

## South Carolina Beach Communities Kick-Off Meeting: Beginning a SC Coastal Managers Association

Aug 12 & 13, 2014, Charleston, SC

### Meeting Summary

Mayor Tim Goodwin of the City of Folly Beach opened the meeting by welcoming the other elected officials and community representatives. He confirmed Folly's interest in a beach advocacy association for South Carolina communities and introduced Nicole Elko as the meeting organizer. Nicole thanked the 81 registered attendees representing 19 beach communities and 9 state or federal agencies. She provided an overview of the meeting agenda and discussed beach preservation advocacy at the national and state levels.

Dan Burger reviewed state coastal policy issues via recommendations of DHEC-OCRM Shoreline change advisory committee (SCAC) formed in 2007, and the 2012 Blue Ribbon Committee, which were not adopted by the 2014 general assembly. Interestingly, only two of our meeting attendees served on these committees. Dan also mentioned that Policy 48-39-260 charged DHEC with involving local governments. A few of the committees' recommendations that he touched on were to: minimize risk to communities (strengthen the role of local governments), improve planning of beach nourishment projects (develop RSM plan, strengthen reviews, improve monitoring), and establish a dedicated funding source. The Beach Restoration & Improvement Trust Fund exists but has never been funded. State funding has historically been provided through "earmarks".



The Chief of Planning from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Charleston District, Bret Walters, discussed federal shore protection projects in South Carolina. He described the Corps' beach related (flood risk management) missions and goals, federal project development and policies related to shore protection projects. Bret reviewed the Myrtle, Folly, Edisto Beach projects, Pawleys Island and Charleston Harbor and discussed the outlook, including past and future challenges in obtaining Congressional funding.



A panel of community representatives included the Mayor of North Myrtle Beach Marilyn Hatley, the General Manager of DeBordieu Colony Community Association Blanche Brown, the Town Administrator of Sullivan's Island Andy Benke, and the Director of Public Projects & Facilities/Chief Engineer for the Town of Hilton Head Scott Liggett. This was an enlightening discussion of the varied communities and types of beach erosion issues (or lack thereof) each are managing. All the communities recognize the beach as their #1 asset, driving the tourism industry.



Mayor Hatley described the successes of the federal project, but stressed the need for more science in beach maintenance planning and better education on challenges such as sea level rise. She also described the Coastal Alliance of the Grand Strand, a group of mayors advocating for beach preservation. DeBordieu Colony, a small community of just over 1200 owners, is funding multi-million dollar beach restoration projects 100% with private funds. Challenges include the deterioration of downdrift timber groins and focused erosion at the bulkhead.



Sullivan's Island has set aside over 200 acres of private accreted lands in the last 50 years through deed restrictions. Thanks to accretion at the Charleston Harbor jetties, the most seaward property is ¼ mile from the ocean. Unique challenges exist here, such as funding for long dune walkovers.

Hilton Head is an excellent example of a SC community that has successfully managed erosion for decades. Their beach preservation fee generates \$5 million

annually. Retreat is not the erosion management choice for Hilton Head because the appraised value of the first row of beach properties is \$2.8 billion, which generates \$30 million in tax revenue annually. In terms of future challenges, Scott Liggett (above) is concerned about increased dredging costs and wants improved monitoring plans driven by science. He noted that beach projects have long-lived benefits, which are inadequately documented, and short-lived impacts to habitat.

Breakout groups discussed key examples of success and needs for improvement, as well as the emerging challenges to beach preservation, and identified the following:

#### Successes

- SC beaches healthier now than 10-30 yrs ago

- used to measure length of eroded beach in miles now in feet
- 47% of SC beaches are preserved wilderness beaches
- Beach Access (via grant funding), recreational value, user beach maintenance fees
- Beachfront Management Act was a great starting point
- Community examples: Sullivan's Island easement on accreted land, maritime forest, Hilton Head's Do Not Build Line & effective economic model from environmental/regulatory perspectives, used beach preservation tax, Seabrook - healthy beach resulted from BMP regarding non-stabilized inlet relocation, but slowed by litigation
- Leveraging funding private/public, overcoming implementation time scales from federal partners
- Effectiveness of beach nourishment projects, provided storm protection
- Project cooperation agreements w USACE and with state
- Finding beach-compatible sediment sources for renourishment
- Beachfront management plans - ID plans for basing beachfront management around knowledge
- Economic impact studies, some have done, others needed, show economic value of the coast
- Environmental: turtle take minimization, maintain sand fences, fertilize dune vegetation

