

GLOUCESTER-MATHEWS GAZETTE-JOURNAL

Bavon residents pin hopes on breakwater system

by Sherry Hamilton - Posted on Dec 05, 2012 - 12:05 PM



Edith and Bill Powell of Bavon, are among the homeowners who will benefit from a project to build offshore breakwaters along Bavon Beach and Chesapeake Shores. The long-term project, which participants hope will serve as a model for shoreline preservation, involves the cooperative efforts of residents; the non-profit and private business sectors; and county, state and federal government agencies. Photo by Sherry Hamilton

Bavon Beach and Chesapeake Shores residents hope they're finally on the way to solving their shoreline erosion problem.

Since 2003, when Hurricane Isabel's storm surge realigned coastal beaches and destroyed homes all across Virginia, residents of these two adjacent Chesapeake Bay-front communities in southern Mathews County have been working desperately to come up with a way to protect their homes and property.

Now, after last month's Virginia Marine Resources Commission meeting, with all required permits firmly in hand, the neighbors are pinning their hopes on an offshore breakwater system funded by a

unique public/private partnership that they believe will serve as a model for similar shoreline preservation efforts all across the bay.

Bavon Beach homeowner Bill Powell said that the Chesapeake Bay is now 100 feet closer to his home than it was before Isabel, Tropical Storm Ernesto in 2006, and a couple of subsequent northeastern storms ravaged the white sand beach and destroyed several homes in the neighborhood.

Powell and neighbor Dennis Baker praised government agencies and a private non-profit organization for their cooperation in trying to solve the problem, and he said they hope a private corporation that expressed an interest in the project will lend its support, as well.

"Through collective partnerships, we can make inroads into protecting our properties," said Baker, "but it will take some creative resources."

Powell said that The Nature Conservancy, an environmental organization that owns the beach that fronts all the properties in Bavon Beach, is interested in preserving habitat for the threatened Northeastern Beach Tiger Beetle. So is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Residents in the two communities weren't entirely onboard with the idea of protecting the beetle at first, said Baker, since it involves time-of-year restrictions on construction. But the beetle serves as a bellwether for the health of beaches in the northeast, so creating a healthy habitat for the tiger beetle creates a healthy habitat for other beach-dependent species, as well. And Baker said that property owners have always "demonstrated a conservation ethic" and are "in tune with protecting the dunes, the beach, the grasses, and the animals."

However, the project is going to take funding. Biologist Mike Drummond and field supervisor Cindy Shultz with U.S. Fish and Wildlife have secured a grant for \$230,000 toward the \$1.2 million cost of the project and are seeking other funding, as well. The Nature Conservancy will provide the avenue for receiving grants and other contributions, and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, through its Natural Heritage Program, is providing support, as well. Other partners in the effort are the Army Corps of Engineers, the Virginia Marine Resources Commission, the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, and Mathews County.

Neighbors additionally hope that a private company that provides stone for shoreline projects will donate materials, but that still leaves a lot of money to be raised. Homeowners expect to cooperatively make up any shortfall in funding.

Baker said the success of the Bavon Beach breakwater project so far shows that "if a community wants something to occur, it can."

"We didn't moan and groan and say we're entitled," he said. "We wanted to find a way to be resourceful, and I think we have."

He praised Powell for his leadership role on the project.

"He provided the continuity and maintained the stamina to see this project come to a successful beginning," said Baker, "and, hopefully, to a successful closure."

For more information about the breakwater project, including a video, visit www.fws.gov/northeast/virginiafield/endspecies/bavonproject.html.

© Copyright 2010-2012, Tidewater Newspapers, Inc. All Rights Reserved.
P.O. Box 2060, Gloucester, VA 23061 - phone: 804-693-3101