

Beach work blasted

St. Lucie residents shocked at appearance, quality of sand



ERIC HASERT staff photographer

Christine Blanchard, center and Scott Navarro of Plymouth, Mass., relax on Waveland Beach, in St. Lucie County with their children, Dante, 8 months, left, and Emma Navarro, 3, on Tuesday as an off-road dump truck hauls sand trucked in from a quarry west of Interstate 95 in Fort Pierce to renourish the dunes along a 3 1/2-mile stretch from the Martin County line to Normandy Beach.

By Suzanne Wentley
staff writer

Treasure Coast beach renourishment projects are causing a wave of anger from residents — and environmental concerns among federal officials — just 10 days before heavy equipment will be forced off the sand for sea turtle nesting season.

Oceanfront homeowners in Martin County were outraged when contractors started bulldozing and moving sand away from the southern section of the project because they added too much sand to the beach.

In St. Lucie County, beach-dwellers were shocked by the look and hard feel of the almost 4-mile dune restoration project designed to protect nearby condominiums from

Beach renourishment project

ST. LUCIE COUNTY

- ▶ Length: 3.7 miles
- ▶ Cost: \$4.8 million
- ▶ Goal: Emergency dune restoration

MARTIN COUNTY

- ▶ Length: 4 miles
- ▶ Cost: \$8 million
- ▶ Goal: Restore beach to pre-hurricane conditions

coastal managers said Wednesday residents will be pleased with the finished product.

With beaches still looking drastically different from pre-hurricane conditions, Martin and St. Lucie residents aren't so sure.

'It's a barrier'

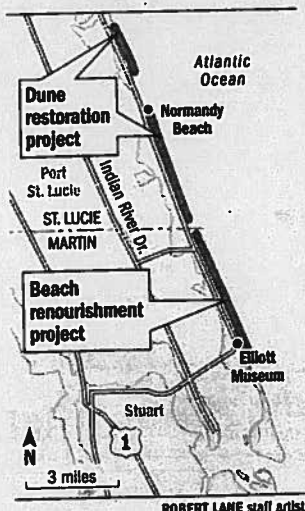
Ward Woodruff, a commercial fisherman who has fished the surf off Normandy Beach in St. Lucie County for 30 years, said he's disgusted by the new, 14-foot-high dunes that are so hard cars can drive on them.

"It's not a beach, it's a barrier — a concrete wall," he said. "It would hurt to lie there on a blanket. That's not what people want when they buy places in Florida."

the upcoming hurricane season.

Officials with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also complained to state environmental regulators that the new dune material did not seem to be compatible with the natural beach sand.

But even though the work is almost complete, federal and local



ROBERT LANE staff artist

BEACHES

FROM A1

About 10,000 truckloads of sand from a pit near Indrio Road and Interstate 95 have been deposited on the beach by county contractor Dickerson Florida.

It's the same company that could be fined \$36,000 Friday, if a settlement can be reached, by the state Department of Environmental Protection for allowing dirt to erode into the Indian River Lagoon during the Indian River Drive restoration project.

Although the sand looks lighter and consists of large shell fragments, St. Lucie County's consultant said the material — the only sand available during the county's tight permitting timeframe — meets state standards.

But officials with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service complained on Wednesday to the state Department of Environmental Protection, which plans to inspect the dune work today to determine if the material is "beach-quality" sand, a spokeswoman said.

The dunes are so tightly compacted the beach is unusable for nesting sea turtles, said biologist Erik Martin of

Ecological Associates.

"If the sediment is hard, it is more difficult and maybe not possible for the turtle to nest in it," he said. "That's something we'll monitor."

Norman Beumel, St. Lucie County's consultant with Coastal Planning and Engineering, said the contractor will till the dunes with an eight-foot-wide rake late next week to increase the nesting habitat before the \$4.8 million, federally funded project is finished.

Taking too much?

In Martin County, meanwhile, engineers with the Army Corps of Engineers discovered the contractor pumped too much sand on about 6,000 feet of beach near Stuart Public Beach as part of the \$8 million project.

"If you stack it too high, when the beach adjusts, that sand will move off shore and impact additional hard bottom (reefs)," said Rick McMillen, the corps' project manager. "We're asking him to take it and move it north."

But Hutchinson Island resident Bob Eustace said it looks like the contractor is taking more sand away than was there before hurricanes Frances and Jeanne made direct hits.

"They're taking away what little they put down," he said. "There wasn't as much sand replenished as was lost."

McMillen said Martin County's beach — from the northern county line to approximately the Hutchinson Island Marriott — has been rebuilt to the same specifications as the 1996 renourishment project.

'People will be happy'

Both projects have until April 30 before federal laws require heavy equipment to be removed from the beach as nesting increases for loggerhead, leatherback and green sea turtles.

McMillen said the Martin County project should be completed by then. The St. Lucie County dune project will be only about 90 percent completed, Beumel said.

St. Lucie County officials have requested an additional week to build about 1,800 feet of dunes about 1.5 miles north of Normandy Beach.

"The purpose is to hold hurricane waves and storm surge back. It's all we could do in a short period of time," Beumel said. "People will be happy when everything is finished."

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