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Common Sense and the Geotubes

on SEPTEMBER 3, 2015 · [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

For reasons we can't fathom, the ironically named Sconset Beach Preservation Fund wants to install a fourth geotextile tube on top of their current construction. We are baffled by this desire, as no waves have reached the top of the existing structure, much less traversed it to reach the bluff. To add a fourth geotube would require heavy machinery to again be used on the vulnerable top of the bluff. With no reasonably foreseeable wave threat to the bank above the current installation, the greatest and most imminent threats would appear to be from the excavation of the bank to form a "bench" to support the rear portion of the fourth tube, the removal of the sand covering of the existing top tube, and the concentration of a large area of rainfall into a single 6" pipe ostensibly to be distributed *behind* the installation through a 50' length of 4" perforated pipe. Having witnessed the destructive power of the rain run-off when left to choose its own multiple paths, we are left to wonder about the result of channeling it into one pipe, even if it does eventually exit the perforations into the sand.

There is agreement that when material is removed from the toe of the bluff, the face of it breaks loose and drops down. Why, then, would the same thing not happen to the newly planted face of the bluff if material is removed to shape the "bench" that would support the fourth geotube? Much of the netted and planted face of the bluff in other nearby areas has failed in exactly that manner, being renetted and replanted in some cases, with downward movement already in evidence.

In a Fact Sheet titled "StormSmart Properties Fact Sheet 2: Controlling Overland Runoff to Reduce Coastal Erosion" the Massachusetts DEP lays out a plan to help control runoff to reduce erosion on coastal banks. You can read this fact sheet here – [Fact Sheet](#). Several points are made in this document that could help the residents of Baxter Road protect the bluff. One thing that is mentioned is to reduce the use of heavy machinery to prevent ruts and other damage to coastal banks. Heavy machinery was used extensively on lot 97 while installing the geotubes and for maintenance of the tubes. This lot is deteriorating. Bluff House, at 97 Baxter Road, was moved in recent years and recently demolished, each event requiring the filling of foundation holes each time. This has created an unstable lot that gets heavy runoff across it. Common sense would dictate that you stay off it, build it up and use the machinery elsewhere.



Heavy equipment on lot 99 – another site needing less machinery and more grading away from the edge.



Another point made in the fact sheet is to remove lawns and use native plants in the areas next to the bank. This will reduce the need for irrigation which makes runoff worse.



The lawns along the bluff side of Baxter Road are beautiful, but it would be much wiser to do what the MASS DEP recommends and use natural plantings. Otherwise, they could all end up like Swept Away.



It's easy to see how moving homes a few feet further destabilizes the top of the bank. This is the new foundation for Slip Slidin' Away seen in the background. It seems that since there is so little room left from the road to the edge of the bank that homes should be moved across the road or elsewhere rather than dig more foundations close to the edge. Again, common sense doesn't seem to play in these decisions.



When asked at the ConCom meeting what would happen when Nantucket ran out of sand, the SBPF's consultant stated that it would just be barged in. This completely ignores the fact that the mainland is running short of available sand too. What will sand cost Nantucket to barge it in? And yes, when we run out of sand, the SBPF could opt to remove the geotubes. But that would still leave those of us who live and work here little sand for construction, roads, etc. The SBPF's has acknowledged the possibility that local sand may no longer be available, but we have seen nothing to indicate a concern for what it would mean to the rest of the community. If the thought is that we would dredge sand from the ocean, this is a controversial issue here and elsewhere in Massachusetts and could cause significant injury to ocean habitats. Here's an article in the NY Times about sand shortages but all you have to do is search "running out of sand" and you will find many sources.

Where Sand is Gold – NY Times. Here is another article about sand shortages in Massachusetts – **The costly sand wars in Massachusetts.**



For those of us who go to the beach below the bluff, it will make for a very steep climb to walk on top of the geotubes, which is what SBPF has said we all can do in high tide situations. I hope they install an escalator. This is what it is like to climb it with 3 geotubes installed.



This is what the Sconset Beach Preservation Fund has done to preserve Sconset Beach. They have ruined it for any aesthetic enjoyment. Real estate value trumps nature and beauty on Nantucket.



Attorney Cohen, representing the SBPF, said this wasn't a personal or a moral issue, it was a legal issue. How sad that the SBPF would dismiss the moral issues to stand on the letter of the law. Especially sad when the ultimate outcome will be that a number of Baxter Road house owners will still have to move their houses having emptied the island of sand while destroying one of Nantucket's most beautiful resources.

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