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Seabrook Island named among top restored beaches

[\(/apps/pbcs.dll/personalia?ID=66\)](/apps/pbcs.dll/personalia?ID=66)[Jim Parker \(/apps/pbcs.dll/personalia?](/apps/pbcs.dll/personalia?ID=66)[ID=66\)](#) ✉ Email (<mailto:jparker@postandcourier.com>)

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Seabrook Island was one of five winners of the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association's annual award for the nation's best "restored" coastlines — those replenished with fresh sand to curb erosion. Fellow top picks were Babe's Beach in Galveston, Texas; Rosewood Beach, Highland Park, Illinois; Topsail Beach in North Carolina; and Redondo Beach, California.

According to association president Tony Pratt, many heavily used beaches are restored, offering wide and sandy shorelines with abundant recreational opportunities.

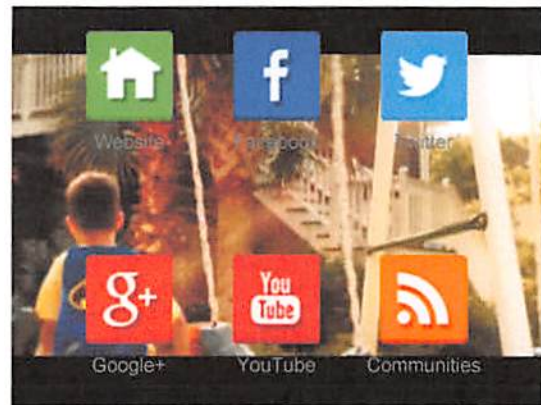
"As Americans flock to our nation's coastline during the upcoming beach season, most don't even realize they may be enjoying a restored beach," says Pratt,



administrator of the Shoreline and Waterway Management Section within the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control.

"Coastal communities have restored more than 370 beaches in the United States, including such iconic beaches as Jones Beach in New York; Ocean City in Maryland; Virginia Beach; Miami Beach; South Padre Island, Texas; Santa Monica; and Waikiki Beach," Pratt says.

An aerial view shows the sandy beach at Seabrook Island. Provided



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Enlarge The subtle movement of Captain Sam's Inlet over the years helps build up the Seabrook Island shoreline. Provided

According to the Fort Myers, Florida-based organization, beach restoration has been the preferred method of shore protection in coastal communities for more than 50 years. The association defines beach restoration as "the process of placing beach-quality sand on dwindling beaches to reverse or offset the effects of erosion."

According to the group, reasons for restoration include:

- Storm protection – A wide beach helps separate storm waves from upland structures.
- Habitat restoration – Numerous species rely on healthy beaches as places to live, feed, rest and nest.
- Recreation – America's beaches totaled 2.2 billion visits in 2010 – more than twice the numbers of visitors to all federal and state parks combined, according to the beach preservation association. It also says beaches contribute an estimated \$225 billion a year to the U.S. economy, and governments annually take in \$570 in taxes from beach tourists for every dollar spent on restoration.

To enter the Best Restored Beach competition, coastal communities nominate projects and an "independent panel of coastal managers and scientists" choose the winners based on economic and ecological benefits, short- and long-term success of the project; and challenges the communities overcame during restoration work.

"The Best Restored Beaches contest can be compared to an old-time beauty contest. If you like what you see, you vote for it," says Lee Weishar, chair of the Best Restored Beach Committee. "I look for commitment and dedication to the project. I want the applicant to make me love (the) beach," the chair says.

In an overview of Seabrook Island's restoration, the committee cited the community's management adopting a "soft engineering strategy to combat ongoing and severe erosion." The approach involves periodic relocation of Captain Sam's Inlet.

Rather than stabilizing the inlet itself or heavily armoring the shoreline, the inlet is allowed to migrate naturally at 200 feet per year for about every 15 years over a designated inlet conservation zone. That leaves a length of coast in a natural state between each event.

"Repeated projects, many years apart, allow new sand spit formation and washover habitat sought by certain threatened species, such as the piping plover and red knot," the committee says.

Although inlet relocations required multiple attempts to close the old channels — the most difficult aspect of the projects — the result was the same: formation of a new inlet, and the old inlet staying closed. Thus, sand in the "abandoned ebb tidal delta" moved onshore and naturally nourished Seabrook Island's beach.

Ecological impacts include forming additional dry sand beaches above the high tide line for turtle nesting sites, according to the association's restored beach committee.

The shoreline accretes down coast, and healthy dunes form to protect the island from storm tidal surges. Fine-grained sand accumulating from shoals moving in from just offshore matches existing beach sand, the committee adds.

"The Seabrook Island restoration project clearly demonstrates the importance of developing a long-term management plan that works with the natural processes to overcome severe erosion," Weishar says.

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