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Sullivan's gets last draft

Consultants submit final plan on how to manage accreted land at beach

BY JESSICA MILLER
The Post and Courier

More residents on Sullivan's Island could have an ocean view under a proposed management plan offered for the island's accreted land on an area of beach that has built up over time.

Sullivan's Island Town Council hired Coastal Science & Engineering in January 2008 to lead a team of consultants to design a plan to manage the land, home to a maritime forest, shrub land and grasses, held in a public trust since 1991. The firm submitted the final draft of its plan last week.

The updated management plan recommends the town turn more than half the land into a 50-50 mix of maritime shrubs and grasslands and take out some of the taller trees in those areas. The plan would leave some forested areas, primarily in front of publicly owned property, as they are.

Consultants divided the accreted land on the island into four sections and recommended specific management plans for each zone. The first section, Fort Moultrie, includes the national monument east to Station 17. The Sand Dunes Club section includes Station 17 Street east to the lighthouse. The land bordering Sullivan's Island Elementary School has its own unit. The fourth unit is called Bayonne Avenue and extends from Station 22½ to 29.

Consultants recommended turning the Sand Dunes Club and Bayonne Avenue units into half-shrubs and half-grassland. But the town would determine

which areas within those zones would become shrubs and grass. The plan recommends land in the other two zones be left unmanaged. Tim Kana, Coastal Science & Engineering president, said he expects Town Council to make some changes to the plan before it approves it.

"It certainly offers an improvement to what's been a fairly ad hoc lack of management of the accreted land," Kana said of the plan.

Residents have been allowed to trim three varieties of trees by permit under current rules, which has led to the thickening of vegetation that could pose a fire risk and create a habitat for rodents, according to consultants.

The plan also suggests using beach access paths for fire breaks and creating a 32-foot buffer between the accreted land and homeowners' property that would be cleared of all trees and shrubs.

Kana originally recommended the town's best protection from storms would be to build a high dune, saying the topography rather than plant life would better protect the island, but residents seemed to like a mix between manipulating the land and allowing some areas to become a maritime forest.

Town Councilman Pat O'Neil, chairman of Town Council's Real Estate Committee, said council will have a work session Sept. 13 to review the 191-page study.

It would be months before the town could implement any of the recommended changes because it would require modifying Sullivan Island's zoning or-

dinance. The town also would have to contact the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service before making any changes because about 13 endangered or threatened plant and animal species live on the land.

The management plan might also be affected by a lawsuit two Atlantic Avenue couples have against the town.

The lawsuit, filed in July, claimed that their property values have diminished as plants and shrubs growing on the land have blocked their ocean views. The suit asks the court to reverse all ordinances pertaining to the public land and that residents be allowed to cut all shrubs to no more than 3 feet. The town plans to respond to the suit.

O'Neil said the lawsuit wouldn't stop the town from moving forward with discussions on the management plan.

Resident Steven Poletti said even if the town wins the lawsuit and implements the plan, he doesn't think the town has the funds or the people available to manage the land as the plan suggests.

Where the funding would come from is something that O'Neil said the town plans to discuss in future meetings.

"I think the town of Sullivan's Island is incredibly fortunate to have this challenge. We have 190 acres and growing that will not see development because of the wisdom of an earlier council," O'Neil said.

Reach Jessica Miller at 937-5921 or jmiller@postandcourier.com.



JESSICA MILLER/STAFF

Coastal Science & Engineering, hired by the town of Sullivan's Island, suggested allowing the land on the island's western end to remain unmanaged, similar to the forested area around the beach access path at Station 16.



JESSICA MILLER/STAFF

Sullivan's Island accreted land west of Station 17 would go unmanaged, according to recommendations in the latest draft by a team of consultants.



FILE/JESSICA MILLER/STAFF

Richard Porcher, a biology professor at The Citadel, describes how Sullivan's Island's accreted land formed over time. The land in this area of the island would be left to grow in a current accreted land management plan.