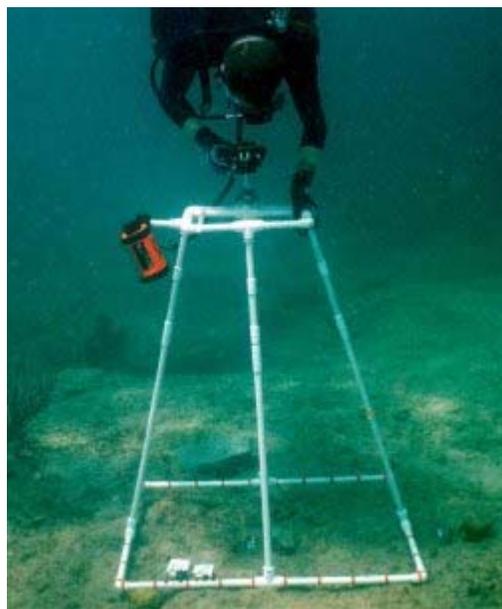


Scientists to monitor reefs, fish while Broward beaches are being replenished

By LISA J. HURIASH Sun-Sentinel
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Broward County commissioners don't want to pay an environmental price for replenishing the county's coastline.



To prevent that from happening, commissioners agreed Tuesday that scientists will monitor the reefs off Broward's coast during beach refurbishing that will pump sand, now under water, onto shore. They will make sure pipes don't break and sand isn't being pumped from the wrong spots. Researchers also will dive in the ocean to count fish to determine whether they are being harmed.

Commissioners voted to pay up to \$1.7 million over five years to Nova Southeastern University for the studies. Federal and state agencies will reimburse some of that money.

The \$43 million county project, which still needs federal and state permits to start, is slated to begin in November with the work to finish in March 2003. It will affect 12 1/2 miles in Port Everglades, Hollywood, Pompano Beach, Hallandale Beach and Fort Lauderdale.

The project will dredge sand from off shore and add it to the thinning shoreline. The intention is to create prettier beaches and a protective buffer between oceanfront buildings and the sea.

"The biggest economic impact in all of South Florida is the beach," said Lou Fisher, the county's natural resource specialist. "Our entire economy is based on the beach and tourism. If we don't have a beach for tourists to come to, the economy takes a fall."

Dick Dodge, the dean of the Oceanographic Center at Nova Southeastern, said his scientists could start studying the area as soon as late this month and continue monitoring the area years after dredging has stopped. They'll make sure the reefs, sponge and fish population are restored to normal after the beach restoration project is finished, he said.

If scientists discover adverse effects during the pumping, they can stop the project, he said. If problems are discovered after the pumping has finished, the scientists will teach officials what to do differently next time.

"We don't expect there will be" problems, he said. "But people like to be sure."

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