

\$2.5M set for beaches in 2007

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Despite controversy surrounding easements and beach access, the federal government announced Tuesday that the beach replenishment project on Long Beach Island will continue to be funded in 2007.

U.S. Rep. Jim Saxton, R-3rd, released a statement announcing the \$2.5 million has been appropriated for the coming year. The money is included in the Administration's 2007 Energy and Water Development Budget.

"This is terrific news because it's the first time we've received construction funding in the president's budget for LBI," Saxton said in the statement.

The appropriation, which brings the total amount of federal money invested in LBI beaches to more than \$12 million since the mid-1990s, will be earmarked for the pumping of millions of tons of offshore sand to create a sturdier, Island-wide dune system.

The proposed beach project includes construction of a 125-foot-wide beach berm and a sand dune 30-feet wide; incorporates 347 acres of planted dune grasses and 540,000 feet of sand fencing; raises the beach 8 feet above sea level and dunes another 14 feet for a total height of 22 feet; replaces 7.4 million cubic yards of sand fill during initial construction; and provides maintenance work about every seven years over a 50-year period.

"I think we all need to heed the advice of the USACE (U.S. Army Corps of Engineers). They have studied LBI for years. Should a 'mega-storm' hit LBI and its six small towns and 8,000 year-round residents, we could see Katrina-like destruction," Saxton said.

Now that money has been secured, the corps can turn its full attention to convincing beachfront homeowners to grant easements allowing the project to start.

Corps spokesman Merv Brockey said he has already fielded numerous inquiries from homeowners and their lawyers who are hesitant to grant access to what they consider their private property.

"The 'ground truth' is, we realize there is an information gap," Brockey said. "It is important that we work with the local townships and officials to respond to their requests and work to get information out to their constituents."

"We need to show people what this project can look like and what they can expect —and talk about the benefits of the project itself and what can happen to tourism," he said.

One of the main contentions of replenishment proponents has long been the impact that a major storm could have on Island residents and the local economy.

"This project will provide storm damage protection from hurricanes and nor'easters that is so badly needed in this part of New Jersey," Brockey said.

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