

## **No replenishment for LBI refuge, just the natural progress of the sand**

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LONG BEACH TOWNSHIP - Officials from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife agency have some advice for those close to the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge on Long Beach Island - "Let nature take its course."

"Actually, it's watching nature, and I think it's pretty cool. Because where else do you get to do that?" said refuge supervisor Brian Braudis.

During the last few months, several fierce storms have taken their toll on the small strip of refuge at the island's southernmost point in Holgate, Long Beach Township, according to Braudis.

Severe erosion in the Holgate portion of the refuge has had locals on edge.

But Braudis said Friday there's really nothing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can do.

"Really, all we can do is monitor it, we can't act. The area is closed to mechanized implements," Braudis said.

Braudis said the most recent storm that caused damage at the refuge was Dec. 23.

"The Sunday before Christmas it was raining sideways for most of the day, and we were up there monitoring," Braudis said.

Braudis has been the refuge supervisor for the last 18 months. He said it is difficult to assess in that time period whether the erosion has worsened.

"We do have aerial photos that show how things have moved since the 40s and that is very interesting," he said.

Although northeasters have a tendency to move a lot of sand around, Braudis said, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not in the business of replenishing sand.

"It's designated a wilderness area by Congress, so we don't replenish the sand. But we're not alarmed; we're hoping that, like every year, the spring will bring new sand," Braudis said.

The agency is not permitted by law to bring any wheeled vehicles onto the refuge or move sand, according to U.S. Fish and Wildlife spokeswoman Terri Edwards.

But just because they cannot act, does not mean they don't care, according to Braudis.

"I think some people don't think we're doing anything about it because they don't see us doing it. We care deeply about that land; that's the reason we're here," Braudis said.

The Holgate portion of the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge is 2½ miles long, and consists of more than 400 acres of barrier beach, dunes and tidal saltmarsh. The area is an important and productive destination for beach-nesting birds, including piping plovers.

The refuge is also home to more than 50 other nesting bird species including ospreys, black ducks, American oystercatchers, willets and seaside sparrows.

To his knowledge, Braudis said, erosion has not affected the wildlife at the refuge.

"The birds that were raised this summer are gone now and there are birds here now that are nesting and loafing," Braudis said.

As far as the rumors that recent storms are creating a new inlet, Braudis said the refuge has not been breached.

"If anything happened we'd get more people involved and have to assess the situation if it would break through. Obviously, we're hoping for no more nor'easters like the one we just had," he said.

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