



Coastal Point

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Bethany beach replenishment delayed until June

BY M. Patricia Titus
News Editor

Bethany Beach officials announced this week that the anticipated replenishment of the town's beach to restore it to its engineered design has been delayed until June 1. The project is now slated to be finished around June 12, barring further delays.

"Weather-related problems at other replenishment sites have resulted in the Dewey/Bethany replenishment being delayed," said Town Manager Cliff Graviet on Wednesday.

Graviet said initial landfall for the replenishment equipment is to be between Campbell Place and Central Boulevard, but he said engineers had not yet advised town officials as to whether the replenishment would proceed north or south from that point when the project begins.

As it stood this week, plans for the replenishment called for the majority of the work to take place between Wellington Parkway and Oceanview Parkway.

The company contracted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Weeks Marine Inc. – which previously performed the initial replenishment work done in the fall and winter of 2007-2008 – will begin to move equipment for the replenishment into the area in the next few weeks, Graviet said.

While the replenishment is now scheduled to occur during the beginning of the town's summer season, town officials emphasized this week that the beach will only be closed during the replenishment in areas where sand is being pumped and moved by heavy equipment. The rest of the beach will remain open.

Graviet is asking that any comments or concerns regarding the project be directed to his office at (302) 537-3771 or via e-mail at admin@townofbethanybeach.com.

Delays put project months behind

The planned restoration of the beach's engineered design was deemed necessary last fall after several significant coastal storms between May and October of 2008 did major damage to the beach and the new dune.

The initial beach reconstruction project was due to have been completed and signed-off on by state officials in May 2008, but on the very day of the scheduled inspection, Mother Nature socked the area with a strong nor'easter that severely undermined the front face of the dune and took much of the town's newly widened beach back out to sea.

The town postponed planned implementation of a beach smoking ban until the dune area could be rebuilt to accommodate required smoking areas.

State and town employees helped secure and mitigate the worst parts of the damage from that storm until contractors could return to repair the damage to the dune, which had been completed by mid-summer. But a storm in October of 2008 did more damage to the dunes and swept even more of the widened beach back out to sea.

The town and state workers have since worked to restore access to the beach, but the shoreline no longer looks like it did when the reconstruction project was originally completed, once again being narrow, and the dune no longer fits its original profile. Some of the sand that had been washed out to sea gradually returned, but not to the degree that had been hoped.

Acknowledging that the Bethany Beach portion of the project had not fared as well as it had been designed to do, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials in the fall of 2008 announced that they would be adding Bethany Beach to a planned periodic replenishment of Dewey Beach that was slated to take place over the winter, repairing the storm-damaged dune face and beach access and once again widening the beach to the state it was designed to be.

However, delays related to the Dewey project have pushed back the timeline on the Bethany replenishment several times since the original announcement. Initially, Dewey's project was to start in late fall or early winter. Now four

to five months behind that schedule, the Dewey project only recently got under way, putting Bethany's timetable back from the original February start estimate now to June.

While past periodic replenishments have brought many visitors to the site of such work as a curiosity, the delay until June is expected to be considered a headache for visitors, property owners and businesses alike, since it will disrupt portions of the beach during the prized summer season.

Town officials had expressed hopes that the 2009 summer season would be a bellwether for the town's tourism industry, since it would have been the first full summer with a fully reconstructed beach. That full season will now be somewhat shortened.

By mid-June, however, the town should have a fully restored beach and dune for the many thousands of visitors who come to the shore each summer.

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