



Plum Island Foundation, Inc.

JOIN WITH US TO SAVE PLUM ISLAND

The Plum Island Erosion Story: Talking Points

What's the problem?

- There have been comments to the effect that anyone who lives on a beach should expect that erosion will occur, and that this is what comes with the territory. The implication of this is that anyone who owns a home on a beach should expect the possibility of Mother Nature endangering one's home. While it is true that sometimes occurs, the erosion occurring on Plum Island Beach is anything but normal.
- **As stated by the Army Corps in its recent 204 Study, Plum Island has experienced an abnormal erosion rate of beach loss of 13.3' per year on average, between 2000 and 2007, with some years being up to 20'+ per year. Normal rates of change on the beach, as per the Army Corps' assessment, are for erosion or sand accretion averaging 1.2' per year between 1976 to 1994.**
- **This abnormal erosion rate has been explained by Army Corps engineers as directly related to the degraded South Jetty of the Merrimack River, through which sand is transported over and through to enable this increased erosion.** The ongoing repair and maintenance of that Jetty is the legal and financial responsibility of the Army Corps, who built the Jetties 100 years ago, and who repaired them last in 1972 at the request of Senator Kennedy. **It would be a normal citizen's expectation and an implied promise that these structures built by the Federal Government would be maintained.**
- **In addition, the lack of dredging of the Merrimack River over the last 10 years and the lack of sand deposits on to the beach has robbed Plum Island of further replenishment. For decades, the river was dredged regularly every two, three, or four years.**

What are the stakes and risks if this problem is not fixed?

- **By the Army Corps 204 Report (Draft: Jan. 2009), 26 homes will be lost directly into the ocean within 10 years or less.** There has been public commentary that these homes are the property of 'rich people' who shouldn't need the help of the Government. This is not the case—in fact all of the people who own those homes are working people. It is unreasonable to think that the local government or the citizens themselves would be able to deal with fixing structures erected by the Federal Government with a specific promise to maintain.
- **The other threat that comes with the 13' of erosion per year is that Northern Boulevard (the main road on the north side of the island) would also be under water within 10 years and this poses a real possibility of the Atlantic Ocean breaching the \$30 million Water and Sewer system -- a potential economic and environmental disaster for the entire city of Newburyport and the town of Newbury.** The system was paid for by island residents, at State requirement, and is hooked up to the system that services Newbury and Newburyport.
- **A breach of Northern Boulevard would threaten the ability to respond to health needs, address safety concerns for life and property, and limit access for fire-fighters.** This problem could prevent any and all emergency vehicles from reaching hundreds of residents.
- **The appraised values and equity of all homes on the island have been eroded by this threat. This affects 1200 residents.** The local banks are either not making mortgage loans on the island, or are severely limiting them by requiring flood insurance and/or within FHA limitations on a selective basis, so the loans can be sold off.
- **This is an issue for all Newbury residents as the tax base of Newbury will be severely reduced, and similarly for all residents of Newburyport as loss of homes reduces the tax base there as well. The total tax value of beachfront homes is a significant portion of the tax bases of the Town and the City. It should also be noted that the residents of Plum Island tend to make much less of a draw on Town and City services thus meaning that their tax contribution comes without as much budget draw.** (It should be noted that thus far, there has not been any significant move towards tax abatement. Should the citizens 'wake up' to the fact of their loss of value, such a move would shake up the already stretched finances of both Newbury and Newburyport.)

- **This is an issue for the entire North Shore as the beaches of Plum Island are used and enjoyed by many non-residents** – There is a huge risk of lost public access and open spaces on one of the few remaining public beaches in the State.

What has been done?

- **At Center Island, in the hub of the worst erosion, sand tubes (30' long and 5' in diameter) have been installed for about 500', stacked 4 or 5 high, and then covered with sand.** This barrier, viewed as a short term protective fix, is currently working and forestalling any more severe erosion at that specific location. This is the result of the collaboration of town officials, with the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) and the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), with local stakeholder groups like PITA and PIF, with the work done by a contracted company (NETCO) under direction of David Vine, a coastal engineer hired by Newbury.
- **A regional commission has been formed to address these serious issues. It is called The Merrimack River Beach Alliance (MRBA) and functions as a Newbury-Newburyport-Salisbury coalition.** The Alliance includes representatives from US Representative John Tierney, State Senators Bruce Tarr and Steven Baddour, State Representatives Michael Costello and Harriett Stanley, DEP, DCR and the Army Corps, Vince Russo and members of the Newbury Town Government, Mayor John Moak and municipal officials of Newburyport, PITA PIF, and from the town of Salisbury, the Salisbury Beach Betterment Association and Selectman Jerry Klima and Town Manager Neil Harrington. This group is leading the effort and managing the process of dredging, sand replenishment on the beach, and studying and fixing the Jetties.
- **Funding is being allocated for the Dredging at a cost of \$2.1 mil. by Congress, plus \$1.3 mil. for Replenishment through Congress and the Army Corps to pay the Federal share of Dredging and Replenishment.** DCR has committed \$525,000 to pay ¼ of the local match, and we need to find \$175,000 locally or within the state budget to complete the local match to get the Dredging and Replenishment done within the next 12 mos. All relevant municipal and State governments will be approached to meet this need.
- **DCR and the Army Corps will drive a further study to determine the role that the Jetties and the Groins play in the erosion process, and to determine if to, how to, and when to 'fix the Jetties'.** There is a general 'sense' on the part of all stakeholders, local, state and federal, that the Jetties are currently playing a negative problematic role and need to be fixed—either by rebuilding to original specifications or to modern current specifications.

What's needed now?

- **While the above has been committed, we will need to work to manage and drive the process of implementation through the Alliance (MRBA).** PIF will help ensure this gets done.
- **The citizens, together with the town of Newbury and the city of Newburyport, will need to deal with the local real estate issues to get 'easements' to enable the process of Replenishment to occur.**
- **The State, or the Towns and Cities, and/or the citizens will need to raise the \$175,000 local/state match.**
- **As we work to complete this, some of us (and PIF tends to play this role) will need to problem-solve as issues and conflicts arise.** There are always issues and conflicts in these kinds of projects.
- **We need to continue to educate the public re: all of the above.** In particular, we all (all of us who are committed to the above stated direction) need to reach out to people who live off-island to build support for this work.
- **PIF, its contributors and members, need to raise \$60,000 in order to continue public education to rally support for the work, in order to continue the work of Marlowe and Company, to partner with and help the Army Corps and all the other players to accomplish all of the above.**

While we are immensely gratified that all of the above has been committed, we are acutely aware of the need to follow through and make sure these actions are implemented and we ask that all of you support us.

Marc Sarkady, Island Resident, President, Plum Island Foundation, Inc.

Donate online at www.PlumIslandFoundation.org or send a check to PIF, P.O. Box 226, Newburyport, MA 01950

