Why do beaches erode?
The simple answer is they do not have enough sand. However, the causes are different in different parts of the country.

- On the West Coast, beaches are sand-starved when river dams block the flow of sand. Eastern beaches often lack sand because inlets or navigation projects interrupt sand’s along-shore movement.
- All beaches suffer from storms and other natural events that cause erosion. Things as disparate as storm-driven waves or a simple change in an offshore sandbar may cause one coastal area to lose sand while another gains.

Who is the ASBPA?
The American Shore & Beach Preservation Association is the nation’s oldest organization promoting science-based policies for the protection of beaches and shores.

Since 1926, this national organization has worked with legislators and regulators to craft sound public policy to benefit shorelines across the country, while spearheading research efforts to better understand the dynamic processes at work along our coasts.

To learn more about beaches, visit the ASBPA’s Web site at www.asbpa.org
What can we do about it?

For decades, people have tried putting everything on the beach to stop erosion including the proverbial kitchen sink. During the 20th century, when coastal engineering and coastal geology came into their own, science played more of a role in fighting erosion.

Still, there is no one magical answer that works everywhere. Often, it takes a combination of solutions.

Land use regulations: While requiring coastal buildings to be set back and elevated doesn’t slow erosion, it does lessen its impact on buildings. That’s why most states have enacted special coastal land use regulations.

Abandonment: Wholesale retreat is not practical in many areas. But, in minimally populated areas with low property values, it may make sense to buy property and remove infrastructure.

Structures: There are two kinds that “draw the line” in the sand – literally. Seawalls run parallel to the shore to protect the property behind them. Unfortunately, they don’t add sand to the system. Other structures (groins and jettys) run perpendicular to the shoreline and keep sand from moving down the beach. They can work well only when sand is already being added to the beach.

Beach restoration: Adding sand to the beach to replace what’s been lost is the closest we’ve come to solving the problem. Coastal scientists have years of experience with beach restoration projects and have learned that adding sand in the right quantities, properly engineered and maintained, can make a beach last forever.

Why do we care about beaches?

Our beaches are an American treasure in terms of storm protection, recreation, the economy and the environment.

Storm protection: Studies show that a healthy beach protects the properties behind it – and the roads, buildings and sewer or water lines. That means fewer flood insurance claims and disaster assistance requests. It also means a lot less misery for coastal citizens.

Environment: When we lose the beach, we lose invaluable natural habitat. Sea turtles have difficulty nesting on an eroding beach, and those nests are more susceptible to predators. On a narrow or nonexistent beach, birds have no place to nest or feed. Unique beach ecosystems can be destroyed when there isn’t enough sand to support them.

Economic: America’s coast is a magnet for people who want to live and play on the beach. More than 50 percent of Americans live within 50 miles of the coast. Healthy beaches are a major draw for tourists from across the nation and the world, generating billions of dollars in revenues annually and creating thousands of jobs.

Now, public beach access must be provided in order for a beach project to receive any federal funding. That’s a great motivation to keep our beaches accessible to everyone.