



# IMPORTANT NEWS AFFECTING THE FUTURE OF ALL PROPERTY ON THE CAPE

[www.savethecape.com](http://www.savethecape.com)

St. Joseph Peninsula Beach Advisory Committee

Greetings from the St. Joseph Peninsula Beach Advisory Committee! Everyone is all too familiar with the damage in our area that was caused by the hurricanes of the 2004 and 2005 seasons, but we realize you may not be aware of our committee or the work we've been doing over the last several months.

**This brochure contains important information concerning our committee and a proposed beach restoration project for our area.**

Although it will be a few more months before we have the final details of the project in place, we felt it was important to share as much information with you as possible about the proposed beach restoration project, its background, the progress made to date, and the steps that will be taken in the upcoming months. **You own property located in the proposed project area. Whether or not this project moves forward will directly affect you.** (A second mailing will be done at a later date to obtain your opinion on the project.)

## **What is the "project area," & why are we talking about beach restoration?**

Like so many other areas in Florida, a 6- to 7-mile section of our beach is eroding, and that's what we generally refer to as "the project area." So you'll know what we mean when we use that term, we're referring to **the stretch of beach located between the Stump Hole (the bend on Cape San Blas Road where the rocks are) and St. Joseph Peninsula State Park.** Just last year the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) designated the proposed project area as **critically eroding.** As a result, the county and state are exploring ways to reverse this trend and restore the beach.

## **WHAT HAPPENS IF WE DO NOTHING?**

**In a 50-year storm event, 111 structures worth approximately \$22 million will be damaged. \$45 million worth of land will be lost to storm-related erosion. Hurricanes Opal, Ivan, and Dennis were greater than 50-year storm events.**

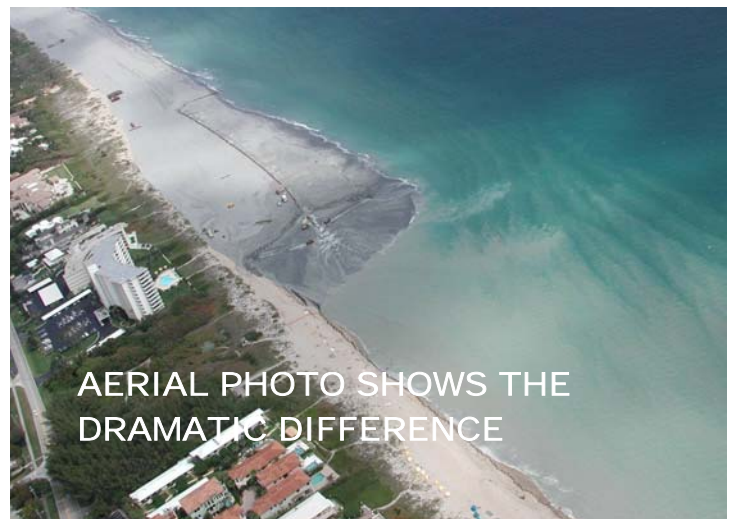
*Projection provided by MRD Associates*

Erosion is destroying the beaches, dunes & valuable properties on St. Joseph Peninsula...



## **What is beach restoration?**

Simply put, beach restoration is a method of pumping sand from the Gulf back onto the beach. Beach restoration differs from trucking sand in that the volume of sand is much greater and the cost is lower per cubic yard. This process involves increasing the height, width, and contour of the beach and restoring it to a healthy state. It may also involve using structures such as "groins" or "breakwaters" to help reduce the erosion rate. The picture below shows a recent beach restoration project underway on the East Coast of Florida. (The sand appears dark where it's still wet. It turns white when it dries.)



