

# Corps OKs Beach Nourishment At Bald Head

BY DOUG RUTTER

Bald Head Island property owners and the federal government will share the cost of an historic beach nourishment project expected to begin within the next two months.

Sand will be dredged from the Cape Fear River ocean bar channel and placed on a badly-eroding section of Bald Head Island.

Work is expected to begin in late September or early October, said Frank Snipes, study manager with the Army Corps of Engineers planning division in Wilmington.

Bald Head Island Town Manager Wallace Martin said 320,000 cubic yards of sand will be dumped along an 8,000-foot stretch of beach, extending from the west side of the island south to an area known as East Beach.

The work should take about six weeks to complete and add about 80 feet of width to the beach. "We're really pretty much excited about it," Martin said.

Snipes said the Bald Head Island project will be the first of its kind in North Carolina and one of the first in the nation.

Congress passed a bill in 1986 authorizing the U.S. Corps of Engineers to split the cost of beach nourishment projects with local governments. All proposals must receive state approval and provide an economic benefit.

Martin said he first applied for the program about three years ago, and made a trip to Washington, D.C., last month to talk with Corps officials. "It's been quite a struggle to get all of that through," he said.

The project cost has been estimated at \$900,000, with the island and Corps of Engineers each paying half. Bids will be opened Aug. 23.

Martin said Bald Head Island landowners will pay for the beach nourishment project through a combination tax increase and assessment.

The village council increased the tax rate by 12 cents this year to raise \$150,000. The other \$300,000 was borrowed from a bank but will be recovered in assessments once the work is finished.

Martin said three zones were set

up on the island based on elevation, distance from the beach and how long it would take for property to be damaged if nothing was done to control erosion.

People who own property in the zone closest to the beach will pay \$2.02 for every \$100 worth of land. The rates for the other two zones are \$1.01 and 33.33 cents per \$100 of land.

Martin said some landowners resisted the project at first, saying that the sand wouldn't last long enough to make it worthwhile. However, most people said they supported the project after a series of public meetings.

"It's been a total turnaround," Martin said. "I just hope they still feel that way when we start billing them."

Snipes said the major benefits of the project are protecting oceanfront homes from storm damage and saving relocation costs.

The federal government helps cover the cost of moving erosion-threatened homes if homeowners have federal flood insurance.

Building up the beach should also help protect the tax base. "Those aren't your average houses as far as value," Snipes said.

# Calabash Merchants Might Form New Chamber

BY DOUG RUTTER

Calabash merchants are considering forming their own chamber of commerce to draw more tourists to the border town that was once famous for its seafood restaurants.

Rich Johnson, who owns a retail shop in town and started organizing a merchants group in February, said tourism isn't what it used to be in Calabash.

South Carolinians are getting tourist dollars that used to end up in the hands of local businessmen, he said, and several restaurants in North Myrtle Beach are using the "Calabash" name to attract patrons.

To combat the loss of tourism, Johnson said approximately 40 business owners—nearly half of the merchants in town—have come together to form the Calabash Merchants Association.

So far, donations from businesses have helped pay for a billboard on U.S. 17 in Little River that invites motorists to "Experience the real Calabash."

Wooden signs welcoming visitors to the "seafood capital" will be erected at four locations over the next few months. A map showing the location of various businesses is in the works.

"I think we've established ourselves in six months as a very vital merchants association with some very positive goals," Johnson said at a meeting last week.

Approximately 40 Calabash area merchants belong to the South Brunswick Islands Chamber of Commerce, which has 450 members

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—Rich Johnson  
Calabash Merchants Association

and promotes tourism on a regional basis.

The chamber promotes Calabash and the other South Brunswick Island towns in its brochures. It also distributes literature for individual businesses in Holden Beach, Shallotte, Ocean Isle Beach, Sunset Beach and Calabash.

Despite the Shallotte-based chamber's efforts, Calabash business owners met last Wednesday to talk about establishing a new chamber that would focus specifically on luring tourists to their community.

Al Laughinghouse and Nick Newton, who both serve on the South Brunswick Islands chamber board of directors, said the chamber will support and help the businessmen if they want to form a new chamber of commerce.

They also said they would be willing to work with the Calabash merchants to give them better representation on the South Brunswick Islands chamber.

"We do strive, more so than you may think, to promote Calabash," Newton said. "Calabash really is stressed as much or more than any

other place when we go to travel and tourism shows."

Newton said the chamber board of directors would be willing to consider setting up a satellite office in Calabash. "If you work together you can get more for your dollar," he said.

Jim Schell, the southern region's senior legislative manager with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said a new chamber in Calabash could work if the merchants there are enthusiastic and able to fund it.

Schell said the 70 chambers of commerce that serve areas with populations under 10,000 operated with an average budget of \$87,000 last year. Money comes from membership dues, government funds and special projects such as festivals.

To form a successful chamber, Schell said the group would have to develop a "mission statement" or purpose for the organization. Merchants also would need a long-range plan for five to 10 years and a specific one-year plan of action.

"You can't just go out and say, 'Join the chamber,'" he said. "You've got to have a selling tool."

Schell said chambers use plans to develop budgets and form committees that can carry out their objectives. Most chambers must hire professional paid staff to operate.

However, Newton said chambers of commerce can't operate successfully without volunteers to support the professional staff. "That's what it takes to make a chamber run—volunteers. You can't do it just with paid staff."

Johnson said business owners have "come out of the woodwork" to support the Calabash Merchants Association. Town officials also have been in favor of the effort.



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