

A Letter from the North Carolina Beach Family

Greetings from the beach at Shackleford Banks. No, I'm not at the beach; I AM the beach. With 2004 now in full swing, I want to take this opportunity to look back and reflect on the events that have shaped the North Carolina Beach family in 2003.

Things here on Shackleford Banks couldn't be better. I'm still free to naturally migrate and erode, just as I've done over the past five thousand or so years. My only gripe is the four-wheelers that the National Park Service rides up and down me, crushing my shells. I guess they don't realize I have the best shelling of any of my relatives.

Speaking of relatives, my undeveloped cousins Core Banks and Bear Island are doing well, as are my developed cousins Wrightsville Beach and Carolina Beach (although neither has any natural beach left). Unfortunately, I can't say the same for the rest of the Beach family.

Cousin Oak Island is still suffering from the rocks the US Army Corps of Engineers carelessly pumped up in 2001 in what they still claim was an effort to restore sea turtle nesting habitat.

Cousins Emerald Isle, Pine Knoll Shores and Indian Beach are slowly recovering from recent beach fill projects that placed a lot of jagged, fragmented shells and rock on the beach. I hear that kids now have to wear shoes if they want to go swimming.

Cousins Ocean Isle Beach and Holden Beach seem OK, but I expect to see both moving back faster than they normally would because the Corps mined the ebb tidal delta of Shallotte Inlet in 2001. The town of Emerald Isle plans to do the same thing at Bogue Inlet next year. When will they learn that mining tidal deltas is the same as mining us?

Of course, the big news in 2003 was Hurricane Isabel. We were all so excited to learn of the birth of the new inlet on Cape Hatteras. It was such a beautiful inlet, and would still be around today, if not for a few shortsighted, yet powerful, politicians and state bureaucrats consumed with the belief that a new inlet would reduce tourism revenue.

Now I've been around a long time, and I can assure you that my entire family is perfectly capable of handling a hurricane - we've been doing it forever. I'm sure Cousin Hatteras had a good reason for allowing that inlet, but here you come with your roads and your buildings and you insist on keeping them where they are. So, when we react to storms - something we all have to do in order to survive - you overreact and scramble to put everything back exactly the way it was before. I'm fortunate because I'm allowed to move. But my cousin along Cape Hatteras isn't. Don't you realize you're sacrificing the future of your national seashore just so you can drive to your bar, restaurant, shop or hotel a few minutes quicker?

Which gets me to thinking; you have been building right next to us for a long time, and a lot of houses in Nags Head, Kill Devil Hills and Kitty Hawk are now right on top of us. How much money are you willing to spend to try and save these buildings? And why do you allow people to bulldoze us and build seawalls made of sandbags? Don't you know that bulldozing kills a lot of the little critters that live in us, and that sandbags cause us to disappear just like concrete or stone walls? Sure, we'll stick around at low tide, but eventually you won't see us at all. On a positive note, I am happy to report that the NC beach family still has fewer seawalls than our relatives in other states. In Georgia, for example, almost every developed cousin has a seawall.

I guess our two biggest problems are: 1) more and more buildings are right next to us and as we move back, we get closer and closer to them and 2) beachfront property owners are making decisions about our future. I'm afraid this means that the entire Beach family, with the exception of those of us lucky enough to be left alone, will gradually disappear or become engineering projects.

That's just not right. We are so much more important than buildings or roads, and I know you would like us to stay around for a long time. Let's hope 2004 brings about a more enlightened approach to our management, because if it doesn't, it's your loss.

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