

You've heard us say this before, but nobody seems to be minding North Carolina's beaches. The problems on Bogue Banks (near Morehead City) during the last five years are symptomatic of this neglect. For example:

- Unsuitable material has been pumped up on miles of beach
- Sand has been obtained from environmentally inappropriate places
- The availability of public parking and beach access in one town was distorted to make a local project eligible for state funding.

In 2002 and 2003, every town on Bogue Banks, with the exception of Atlantic Beach, pumped up shell gravel beaches - unusable for bare feet. Not to be left out, Atlantic Beach pumped up its own bad beach in early 2005, but this time it was mud rather than gravel.

For the project completed in Emerald Isle just last month, the sand was of relatively good quality, but it was obtained by mining the ebb tidal delta - the body of sand seaward of the inlet - at Bogue Inlet. Mining ebb tidal deltas is a damaging practice because it leads to increased erosion rates on adjacent beaches. Yet, plans are afoot to continue mining Bogue Inlet for future beach nourishment projects.

As a side note, the design of this project by a private consulting coastal engineer is faulty in the extreme because it assumes: 1) that mining the inlet will not cause erosion and 2) that no storms will occur in the next four years. Good luck with that.

This project only took place because Emerald Isle was able to secure a last minute, \$4 million grant from the state Division of Water Resources (DWR). In its grant application, the town claimed to provide adequate public beach access and parking within the project area - a state requirement for receiving public assistance. In the end, however, state money helped rebuild a mile of beach in front of private, gated communities with no public access or parking and a major parking area highlighted by the town in its grant application no longer appears on the town's official beach access and parking maps. We can't help but wonder if the town provided misleading public beach access and parking information to the state in order to secure funding.

In Pine Knoll Shores, instead of following federal public beach access and parking standards, the community has received permission from the US Army Corps of Engineers' Wilmington District to institute a busing system, a clear violation of federal rules governing public access to nourished beaches.

All the bad practices, low quality sand, inappropriate mining sites and limited public access have occurred for one simple reason: so towns can cut corners and do nourishment projects on the cheap.

At the local government level, no concern has been expressed for the bad quality beaches or inappropriate mining site. At the state level, a seemingly disconnected state Division of Coastal Management (DCM) overlooks beach quality issues while an apparently

disinterested DWR funded the Emerald Isle project without concern for the environment or public access. At the federal level, the US Army Corps of Engineers' Wilmington District gave a rubber stamp approval to every project, no matter how poorly designed or improperly executed.

All told, the experiences along Bogue Banks clearly point to deteriorating quality of North Carolina beaches for future generations. DWR, DCM and the Corps, as well as town governments, all seem to be standing idly by, making no effort to prevent bad material or bad mining practices.

The NC Coastal Resources Commission, the state's coastal rule-making body, needs to reemerge from the shadows and do something, anything, and soon. As it is now, the state is doing all the wrong things to provide healthy beaches for our grandchildren in a time of rising sea level.

Dr. Orrin Pilkey, James B. Duke Professor Emeritus of Earth Sciences and author of *A Celebration of the World's Barrier Islands* and *How to Read a North Carolina Beach*

Andrew S. Coburn, Associate Director of the Duke University Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines

Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines
Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences
Duke University
Campus Box 90228
Durham, NC 27708-0228
Tel: 919-684-4238
Fax: 919-684-5833
<http://www.nicholas.duke.edu/psds>