

Bush budget lists \$2.5M. to build up LBI beaches

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The Long Beach Island beach-replenishment project would get \$2.5 million in federal funds in 2007 under President Bush's proposed budget, though Congress must still approve the money.

A spokesman for U.S. Rep. Jim Saxton, R-3rd, whose office announced the funding Tuesday, said that although the project is supposed to begin this year and received \$5 million in federal money for 2006, this is the first time funding for the LBI project has appeared in the proposed budget for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. In the past, Saxton has lobbied to have the funding inserted by Congress, spokesman Jeff Sagnip Hollendonner said.

"Jim has had to add this money himself in Congress and push it at the committee level. ... It's not impossible, but what makes it different this time is that the corps has put the construction funding in their budget," Hollendonner said.

The beach-replenishment project, which was long awaited and viewed by many as essential to protect the island, has become highly contentious recently due to easements required by the state and federal governments. A Department of Environmental Protection requirement that the island municipalities add public access points every quarter-mile and construct parking lots with restroom facilities has also been a sore spot for some island property owners.

Saxton, who has long fought for the project, criticized the DEP earlier this year for adding what Saxton called stringent requirements that he said could jeopardize the project.

On Tuesday, Hollendonner portrayed the Army Corps' budget as a bright spot amid the recent controversies over the project. And Saxton repeated arguments in a statement that beach replenishment is vital.

"I think we need to heed the advice of the USACE. ... 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 (Hurricane) Katrina-like destruction," Saxton said in the statement.