

NC Coastal Erosion Threatens Beaches and Communities

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After centuries of wear and tear, the North Carolina coast continues to be beaten down by annual hurricanes, tropical storms and nor'easters. In addition to the expected erosion, new research shows that the water is rising three times faster on the coast than it did just a century ago. According to a January 18th News and Observer article by Bruce Henderson "the sea level began rising in the 19th century," and that, "the rate of climb doubled again in the 20th century, with a further quickening in the past 30 years." Scientists and specialists in the field say that this is not a problem to address in the future but one that must be handled right now.

One aspect of this relentless situation to inspect more closely is the land that is at risk, as well as the multi-million dollar mansions that reside on that land. The pieces of property and the homes on them could be lying on the ocean's floor a few generations from now if the erosion continues at the current rate. Henderson says that, "at risk are more than 30,500 homes and other buildings, including some of the state's most expensive real estate." He adds that economists studying four counties along the coast estimated a total of \$6.9 billion in property that is at risk from rising seas.

The Outer Banks has been experiencing multiple problems with the rising sea level for years. According to Henderson, "a row of beach houses in the old resort town of Nags Head is collapsing into the surf now

as the town plans a \$36 million project to pump fresh sand onto its eroding strand this spring." This beach nourishment strategy is projected to stop the effects of time in order to save countless houses, many of which have already suffered the consequences of the rising sea level. In the meantime, homeowners still suffer increased property risk.

Jamie Hatchell, co-owner of Hatchell Construction located in Manteo, NC, is a Nags Head homeowner that has been affected by the constant push of the ocean. During a storm over the Thanksgiving holiday in 2008, the back wall of her family's beach cottage was torn off and washed into the ocean. Hatchell is one of many that chose to rebuild after serious damage to their houses due to the ever-moving shoreline and natural disasters. Henderson talks about homeowners, like Hatchell, and said, "beach communities shredded by hurricanes are typically built back, sometimes repeatedly." Although Hatchell succeeded in replacing what had been ripped away, she admits that reconstruction was difficult due to rules and regulations already enforced by the county and the town of Nags Head. Hatchell said, "it was really difficult to rebuild; Luckily I am in the construction business and had contacts to call in," and went on to say, "If I wasn't in the business that I am in and didn't have the right people to call, I would not have been able to rebuild. The average person would not have been able to work their way through it." Hatchell recalled many obstacles she had



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to overcome in order to replace the house. However, not only land owners will be affected by the rules and regulations.

In the News and Observer article, Henderson makes a point to mention that, "the N.C. Division of Coastal Management is circulating drafts of what could become the state's first policy of sea-level rise. If adopted, the policy would lay the groundwork for regulations influencing development and how public structures from boat ramps to bridges are built." Local real estate agent Beth Twyne commented on new policies, like this one mentioned by Henderson, by saying, "as a realtor on the Outer Banks, it is important to stay abreast of these on-going regulations that may affect the properties, including the possibility of beach nourishment." Twyne, owner of Carolina Dunes Real Estate, is one of many Outer Banks locals who support the plan of beach nourishment:

the \$36 million tactic that Henderson mentioned in his article, which is yet another argued topic in local and state politics.

While the majority of residents of the Outer Banks are in favor of beach nourishment, geologists and scientists around the state disagree. However, those residents opposed may be taking the same perspective as Dr. Wakeman, Meredith College Professor, a coastal studies enthusiast. Wakeman said, "By in large, I think it's a bad idea for a couple different reasons. One is, generally speaking, it doesn't work very well." He continued on to say, "generally they don't work nearly as well as they are forecasted to work." He spoke of the negative ecological impact of beach nourishment. The sand is pumped onto the already existing beaches can, and most likely will, suffocate already existing ecosystems beneath the sand. He added, "It's not about beaches, it's about buildings."

No matter what an individual's perspective is on the situation at hand, the fact of the matter is that the erosion that began two centuries ago is an ongoing process that is increasing in speed. With sea-levels rising at three times the originally predicted rate, homeowners, individually, and entire communities, at large, must prepare for a natural change that no one is in favor of.

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