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Front Page

# TEMPERING THE WRATH OF MOTHER NATURE

BY PETER B. BRACE INDEPENDENT WRITER



Massachusetts is the only coastal state with severe

erosion in the country that does not fund beach nourishment to protect residential and commercial property.

That could change within the next year if the Siasconset Beach Preservation Fund's (SBPF) own beach nourishment project, proposed for just north of Sankaty to Low Beach, gets its permits.

**NetCo Engineering employee Juan Paz shovels sand behind a line of DuneGuard on the beach along Baxter Road yesterday. The 'Sconset Beach Preservation Fund is now promoting a plan to renourish the eroding beach by pumping sand from offshore.**

, an offshore dredging mission for 1.6 million cubic yards of sand that would be liquefied and spat onto the beach, is playing out to be a test case for the state.



**Congressman Bill Delahunt pledged his political support for the 'Sconset beach nourishment project over the weekend.**

At Saturday's project update meeting at the Siasconset Casino, SBPF and several coastal erosion experts brought about 70 people up to speed. Congressman Bill Delahunt also dropped by to assure SBPF and Nantucket that the state and federal agencies were watching the project with enthusiasm.

"We look forward to working with you on this particular project and hopefully, years from now, this particular schematic will become a reality for the state," said Delahunt. "We see this kind of reality as [a possible solution] to the kind of problems currently happening along the coastline, so please know that we will work with you and that we

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work on a frequent basis with the Army Corps of Engineers, and we will do all that we can to help you with permitting, so...go to it.”



**Talking about building a very big beach, Bob Hamilton, a coastal engineer with the Woods Hole Group in Woods Hole, Mass., explains to about 70 people on Saturday afternoon at the Siasconset Casino how the Siasconset Beach Preservation Fund plans to use offshore sand to protect 'Sconset's beaches from erosion. ROB BENCHLEY/The Independent**

## SANDCASTLES

Using a barge that could haul between 3,000 and 10,000 cubic yards of sand, SBPF wants to vacuum sand up from the ocean floor in about 25 feet of water roughly three miles off shore.

The barge would be towed close to the beach and the sand would be turned into slurry and then pumped onto the beach. SBPF would use that sand to widen the beach to 250 feet at a height of 14 feet.

Along the base of the bluff, giant sand bags, called geotubes, 15 feet in diameter would be buried to protect the bluff from erosion.

Additionally, structures called sand gates — pilings driven into the beach outward from the toe of the bluff with removable slats — would serve to hold the sand in place in certain high-erosion areas.

This part of the nourishment, about half of the sand, is called the design beach, built to hold the bluff in place and protect the dunes. The other half of the sand, sacrificial beach, is there for the ocean to take during major storms and erosion.

SBPF estimates that it will need to renourish its sacrificial beaches at five to seven-year intervals, depending on the severity of erosion.

Ultimately, SBPF believes it will need 2.4 million cubic yards of sand including renourishments.

This project would work in concert with SBPF's bluff terracing efforts, Dune Guard snow fencing, and the restarting of the Codfish Park dewatering system, currently not operational.

## BEACH MONEY

With last winter's storms taking an average of 15 feet of bluff along Baxter Road, the push is on for SBPF fix its beach.

But first, they need come up with the cash.



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The beach nourishment project is going to cost \$18 million, said SBPF's vice president Helmut Weymar. Fifteen of the \$18 million must come from Baxter Road residents.

SBPF hopes to raise the other \$3 million from other 'Sconset residents. Weymar said they have already received several sixand seven-figure gifts from Baxter Road property owners, and need still a few fiveand six-figure gifts from 'Sconseters who do not live on the Bluff.

Of the entire \$18 million, SBPF needs 10 percent now to keep going with its permitting and review process, 10 percent more at the end of the year, a little less than that during the winter and the balance of the cost by the fall of 2006 to get going on the project. Two million of the total would be spent on design of the project.

The more money SBPF gets now, the easier it will be to armor the toe of the bluff in front of Sankaty Head Lighthouse, restart its dewatering system at Codfish Park and maintain its existing erosion control measures, said Weymar.

Referring to aerial photos of the project area with measurements showing the advance of the ocean since 1957 through 2035, Weymar said that not nourishing the beach would allow the ocean to keep chewing inland.

"There is no technological solution for individual property owners to save their land; this has to be a community effort," he said. "We are the stewards of 'Sconset for future generations. I would argue that history is not going to be very kind to us if we don't do anything here."

## **LOSING GROUND**

Broken up across seven photos collectively showing the shore from the southern end of Sesachacha Pond to 1,800 feet south of Codfish Park, Weymar described 10-, 20and 30-year estimations of where the shore will be based on average annual rates of erosion from 1990 though 2005.

He and SBPF are predicting that in 10 years, many of the houses on the Bluff between Ann's Lane and the lighthouse will either have to be moved off their lots or will be taken by the ocean.

In 20 years, the lighthouse would be too close the edge of the bluff to be moved.

In 30 years, the edge of the bluff would be directly along the edge of Baxter Road in some places. Codfish Park and the Summer House pool would be underwater. "So that's where this goes if this doesn't go," Weymar said.

Reinforcing Weymar's plea for support of SBPF's project is Sandy Tate, Coastal Projects Administrator for the town of Palm

Beach, Fla., which gets matching state funding for beach nourishment each year.

“I feel that this project has the potential as being an exemplary project for the state of Massachusetts,” said Tate. “The one message I feel compelled to bring you is that beach nourishment combined with properly designed structures will work, they will solve the problem.”

Tate said that once the engineered beach is installed, the Federal Emergency Management Agency then considers it part of a town’s infrastructure. As such, it becomes eligible for FEMA emergency storm relief funds after a major storm washes away beach and property.

Tate added that the only obstacle for beach nourishment projects in Massachusetts is the environmental permitting process, but that a beach nourishment project can actually help wildlife and their habitats.

“I believe the structures we’re building in Florida create habitat, not destroy habitat,” she said. “There is no reason your project can’t be built and still satisfy the environmental concerns of the permitting agencies.”

Beach nourishment is now the standard for many coastal states, including New Jersey and Florida, where \$100 million is spent annually on beach projects, \$35 million from the state alone, said Tate.

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