

## Line in the sand on beach access

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Rep. H. James Saxton, R-N.J., wants the state Department of Environmental Protection to back off on its insistence that beach access points be provided every quarter mile on Long Beach Island. The agency should flatly deny his request, and instead deputize him to help overcome the resistance of beachfront homeowners that has stalled a \$71 million sand replenishment project.

In a letter to the DEP, Saxton asked that access points be required every half mile on the 17-mile island instead. That would make it easier to obtain the easements required to begin the replenishment work. Many homeowners have balked at granting the easements. Some of the most vocal own property in areas with little or no public beach access.

After receiving Saxton's letter, acting DEP Commissioner Lisa E. Jackson said she remains "committed to securing public access to those beaches that are being replenished at significant public cost." Good. The rest of the state's taxpayers shouldn't have to pay to widen the beachfront along the island if they aren't able to use it. Providing beach access is the least the beachfront property owners should do in return for the storm protection the replenishment project would provide.

A wake-up call this week may help them reconsider. The need for replenishment hit a little too close to home Wednesday as wind-driven waves cut the size of dunes in one part of the island in half, leaving supportive bulkhead pilings exposed and two multimillion-dollar homes with beams dangling 2 feet above solid ground. As Long Beach Township Commissioner Robert Palmer said, "Mother Nature gave us a telephone call and I hope some of the oceanfront homeowners answer."

Business owners are calling for property owners to sign the easements and allow the beach replenishment project to begin. Officials must do everything they can to ensure the easements are granted quickly, before more damage is done and more tax money is spent rebuilding beaches and dunes. The same stretch of beach damaged Wednesday received a \$350,000 delivery of sand only two years ago.

Merchants are frustrated that homeowners haven't signed easements. "The people should be lining up to sign the easements," said one business owner. "If the owners don't sign and we do get a severe storm, there will be no one to help them and some of these homes will go under." Saxton should be on the beach with a bullhorn underscoring that point.

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