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Work begins to replenish sand at Fire Island beaches

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December 30, 2008

At a cost of \$36 million, work began this week to replenish narrow beaches on [Fire Island](#) with sand dredged from Moriches Inlet and offshore.

Surveyors are assessing six miles of shoreline from Saltaire to Davis Park, where 11 communities plan to stave off erosion from winter storms with millions of cubic yards of sand.

After delays of more than a month, equipment for a separate project to strengthen beaches further east at Smith Point and Cupsogue County Parks arrived in [Long Island](#) waters last week, Suffolk officials said. Dredging in Moriches Inlet was scheduled to begin yesterday, giving the county's contractor less than three weeks to mine 460,000 cubic yards of sand before its permit expires on Jan. 15, at the start of winter flounder spawning season.

Suffolk spokesman [Mark Smith](#) blamed bad weather for the holdup, saying it had slowed the contractor's previous job and made it difficult to move the equipment up the coast from [Georgia](#). He said the state Department of Environmental Conservation had "tentatively" agreed to extend the permit through the end of the month; DEC officials said the request was still under review.



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"If we had to stop on the 15th, we'd stop on the 15th and get done what we could up until that point," Smith said.

Both projects are interim strategies to protect the shoreline from storm damage until a long-delayed federal management plan is completed to reduce erosion and flooding along Suffolk County's South Shore.

Proponents said the short-term work was crucial, citing the toll from a 2007 nor'easter that left several Davis Park homes uninhabitable

and washed away much of the sand placed at [Smith Point County Park](#) during a prior renourishment project.

Gerald Stoddard of the Fire Island Association, which represents barrier island residents, said high summer surf swept away sand that would have been used to build up protective dunes. More communities lined up beach projects this year than Stoddard had seen since the early 1990s. The work was paid for by taxes levied by local erosion control districts and [Federal Emergency Management Agency](#) grants, he said.

The \$25 million cost to pump in sand from sea floor "borrow areas" about a mile south includes monitoring to see whether the dredged areas will naturally refill with sand. That condition was imposed by officials at Fire Island National Seashore.

"If they're using the sand that naturally comes on shore, what happens if that sand is not replenished?" said Mike Bilecki, the seashore's chief of natural resources.

Suffolk's work was funded by a FEMA grant of more than \$11 million to repair damage from the 2007 nor'easter at the two county parks. Smith said the parks now have 50 to 65 feet of beach, depending on tide and weather conditions. He added that "50 feet could go very quickly under the wrong set of circumstances."

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