### Issues & Challenges

- Funding:
  - Federal: Federal dollars more scrutinized. Federal BCA ranks infrastructure higher than tourism, private communities deal with same issues w less \$
  - State: Need dedicated state funding source, Only \$5M annual state funding.
  - Local: A-tax useful but has competing resources, expectation for higher local share now that A-tax increased and beach preservation fees
  - Cost of dredging
- Sand sources: ID & mapping, get more mileage out of dredged material, regional management of dredged materials (RSM), where is sand, is it compatible?
- Permitting: Streamline permitting and appeals process, lengthy, who has submitted a good application, what's the model?
- Critical Habitat, loggerheads and multi-use restrictions, piping plover
- Public education: Engage those in the upstate, Perception of beach renourishment projects
- Economic analysis: More creative ways to determine future costs
- Technical issues: Understanding hot spot erosion, SLR at 2.93mm/yr - ≈0.3ft/yr of erosion
- Monitoring/mapping: Annual monitoring of inlets/beaches, Mapping vulnerable areas, long-lived benefits (document!) but short-term impacts, Utilize past to help guide future monitoring
- Collaboration b/w all coastal counties, municipalities, state legislators
- Political fortitude
- Legal challenges, real estate, takings, easements
- Land use and zoning challenges – development pressure, property rights issues – septic, limited infrastructure

Tim Kana closed the afternoon session with an overview of the physical condition of SC Beaches. He reminded the group that sea level rise is not the primary cause of erosion, that property values in SC far outweigh the cost of beach nourishment, and that over 20 million cubic yards of sediment were placed on SC beaches in the 1990s, nearly twice as much as any other decade. Tim estimated that statewide, it costs \$39/ft/yr to maintain our beaches.

The group networked during a late afternoon reception.

The second day of the meeting focused on agency perspectives on planning, designing and permitting beach projects. Jaclyn Daly with NOAA National Marine Fisheries Service provided an overview of the federal regulations with a focus on EFH, essential fish habitat. This included examples of the beach nourishment review process and lessons learned from Folly Beach (e.g., dredge shallower), Hilton Head (where shoal notching was successful), and Isle of Palms beach scraping (where frequency of events is a concern). She recommended early consultation meetings and noted that the SARBO (programmatic regional Biological Opinion (BO)) is being updated.

Next, Jeff Reidenauer with BOEM reviewed the Marine Minerals Program which grants leases for borrow areas in federal waters (3 mi offshore). This included overviews of completed/ongoing projects such as Myrtle Beach & Folly Beach, and typical 2 or 3-party MOAs between the local sponsor, (USACE) & BOEM, which require stipulations such as dredging & environmental compliance monitoring. Jeff noted that research to identify offshore sand sources is ongoing thanks to Hurricane Sandy funding.

Debbie King with USACE regulatory provided an overview of their permitting authority (R&H Act, Clean Water Act Sect. 404, and ESA) and mission. This included a review of the type of beach nourishment permits: general (streamlined for small-scale projects in an emergency), land-based equipment (for an upland source/spit relocation), & dredging (hydraulic/hopper). Debbie stressed permitting considerations such as reviews required by federal law, public interest, & others such as time frame/frequency of event & project footprint.

Melissa Bimbi with the local US Fish & Wildlife Service office discussed their regulatory process for threatened and endangered species, particularly Section 7 of the ESA of 1973 administered by FWS & NOAA NMFS which requires designation of critical habitat (CH). Once a Biological Assessment triggers formal consultation, FWS has 135 days to complete a BO. Beach dependent species include loggerhead, sea beach amaranth, red knot, piping plover, & west indian manatee. For species listed before/after 1978, CH designation is discretionary/prudent & determinable. The loggerhead was reclassified in 2011 into 9 distinct population segments thus CH designations are now required. 15 Piping plover CH units designated in 2001. 22 loggerhead CH units designated Monday. Red knot rule will be finalized this fall. Melissa noted that FWS is generally not in favor of mining nearshore sand shoals due to the habitat value. Programmatic consultation vs project-by-project was discussed as a future possibility, as is done in FL, but would likely be a NC-SC-GA combo.

Bill Eiser with DHEC OCRM reviewed the Beachfront Management Act which implemented a 40-yr policy of retreat, the baseline and 40-yr set back line, and promotion of beach nourishment. OCRM requirements include sediment grain size/quality, borrow area selection, identifying environmental

conflicts, & pre- and post-monitoring. Permits for beach nourishment are processed jointly with USACE with a 30-day public comment period and a public hearing if requested by 20 or more citizens (or sometimes by a mayor). DHEC's water quality division has 365 days to issue Water Quality certification!

