

Dune to Long Point perilously thin

Flood breached dike, cut Long

Pt.

By Gregory Katz

The tiny swath of land leading to Long Point, which has eroded this winter to about half its normal width or less, may be washed away in some places in a few more winters.

More than half the width of the narrow dune ridge on the way to Long Point has been scoured away. The strip of land is much skinnier and more vulnerable now than it was last winter. The new cut at Wood End, where the tide now rushes in and out, may widen, causing even more tidal water to flood the salt marsh and clam flats west of the West End breakwater.

The strip of land is so narrow now that any foot or four-wheel-drive traffic is forced to go over what little beach grass remains on top of the fragile dune that keeps the ocean out.

The cut at Wood End has created new tidal action inside the basin formed by the curve of Long Point. Water now rises so high on both sides of the isthmus that one more unusually high flood tide could dramatically reshape or even eliminate the thin remaining beach and barrier dune.

During normal high tides in the wake of last month's flood, waves wash gently against the paved area protecting the parking lot at Herring Cove Beach.

The power box that operates the approach lights at Provincetown Airport sits under water and out of commission.

Water rises so high on both sides of the isthmus leading to Long Point that observers fear the beach there has eroded so much it will have to be closed all summer to allow it to heal—if indeed it ever heals.

The selectmen voted unanimously Monday to ask the National Seashore to protect the town's traditional use of Long Point and to repair quickly the breach in the Hatches Harbor dike. The broken dike allows each tide to threaten Provincetown Airport.

Airport Manager Dick Pereira said Monday that cracks in the taxi and aircraft parking apron have worsened. The airport flooded Feb. 7 when the dike broke.

another flood won't wash out Provincetown Airport.

"By taking no action we might lose a valuable property that has been an asset to the entire Lower Cape," Selectman Munro Moore said Monday. "The dike won't be filled in by itself."

The erosion of the beach leading to Long Point, as well as the drastic cut there, worries people who fear the barrier dune leading to Long Point may wash out and leave Long Point an inaccessible island.

Pereira appealed to the Seashore to act quickly to assure that the airport is not ruined.

"If we're flooded again the entire airport will be ruined," Pereira said. He estimated the cost of resurfacing and reconstructing the runway at more than \$500,000.

Despite requests for quick response, the Seashore has been taking a cautious wait-and-see attitude. Seashore Supt.

Lawrence Hadley said research shows that the state Mosquito Control Project might be responsible for maintaining the dike.

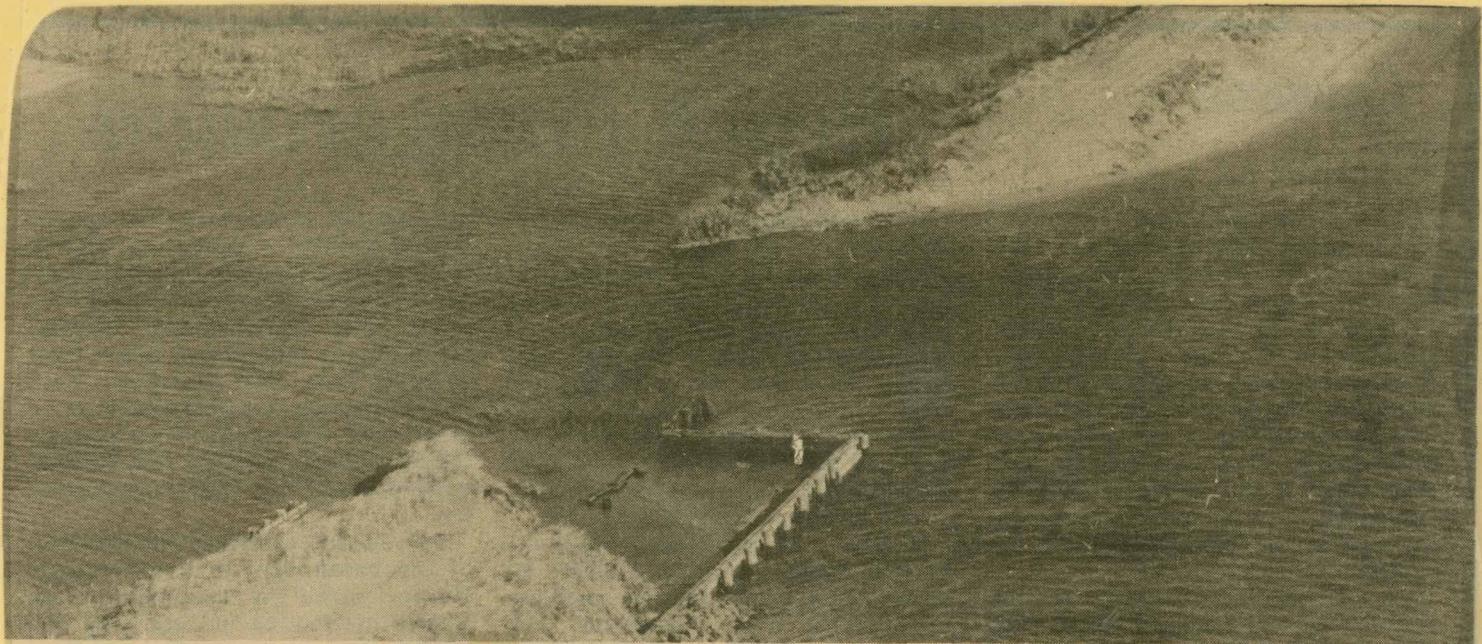
He wrote to the state Department of Environmental Quality Engineering to determine who is legally responsible for repairing the dike, which he said would cost \$10,000.

