



Fire Island Association

WORKING FOR FIRE ISLANDERS SINCE 1955

FIA UPDATE



A powerful storm battered Fire Island in December (Photo Luke Kaufman)

Dear Fire Islanders,

Although this winter was relatively uneventful on the mainland, a fast moving and powerful storm hit Fire Island surprisingly hard in December, with barometer readings so low that the event carried the destructive power of a Category One hurricane. On the ocean side, beaches and dunes were decimated up and down the island, although the far west end (Kismet to Fair Harbor) was spared serious sand loss. On the east end (Ocean Bay Park to

Davis Park), the storm washed away huge amounts of sand from many areas of beach and berm that were already dramatically eroded.

Since the December storm, there has been a lot of activity you will want to know about as the weather warms up and you head out to the beach. First of all, the west end shoreline has just been repaired by the Army Corps in the last two months. On the east end, Suffolk County has been leading an emergency effort to install trap bags for erosion hot spots, primarily in Fire Island Pines and Davis Park, with some work in Seaview and Ocean Bay Park. It looks like the Army Corps will be back again to fully restore the east end beaches and dunes in the fall, but if the stars align, perhaps even sooner!

This **FIA UPDATE** will fill you in on everything you need to know about all the activity on our ocean shoreline. It's a long read, but we think you deserve all the details on this very important subject.

A Successful West End Project

Some Fire Islanders believe that this winter's west end beach repair project by the Army Corps was a prompt response to December's storm. Actually, it was just coincidence. After a series of nor-easters pounded the island back in 2019, Suffolk County asked for help from the Army Corps PL 84-99 program that provides emergency repair of coastal projects at 100% federal cost. At the time, communities east of Seaview were not as severely damaged, and so they were not included in the application for emergency action. The repair was authorized by the Corps in 2020, but with no PL84 funds available, west end communities waited 3 years for this project to begin!



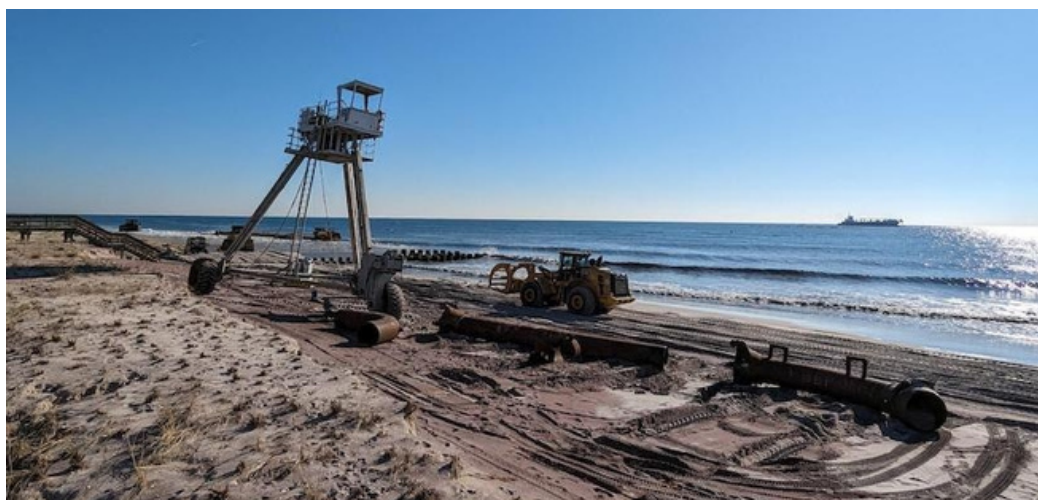
The Ellis Island arriving off Ocean Beach (Photo Chris Norris)

The Great Lakes Dock and Dredge Company (GLDD) dredge Ellis Island arrived on December 31st, and the long delayed project shifted into high gear. One of the newest and the largest hopper dredges in the US dredging fleet, the Ellis Island can pump sand from the ocean floor at depths of up to 122 feet and carries a load of 15,000 cubic yards of sand on each trip from the offshore borrow area to a sub line that carries the sand onto the shore.



Shaping all that sand into a beach (Photo Theresa Macri)

The project goal was to restore the beaches and dunes to the design template of the FIMI project that repaired Fire Island after Sandy. With the sub line placed at Ocean Beach, GLDD laid a series of pipes on the beach running eastbound to pump sand all the way down to Seaview. The pipes were then reversed to run the other way, carrying sand to the western communities. Western Fair Harbor, Saltaire and Kismet did not receive sand because their current beaches are fortunately wide enough, and their dunes high enough, to meet or exceed the FIMI template.



The CRAB, a bulldozer, and sections of pipe, with the Ellis Island off shore and bringing in another load of sand from the borrow area (Photo Theresa Macri)

As the largest dredging operator in the United States, GLDD also has a vast amount of land equipment to restore shorelines. Bulldozers, excavators, and backhoes are used to build and shape the dredged sand into berms and dunes. The CRAB (Coastal Research Amphibious Buggy) takes measurements of the beach and the near shore profile to make sure that GLDD is restoring the shoreline to the correct Army Corps design specifications.



GLDD earth moving equipment shaping the dredged sand into new dunes and a wide berm for the Village of Ocean Beach (Photo Theresa Macri)

From the beginning of January to early February, the Ellis Island pumped approximately 818,000 cubic yards of sand to successfully restore our west end beaches. To appreciate the magnitude of this project, see the dramatic ‘before and after’ pictures below. Many thanks to year-round residents Theresa Macri of Corneille and Luke Kaufman of Seaview for these great pre and post comparisons.



