

HARDENING BAN IS UPHELD

Local Beach Town Officials Disappointed With CRC Decision

BY DOUG RUTTER

Local beach town officials are disappointed with the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission (CRC) vote last week to stand firmly behind the state's ban on jetties, groins and seawalls along the coast.

The CRC voted last Friday to deny a request from the Town of Topsail Beach to change five-year-old rules that prohibit hardened erosion-control structures on the beach.

Topsail Beach had petitioned the CRC for the rule change because the town wants to construct a groin to slow erosion at the south end of the beach near New Topsail Inlet.

The erosion problem at Topsail Beach, which threatens about 80 homes and a main access road, is a familiar one for area beach town leaders who have witnessed erosion on a smaller scale for years but have been prevented from doing much to stop it.

Several local officials think the CRC should relax its rules and allow hard erosion-control devices in certain instances.

The CRC outlawed hard beachfront structures in 1985, reasoning that while seawalls, jetties and groins reduce erosion where they are built, they tend to cause more erosion nearby.

Prior to last week's CRC meeting in Atlantic Beach, the Ocean Isle Beach Board of Commissioners adopted a resolution endorsing Topsail Beach's plan to seek a change in the rules.

For years, Ocean Isle officials have watched the east of the island near Shallotte Inlet erode. A series of wooden groins was erected years ago before the state ban was enacted.

"Personally, I was disappointed in the outcome of it," Ocean Isle Beach Commissioner Terry Barbee said Tuesday.

Barbee said town officials had not discussed taking any erosion-control measures if the rules had been changed. However, he added, "If something of that nature was allowed, I think we'd definitely consider it."

Holden Beach Mayor John Tandy said Monday he thinks the outright ban on hardened erosion-control structure should be relaxed. The state should review each case to determine the impact of a groin, jetty or seawall before deciding whether or not to allow it, he said.

"They're saying no hardened structures are allowed, and that really isn't helping the general public," the mayor added.

Tandy said there are a number of jetties along the Atlantic Coast—including ones at Sandy Hook, N.J., and Miami Beach, Fla.—that have helped build beaches and not resulted in erosion elsewhere.

At a town board workshop last Wednesday, Maintenance Supervisor Henry Thompson said he would like to see a rock pile jetty near the east end of the island to protect homes and a parking area from further erosion. "I'm afraid we're going to lose the whole east end," he said.

Mayor Tandy also said members of the Coastal Resources Commission should be elected instead of appointed by the governor.

"You've got this one group of appointed people making up the rules and interpreting the rules," he said. "It's really not government by the people."

Long Beach Town Manager Gary Britt also said this week he would like to see more flexibility in the state's ban on hard beachfront structures.

"Obviously, we were very interested in the outcome (of the CRC meeting) because that is one possible alternative the town has to control erosion here," said Britt. "Right now, our options are very few as far as handling erosion on the beachfront."

Like Tandy, he said there are situations where hard structures have not damaged the beach. For that reason, he said each case warrants individual consideration.

Speaking specifically of the Topsail Beach case, Britt said the Army Corps of Engineers should be qualified to determine how a groin will affect the beachfront. Topsail Beach had worked with the Corps to develop its erosion-control plan.

Wallace Martin, village manager at Bald Head Island, said the village council took no formal position on the beach hardening issue.

However, he said the CRC ruling will almost certainly prevent the village from including low-level

problems at the southwest end of the island.

Kent Mitchell, whose family is developing Bald Head Island, was one of three CRC members who voted against the majority last Friday. He could not be reached for comment Monday or Tuesday, but

had reportedly joined two other CRC members in pushing for a hearing on the Topsail Beach request.

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THE N.C. COASTAL RESOURCES COMMISSION last week upheld its five-year-old ban on seawalls, jetties and groins along the coast. These wooden groins at the east end of Ocean Isle Beach were put in place before the ban was approved in 1985.

STAFF PHOTO BY DOUG RUTTER

plans. Bald Head officials had hoped to use groins to hold sand on the beach and reduce severe erosion

problems at the southwest end of the island.

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