



Matthew Costa, president of the Highland Fish and Game Club of Provincetown, points to pictures at a public hearing on breakwater damage repair in the west end. (Staff Photo by Neil G. Nickerson)

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Army engineers will decide

Cape-tip opinions vary on breakwater repair

By NEIL G. NICKERSON

PROVINCETOWN — A hearing on whether to close or allow to remain open a large gap in the west end breakwater highlighted a meeting of selectmen Monday night in town hall.

But when the feeling of the 100 there was sought, 59 wanted the gap closed, 18 didn't, and about 20 didn't even vote.

Leo Gracie, secretary, and Matthew Costa, president of the Highland Fish and Game Club, led the discussion for the closing of the 50-foot wide gap. Francis Santos, proprietor of Flyers' Boatyard, and a former selectmen, led the group that wanted the hole to remain.

The fish and game club maintained the gap should be closed for conservation reasons or the marshes would be destroyed.

The opposition maintained the hole allowed a passage to safety for small boat owners and that the town had never done anything for the small boat owners. They said the marshes wouldn't be harmed.

Letter from Ted

Costa read letters that had passed between the club and public officials, and read the most recent notice from Army engineers by way of Sen. Kennedy, that funds are

included in this year's budget for maintenance of the breakwater.

Santos presented a petition signed by some 60 persons, mostly boat owners, who wanted the hole to remain, thus affording access to the calm beyond in case high winds.

The fish and game club quoted Col. Eugene C. Clarke, marine biologist, as much in favor of closing the gap, as the army engineers plan.

Discussion for the most part was orderly, presided over by Chairman of Selectmen Marion Taves, who allowed those wanting the hole closed first chance to talk, and then the others. He told the gathering that the opinions would be passed on to the Army engineers if they so requested. He added that frequently the engineers have asked what the public wants, but no written request for such information had been received.

Gate suggested

Town counsel Attn. John C. Snow advanced a third plan, that of the installation of a gate, which could be utilized in an emergency, so it could be opened when the time

came if needed to protect the vessels.

Santos said that in his lifetime the gap had occurred three times, because of quicksand in that particular spot. "It's about time the town did something for the boat owners," he said.

Mrs. Josephine Deldeo said she felt Snow's idea was a good one and asked how the fish and game club felt. Gracie answered that it had taken two years to get the project ready for repairs, and if it isn't done now he wasn't sure what year it would be done.

Other speaking for closing the break included William A. White, Reginald Enos, Robert Collinson, Justin Avellar and Heaton Vorse.

Others speaking for having it remain open included Joseph Andrews, Robert Cabral, Manuel Phillips, Herman Desilva and William Souza.

50,000 years

Costa said that it took 50,000 years to build the marshes, and asked that they be preserved. Santos said he was a real conservation man but said there was more marine there was in the marshy area.



South wind.

BY HEATON VORSE

Hung a bucket over the tines of my clam rake. Headed west.

As I passed the Inn there was a glimpse of the break in the dike, a gully on one side and mound on the other. Instant erosion with every tide. I reached the gate at the foot of a granite barrier and glanced down the length of its jumble of rocks. From here, the gap was not as obvious as before.

I had a sudden flash-back of standing in the same spot as a child and looking out across a mole so neatly constructed that a horse and wagon could have been driven along its top all the way to Wood End. One of the crane operators proudly explained his share in the making of the jetty to the pretty nursemaid whose hand I held. (P.S. He married the girl.) Two years later, the breakwater was no longer a level roadway and there was a dip at the point where the hole is now that was covered at high tide.

MYSTERY VISITORS

I chatted with the clam warden for a moment. As I turned to make my way to the clam beds I noticed that two people stood at the edge of the breach and were looking at it. I was sure that they hadn't been there before and since nobody had passed through the gate nor had been on the near by flats, I wondered where they had come from. Who were they? Why were they there?

I walked towards them and was soon able to recognize Beach Point Bertha. She was holding her broom upright like a spear.

The man was familiar, too. He wore an ankle-length army overcoat sizes too large for him and a broad-brimmed flat crowned hat set at a rakish angle. He was a double for the late John Gaspé, Lord of the Flats and their long-time warden.

As I came closer they heard my footsteps and turned to see who was coming.

ENCOUNTER

"Hi, kid," Bertha said. "Look who I got with me."

He turned around and shook my hand. "Hey," he said, "you look just as lousy as ever. Maybe a little worse than usual, even. You look as if you'd just seen a ghost. What's the matter with you?"

The handle of the rake slipped from my hands. It and the bucket fell to the stones and bounced down clanging from boulder to boulder till they came to rest on the flats below.