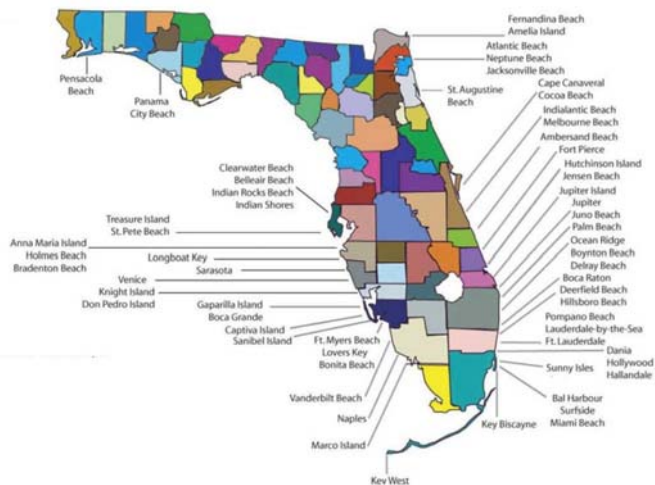
AERIAL PHOTO SHOWS THE DRAMATIC DIFFERENCE

*Picture courtesy of Florida DEP*

Beach restoration is the State of Florida's preferred method to address beach erosion. In fact, the state will pay for up to 50% of a project. In 2005, the state committed \$78.5 million towards restoration and follow-up nourishment projects throughout Florida, and the 2006 proposed budget allocates \$38 million for beach restoration projects. The opportunity for Gulf County to receive funding has never been better.

**Where have other beach restoration projects been done?**

Currently, there are 42 beaches in the state with active restoration programs. This represents a total of nearly 175 miles of restored beach, located in 60 communities throughout the state. Nearby established projects include Pensacola Beach and Panama City. Navarre Beach, Destin, and Walton County are all scheduled to begin their initial restoration projects around the time this brochure goes to press and are not included on the map below. Alligator Point, Perdido Key and Ft. Walton have begun the initial stages of planning a restoration project.



**Does it work?** Overall, beach restoration projects in the state of Florida work well, and we've been unable to find any community in the state that has abandoned their beach management program once they've instituted it. Now, that doesn't mean you "fix it once and forget it." Many people are under the common misconception that a restoration project has failed if sand is added to the beach at a later date. However, with few exceptions, this is a normal and planned stage of a managed beach project.

Projects typically include two phases: restoration and maintenance (commonly called nourishment). The first phase involves extending the beach to a width set in the engineering study. The second phase involves anticipated maintenance, or pumping additional sand on the beach, approximately every 6 to 8 years. It is important to note that the nourishment phase involves restoring a lesser amount of sand to the beach than under the initial phase, and the maintenance is done before the dune structure or upland properties are damaged.

After construction, the beach performance is monitored to decide when additional sand needs to be pumped in.

Some beaches perform better than expected and do not require nourishment for a decade or more. Some beaches, particularly in the event of severe storm damage like that seen from the past two hurricane seasons, may require additional sand sooner. Again, the key to the process is not only initial restoration but regular maintenance. Just like painting the house, changing the oil in the car or the continued care and maintenance of anything of value, beaches need periodic attention.

It's important to note that once we have a managed beach, it becomes "public infrastructure" and qualifies for FEMA funding of up to 75% in the event of hurricane-related storm damage.

**What is happening regarding the proposed beach restoration project for our area?**

In 2005, the state awarded Gulf County \$562,000 to conduct a beach management study and sand search as it relates to the project area. In addition, the St. Joseph Peninsula Beach Advisory Committee was formed to oversee the project. To learn more about the committee, read its minutes, and find out how to become involved, visit the website at [www.savethecape.com](http://www.savethecape.com).

The Gulf County Tourist Development Council hired well-known beach economist Dr. William Stronge to determine the economic impact our beach has on the local economy. The results of this study have been received in preliminary form.

**Significant Findings!**

**Over 100,000 people visit the Cape and spend almost \$29 million annually.**

**A restored beach will protect over \$300 million in shoreline property and structures from storm-related damage.**

**Nonresident owners spent \$7.1 million last year on home maintenance. Storm repair is by far the largest of these expenditures.**

Of course, we all generally know what these studies will show: this stretch of our beach has suffered a tremendous amount of erosion and it is one of Gulf County's top economic assets. **It has become clear that we need a long-range solution to this problem.**

The recreational, environmental, and economic future of one of the most beautiful beaches in the country now depends upon beach restoration. We have an opportunity to join dozens of other Florida communities who have recognized the value of their beaches and implemented managed beach plans. As a community, we must soon decide if we wish to take important financial steps to proceed.

