

# Dumping Sand



## Suffolk Closeup

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**By Karl Grossman**

This is where I came in. It was 1962 and I had started as a reporter and writing about a new plan of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Fire Island to Montauk Point project. The scheme: to dump mammoth amounts of sand and construct up to 50 rock jetties called "groins" along 83 miles of Suffolk County's south shore.

New York public works czar Robert Moses was pushing, as an addition to the plan, building a four-lane highway the length of roadless Fire Island. The highway, he claimed, would "anchor" the beach. Moses was stopped by creation in 1964 of the Fire Island National Seashore. The would-be Moses highway is long dead but 59 years later surviving is the planned Army project, with the acronym FIMP (Fire Island Motor Parkway) and it's now scheduled to fully begin next year. It's no longer estimated to cost in the millions of dollars. The price has now gone up to "more than \$3 billion."

As U.S. Representatives Lee Zeldin and Andrew Garbarino from Suffolk stated in a press release last month, the "initial" cost will be "more than \$1.5 billion, paid for entirely through federal funding. The renourishment cost for the project separately totals approximately \$1.5 billion, 50% of which will be federally funded. From start to finish, the FIMP project will total more than \$3 billion."

As to the other 50% of the "approximately \$1.5 billion" of the "renourishment cost": where's that money to come from? That would be a "local" obligation to come from the state, Suffolk County and the towns where the "renourishment" take place.

"Renourishment" and "nourishment" are words developed to describe dumping of sand on beaches. The FIMP project now, says Kevin McAllister, founder and president of the Sag Harbor-based organization Defend H2O, is mainly a "sand plan" focused on sand-dumping. Mr. McAllister is critical of this because the "average life span" for sand dumped on a beach, he says, "is three-to-four years" for it to remain. So, after dumped sand washes away, there needs to be regular "renourishment." The FIMP project narrative says there would be "periodic renourishment every 4 years for a 30-year period."

An illuminating report on sand-dumping on beaches was issued by the U.S. Senate in 2009 and titled: "Washed Out to Sea: How Congress Prioritizes Beach Pork Over National Needs." It begins: "Many Americans are unaware that their government has spent billions of dollars on beach projects knowing they will simply wash out to sea. Known as 'beach nourishment' this misplaced 'priority' is an effort at various beach locations that pumps offshore sand-type sediment onto beaches." It says: "This investigative report examines why federal funding," of this "is a short-sighted and inefficient use of taxpayer dollars."

The FIMP project no longer involves placement of groins. That turned out to be disastrous. In early work between 1965 and 1970 some 15 groins were placed along the Westhampton Beach shoreline. They disrupted the drift of sand moving east to west in the ocean and left the coast to the west sand-starved. Beach houses were lost.

There was a lawsuit and a \$80 million settlement. Indeed, part of the new FIMP scheme involves removal of two groins at Ocean Beach on Fire Island to “allow sand to follow” the littoral drift. Also, it provides for the “elevation” of 3,675 structures, “flood proofing” of 650 and “acquisition” of 14.” And it offers “sand bypassing” at Fire Island, Moriches and Shinnecock inlets to maintain “littoral transport of sediment” of sand otherwise sucked into the inlets.

Marine scientist McAllister was featured last month in what he called a “Beach Science 101” presentation sponsored by the North Fork Environmental Council. In it he presented photos from all over Suffolk of bulkheads, blocks of sandbags, rock revetments and other “hard structures” that have been going up “right and left” along bays and oceanfront and which, he emphasizes, are disrupting natural systems and causing adjacent beaches to shrink.

Mr. McAllister says it is “inevitable” that the FIMP project “will unravel both physically and financially. Demand will outpace the Army Corps’ ability to deliver sand when every coastal community up and down the East Coast is in line and back in line. Perpetual sand replenishment is both economically, and environmentally, unsustainable.”

And, he predicts, a public “awakening” when that so-called “renourishment” phase is to happen and the “local financial obligation kicks in and hits home with taxpayers. Long Island politicians need to stop kicking the can and give some tough love and develop and execute withdrawal/rollback plans for vulnerable areas without further delay.”