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Your Community

Beach restoration projects to begin

Major work will begin soon on Bathtub Reef Beach, Sailfish Point Beach

By Martin County BOCC
YourNews contributor

STUART — With permit in hand from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) and the pending permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, major restoration work will begin soon on a vital project to enhance one of our community's local treasures, Bathtub Reef Beach, as well as the northern half of Sailfish Point Beach. Martin County has selected Ferreira Construction to perform the work, which will use sand from the St. Lucie Inlet and nearby flood shoals to build the beach.

Funding for this project will come from multiple sources, including a grant from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection that was included in this year's state legislative budget and a 50 percent cost share with the Sailfish Point Property Owners Association. A FEMA reimbursement from hurricane damage sustained in 2012 is also under review and may provide additional funding.

The goal is for the project to be completed in May 2016, prior to the start of the new sea turtle nesting season.

Martin County's Coastal Engineering Division plan for the restoration effort is the most cost-efficient as well as the most environmentally sensitive approach. Sand will be dredged from the flood shoals and the impoundment basin of the St. Lucie Inlet located immediately south of these beaches. This will help maintain



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Bathtub Reef Beach and Sailfish Point beach restoration projects to begin.

the safety and navigability of the Inlet for local boaters. The sand will then be piped to the beach and distributed from that point across 4,900 feet of coastline, from just north of Bathtub Beach and extending south into Sailfish Point.

"This approach provides a high-quality recreational beach, increased storm protection and is designed to protect the integrity of the fragile Sabellariid worm reef that serves as both a critical marine habitat and pro-

jective barrier at Bathtub Beach," explained Martin County coastal engineer Kathy FitzPatrick.

Part of the project will restore the Bathtub Beach parking lot that was lost over the last several years as the beach eroded and sand had to be piled up in the parking area.

"Essentially, visitors to the beach have had very little parking available. This project will restore 100 parking spaces," said FitzPatrick. "We know this may be frustrating to some beach visitors in the short-

term, and cause inconveniences. However, the end result will be a bigger and better Bathtub Reef Beach — one that more closely resembles the way the beach used to be."

As preparation for restoration begins, the south section of the parking lot will be closed, beginning on Jan. 27, with the entire parking lot expected to be closed beginning Febr. 8 until the restoration work is complete. Additionally, the beach itself will have extremely limited access for the duration of the

project. It is suggested that residents use the Chastain and Santa Lucea beaches until restoration work for Bathtub Reef Beach is completed.

"We know how beloved the Bathtub Reef Beach is to Martin County residents and visitors and are excited about being able to move forward jointly with our critical beach renourishment projects for Bathtub Reef Beach and Sailfish Point," said Edward J. (E.J.) Ewing, Jr., Sailfish Point general manager.

Information about beach

and parking lot closings, access and construction and restoration updates will be soon be available on the county's website.

Martin County's Atlantic beaches span nearly 22 miles along our coast and include Jensen Beach, Stuart Beach, Sailfish Point, St. Lucie Inlet State Preserve, Hobe Sound National Wildlife Refuge, and the Town of Jupiter Island. These beaches are an integral part of the quality of life in Martin County, generate considerable revenue to the economy of Martin County, and support homes, businesses and related infrastructure (roads, utilities) for many residents and visitors.

Bathtub Reef is located just offshore at Bathtub Beach Park and is a popular spot for snorkelers due to the large numbers of marine creatures and fish that congregate there. Its presence is also a key factor in creating the "bathtub effect" of very shallow waters during low tide that make it such a favorite swimming location for families with young children. Bathtub Reef is a fascinating reef system, created by tiny tube-building Sabellariid sea worms. It is not only an incredibly unique system, but also an extremely fragile one. The worms cement sand grains together, creating a vast network of tube dwellings. Colonies build on top of one another over time and create a reef system that helps break waves and reduce beach erosion. This habitat is used by more than 500 marine species including endangered sea turtles that forage on and around the reef.