## What is happening with our beach management study?

The county hired the firm of MRD Associates of Destin to do the study. The study is intended to determine where the sand is going once it washes away from our beaches and to identify the factors that are causing the erosion to occur. In addition, the study and related sand search is intended to identify the source for the sand we'll use to restore the beach and address the impact that this will have on the region's wave patterns, erosion rates, and sand transport patterns.

## What will be the results of the study?

The coastal engineering firm will recommend a beach restoration project for our area! The principal engineer, Michael Dombrowski, is scheduled to complete the study by February 28, 2006.

In a presentation to the Beach Advisory Committee on January 13, 2006, Mr. Dombrowski shared some preliminary findings of his study. The picture to the right depicts what our beach will look like after restoration.

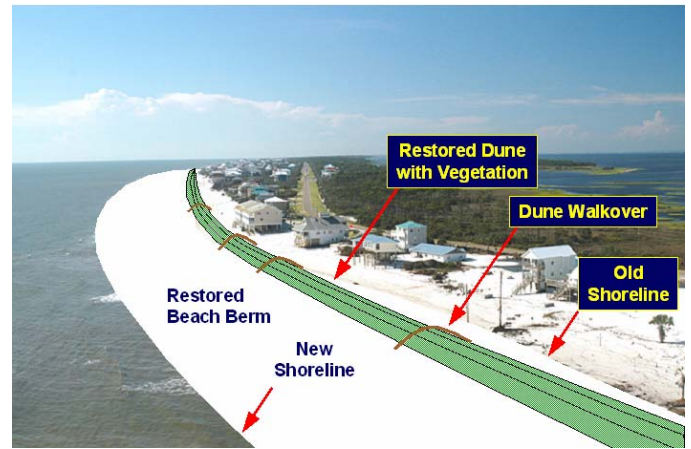


Photo from MRD Associates

## What are the benefits of restoring the beach?

*In 2002, we made national news when we were designated as the #1 beach in the country by the highly regarded Dr. Beach (Dr. Stephen Leatherman)! Once restored, our beach will return to the pristine & majestic state that made it worthy of this award.*

Even more importantly, our homes and properties will be protected from the storm-surge damage commonly experienced with Ivan and Dennis. Also, as noted in the economic study, properties located in areas with managed beaches normally enjoy increased property values after restoration. Finally, the habitat for our diverse coastal wildlife will be restored.

Equally as important to Gulf County, but less recognized, are the substantial economic benefits that result from our beaches. Beaches contribute to expanding federal, state, and local tax bases; increased income and employment opportunities for residents; and increased visitor spending.

The project will also provide additional stability for the road at Stump Hole, which was damaged during both the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons.



Stump Hole - 2005

## What you need to know!

- The study indicates the abnormally high erosion occurring on our beach is a direct result of increased storm activity and changes in the wave patterns which began occurring even before Hurricane Opal.
- It is possible that the erosion will expand to the east/west arm of the Cape.
- A groin or breakwater system will also likely be used to reduce the erosion being caused by the changing wave patterns.
- The engineer's preliminary meetings with FDEP to review the plan resulted in positive feedback!
- The preliminary results of the "sand search" show exciting results – we have lots of "compatible" sand within pumping distance.
- The final beach project, when completed, will include rebuilding a 10- to 12-foot high dune system, planted with sea oats.
- The beach will be much higher and an average of 125 feet wide.
- The project will have a "turtle friendly" design.
- Our project will likely have an average restoration cycle of 7.5 years, well within the average of 5 to 10 years for other Florida beaches.

## When will the project begin?

This project has a very proactive timeline, with the construction phase beginning **sometime in late summer/early fall 2007**. Obviously, whether or not the project will be implemented and the timeframe for doing so is dependent upon funding and permitting. The complete timeline is located on the committee's website at [www.savethecape.com](http://www.savethecape.com).

