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## Timetable on beaches taking shape

By M. Patricia Titus  
News Editor

Beachgoers in Bethany Beach could see beach reconstruction activity as soon as this week, according to state beach guru Tony Pratt, program administrator for the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control's (DNREC's) Shoreline and Waterway Management Division.

Pratt said initial activity would be subtle to the beachside observer, taking the form of boating activity as workers begin to place dredging pipes on the ocean floor off Bethany Beach. "You won't notice much," he said.

The preparatory work will lead up to the beginning of more obvious activity during the week of Sept. 15 to Sept. 22, which is the current target window for the arrival of the first of two "hopper" dredges expected to be involved in pumping new sand onto the beaches of Bethany and South Bethany this fall and winter.

Pratt said mid-week that the first of the Weeks Marine dredges was expected to arrive off Bethany Beach on or around Sept. 17 and would immediately start using the pipes laid offshore to bring the first loads of sand onto the beach from Hens and Chickens Shoals, the borrow site for the project.

That first sand is expected to arrive on the erosion-narrowed beach near Hollywood Street, just south of the main drag on Garfield Parkway. But the exact landing spot won't be known until the pipes are actually on the beach.

"The pipes will be carried to shore on a series of barges," Pratt explained. "And they will have to deal with cross-currents and winds. They may miss their target by as much as 100 feet on either side. They don't have the ability to pinpoint it. It could be closer to Garfield Parkway."

Once the landing is made, that spot will become the mid-point for all of the beach reconstruction activity in Bethany Beach, the timetable for which is still not firm. Pratt said the rough determination of a schedule for the northern segment of the two-town project would only be made after a load or two of sand has been pumped.

"They will have to experience a couple of loads to find out how fast they can work. That's why only one dredge is coming up initially," Pratt noted. "We will know within a couple of days, within two or three weeks from now."

The schedule for the project will be determined once contractors see how quickly those first few loads of sand come onto the depleted beach.

"There are a lot of uncertainties involved," Pratt noted. "The conditions of the contract include screening with a 1.5-inch diameter opening on the intake, and all of the sand will also be pumped through a 'basket' of wire screening at the beach end."

### Ordinance screening a factor in pace

The screens at both ends of the dredging system are designed to filter out most debris, such as the unexploded ordnance from U.S. Navy target practice offshore of Bethany from the 1950s to 1970 that has sometimes been brought up onto the area's beaches during past replenishment projects.

In the spring of 1999, the prior fall's replenishment project was discovered to have brought ordnance onto Bethany Beach. The beach was temporarily closed, and quick efforts were made to remove it and ensure the beach's safety in the weeks leading up to the official start of the summer season of 1999.

A scan of the beach led to its designation as safe at that time, but subsequent beach replenishment has focused on safety measures such as the dredge and beach screening, as well as pre-dredge remote sensing surveys of borrow sites, to avoid bringing the ordnance into the dredging system in the first place.

"We've found them in the past," Pratt said. "The stuff that was a problem in the past was very large, 2- to 3-inch objects. The 1.5-inch screening should make sure it never even enters the dredge. And if it were to get pumped onto the beach, it will get caught in the basket on the beach."

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Pratt said inspectors will be routinely inspecting both sets of screening to help ensure that they do their job. "They'll inspect them after every load," he said. "I'm told that any [ordnance] smaller than [the screening] is bullet heads, which have no power."

The Hens and Chickens Shoals is the same borrow site used in previous replenishment projects, including the 1995 replenishment, in and near Bethany Beach. It is labeled Site E by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which oversees the engineering on the projects.

Pratt said Site E had also been surveyed for possible environmental impact from the dredging as part of the federal and state permitting processes. "They agreed that the impacts were all acceptable," Pratt said, adding that any marine life impacted was expected to repopulate the area after the work is completed.

While turtles have been a major concern in some past replenishment projects in the region, Pratt said they would not be expected to be impacted by the Bethany-South Bethany project due to the time of year and location of the work.

Still, a turtle observer is required to be on the dredge, to watch the loads and look for any indications that a turtle has been hit by the dredging equipment, until the weather is too cold for the animals to be in the area, which should be later this month.

Should a turtle be hit, Pratt said measures would be needed to address the situation. "In all my years working on replenishment in Delaware waters, we've never had a turtle taken," he emphasized.

## **Landing points to be made in both towns**

The initial phases of the reconstruction will involve the building of a platform for that hub near Hollywood Street.

Pratt said a couple days would be spent just gradually building up a vertical platform of almost 100 feet in circumference at the landing site, with bulldozers gradually raising up the end of the pipe above the previously pumped sand to cause the platform to build in height. The result will be a rounded mound that Pratt said will gradually be widened as it moves toward the shoreline.

Once the needed width is achieved for the platform, Pratt said workers would install a 90-degree elbow at the end of the pipe, to which they would gradually add lengths of pipe running parallel to the boardwalk.

Those pipes will carry sand from the dredge down the beach as the project gradually moves to the north, adding more pipe along the way until the new beach has been built all the way to the north end of Bethany Beach. Once that work is complete, workers will reverse the elbow at the project mid-point and begin the process again, but running to the south end of Bethany.

Pratt said that when work in Bethany is done, a new landing point will be made in the middle of South Bethany's beach, at which time the entire process would commence once more. He said that shift to South Bethany is likely be "a couple months out," again, depending on the rate of progress and any complications the project might run into in the meantime.

