

South end renourishment deemed a success

By [Julia Roberts](#) on Thursday, June 16, 2022



A \$15.1 million project recently placed 1.8 million cubic yards of sand on South Amelia Island. The project was conducted by the South Amelia Island Shore Stabilization Association, and funded with tax dollars and grants.

After a successful beach renourishment project, the South Amelia Island Shore Stabilization Association (SAISSA) is paying down loans it obtained using money received through state and federal grants.

Incorporated in 2000, SAISSA is a not-for-profit corporation created to manage beach renourishment projects on the south end of Amelia Island. Through an agreement with the Nassau County Board of County Commissioners, SAISSA administers the projects of the South Amelia Island Municipal Services Benefit Unit (MSBU) which undertakes and finances beach renourishment within the boundaries of the MSBU. Property owners within the boundaries of the MSBU pay an annual assessment on their property taxes to finance SAISSA.

SAISSA President Drew Wallace reported to county commissioners, which acts as the SAISSA governing board, about the 2021-22 beach renourishment on the south end. He said the project was successful, moving 1.8 million cubic yards of sand from a “borrow” site two miles offshore and placing in on the beach.

The project, which is done every eight to 10 years, added an average of 8 feet of depth to the elevation and widened the beach up to 200 feet.

Wallace said the borrow site is important, as it determines the quality of the sand placed on the beach and the distance the sand must be pumped. He said the site used in this year’s project is reusable.

“We are very excited because, for the first time, our engineers were able to create a reusable borrow site,” Wallace said. “The site will refill with Amelia Island sand to satisfy our sand needs for the foreseeable future, significantly reducing the cost of future sand services. In addition, since we will be reusing Amelia Island sand, the sand we place in future renourishments will be more compatible with our beach. Having the borrow site so close, future transportation costs will also be held to a minimum.”

Wallace said concerns about conducting the project during sea turtle nesting season were addressed. The Amelia Island Sea Turtle Watch physically relocated 47 nests, primarily to American Beach and points north as well as to Amelia State Park. Since the SAISSA beach maintenance program began in 1994, Wallace said the number of nests on the beach during nesting season has gone to less than five to 50 at the end of 2020.

SAISSA’s finances have received a boost from grants and from careful planning, Wallace said.

“We got a loan (for the 2021-22 project) for \$16.6 million. The final project costs were about \$15.1 million, direct savings of over \$1.5 million,” Wallace said. “Part of the savings came from a contingency (fund) that we included of \$1.5 million that we actually thought we might have to use as the project was winding down, but fortunately we did not have to use.” He said the county’s financial adviser was able to help the organization obtain a nine-year loan at a 1.98% fixed rate.

“This \$16.6 million loan resulted in an assessment to property owners of \$2.2 million spread over 2,200 property owners,” Wallace told the BOCC. “The \$5.5 million (loan balance after grant and excess assessment funds are applied) will result in an assessment to the property owners of about \$800,000, a reduction of 65%. What that means is that when they get their tax bills this coming November, they are going to have a significant decrease on the SAISSA line of that bill as a result of us getting this \$8.5 million in state and federal grants.

The MSBU has received \$8.5 million in grant reimbursements and expects another \$77,022.59 in June and July. State and federal grants are paying 57% of project costs and property owners, through the MSBU, will pay 43% of the project cost. In addition, a prior agreement between the county and SAISSA required the establishment of a financial reserve that could be used to fund state cost-sharing grant repayment demands, if the state determined there was a reduction in publicly accessible shoreline length and demanded repayment of such funds. A total of \$158,600.24 has been reserved from FDEP grants. This brings the total grant reimbursement up a point to 58% if the reserved percentage was authorized for this purpose.

County commissioners, acting as the SAISSA board, approved applying the grant funds toward the loan, which was unanimously approved.

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