

COASTAL OBSERVER

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50 cents

New Corps study clouds Pawleys beach project

BY CHARLES SWENSON
COASTAL OBSERVER

The Army Corps of Engineers is reviewing the cost-benefit ratio of a Pawleys Island beach renourishment project, raising concern among town officials that the project will be delayed another year.

“Everything is pretty much on hold while they do it,” Town Administrator Ryan Fabbri said.

Staff at the Corps’ Charleston District is currently working on the project design and specifications in order to put it out for bids, according to a spokesman. “Concurrent with the finalization of the beach design, the Charleston District is also

working to validate the benefits and costs of the project,” Sean McBride said. The validation could take up to four months to finish.

The Corps’ initial timetable called for soliciting bids this month and issuing a contract in October, which would allow work to start in November. The town worked to meet that schedule by acquiring easements from 113 beachfront property owners on 1.4 miles of the island’s south end. That portion of the island is due to get up to 840,000 cubic yards of offshore sand with the federal government paying 65 percent of the cost.

The town also plans to add sand to the beach as far north as Third Street using

The high tide washes under decks on the south end of Pawleys Island.

Trevor Swenson/Coastal Observer

local and state funds.

“Everything is pushed back four months,” Fabbri said. “If we have any more setbacks, we’re looking at going through another storm season” without new sand on the beach.

Former Mayor Bill Otis, who has worked on the beach renourishment project for over 20 years, is mobilizing island property owners to contact the state’s congressional delegation to let them

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Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

Ty Saul and Joe Keating use a fire hose to spray oyster shells over the reefs in Murrells Inlet

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Approximately 7,500 bushels of oyster shells were added to nine reefs off Murrells Inlet during the last week.

The project, led by Michael Hodges, was part of state Department of Natural Resources oyster recycling enhancement program. It’s a yearly event for the inlet.

“Every year there’s a lot of harvest pressure, that’s why we come back here and plant shells,” Hodges said.

DNR started collecting oyster shells to recycle in 2000 and building reefs in 2001. Since then nearly 2,000 tons of shells have been deposited in more than 100 sites from Murrells Inlet to Hilton Head.

Oysters in the larvae stage are free-swimming and search for a solid surface to attach to. Adult oysters and the shells of dead oysters

ENVIRONMENT

SHELL GAME

State turns to NC imports to help build oyster reefs around Murrells Inlet

emit chemicals that attract the larvae, which need to be close to other oysters to reproduce.

Adult oysters filter up to 2.5 gallons of water per hour and build reefs that become habitats for other creatures, according to DNR. Oyster reefs are also natural breakwaters that help control erosion.

Hodges and a crew from Carolina Dock and Marine were at the dock behind Nance’s just before high tide on Friday to take a load of about 28,000 pounds of shells to a site off the inlet. There are nine sites in the inlet: four on Woodland Cut, three on Oaks Creek and two on Main Creek.

“Some of them are smaller than others,” Hodges said. “The biggest one [is] almost a 200th of an acre.”

Using a Bobcat tractor that carried three bushels of shells at a time, Hodges loaded 900 bushels onto a barge. The trip from Nance’s to

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MURRELLS INLET | Fire district referendum

Lawmakers and board still at odds over tax increase

BY CHRIS SOKOLOSKI
COASTAL OBSERVER

Voters in Murrells Inlet and Garden City will go to the polls Tuesday to decide whether they and their neighbors should pay more for fire and EMS services.

The Murrells Inlet-Garden City Fire District wants to increase its property tax rate from 14 to 19 mills starting this year. A mill is equal to \$1 of tax on every \$1,000 of assessed value. The district stretches from just north of Brookgreen Garden across the county line to the border with Surfside Beach and from the Waccamaw River to the Atlantic Ocean. Most of its coverage area is in Horry County.

“It’s vital for us to keep up with the increased request for service,” said George Oldroyd, chairman of the fire district board. “Either we keep up, or go backwards.”

Voters last approved a millage increase from 10 to 14 mills in March 2015. That money was used to build a fourth fire station on McDowell Shortcut in Murrells Inlet near the county line.

The Murrells Inlet-Garden City Fire District is a special service district that was created by the legislature in 1966. Emergency medical service was added in 2008. The district’s tax rate was capped by the legislature, but voters can raise it through a referendum.

The fire district needs the money to provide a fourth ambu-

lance and more paramedics, partially due to increasing amount of citizens 62 and older that live within the district, according to the ballot question.

“We’ve had a significant increase in development which results in a significant increase in calls,” Oldroyd said. “The new taxes brought in by new development do not keep up with our costs.”

The district also transports the second highest number of trauma patients to Grand Strand Regional Medical Center of all first responders in the area, which adds to the time crews are out on a call.

Aging equipment and apparatus also need to be replaced.

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Tanya Ackerman/Coastal Observer

Two fire stations will serve as polling stations for next week’s tax referendum.

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Spine-tingling tales: The Friends of the Waccamaw Library draws stacks of buyers to its annual sale.

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