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Dredging keeps our beaches — and our tourism — in good shape

FORT MYERS, FL – If you are reading this article, chances are you live within an hour's drive of an American coastline. If that is the case, you should be interested to know beaches represent one of our nation's most important economic and natural resources. But enjoying this resource comes at a price, because beaches often require maintenance to stay in tip-top shape – just like your house or car.

You see, beaches are in a constant state of flux. Hurricanes, tropical storms, winter storms and other natural processes cause sand to erode, leaving the structures and infrastructure on the beaches wide open for disaster.

One of the ways scientists and engineers combat this erosion is through periodic beach nourishment, where large dredges scoop or suck sand from an offshore location and deliver it to the shore to widen the beach. Dredging restores natural barriers that protects private property and public infrastructure along the coast from disappearing into the ocean.

“In Ocean City, Maryland, a 1992 beach renourishment project paid for itself, more than three times over, by preventing at least \$180 million in property damage in just three years,” said Barry Holliday, executive director of the Dredging Contractors of America.

This sand doesn't magically appear back on the beach, though. There is an entire industry that specializes in putting it there – the dredging industry. In conjunction with state and local governments, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and other federal agencies, the dredging industry works on many beach renourishment projects around the country.

The Corps is the federal agency responsible for the majority of dredging activities in the United States. They control the permitting process for all projects, as well as planning and design, feasibility analysis, policy, funding and contract administration. In fact, the Corps dredging budget now exceeds \$1 billion per year.

“The Corps is the industry's primary customer – more than 80 percent of our work comes from the Corps,” Holliday said. “Its actions determine the scope, shape and health of the entire U.S. dredging industry.”

The industry works closely with the Corps to ensure it can respond to the dredging needs, but dredging companies also must be cost-effective and timely -- and the competition can be fierce.

Accordingly, the dredging contractors have an advocate in the Dredging Contractors of America (DCA), a nonprofit trade association that has represented the interests of the U.S. dredging industry and its members for more than 26 years.

“Our most important role is to give dredging contractors the chance for an effective dialogue with the Corps,” Holliday said. “Working together as a group gives much more weight to the issues that affect the industry and helps to influence changes that would simply be impossible for individual companies to achieve on their own.”

The DCA also assists in lobbying Congress on industry issues, the most important of which is authorization and funding for projects. The Corps has a detailed process for moving projects up the funding ladder.

“Beaches are America's favorite vacation playground, and they are also a preferred destination for tourists from around the world,” Holliday points out. “The value of these dredging projects is easily measured by our country's \$26 billion trade surplus in tourism.”

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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.

This information is provided by the American Shore & Beach Preservation Association. For information, to change your e-mail address or to unsubscribe from this list, contact us at exdir@asbpa.org.