### What will the project cost?

It is no secret that these projects are expensive, but studies have shown that the amount of money invested is more than offset when weighed against the economic impact, storm protection, and recreational benefits of a restored beach. The final cost projections for our project will be a part of the coastal engineer's report, scheduled to be presented to the committee and County Commission at the end of February.

### Who will pay for the project?

These types of projects are typically paid for by a combination of local, state and, sometimes, federal funds. In our situation, the project will be funded on the local and state level.

### How much will the State of Florida pay?

The state will pay for up to 50 percent (matching dollars) of the cost if certain requirements are met, including provision for public beach access.

### How do we maximize state funding?

In order to maximize state funding, additional public access points will be created on the Cape. The state requires that the public access points be in place before the project begins. There are strategic locations where access is needed, and a few property owners are already stepping forward to offer easements to the county for public walkovers! There are some incentives to property owners to grant easements, and any property owner considering granting an easement will be given a full understanding of what's involved.

### Who will pay for the local share of the cost?

Once all state funding has been identified and taken into consideration, the remainder of the project cost will be funded through the County. The County contribution will be comprised of several funding sources.

As is typical with beach restoration projects, some portion of the project will be paid for by property owners in the project area through an MSTU, or Municipal Services Taxing Unit. In addition, the Gulf County Tourism Development Council has committed 1/6<sup>th</sup> of their annual budget toward the costs of this project. Finally, a variety of new funding sources are currently being explored in an attempt to minimize the amount paid for by the special taxing district.

### Tell me more about the "MSTU."

The MSTU, or special assessment tax, will be imposed on only those properties located in the project area and *can only be used to fund this specific project*. The cost of the project to be funded by the MSTU is typically spread over 5 to 7 years; therefore, a bond issue will need to be in place to fund the project.

As currently proposed, there will be three separate MSTUs: one for the gulf-front properties, one for gulf-interior properties, and one for bay-side properties. The MSTUs will be graduated, with gulf-front properties paying the highest millage rate, gulf-interior properties paying at a lower rate, and bay-side properties paying

at an even lower rate. The MSTUs were created through an ordinance passed by 4 out of 5 of the county commissioners in December 2005. **It is important to note that the MSTUs contain caps and will automatically sunset, or expire, at the end of the life of the original bond.** A listing of all of the properties, along with their MSTU designation, can be viewed on our website.

## Who votes on the MSTUs?

Only registered voters in the project area will vote on the referendum, but nonresident property owners will still be asked to voice their opinion. In the near future, you will receive additional information about how to participate in a property owner's survey.

**It's extremely important that you complete the survey form when it arrives. The commissioners and local voters need to know the majority of our nonresident owners support restoring our beach.**

### Am I going to be taxed this year?

It is important to note the tax will not automatically be assessed in 2006. By passing the MSTU, the county commissioners simply opened the door for the voters in the project area to vote on whether or not they want to proceed with the project. In other words, those residents in the project area on the Cape will vote to approve or disapprove spending tax dollars on the restoration project. **If the voters in any of the three MSTU areas do not approve the referendum, that MSTU will be rescinded and the County will not assess the tax for that group of properties. Obviously, the rejection of one or more of the MSTUs could mean the failure of the entire project.**

### How much will this cost me?

It's still too soon to calculate what the actual amount is that will be funded through the referendum, as well as what the individual millage rates will be for the three MSTUs. We will have concrete answers in the near future, however. At that time, we'll be contacting you again in a mailing specifically designed to give you the final project details and costs, as well as providing you with the survey form mentioned above.

### How can I learn more & how can I help?

If you haven't already done so, please sign up at our website [www.savethecape.com](http://www.savethecape.com) to stay up-to-date on the project progress. You will find a complete project timeline, links to other sites of interest, and photographs from other beach projects around the state. There's also a complete set of the SJPBAC meeting minutes, as well as links to articles from *The Star* and news stories from WMBB-TV of Panama City. If you wish to become more involved, please send an email to [info@savethecape.com](mailto:info@savethecape.com) or call Paula Ramsey Pickett at the TDC, 850-229-7800.

*The content provided herein is for informational purposes only & does not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Gulf County Tourist Development Council or Gulf County, Florida.*