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## **New Stump Pass permits needed**

**ENGLEWOOD** -- The permit allowing dredging for Stump Pass currently says Charlotte County must wait until the pass shifts south another 300 feet before any maintenance can be done.

If that were to happen, a full dredge, costing about \$4 million, is likely to be needed within the next year or two and the costs will continue to rise.

County Commissioner Mac Horton said he wants the wording of the Florida Department of Environmental Protection permit fixed as soon as possible in case work needs to be done sooner rather than later.

"We can't wait for the pass to go back to the way it was," Horton said. "That could take five years, and by then it will be shallow -- and the channel will have a curve in it like it did before. We can't have that happen."

The dredge done in 2003 was shifted north to the 1980 navigational marker thanks to the discovery nesting birds.

While the future maintenance is a legitimate worry, another potential problem is getting the DEP permit needed for the Stump Pass Beach State Park Stabilization Project which was approved by the Charlotte County commissioners Tuesday.

The DEP must approve the permit before work can be done to install a submerged groin system designed to slow the flow of sand south and ultimately into the existing channel.

Geotextile tubes, placed in the water off the park, would create sand deposit zones. The tubes would extend for about 10,600 feet and be placed in about 10 feet of water.

The two projects combined are expected to ensure the life of the channel and beaches.

The problem would mean a shallow channel which becomes impassable to boaters.

The stabilization project will cost about \$1 million, with the DEP paying \$630,000 of the price tag.

Work needs to begin on the stabilization project before May 1, which is the start of sea turtle nesting season, or else it will be delayed until Nov. 1, the end of sea turtle nesting season.

Such a delay is worrisome to Horton.

"We need to get the stabilization done," he said. "Then we can get the rest of it taken care of."

The channel has narrowed in recent months, from about 400 feet to 150 feet, since the first major dredge which was done in the spring of 2003. The current deep channel and path is what experts call an expected natural shift of the sand.

Horton said he fears any delay in the permit for the stabilization or the future dredging which might be needed could be disastrous.

Assistant County Administrator Tom Keith said the permits are needed so work can begin on taking measurements of the water and gathering data.

"This is a very tight time frame," Keith said.

Once the survey work is complete, the groins can be installed, with some work possible around the sea turtles, he said.

"If the work gets started, we should be OK with the turtles and birds," Keith said.

All of the permit issues are not insurmountable to Keith since the groin program is a DEP-initiated project, while the other permit for future channel work was accepted even if the details need to be altered.

"It should be a minor change, but something we should deal with now," he said.

Meanwhile, Horton said he will work the phones and start a campaign to solve the dredging permit problem if necessary.

"I have a whole army of people I can call if there is a problem that needs fixing with this pass," he said. "I won't call them yet, but they are there if we need them."

Horton said he plans to invite Michael Barrett, the new DEP district head, to take a tour of Stump Pass to physically show him why the issue is so important.

"I worked with the last boss they had and it should work again this time," Horton said. "I don't want to leave anything to chance."

If future maintenance work is needed, Horton said he would like to see some of the sand dumped on Englewood Beach instead of just Don Pedro and Knight islands or the state park beach.

The county has about \$7 million left to dredge the channel two more times during the next eight years, but Horton said why do that if preventative maintenance can extend the life of the pass.

You can e-mail Bob Reddy at [breddy@sun-herald.com](mailto:breddy@sun-herald.com).

**By BOB REDDY**

Englewood Assistant Editor