

# Federal replenishment projects have now become routine, most beaches said to be in good shape heading toward the winter

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With nearly two months left before the hurricane season of 2020 ends Nov. 30, and the winter storm season waiting in the wings after that, most local beaches are in relatively good shape.

Still, there remains work to be done.

A federal beach replenishment project is set to begin in Ventnor, and in Ocean City, which saw a replenishment project of its own over the summer, officials are seeking state permission to install geotubes to fend off future erosion.

“Atlantic County is doing all right,” said Dr. Stewart Farrell, the founder of the Coastal Research Center at Stockton University. Founded in 1981, the center tracks how shorelines move and change, working on shoreline assessment programs for the state of New Jersey and several municipalities.

The area of greatest concern, the north end of North Wildwood, is awaiting a beach replenishment project of its own. So far, a project for that area has been planned but not funded.

That makes North Wildwood the exception. According to Farrell, each of the 97 miles of developed coastline in New Jersey is under federal jurisdiction. Most of those have seen beach replenishment projects through the Army Corps of Engineers like the one completed in Ocean City and the one planned in Ventnor.

Once a novelty, the projects have become almost mundane along the shore. A dredge pumps sand and water from the inlets onto eroded beaches, which are then shaped to engineers’ specifications by heavy machinery. The process costs millions of dollars for each project, with the cost divided among the federal government, the state and the municipality. The total cost of protecting New Jersey’s beaches has edged over \$1 billion over 30 years.

Decades ago, before the first federal beach project, beachgoers in Ventnor sat behind the boardwalk, he said. Now, there is a line of dunes between the boardwalk and the water. The latest project will build the beach in front of those dunes.

According to Rochette, that project will start in early to mid-October with a total cost of \$23.8 million. A different type of dredge will be used for the Atlantic City portion of the work, with that part expected to get underway in mid-November.

Margate has had a fraught relationship with federal beach projects, which included going to court in 2017 in an unsuccessful bid to block construction of a line of dunes included in a prior project. On a recent weekday, an enormous tripod sat parked on those dunes. Known as a Crab, or Coastal Research Amphibious Buggy, the vehicles can be used to drive into deep water and are a sure harbinger of a pending beach project.

Margate Mayor Michael Becker said he does not know anything about the project, and for his part doesn't want to know.

"We've had a history on this. I guess they're moving ahead without our involvement," he said. According to Becker, Margate has an agreement not to participate in any beach projects. "We're not going to pay for it. We're not involved in the planning. If they want to come and put sand on our beach, it's OK with us."

He said the beaches in his town are in fairly good shape.

Other communities welcome the projects, including the dunes, which coastal experts say provide an important line of defense against coastal storms.

In Ocean City, several people commented on images posted to social media showing erosion on the beach at Fifth Street as Hurricane Teddy passed far off the coast in late September. The storm did little damage locally, but threw up waves that delighted surfers while also eating away at the beaches.

According to Farrell, that spot is where Ocean City sees some of its worst erosion.

"That's where it always happens, from the Gardens to Fifth or Sixth street," he said. "The northeast corner of every barrier island in New Jersey suffers erosion."

Ocean City spokesman Doug Bergen said the city's beaches fared well in that storm, but added that the city was fortunate to have completed the beach replenishment project. Some sand was lost in the downtown area, he said, but the wide berm of the beach remains intact.

"It's not the hurricanes that do the most damage. It's more the northeasters that eat at it for a couple of days," Bergen said. The city has sand stockpiled from the summer project, which can be used to refill areas where erosion is at its most severe over the winter.

On Sept. 24, Ocean City Council approved seeking bids to install Geotubes on the beach. The beach protection systems are large fabric tubes stuffed with sand, which will remain in place even if the sand around them erodes away.

According to Bergen, the tubes have proven effective along the Great Egg Harbor Inlet, along Waverly beach, where they have been credited with holding back the water in the area's worst storm in decades.

"Sandy knocked the dunes flat, and the Geotube held. That really saved a lot of property from damage," he said.

The city has applied to the state Department of Environmental Protection for the permits needed to place new tubes on the beach, including in the Fifth Street area. If approved, they could be put in place in the spring to serve as a further measure of defense against storm-driven waves.

"If we get permission, the Geotubes would be buried under the dunes and just serve to reinforce the storm protection there," Bergen said.

According to Farrell, the replenishment projects are part of a long-term strategy to protect shore properties and are expected to become more important in the coming years, when seas are projected to rise and storms to become more severe.

The best performing beach in Atlantic County is in the southern end of Brigantine, he said, where sand has accumulated to the north of a jetty along Absecon Inlet.