Hadley received a letter yesterday from the state Mosquito Control Project

disclaiming any responsibility.

"There's some urgency," Hadley said. "Obviously the airport can't be threatened. But I don't know if it's the Seashore's responsibility. I plan to consult my regional director in Boston on Friday."

While Seashore bureaucrats hold meetings to discuss the matter, local officials cross their fingers and hope



Hatches Harbor dike

Aerial photo by Gregory Katz, courtesy Provincetown-Boston Airlines

Utility poles that were not visible last winter now poke four or five feet out of the sand along Wood End, indicating the

accelerated erosion there. The poles, which once served Wood End and Long Point lighthouses, are not only uncovered but awash in the tide. It is an indication that the isthmus is only half as wide as it used to be.

Selectmen Chairman Mary-Jo Avellar said there are other spots, besides the cut now existing, that look like they may wash out and cause serious flooding.

"Last year pavement at the parking lot at Herring Cove collapsed and it's doing it again this year," Avellar said. "We may not have too many seasons left."

Selectman George Bryant suggested asking the Seashore to consider plugging the cut at Wood End. Seashore policy is to let nature take its course in the area. Various oceanographers claim the cut will eventually heal itself.

But Moore said there was a similar cut in the same place 16 years ago and the Seashore repaired it by bulldozing sand and using snow fences.

Hadley thinks further flooding is unlikely because it was caused by an 80- or 100-year tide. He said it was too early to tell if the entire area from Race Point to Long Point will have to be closed this summer.

"It might not be necessary," he said. The stretch of beach there is an accreting beach, not an eroding beach. This means it would naturally tend to build itself up rather than wash away.

"In time the beach will heal itself, but we can't say when," Hadley said.

Almost every Cape Cod beach suffered severe damage during this winter's two major storms.

Last week's flood breached the Hatches Harbor dike, washed out the road to Herring Cove Beach and severed Long Point from the mainland.

It left a 150-yard cut at Wood End and a 100-foot break in the dike. When the dike burst, water inundated Provincetown Airport and stopped just short of the terminal. The runway was covered with three feet of water. The runway and taxi apron now have several cracks caused by the flooding.

The airport is operating, but it was out of commission for a day. The runway will continue to be safe unless frost heaves develop in the asphalt.

Airport manager Dick Pereira said he wants the dike plugged immediately so the airport is not endangered by another flood. At high tide the airport is now completely surrounded by water. Previously, water has not been visible from the runway.

Pereira is also worried that rainwater will get into the cracks and freeze, which could result in frost heaves. The airport was flooded with salt water, which will

probably not cause serious frost heaves.

The National Seashore is responsible for maintaining the dike, the washed-out road and the cut at Wood End. Seashore Supt. Lawrence Hadley said Tuesday that an engineer from Boston would examine the damage at the dike and the road and repair work would be planned.

But Hadley said the Seashore does not intend to do anything about the cut at Wood End, which allows high tides to inundate the salt marsh. During the flood the tide came over the guardrails by the Moors and did severe damage to the Provincetown Inn.

Hadley said Seashore policy is to allow nature to take its course in cases like this. He said a University of Massachusetts engineer, Dr. Steve Leatherman, said the cut would eventually close itself naturally.

The Seashore's hands-off policy drew sharp words from Provincetown officials Monday. Town Manager Charles Cobb said the cut posed a danger to people and property in the West End. He said the Seashore thinks of the ecological consequences of its actions instead of the people consequences.

Selectmen Chairman Mary-Jo Avellar said the Seashore is taking a "cavalier"