

Paradise vs. parking lots

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Just as it looked like LBI's federal beach replenishment project might be able to go ahead and that the sand would be back on the beaches before tourists start coming down in May, the New Jersey Department of Environment has upped the ante, increasing the size and number of public access sites, and adding parking lots and public bathrooms to the list of demands.

The original requirements were stiff (and costly) enough, and met the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers standards. The additional demands are considered by many to be excessive.

So whose big idea are they? Is our new Gov. Jon Corzine responsible?

As a U.S. Senator, Corzine, a Democrat, worked closely with Rep. Jim Saxton, a Republican, to obtain the federal funds for the replenishment project in the first place, so he must have been in accord with the original requirements.

As a successful businessman, he also must know the importance of tourism dollars to the state's economy, so why the change?

Could the increase in demands for parking, toilets and paths to the beach be something dreamed up by Lisa Jackson, the newly-appointed but not-yet-sworn-in replacement for former DEP Commissioner Bradley Campbell? Has she ever been to Long Beach Island?

And what about CAFRA? Surely the Department of Environmental Protection should be concerned about adding more impervious cover to a barrier island with a sensitive environment and dwindling habitat for wildlife.

Also what kind of impact on LBI's potable water supply could be made by all those public bathrooms?

The parking lots and public restrooms may be music to the ears of the thousands of new mainland residents. After all, mainland neighbors like to go to the beach too, and finding a place to park or a bathroom for the kids can be difficult.

But, how many new, out-of-the area daytrippers would such conveniences attract?

The Island's unspoken but obvious desire not to attract out of area day-trippers is less a matter of snobbery than economy.

Daytrippers tend to bring their own food with them and not spend money on clothing, souvenirs or other merchandise. With the addition of public toilets available as dressing rooms, they won't need to spend money on hotels, either.

LBI is a place where businesses rely heavily on the dollars of vacationers who spend anywhere from a week to an entire summer.

For that reason alone, it is easy to see why Long Beach Island towns view these added demands from the DEP as a huge expense that will reap little in increased revenues and cause even more summer woes, such as increased traffic, an increase in traffic accidents and possibly a need for more police.

Long Beach Township Mayor DiAnne Gove has written a letter to Jackson, asking for a meeting. Perhaps all the Island mayors ought to back up Gove and invite both Jackson and Gov. Corzine down to meet with some of the residents, business owners and members of the Alliance for A Living Ocean.

After all, it's easy to mandate orders from behind a desk when you don't have to make eye contact with the people who will be affected by those orders.

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