renourishment project needs to take place to bring the protection value back."

He continued: "The problem with nor'easters is that each storm takes a little bit more sand away, causing the beach to be constantly receding."

Restoring a beach after a nor'easter is a matter of money. "As a nation, we have a very reactionary policy for dealing with nor'easters," Herrington said. "But, basically, there are two ways a beach gets renourished after a storm - either you have a federal project on your beach, or you don't."

If you live in a community that has a federal beach project, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the local sponsor will work together to renourish the beach after a nor'easter sufficiently diminishes the beach width and its protection value.

However, if you do not have a federal project on your beach, it's up to the local or state government to find the funds to rebuild the beach. "The problem with this is that local governments are generally only able to come up with enough funds to renourish a beach to withstand a five- to 10-year storm event, instead of a 50- to 100-year event that federal projects are designed to withstand - so it ends up needing to be done more often," Herrington said.

Sometimes after a nor'easter erodes a beach that is not under a federal project umbrella, the state government will step in and provide an emergency restoration for the beach. With the expenditure of public funds, many states will require the local community to adopt state and

federal land use regulations or a coastal zone management program in the affected area to help protect the community in the future. Such regulations can include:

- The creation of dunes on the beach;
- FEMA rules for setting structures back away from the beach; and
- Beach access requirements, including walkovers across dunes to protect them.

"All of these things cost money, and sometimes create controversy," Herrington said. "But, over the years, I've found that the people who have lived along the coast for a long period of time better understand the destructive potential of nor'easters and are more willing to support the expenditure of capital that is necessary to protect their homes and businesses."

In summary, Herrington says a more proactive policy by the federal and state governments would be better, but that it's a matter of convincing Congress that beach renourishment projects are valuable. "We need to keep showing them the dollars and cents," he said.

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ABOUT ASBPA

Founded in 1926, the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA) represents the scientific, technical and political interests along the coast in an effort to shape national research and policy concerning shore and beach management and restoration. ASBPA strives to engage in a factual debate on coastal issues and economics that will foster sound, far-sighted and economical development and preservation of our beaches; thereby aiding in placing their beliefs within the reach of the largest possible number of people in accordance with the ideals of a democratic nation. For additional information about ASBPA, please visit www.asbpa.org.

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