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## BEACH FILL PROJECT WILL BEGIN AFTER US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE DISPUTE RESOLVED

Three Shore towns are proceeding with beach replenishment projects that have been stalled for years during a fight with the federal government.

Standing in front of the 7th Street area of the beach in North Wildwood on Friday, Congressman Jeff Van Drew, D-1st Dist., Avalon Mayor Martin Pagliughi, along with Republican mayors North Wildwood Mayor Patrick Rosenello and Stone Harbor Mayor Judy Davies Dunhour, announced the towns would be replenishing their beaches.

Since 2012, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has blocked the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers from using federally-owned sand from the nearby Hereford Inlet to replenish the beaches. The service wanted the state or the towns themselves to fund the project and find another source of replenishment sand, which they said would have cost \$6.5 million.

Since then, the politicians said, the beaches have been suffering.

"This area has been obliterated," Rosenello said. "You would think that an agency with the name Fish and Wildlife would actually be in the business of preserving fish and wildlife. This interpretation did the exact opposite. It decimated natural areas."

The three mayors, pointing to an Army Corps of Engineers feasibility study showing the need to use the Inlet as a borrowing area, recruited Van Drew's help. The Congressman and mayors eventually met with acting Department of Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, who they said listened to the concerns.

Fish and Wildlife had blocked the Inlet from being dredged, but the Department of the Interior overruled the decision, and allowed the project to continue -- using the federal government's inlet.

"It is not that we are trying to create an area for more development," Van Drew said. "The point of this is to make sure that we save the taxpayers money, and that we use what is appropriate for beach fill to ensure that we protect the area that's so important to us, our beaches."

Rosenello said he grew up in North Wildwood and the area where the press conference was held Friday used to have numerous Bayberry bushes, large dunes, and an abundance of wildlife, which included foxes and migratory birds.

"There is no way that we can move the sand from Wildwood quick enough to maintain this area," Rosenello said, suggesting that sand from the Inlet was the only solution to restoring the area.

If there is a legal challenge from the federal government to stop the projects, the towns would be ready to go to court, Pagliughi said.

"These three communities are not going to be ruled anymore by low-level management from the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife that make decisions on ego instead of science," he said.

A request for comment from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service was not immediately returned.

Dunhour pointed to the success of a beach fill project in Stone Harbor Point, also known as South Point. The area had suffered significant erosion in 1990, and South Point was, as Dunhour put it, "nonexistent." In 1998, a beach fill project was executed, with another one following in 2003. In 2005, a spit began to form.

"If you go to South Point, it is now a mile and a half," Dunhour said. "It is used for beach-nesting and a migratory bird habitat with vibrant plant life, and it has grown significantly."

"The Congressman's intervention here and our collaboration is a big win for Stone Harbor, in the resilience point of view, but also from that environmental point of view," he added.

The towns will now begin to apply for permits to begin the project.

By Chris Franklin, For South Jersey Times

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