

Erosion experts to inspect beaches, meet with public

By Victor Tine

Staff writer

PLUM ISLAND — A panel of experts from the Army Corps of Engineers will tour the area tomorrow to assess the beach erosion on Plum Island and Salisbury Beach.

The tour will be followed by a public Town Hall Meeting at the Plum Island Taxpayers and Associates Hall on Plum Island Boulevard, from 5 to 7 p.m.

Five members of the Army Corps of Engineers Planning Center for Expertise in Coastal Storm Damage Reduction are scheduled to meet with state and local officials and get a firsthand look at beach erosion at the two locations during the afternoon.

The event, including the meeting at PITA Hall, is being hosted by the Plum Island Foundation, a private group that is working to replenish the beach.

The Planning Center team members are expected to discuss a proposed Plum Island beneficial sand placement project and a related study, the repair of the Newburyport Harbor south jetty and plans to dredge the Merrimack River channel, before opening the floor to a question-and-answer session at about 6:15.

"I view the Town Hall Meeting as a perfect opportunity for coastal property owners or coastal officials to ask the experts," said Plum Island Foundation Vice President Robert Connors.

Beach erosion has become a major problem on Plum Island, especially since the April 2007 storm.

The damage is most evident near the intersection known as Plum Island Center, where Plum Island, Northern and Southern boulevards meet.

Parts of the deck of the former Jeanne's restaurant building have been taken down because the ocean undermined the dune and it was in danger of falling onto the beach below. Another deck slightly to the north also was undermined and has fallen.

The Plum Island Foundation is trying to get the Army Corps to deposit sand dredged from the Merrimack channel onto the beach at the island. The foundation also is seeking money for the repair of the south jetty, which some local officials think is actually accelerating the erosion.

State Sen. Bruce Tarr, R-Gloucester, will moderate the 5 p.m. session. The Army Corps of Engineers Coastal Planning Center of Expertise members are Larry Cocchieri, Peter Blum, Richard Ring, Jason Shea and Bill Curtis.

Edward O'Donnell, navigational services chief for the New England District of the Army Corps, will also participate.

Elected officials expected to attend are Congressman John Tierney, D-Salem, or his district representative, George McCabe; state Sen. Steven Baddour, D-Methuen; state Reps. Harriett Stanley, D-West Newbury and Michael Costello, D-Newburyport; Newburyport Mayor John Moak; Newbury selectmen Chairman Vincent Russo, and Newbury Selectmen Joseph Story and Jennifer Wright; members of the Newburyport City Council and Salisbury selectmen Chairman Jerry Klima.

Also participating will be Salisbury Town Manager Neil Harrington, Newbury Conservation Agent Douglas Packer, Newbury Public Works Director Tim Leonard, Newbury police Chief Michael Reilly, Plum Island Taxpayers President Ron Barrett, Kevin Mooney of the state Department of Conservation and Recreation Waterway Division, Raul Silva of the DCR Parks Division, and Plum Island Foundation President Marc Sarkady.