At the close of that phase of the project, the current expectation is that work will begin on two private replenishment projects that are proposed to be "piggybacked" onto the publicly funded project.

Pratt said Sea Colony has already made arrangements for the engineering portion of its project to be added on top of the public projects and is currently completing contract negotiations with Weeks Marine for the construction contract addition. He said Middlesex Beach is also aiming to piggyback on the project and is currently completing the permitting phase before pursuing contracts for engineering and construction.

## **Beach closures anticipated, balance the aim**

During the beach reconstruction project in Bethany and South Bethany, beachgoers and shorefront residents can expect some impact on their time on and near the sand. Pratt said efforts will be made to minimize those impacts as much as possible without hampering progress of the reconstruction project.

"They will close off the sections where they are working," Pratt acknowledged, offering that ongoing work in Bethany's central section the beach might be closed from the boardwalk to the water line at some points. Just when, where and how much of the beach will be closed has yet to be determined, Pratt said, and will be decided based on how much room work crews need for their work, equipment and safety around both, as well as their rate of progress.

"It's a balance between the contractor's needs and the public's need to use the beach," he emphasized. "We'll be carefully trying to balance that."

Pratt said he and other state officials hadn't yet completed negotiations with Weeks Marine as to whether, for

instance, one block or two blocks of beach might need to be closed at a given time.

Typically, Pratt said, contractors aim to block off enough room for the storage of the dredging pipes they need in the near future, for their other equipment to be stored. Initially, that could mean the landfall area and 50 feet around it; then, additional room for the operation of bulldozers; then, a storage area for pipes closed near the planned dune line but the beach open in front of it; then more area closed for additional bulldozers to shape the beach, as well as room for a construction trailer for the crew's operations.

"There will be some closures," Pratt emphasized. "But [Weeks Marine does] this kind of work all over the world. They know that the public, in September's nice weather, would like to access the beach.

"They won't close down in front of any one area longer than they have to," he added, acknowledging a likely high "burden" on those in the area around the landfalls for the project, where it will take several days to build the landfall platforms. "Just as soon as they can open that up, they will."

### **Some disruption also expected for residents**

Beachfront residents will also have to expect some noise from the project and may want to invest in some earplugs to get a good night's sleep.

"This is a 24-hour-a-day job," Pratt cautioned, while emphasizing that state officials would attempt to work with contractors to minimize nighttime disturbances.

"In Dewey and Rehoboth, they were working into May and June, when the weather was warmer and people had their windows open. Federal law requires that they have to have backup alarms on their equipment. And we said, 'We know this is asking a lot, but as much as you can, can you try to prearrange the work to minimize the amount of backing up being done after dark?'"

Pratt said residents and officials recognized that some work simply required construction vehicles to back up during the night, but that contractors were willing to try to minimize the disruption by altering schedules when possible.

Also expected to be impacted during the project is the street end of Cedarwood Street, Bethany's southernmost beachfront road.

The beach crossover at Cedarwood will be used as the construction access for the project, with pipes and other equipment being taken over the dunes there. During those loading periods, the street end will be closed, Pratt said. But he noted that Weeks Marine had rejected an offer to close the street end for the duration of the project so that a construction trailer could be located there. Instead, he said, the contractor has found a vacant retail space to use for its base of operations.

Another area being used for the crossing of equipment to the beach is just south of South Bethany, in a state-controlled beach area. Pratt said the company had opted for that crossover versus trying to bring in all of its equipment through Bethany Beach.

An access point had been planned immediately to the south of homes on the south side of Logan Street in South Bethany. But Pratt said this week that he was working with state parks officials to move the access point some 75-100 yards farther to the south than originally planned, in an existing natural "contour," to help preserve stands of bayberry and beach plum on the naturalized dunes where the plan originally called for a hard-packed road.

Pratt said the contractor also told state officials they didn't want that more clearly established access roadway to be built. Instead, pipes will be offloaded from trucks right alongside Route 1 and towed over the naturalized dunes right onto the beach. The dunes will be fully restored once the project is completed, he said.

### **Project to be completed before next summer**

One thing that could affect the schedule for the project is storms, including the nor'easters that have damaged the towns' beaches in recent years. Pratt said no special accommodations had been made for the event that a severe storm would arrive while the project is under way. None are needed, he said.

"The contractor is very familiar with doing work in the Atlantic Ocean," he said. "They watch the weather very carefully. They'll get their equipment out of harm's way. They'll have a forecast of two to four days out, and they know they're responsible for their own equipment and anything on the beach."

Pratt said the biggest concern to the contractor in such a circumstance would more likely be a lucky turn of events for the project itself. "The biggest threat to them is that if, before they have chance to survey the (replenished) beach and get payment for that section, that material moves down the beach but they don't get credit for it. They understand there is potential for that. They'd have to repump it. But it just ends up with more sand on the beach for the host state."

According to Pratt, expectations are that the sand pumping phase of the project — what he called the biggest and

most invasive part of beach reconstruction — would be completed this fall or early winter.

Bulldozers will be shaping the planned dune and beach once the pumping is complete, with most of the winter and spring expected to involve only the planting of the dunes with beach grasses and the installation of dune fencing, as well as the construction of dune crossings to allow residents and visitors to get their toes wet on the newly expanded shoreline.

“I have every reason to believe that before next tourist season we will be finished,” Pratt said. “The emphasis is to get all those things which preclude beach user access completed well before warm weather arrives in the spring.”

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