

# The Star

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## Beach Advisory Committee Focuses on Renourishment Options

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In a lengthy meeting last Friday, members of the St. Joseph Peninsula Beach Advisory Committee chose a plan to explore further in the county's efforts to stabilize and renourish the peninsula gulf front.

Michael Dombrowski, of MRD and Associates, the coastal engineering firm contracted for the project, narrated a slide presentation outlining three possible options for the county to take in reclamation of the rapidly eroding peninsula gulf front beaches.

Option one was to simply pile sand onto the beach and do nothing else. This was unanimously rejected.

Option two was to create a series of offshore breakwaters to change and slow waves and currents along the south end of the peninsula, south of the Stump Hole, which also contribute to erosion along the entire length of the peninsula.

Option three was to place groins, specially-manufactured geo-textile tubes ("sand sausages") at designated locations on the south end of the beach, to counteract waves and recapture sand carried by the currents.

The committee voted to further explore the option of groins, and told Dombrowski to outline this plan in detail for his mid-February presentation to the Gulf county commissioners.

According to Dombrowski, the real problem on the peninsula is not the number of storms eroding the shoreline, but the change in the wave angles and the change in the actual shoreline.

Based on one of his earlier presentations, Dombrowski said the state Department of Environmental Protection agreed, in theory, to cost share in the entire renourishment project, from just south of the state park to Stump Hole, contingent, he reported, on public beach access.

He said the DEP agreed that the entire area warrants its help and involvement.

The DEP did not designate the beach as critically eroding, just agreed to treat it as such because renourishing the beach helps other areas the DEP has designated as critically eroding.

Officials from Eglin Air Force Base, which owns and operates a significant portion of the cape and peninsula, also acknowledged they are concerned about the rate of erosion at the Cape, and have signaled their willingness to work in some ways with the county on the project, Dombrowski said.

Construction of offshore breakwaters, a giant offshore accumulation of rock, could be used as an artificial reef and would cost less and produce more benefits than renourishment alone.

Groins would achieve the same goal of stabilizing the south end of the peninsula, but would cost substantially less than breakwaters. They can be adjusted to catch or release sand as needed, and, according to Dombrowski, would basically put the peninsula back the way it was before Hurricane Opal.

Groins would also help save the Cape San Blas lighthouse by enlarging the beach at its location

Numerous questions were raised by representatives from the state Park Service and Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, such as groins interfering with turtle nesting, more mitigation, interruption of sand accumulation at the north end of the peninsula at the park, and increased costs for monitoring the groins.

Groins have never been used in the Panhandle before, although they are permitted along the East Coast.

Since public beach access is vital to receiving state funding for parts of the renourishment project, the advisory committee is looking for ways to permit parking and add public restrooms at numerous points along the peninsula road, all within a quarter mile of the gulf.

They are considering options such as acquiring easements from private landowners through incentives, getting an easement at the south end of Rish Park, and using Dune Drive as a primary access point.

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