

THE STATE PORT PILOT

Wednesday, February 22

Southport, NC

Executive disdain

Caswell Beach mayor Harry Simmons goes nationwide again early next month. In his role as president of American Shore and Beach Preservation Association, Simmons will lead a convocation of beach-lovers and coastal advocates who intend to keep up the pressure aimed at changing America's attitude toward its beaches. An impressive array of personalities from the higher reaches of government and private agencies will both speak to and listen to those assembled in the nation's capital.

The stated goal of the March 1-3 summit is to "provide an in-depth look at critical issues affecting beach preservation and management; enhance media relations and lobbying skills; develop an understanding of federal budgeting and appropriations; and provide networking opportunities with members of Congress, federal officials and beach-lovers."

Nicely put. But the real goal is to get the attention of policy-makers and to plan strategy and learn the best tactics necessary to remove the nation's coast from the government's enemies list.

Simply put, America's coastal property owners are treated with disdain by an executive branch too shortsighted to properly steward one of the nation's greatest natural resources.

The ever-more-powerful executive branch, operating chiefly through the Office of Management and Budget, would starve beach states were it not for resistance from such groups as the ASBPA, an organization which at times resembles the Alamo garrison as it attempts to stand up against stronger forces.

Even when Washington is reluctant to make overt policy decisions harmful to the nation's coastal communities, it does so through other machinations such as shrinking its funding for the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, a much-maligned agency which, for all its faults, represents the best hope for the future of beaches, inlets and waterways.

Simmons uses a hot knife to cut through this butter.

"For 20 years, OMB has consistently shortchanged America's water resource needs by providing inadequate funding for our nation's vital water infrastructure," Simmons said recently. "Over the past four years, they have worked zealously to deny federal planning and funding to all but some of the largest flood control and storm damage protection projects," he charged.

The OMB is waging war on the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, Simmons says.

"The fiscal year 2007 budget puts two hands firmly on the throat of the corps' study program and squeezes tightly," he said.

Without a strong planning capability, the corps is bound to become an operation and maintenance agency, not one that can respond to keeping ports and waterways competitive, and keeping coastal and riverine residents safe from flooding.

The ASBPA president credits Congress for standing as a partner in the fight against the executive branch.

“We have battled successfully for a strong federal coastal program for the past ten years,” Simmons said.

But the warrior may be forgiven for growing weary of that annual ritual in Congress.

“Until there is an administration, of either party, that understands the importance that needs to be given to all types of vitally important water resource projects, we will just have to continue to urge Congress to fill the void,” said Simmons.

Integral to Simmons’ conclusion is the supposition that the current administration’s policies cannot be changed through the political process.

Regrettably, he’s probably right.

<http://www.stateportpilot.com/sections/editorials.htm>

©2006, The State Port Pilot