

## Drifting sands expected to save Holgate Replenishment of LBI municipal beaches would enrich refuge too, engineer says

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Long Beach Township officials said they plan to petition federal and state officials to extend the Long Beach Island beach-replenishment project 250 feet south of where it currently ends in Holgate.

The long-anticipated replenishment, as now planned, will only go as far the parking lot at the tip of the developed area in Holgate. But the request aims to extend replenishment to the property line separating township-owned property and the Holgate portion of the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge.

The measure, officials said, is intended, to allay the concerns of Holgate residents who say they have watched area erode terribly in recent years.

"It should have been in the original project and somehow was left out," said Bill Hutson of Lorry's Island End Motel. "Thankfully, we found out about it and are bringing it to (state and federal officials') attention."

"I live about 300 feet away from where the ocean is trying to cut through (in Holgate)," said Ken Stiles. "We've seen it come and go before, but it's quite extreme right now and every year it cuts in more and more."

Stiles heads the Holgate Taxpayer Association. This week, he drove from his home in northern New Jersey to survey the damage caused by erosion.

The project will almost definitely not extend beyond the property line with the Holgate portion of the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials said the laws governing protected habitat do not permit heavy machinery on the beachfront — or anywhere else in a preserve, for that matter. The law was passed by Congress in 1964.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is quite inflexible on this point. Stephen Atzert, the service's manager of the refuge, said Friday that given the choice between replenishing the beach or losing it, the U.S. government's position would be, "to lose it."

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service purchased the southernmost portion of the island from the National Audubon Society in 1960.

The U.S. government's position has exasperated Holgate homeowners, like Fred Seeber, who is also a Stafford Township councilman.

"At that end of the island something has to be done," said Seeber. "We're always scared about the dangers to habitat ... but if something is not done about Forsythe, there won't be one endangered bird left to have a nesting place ... (there). The bottom line is if we have a preservation area, let's preserve it."

Hutson feels the same way.

The motel owner plans to petition the federal government to cede the Holgate reserve back to local officials. That would allow for beach replenishment there, he said. In calling for the action, Hutson referred to the reserve as "one of America's treasures."

The concern about the Holgate reserve is, in part, fueled by the resurfacing of a 1999 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers study reviewing the erosion troubles on Long Beach Island. In it, Army Corps engineers predicted that, without beach replenishment, the southernmost portion of the island could be swallowed by the surf in the years to come.

The report stipulates that as much as "2.5 miles of coastal wetlands, sandy beach, and scrub shrub habitats" could be lost.

"If nothing is done that area could naturally go the way of the ocean," elaborated Keith Watson, an engineer

with the U.S. Army Corps on Tuesday. "That is not out of the question. It is within the realm of possibility ... if the right combination of waves and storms comes along."

Watson is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project manager for the Long Beach Island beach replenishment project.

But both Watson and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officials told The Press the concerns of Hutson, Seeber, and those like them, are unfounded.

They said that beach replenishment to the property line of the reserve would be more than sufficient to forestall any doomsday scenarios predicted in the 1999 report. Oceanic drifts, Watson said, would naturally push replenishment fill south to the Holgate preserve.

Atzert concurred.

"It's really not a question of replenish Holgate or let it go because if they replenish everything north of us we will eventually get the sand," he said.

Atzert went on to say that northeasters, the erosion-causing storms most feared by island residents, actually come from the north and push sand south. He added that the preserve was actually larger in 1989 than when the Service first bought it in 1960.

The 1960 deed put the reserve's size at 256.3 acres, Atzert said. A 1989 Long Beach Township tax map, he added, shows the property at the time as 438.57 acres large. "That's almost 200 acres bigger than what it was when we bought it," the refuge manager stated. "There is no two ways about it. It's gotten longer and longer, and the way it got longer and longer is the sand from the beaches (to the north.)"