Denise Sanger, a researcher from SC Department of Natural Resources reviewed concerns of beach nourishment such as changes in beach characteristics. She noted that short-term adverse effects to benthic beach species occur 1-6mo after nourishment, whereas ghost crab impacts can be >1yr. Impacts in borrow areas: bottom invertebrate community impacts observed for ~1 yr, most studies don't extend past a year, borrow area communities tend to recover but change. DNR is concerned over borrow areas filling with mud/non-compatible material. Shallow hopper cuts recover faster, fish populations don't appear to be affected negatively. Denise summarized by stating that negative effects on beach are short term, whereas borrow area impacts are longer term. Beach nourishment has been positive for turtle nesting, but we need research on birds. Denise suggested that agencies might explore relaxation of CBRA restrictions, assuming mining is far enough offshore, and <10 ft, avoid areas south of inlets or design to scour and fill with sand.

Stephen Traynum reviewed the environmental considerations in beach restoration construction and monitoring. He discussed the consultation, design, and implementation of beach projects. Stephen offered some interesting questions to consider, such as: When is enough monitoring done to eliminate certain requirements? And should we consider state-wide documentation of typical impacts to reduce monitoring duplication?

On the second afternoon, breakout groups tried to prioritize common challenges and opportunities and discussed how advocacy could help, and identified the following:

#### Key Opportunities & Challenges:

- Funding - State dedicated funding source, competition for federal funding, cost of dredging
- Sand resource mapping
- Streamline permitting, update statutes/ordinances
- Regionalization – combining projects to save \$, reduce monitoring
- Education to improve perception of beach nourishment – public & legislators
- Monitoring, data clearinghouse

#### How can advocacy help?

- Funding – dedicated state funding source, user based fees (increase the A-tax?, property tax, parking fees/passes)
  - Comprehensive SC economic impact analysis
- Educate to improve perception of beach nourishment – public, local residents, legislators, upstate residents & environmental groups (marketing)
- Advocate - More attention, united voice
  - Face in Columbia/Washington (lobbying)

Jim Houston, a Sr. Advisor to Taylor Engineering & Director Emeritus, Engineer Research and Development Center, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, discussed the esthetic, recreational, environmental, storm damage reduction, and economic value of beaches from a Florida perspective. He suggested that South Carolina might increase the collection of tourism statistics/basic data to support studies, continue to educate legislators on the 2013 recommendations by the Blue Ribbon Committee, in particular to replace the policy of retreat with one of preservation. Jim also suggested the state establish a dedicated funding source for beach restoration, considering SC received \$866 million from tourist spending in 2012.

The final presentation on community involvement in state policy making was given by Mayor Harry Simmons, Director of the NC Beach Inlet & Waterway Association. He discussed the formation of this association which merged a beach preservation, an inlets, and a coastal communities coalition. The board is made of mostly community officials and staff. An ex-officio board engages federal and state agency staff. Harry stated that the NCBIWA has helped guide pro-active strategy, guided by the knowledge and interests of local governments, using proven solutions and engaging experts in the field to get ahead of the needs of the NC coast.

Nicole Elko then led an open discussion on the groups' desire to form an association. Discussion included the need to initiate a **legislative coastal caucus** to educate the legislature and as an advocacy option. It was suggested that the statistics from the **economic study** could supply information to engage upstate counties with high % of second-home-ownership or vacationing at the coast. The lobbying restrictions for 501 c3 non-profits were clarified. Elected officials typically handle lobbying for these groups. Mayor Goodwin of Folly Beach offered to host the first meeting of the association. Finally, the name of the organization should be more inclusive than "coastal communities" to engage academics, agencies, and other experts.

The following attendees volunteered to serve on a formation committee, which will meet in the next 30 days.

Tim Goodwin  
Linda Tucker  
Blanche Brown  
Andy Hammill  
Rick Caporale  
Paul Sommerville  
Will Connor  
Denise Parsick  
Ray Rhodes  
Tim Kana  
Steven Traynum  
Fran Way  
Liz Hartje  
Mary Beth  
Johnstone  
Keil Schmid



Rupert Forester-Bennett

It is not too late to join us! Stay tuned and review presentations on the meeting website:  
<http://www.elkocoastal.com/sc-beaches-meeting.html> or contact me ([nelko@elkocoastal.com](mailto:nelko@elkocoastal.com)) to get involved.

*Submitted Aug 22, 2014, by Nicole Elko*