

City of Treasure Island Beach Stewardship Committee

February 13, 2008

1:30 PM

COMMITTEE PRESENT: Dennis Velasco, John Burke, George Greenfield, Mary Daughtry, Rick Raus; Nicole Elko, Pinellas County; Cliff Truitt, Coastal Tech.

Also present: Beth Forsys, PhD and Alison Ormsby, Eckerd College

Chairman Dennis Velasco called the Beach Stewardship Committee meeting to order at 1:35 PM in the City Hall auditorium, 108th Avenue, Treasure Island, Florida.

1. The draft minutes of the January 9, 2008 meeting had been distributed and reviewed by the Committee members. Upon appropriate motion, the minutes were approved as drafted.
2. No changes were offered to the published Agenda.
3. Dr. Forsys and Ms Ormsby had been invited to discuss issues related to shorebirds and how their protection and conservation might be incorporated in the Committee's work. They have been working on these issues at Eckerd College under a study funded by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. A DVD with their entire presentation as well as additional information which might be linked to the City's website was left with Jeff. The following is an abridged outline of several main points in their presentation.

There are five main species of shorebirds that are likely to be seen along Pinellas County beaches, including Treasure Island; they are: Least Terns, Black Skimmers, American Oystercatchers, Wilson Plovers and Snowy Plovers. Four species are listed as 'special concern' and the fifth, the Snowy Plover may soon be elevated to protected status under Federal guidelines. The terns and skimmers are colonial nesters which tend to gather in large flocks, while the other three types are 'solitary nesters.' All species place their eggs in 'nests' that are little more than slight depressions directly on the sand surface. This is one of the reasons that the birds' eggs are so vulnerable to both predation and accidental destruction. The overall nesting season in our area might run from March through August, but most activity occurs during the months of June, July and early August. Estimates of numbers of nesting pairs across the state were presented, showing that Snowy Plovers may have as few as 250 pairs, but all species seem to be trending down in numbers. Part of the study also included verbal surveys of beach users to assess their attitudes about the birds, perceptions about threats to their survival and sources of information. Results of the survey were presented and discussed.

Several ideas were offered on how the City might help protect the nesting birds and conserve their habitat. One suggestion was to reduce, or at least use great caution, in raking the beach, especially the upper beach areas. Also, care needs to be exercised in operating any vehicles on the beach, even necessary emergency and service vehicles. The idea of "pre-posting" zones with signs and flagging to reduce pedestrian access even before actual nesting

takes places was discussed. This seems to create an area to which the birds may eventually tend to be attracted; decoys have been used with some success. This type of restriction does, however, need 'buy-in' from property owners and needs to be planned in concert with maintaining other pedestrian access routes. A very important need is to enforce prohibitions about pets on the beach. Experiments have shown that the presence of a dog or cat near a nest site has a "100%" likelihood of disturbing and dispersing the birds. This effect is significantly greater than the presence of people alone. Lastly, it was suggested that residents and visitors be actively engaged about the issues, and that information [e.g., as on the DVD] be appropriately made available.

There was follow-up discussion and comment by the Committee, including noting that several of the ideas such as 'no-raking' were already topics the Committee is addressing. A consensus resulted, which was to try 'pre-posting' two areas as tests cases – one larger one at mid-island and a smaller one somewhere on Sunset. The Committee and Rick Raus will look at possible areas based on the existing 'no-raking' plan and previous designated preservation areas, and develop a specific recommendation that the Committee can review and decide if we want to endorse it to the City Commission for implementation.

4. Dr. Elko confirmed information received before the meeting from Robert Minning and Maura Kiefer about the status of the draft resolution supporting an interlocal agreement in place of establishing an Erosion Control Line (ECL). The City of St. Petersburg legal staff had indicated that the draft agreement would be forwarded to City Council in 'a couple of weeks,' but after a month, no action has taken place. It was suggested that we go ahead as previously planned and ask the Mayor to send a letter to St. Petersburg.

5. Committee Member Remarks:

John Burke reported on the last beach pick-up day. Twenty-five people plus 8 high school students had participated and collected 305 pounds of trash.

Mary Daughtry mentioned the beach planting effort for this Saturday and asked the TV audience to come out and volunteer. Dennis Velasco further reviewed details for the work day.

Mary Daughtry also asked if the Committee had made any further progress in reviewing the Mission Statement and 'Vision' documents with a goal of our potential integration of native vegetation issues and landscaping guidelines into the Committee's work. There was brief discussion, and Ms. Daughtry requested that the issue be placed on the next agenda for a more complete dialog and eventual action.

Dennis Velasco reported on the sub-committee's site visits and review of beach accesses where dune walkover reconstruction is planned and where additional parking might be incorporated. He said that the sub-committee identified room for a total of about 77 parking spaces. There was discussion of some specific access sites and of funding for improvements. A motion was approved to send the sub-committee's report and recommendations to the City Commission for review and action.

Rick Raus reported on the Elnor Island contract. Lynn Rosetti continues to work with the funding agencies to get written confirmation that the scope of work and contractor selected by the City satisfies the agency requirements and the City can start work. Similarly, Rick has been discussing the dune walkover replacement work with FDOT who administers that grant. Changes in the total funding amount and other procedural requirements from FDOT may require that the City re-bid the work; he will try to get a final decision within the next week. Lastly, Rick said that he continues to follow-up on the beach raking procedures and things are going reasonably well. He noted that some of the areas where raking has stopped are indeed beginning to show signs of vegetation recruitment.

Nicole Elko responded to a comment previously made about dune vegetation acting as 'erosion control.' She pointed out that the vegetation can't really directly stand up to erosive forces. Its role is to restore the dunes, which act as reservoirs of sand, and thereby may reduce the harmful effects of erosion when it does occur. She also suggested that some of the signage proposed by Dr. Forsys' group to inform beachgoers was far too detailed based on the County's experience with similar efforts.

There were no further remarks.

6. The next regular Committee meeting date was set for March 12, 2008 at 1:30 PM

The meeting was adjourned at 3:00.