

Opinion

MY VIEW

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The following My View is written in response to the "Voices Away from the Bluff" with Blair Perkins published in the Oct. 31 issue of The Nantucket Independent.

I would like to address several of the generalizations Mr. Perkins makes, which are not supported by scientific evidence.

1) Beach nourishment projects have been successful even in high energy environments. We have designed and modeled the project using site-specific wave and current data from 'Sconset.

My View

By Norwood Davis

While Mr. Perkins states that beach nourishment projects in other locations have had "very limited success," direct observations of beaches and decades of experience with beach nourishment speak otherwise. The success of beach nourishment projects is often most directly apparent after the passage of a significant storm, when beaches without a nourished beach clearly sustain greater damage than those with a designed beach in front of them. This was recently highlighted during the passage of Hurricane Noel along the eastern US, where news reports confirmed less damage along nourished beaches.

While each shoreline is unique, the fundamental concept remains: if you place additional material on the beach that is similar to what is there now, the beach will continue to perform similarly, just farther seaward of the pre-construction position. In the case of 'Sconset, the nourished beach will protect the base of the bluff.

To design this project, we collected actual wave and current data offshore of 'Sconset. This site-specific data was used within the modeling performed for the project site. The models (three different computer models were applied to the project area) assumed multiple size storms from multiple directions, contrary to Mr. Perkin's statement of "little to no wave/swell modeling" that was only from "one vector." This work has been reviewed and deemed technically sound by outside coastal engineering experts. Knowing and understanding the high energy conditions at 'Sconset, our engineers are confident that the beach will perform as designed. Our coastal engineering team has previously worked in high energy environments, including over twenty miles of beach nourishment projects along the New Jersey coast and multiple successful projects along Fire Island in New York.

2) Federal agencies responsible for assessing impacts to endangered species have determined there will be no negative impacts to right whales.

The federal agency charged with protecting endangered species, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), undertook a comprehensive review of the project and its potential impacts on any endangered species present in the area, including right whales. NMFS determined that the proposed project "is not likely to adversely affect Kemp's ridley, leatherback, or green sea turtles or right, humpback, or fin whales" (NMFS, October 2007). NMFS based their evaluation on over ten years of sightings data, knowledge of species life histories, and government records of species mortality. The project is outside all areas designated as Critical Habitat for right whales. Further, an endangered species observer will be present on the dredge at all times to minimize impacts.

3) Impacts at the offshore borrow site will be minor and short-term.

The observation that the impacts at the borrow site will be permanent is flatly incorrect. Removal of sand at the borrow site will expose the underlying sediment which, due to its burial depth and lack of oxygen, will initially be absent of benthic (bottom-dwelling) organisms. However, sand and organisms will be transported to the disturbed area by natural processes

allowing for relatively rapid recolonization. Marine organisms present at the borrow site are adapted to living in a dynamic environment and can survive disruptive events and propagate future generations. For example, many of these organisms are mass-spawners (releasing millions of eggs or larvae at a time) that are capable of dispersing their young over long distances. Studies completed by the National Research Council and the Minerals Management Service demonstrate that benthic communities fully recolonize borrow areas within a 1-3 year period. Further, the rate of recolonization is positively correlated with the amount of ocean energy. A high energy area like that found offshore eastern Nantucket is likely to recolonize on the early side of this range. Fish that feed on the borrow site will be entirely unaffected by the lack of benthic organisms due to the abundance of similar habitats nearby.

Marine waterbirds also will be largely unaffected by the dredging project. As Mr. Perkins states, there are vast numbers of waterbirds present offshore during the winter months; however, multiple surveys have demonstrated that the waterbirds are concentrated at Quidnet Rip and Bass Rip shoal, where we will not be dredging. The project will have no impact on these preferred habitat areas for the waterbirds. While dredging at the borrow site will temporarily remove some bottom-dwelling food sources for the birds, this should not affect the birds as they could easily forage at their nearby, much larger preferred habitats. Finally, construction will take place during the summer and fall, when waterbirds have migrated elsewhere and are virtually absent.

4) The only impact to nearby shorelines from the project will be some slight increases in beach width and storm damage protection.

Beach nourishment was chosen precisely because it does not cause increased erosion along nearby shorelines like other shore protection methods can. We've quantified the existing sediment transport in the project area at ~210,000 cubic yards per year, and we expect that the beach nourishment project will increase sediment transport by approximately 38 percent due to the placement of clean, compatible sand along 'Sconset Beach. Adjacent beaches may expect some slight increases in width and storm damage pro-

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