



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

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INTERIOR SECRETARY LUJAN SIGNS CONDITIONAL PERMITS
FOR CONSTRUCTION OF JETTIES TO PROTECT OREGON INLET

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan today issued conditional permits to allow the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to use federal lands necessary in the construction of jetties to stabilize Oregon Inlet in North Carolina's Outer Banks. Oregon Inlet is the only opening in the barrier islands along the Atlantic coast for 120 miles between Cape Henry and Cape Hatteras.

"The jetty project will provide needed protection for the bridge and roads essential to Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge," Lujan noted. "If accompanied by proposed sand management options, the project can be consistent with the purpose of the Seashore and compatible with the purposes of the Refuge."

Sand management is necessary to provide replenishment for adjacent areas of the Outer Banks that might erode when cut off by the jetties from natural sand replenishment. The State of North Carolina would share in the cost with the Federal Government.

The Secretary also pointed out that the highway and Bonner Bridge over Oregon Inlet are essential to provide a land evacuation route for residents and tourists in the event of a natural calamity such as a hurricane.

Lujan said the permits will not allow construction by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to begin until all other necessary state, local and federal permits are obtained, and until both a Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement and Endangered Species Act consultations are completed.

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"These permits may be amended, if necessary, in accordance with the findings of the additional environmental reviews," Lujan added.

Lujan credited the determination of Governor James Martin, Lt. Governor Jim Gardner and Senator Jesse Helms with paving the way for action to break a 21-year old stalemate on the proposal to build the jetties. Previously, the Department of the Interior had delayed approval of the project, authorized by Congress in 1970, because of concern about possible impacts on the Seashore and Refuge.

"Special tribute should be paid to Governor Martin and Lt. Governor Gardner for proposing the conditional permits as a way to move this process off dead center," said Assistant Secretary of the Interior John E. Schrote, who made the announcement in Manteo, N.C., on Thursday.

Schrote, who was joined by North Carolina Secretary of Administration James Lofton, also thanked Senator Helms and his staff for "keeping us focused on the concerns of the people on the Outer Banks, and for urging the Department of the Interior and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to sit down together during the past year to explore ways to overcome previously identified environmental impacts."

"This joint report addresses those concerns," Schrote added. "An appropriate sand management plan, to be designed by the Corps of Engineers, can enhance the Seashore and protect the Refuge, highway, bridge and the beaches along the Outer Banks."

The inlet plays a critical role in allowing families, sportsmen and the fishing communities access to fishing grounds and it provides for the exchange of water and organisms between the Atlantic Ocean and Albermarle-Pamlico estuary.