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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Awards Contract to Start First LBI Beach Repairs

Mobilizing to start by Friday, the end of fiscal year; Could help lead to future LBI funding

TOMS RIVER, N.J. - Congressman Jim Saxton (NJ-3rd) confirmed today that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) has awarded a contract to begin the first, preliminary phase of construction to the long awaited Long Beach Island (LBI) project.

"This is the initial start of construction by the Army Corps of Engineers," Saxton said. "The contract is for a relatively small section of beach; however, it may help in acquiring funding in the 2007 budget for the LBI project as a continuing beach repair project."

Saxton obtained \$5 million for the LBI project for fiscal year 2006, which is slated to begin next month after the federal budget is signed into law. With the work underway by Friday, Sept. 30, the last day of fiscal year 2005, LBI construction can be considered an ongoing project, and may be easier to fund in 2007.

"This is a multi-year project and I must look to the future to find ways to keep funding coming beyond 2006," Saxton said. "The Army Corps of Engineers is already preparing its 2007 budget, and I want to see the LBI project on schedule and ready to make real progress."

This summer, Saxton met with the commander of the USACE, Lt. Gen. Carl A. Strock, and the commander of the Philadelphia District of USACE, Lt. Col. Robert Ruch to discuss funding for the LBI project.

The project will cover an area of damaged dunes and beach in Harvey Cedars along a four-block area. Between Cumberland and Salem Avenues, workers will move about 16,000 tons of sand onto the beach. The sand will be a medium grain of washed, screened sand that Corps engineers identified as the closest match possible, and will

be brought in via trucks for up to 45 days. The sand will be bought from a local quarry, Sahara Sand and Gravel off Route 9.

The contract is worth an estimated \$400,000 to \$500,000, using funds Saxton added to the federal budget over the past two years. The successful bidder is Environmental, Engineering & Construction, Inc., (EEC), designated as a disadvantaged business and located in a U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) Historical Underutilized Business (HUB) Zone near Baltimore, Md. Federal laws allow such contracts to be awarded without the usual lengthy bidding process to HUB Zone businesses. EEC workers have already been on-site, and are scheduled to be on site today to begin mobilizing the equipment and other preparations.

The entire LBI construction project could take up to five years to complete. Congress authorized the project for 50 years in 2000. After the initial construction is complete, the project is authorized for periodic maintenance every seven years or as needed.

"When finished, the entire project is expected to offer LBI protection with high, wide beaches, tall berms, grassy dunes, and over a half-million feet of dune fencing," Saxton said. "We have been tempting fate and Mother Nature. This project needs to be hastened. As I watched Hurricane Isabel in 2003, Hurricane Irene this past August and Hurricane Ophelia this month move north off the Atlantic Coast, I wondered how long we have before a major hurricane or Nor'easter wallops LBI. My hope is that the project is finished before that time."

Saxton said that the next phase of pumping off-shore sand onto the beach could be only months away.

"I am anticipating the Corps will start pumping sand in fiscal year 2006," Saxton said. "That work will be significantly larger in scope than this contract."

The \$5 million in the 2006 budget, coupled with state funding, are sufficient to begin the first major stage of construction. The project could go out to bid after the new budget becomes law, and be awarded by the end of the year.

This summer, the Corps signed a Project Cooperation Agreement with the State of New Jersey that stipulates that the State will fund 35 percent of the construction, with the federal government to pay the remainder. The LBI project is one of the last projects in the nation funded at the 35-65 percent ratio. By law, future projects would have a federal cost share of no more than 50 percent.

Saxton added over \$3 million to federal budgets from 1993-2003 to design and engineer a repair plan, and \$1.7 million toward future construction in 2003 and 2004.

In 1991 and 1992, three powerful storms struck the island in rare succession, resulting in severe erosion that has never been repaired.

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