

Priorities for Coastal Property Owners

Speakers:

Parker Dwelley, and Robert Almeder, Goose Rocks Beach residents and members of S.O.S. Maine
Carol Cook, Director, Kennebunkport Parks and Recreation Dept.

Parker Dwelley spoke about Goose Rocks Beach and its uniqueness compared to some of the other Maine beaches. He recommended concentrating on the issues over which property owners can exert some control such as parking permits, and public access. He suggested that beach nourishment is an option but there are serious considerations related to its high price tag.

Carol Cook spoke of beaches from a different perspective. She is not an avid beachgoer herself, and therefore looks at the beaches as a means of getting the public access through the portion of Goose Rocks beach owned by the Kennebunkport Conservation Trust. Part of the problem for coastal property owners is that the tourist industry (hotels and restaurants) encourage visitors to go to the local beaches but neglect to tell them about the extremely limited public access opportunities. Other problems include cook fires, trash, and dog waste on the beach. Carol feels that all parties involved need to work together on these issues.

Robert Almeder spoke about the continued degradation on beaches as a result of population increase and urban sprawl. He suggested that there is a great deal of focus on the need for town residents and tourists to be able to access the beach, but asked for more respect for the rights of the coastal private property owners. He expressed the concern of frontal property owners at Goose Rocks beach and elsewhere (such as Drakes Island) with the "permissive trespass" policy whereby the state and the town encourage tourists and residents to use those parts of the beach that are wholly privately owned. He suggested that private property owners are concerned about the possibility of town and state taking adverse possession (or prescriptive variance) of the private parts of the beach in the name of the public under eminent domain. He also believes that there are imminent problems with overcrowding of beaches that result in water quality impacts. Increased use will likely increase bacteria and contaminants levels on the beaches and in the water. He suggested that the value of beach nourishment is limited if in fact sea level rise predictions are accurate and that a more prudent approach would be to be patient and the sand will come back over time.

Open Discussion:

Goose Rocks is limited by the number of vehicles that can park in the area. How can it expand while it is limited by parking and lack of facilities? The number of parking permits issued is greater than number parking spaces available. There were concerns that Towns may use their powers of Eminent Domain.

Residents of Drakes Island expressed frustration that visitors enter at public access ways and then go directly to the private properties. Impact from the Patriot's Day Storm has resulted in the elimination of the beach at high tide, at which time visitors are climbing onto the seawalls and "fighting" for space. Most property owners don't mind if

people walk across their property, but there are problems when they stay all day, leave trash, build fires, etc.

The option of a tourist tax, like that levied in Florida was suggested, but a similar piece of legislation has just failed in Maine. Funds from such a tax could be used to provide funds for the beach nourishment. In Florida this tax covers hotels, motels, car rentals, public transportation.

The State Geologist from Maine Geological Survey suggested that through the most recent beach stakeholder process that efforts have been made to resolve beach management conflicts between regulators and coastal property owners. The most recent report of the stakeholder suggests policy changes that address property owner concerns. The report was signed off by a representative of S.O.S. Maine.