

PINELLAS APPROVES \$125.7-MILLION BEACH RENOURISHMENT PROJECT

WORK IS EXPECTED TO BEGIN LATER THIS SUMMER

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CLEARWATER—Unable to secure federal help to restore its hurricane-battered beaches, Pinellas County plans to move ahead with the critical \$125.7-million project on its own.

The county commission on June 17 authorized using tourist tax money for a one-time emergency beach renourishment project. That hotel bed tax, collected on all short-term rentals, is paid primarily by tourists who flock to the area every year, largely for its beaches.

The project, expected to begin later this summer, calls for adding 2.5 million cubic yards of sand on the island of Sand Key (Clearwater Beach to Belair Beach and Indian Rocks Beach to North Redington Beach), plus Treasure Island and Upham Beach.

County officials said those communities lost a significant amount of sand during last year's hurricane season, which runs from June through November.

Still, many property owners chose not to sign needed construction easements or could not be located, officials



County Commission Chairman Brian Scott.
Photo from Pinellas County.

said. Those residents may see low spots on the beach behind their homes, particularly on Indian Rocks Beach, Indian Shores and Redington Shores, officials said.

The Army Corps of Engineers required Pinellas to obtain perpetual public access easements from all property owners to receive federal funding, but the county was unable to do so. Nor

were county leaders able to persuade Washington policy-makers during a March lobbying trip for federally funded beach renourishment.

A wide, nourished beach provides a buffer between storm waves and landward areas. Yet many beachfront property owners regard perpetual public access easements as an encroachment on their private property rights.

County officials said they will continue to work with the Army Corps to come up with an agreeable solution to the years-long easement dispute. They said on future projects the county won't be able to shoulder the entire cost, as it is doing now.

On past renourishment projects, the corps has provided about 65 percent of a project's funding.

"A healthy beach offers protection to property and infrastructure against storm surge, and it's vital to tourism," Commission Chairman Brian Scott said. "But our residents should know we won't be able to continue to do these projects



Pass-a-Grille Beach on St. Pete Beach was last renourished in 2024. Photo Courtesy of Pinellas County.

without the full buy-in of our coastal communities."

The county said easements are still being accepted, and additional properties may still be added to the project, depending on the stage of surveying.

If construction has already occurred past a property owner who has not signed, then it will be too late for that property owner to sign an easement to get sand for this upcoming project, officials said.