

Dear Congressman Tierney,

I am truly appreciative of your efforts on the behalf of Plum Island Beach. Finally after all these years, I feel that someone is listening and that perhaps eventually something will be done about the erosion problem. But our real problem is immediate. I seriously doubt that the ocean will wait for the assistance for which you are advocating. Now that water and sewer has been installed the danger is not only to a few oceanfront homes, it now encompasses the entire Island. We are now all dependent on this system, and should it fail because of a storm event breaching the system, our homes will probably be condemned.

For many of us who live here, Plum Island is part of our soul. And to sit idly by and watch the beach disappear, is heartbreaking. In addition to the long term solutions you and others seek, there is a temporary stop-gap measure that will provide us the time needed while we await those more permanent interventions.

In the past when we experienced severe weather events that caused erosion, the oceanfront homeowners would not only protect themselves but also the public beach at their own expense. We would scrape the beach at low tide and restore the dunes in front of our homes as well as the public beach. This method would provide us with protection for five, ten and sometimes fifteen years. The scraping was inexpensive as we used material (sand) that was readily available and already in the system. It only required the cost of manpower and equipment for a day or two.

In recent years, CZM and DEP have prevented us from using this method, stating that we would cause damage to the beaches south of Plum Island. Their theory of 'Downdrift Sediment' may apply to some beaches in Massachusetts, but not to Plum Island Beach. There has never been any damage caused to the beaches to our south. In fact I suspect that they are the beneficiaries. At least, that is my 'theory'. I personally have 63 years of observation and experience with the ocean, and many of our residents have 80 years and more. CZM and DEP have disavowed our experience, preferring their 'theory'. The problem is that their 'theory' is causing irreparable harm to our beach. When we replenished the dunes after a storm event occurred, the damage was rectified. Now that we have been prevented from taking those measures, the problem has become extremely serious with many homes in danger of being taken by the ocean. With each storm event, more and more sand is lost.

Plum Island Beach is starving and about to die. The dredging of the Merrimack River is one culprit. The sand that should have drifted southward to the beach was instead caught by the jetties and then dredged and carried out to sea by the Army Corps of Engineers. Executive Order 181 of Massachusetts law states that when dredging occurs the sand should be directly placed on the downdrift beaches. To my knowledge, that has never occurred in the entire state of Massachusetts. Hopefully with your help, this will never happen again. The second culprit is of course the difficult and insurmountable stumbling blocks that CZM and DEP have instituted. Perhaps again with your help, CZM and DEP would suspend their regulations so that we can take the emergency measures needed to protect our beach and homes. Somewhere there has to be a balance between man and nature. We need to be allowed to exercise our constitutional right to defend our homes.

I am truly grateful that you have taken the time to read my rather lengthy letter. Thank you very much.

Oceans of Warmth,

Nancy Jones

Dear Mrs. Jones:

Your comments regarding the erosion on Plum Island have been forwarded to my attention. I am pleased to respond.

I share your concerns. Ensuring that Newburyport's dredging and Plum Island's erosion issues are expeditiously addressed has been - and will continue to be - a key priority of mine.

You may be interested to know that, at my request, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers scrutinized its budget looking for available funds that could be put toward community projects. Fortunately, in its review, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was able to identify \$100,000 to initiate a beach nourishment study, which is, as you may know, a necessary first step to determine how the erosion problem should be addressed and to assess the federal government's future role in this project. I know our state legislative delegation has been working with local officials on the issue as well.

Be assured that, as I have done in the past, I am working with the Appropriations Committee to secure federal funds for other local dredging and erosion mitigation projects. As you may know, last year, after meeting with local officials and the technical experts at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, I was able to secure the full amount for the Newburyport Harbor Entrance Channel project (\$1.4 million) in the House bill. However, one of the unfortunate consequences of President Bush's failure to negotiate with Congress on final spending levels was that funding for all projects nationwide was reduced in the bill that became law. Still, I am pleased that \$654,000 was included for the Newburyport Harbor Entrance Channel project.

As the appropriations process continues, I will keep working with town and state officials on this important issue. I appreciate your commitment to the same.

Thank you for taking the time to weigh in. Please feel free to do so regarding any matter of concern to you.

Sincerely,

John F. Tierney  
Member of Congress