Seaview beachfront after the December 19th storm (Photo Luke Kaufman)



Seaview beachfront after the PL84 repair project (Photo Luke Kaufman)



Corneille beachfront before the project (Photo Theresa Macri)



Corneille beachfront after the project (Photo Theresa Macri)

East End Beach Repair

The 2019 request to the Army Corps for emergency repair of Fire Island did not include the east end communities. Over the last 15 months, however, two separate applications for PL 84-99 repair were submitted by Suffolk County for the east end beaches. Both applications were denied by USACE, who claimed that strict criteria for repair were not met by either of these two weather events, i.e., the storms weren't strong enough and the damage wasn't severe enough. After an appeal by NYSDEC (who argued that the Corps decision criteria were flawed), and with the strong support of Senator Schumer, the County's east end repair request was approved 2 months ago. We are very confident that a full Army Corps emergency project for the east end will happen after Labor Day; or maybe even sooner.

What is the East End Trap Bag Project?

Until the Corps project gets underway, many areas of severely eroded east end shoreline are vulnerable and unprotected. Brookhaven Town Deputy Supervisor Neil Foley, and Director of Planning Michelle DiBrita worked tirelessly with their TOB colleagues and Suffolk County officials to put together a 'stop gap' trap bag project for these erosion hot spots. To fill the trap bags, the County purchased 20,000 cubic yards of sand from GLDD as they finished up their dredging work on the west end. The purchased sand was left in piles on the beaches in front of Ocean Beach, Corneille Estates and Summer Club until it could be transported by truck down to the east end.



Sand for East End trap bag project was staged in front of Ocean Beach, Corneille and Summer Club

The County surveyed the Brookhaven shoreline from eastern Seaview to Davis Park to identify the critical erosion hot spots. The FIA hired Land Use Ecological Services to help the County determine where trap bags should be installed. Seaview used additional sand to build up a short stretch of severely eroded beach at the east end of the community. A careful evaluation of the Ocean Bay Park oceanfront revealed that installing trap bags was not recommended at this time. OBP did decide, however, to purchase and place additional sand to reinforce sections of their eroded dunes. Point O'Woods, Cherry Grove and Water Island were not as seriously impacted by the recent storms, so their beaches and dunes will be restored during the upcoming Army Corps repair project.

The Pines and Davis Park had the most urgent need for 'hot spot' installation of trap bags. (The Davis Park project may also use additional stockpiled sand that was purchased during the FIMI project, if needed.) Thanks primarily to the efforts of the Pines and Seaview, who worked with the Actum media and government relations team, Governor Hochul earmarked 3 million dollars to help Suffolk County fund this trap bag project. The sand itself will be purchased by the communities through their Erosion Control Districts, while the Governor's contribution will go toward paying the costs of implementing and overseeing the installation project.

The County hired a marine construction contractor to transport sand by truck from the Ocean Beach area down to the east end, and then fill and place the traps bags. With impressive expertise and efficiency, they completed the beach driving phase of the project on time and ahead of the piping plover deadline. The installation team will continue to fill and place trap bags in Davis Park until the end of this month. We can't thank the County field team enough for going way above and beyond on behalf of our very vulnerable east end beaches!



Large trucks drove the sand down to the eastern beaches (Photo Don Sussman)



Trap bag installation in the Pines (Photo P. Priolo)



Trap bag installation in Davis Park (Photo John Lund)



Seaview purchased sand from the County to build the beach and dunes higher on the east end of the community, which was not part of west end repair project (Photo Luke Kaufman)

Collaboration is the Key

Implementing this east end hot spot repair project has been complicated by the involvement of many communities, agencies, and levels of government. There are also funding responsibilities to work out, and regulatory restrictions to deal with, and the vagaries of weather, wind, surf and tides that continually affect the work. But in an impressive illustration of FIA's oft repeated mantra of "we're better together," all stakeholders collaborated seamlessly to move the effort forward:

- Brookhaven Town Supervisor Dan Panico gave his full support to the efforts of Deputy Supervisor Neil Foley and Deputy Commissioner of Planning Michelle DiBrita, who spearheaded the project on behalf of our east end communities. Their leadership was supplemented by staunch advocacy from the Pines and Seaview, and logistical participation and support from the FIA.
- Suffolk County Executive Ed Romaine, an ardent fan of Fire Island, activated the County Department of Public Works to manage the project. DPW Commissioner Charlie Bartha and Chief Engineer Bill Hillman rapidly organized their expert staff in a matter of days to undertake a successful trap bag installation on a narrow and challenging late winter beach.

- Because this is an emergency project with a tight timeline, Superintendent Alex Romero and his FINS staff worked closely with the County to issue permits quickly for trucking sand down the beach, rather than requiring the usual one-month processing time.
- Finally, the project would not have succeeded without the generous cooperation from neighboring communities who allowed large piles of sand to be staged on their beaches, and who recognized the critical need for a daily parade of large trucks driving along their beaches to bring sand down to the Pines and Davis Park.

Congratulations for reading all the way through to the end! I hope you have the information you need to understand all the successful beach repair activity of the last several months. The FIA will continue to monitor our beach conditions, and stay in close touch with all our federal, state and local officials on the status of all future restoration and repair projects.

When there are new and important developments, we will be back with another ***FIA UPDATE!***

Warm regards,



Suzy Goldhirsch

The FIA has been actively, relentlessly, and passionately advocating with government agencies and elected officials for Fire Island shoreline management, sand renourishment, and storm repair for over 40 years.

Please support these efforts by joining us as a member

<https://fireislandassociation.org>