"John Gaspé," I said. "How? What? . . ."

The two of them laughed at my confusion. I started to count, beginning at 10,000 backwards in Roman numerals. It's a system I use to calm my nerves when things seem to be getting a bit beyond me. I'd reached VCCCC-LXXV when Bertha whistled sharply and made a beckoning motion. The rake and bucket sailed up from the sands and landed neatly at my feet.

"OK," I said. "I've seen that stunt pulled on television a dozen times. In just a moment, I'm going to wake up and the neither of you will be here."

NIGHTMARE, NOT DREAM

"You're not dreaming, boy," John was still laughing.

He suddenly became serious. "This is the nightmare. This is the nightmare. It's worse than I thought." He nodded his head in the direction of the crevasses at his feet. "Bertha brought me up and flew me over from Iceland to take a look at it. It's worse than I thought. Something's got to be done about it."

Iceland. Hekla. The nearest active volcano. Things were beginning to get reasonable again. At least I knew where John had come from. Then John set things swooping again.

"I know what you're thinking," he said. "I was at the other place and it was nice. Too nice. Things were much too regular. So I moved. The weather ain't so good, but I see a lot more of my friends."

The three of us watched the

stream pouring out through the gully and as we talked, we could observe all too obviously that this one break served to destroy the whole purpose of the dike.

RUSH OF WATERS

Waters from every part of the marsh and tide flat seemed to want to pour themselves through the gap and in their hurry, they carried everything along with them: sand, mud, weed, small fish and crabs, flotsam of every sort. New channels were being formed in the stands of salt grass, all converging on this one opening.

"This hole has to be stopped up right away," John said. "This whole area is changing from week to week. From day to day. A lot of rock has to be put in here quickly. It takes nature a thousand years to make a marshland like this. Five thousand years. Ten thousand years. But it only takes a change in the flow of the tide, one catastrophe like this one to destroy the whole thing in a matter of months.

"It's like an egg. It's firm. It's solid. It's productive. But once the shell is broken—"

The old clam warden was silent for a while. "Productive," he went on. "Productive. People don't realize how rich a marshland like this place can be."

THE RICH "FARM"

"A salt marsh," I said, quoting from a book on conservation, "produces two and a half times as much protein as an equal area of farmland planted in wheat."

"You and your sticksticksticks. Let John do the talking," Bertha said.

"He's right, he's right," John said. "Just because people can't come out here and get stuff like they pull carrots out of a garden or berries off a bush they forget that it's worth anything.

"But they come out here and dig clams, don't they? What do they think the clams live on? And the crabs and all the little fish that feed the bigger fish that

feed the cod fish? And the stripers? Smell that."

A soft wind blew from the salt hay fields bringing a sour but not unpleasant smell of decay. "That's the breath of life, boy. That's where things begin. That's God's hand creating life."

ROCKS NO ANSWER

John turned and abruptly changed the subject. I think he had been rather startled by his own emotional outburst. "But just putting more rock in here won't do no good in the long run. They could put half the state of Vermont here and it would just go down the drain.

The engineers, they guys who put this here in the first place have got to find a way to fix it. They must." He fell into a study.

"Sorry," Bertha said, "But we gotta get goin' back. Come on, John. Hold on tight." The both straddled the broom and quite suddenly they weren't there. But I'm almost sure I heard John's voice call back:

"Good sailing."

Cape-tip sports group urges breakwater work

PROVINCETOWN — Highland Fish and Game club members have expressed concern about the large hole in the west end breakwater, and went on record of favoring the repairing the gap.

Also, considered was the large hole in the north section of the breakwater, which was erected many years ago to prevent the harbor from filling in with eroding sand from the wooded beach and flats area.

A public hearing has been called by Provincetown selectmen for Dec. 8 to determine whether or not the townspeople in general want this gap closed, or whether they want it to remain open and serve as an access to the calm waters beyond in case of storms.

Need repairs

At the club meeting Sunday night, members said they would like to see this large hole in the breakwater repaired, that the break is now so deep that small craft can pass over the rocks even at low tide.

Club members said extreme damage was being caused to the marsh, clam flats, the breakwater itself and the shoaling of the west end of the harbor.

Sportsmen claim that each year the damage grows worse, and have written the selectmen urging they use their influence to have the army engineers arrange for prompt repairs.

Pond preservation urged

Regarding a track of land turned over to the town by the state, along the north side of Rte. 6, members agreed that the area abutting Clapp's Pond should be preserved in its natural state, and should be so zoned.

In other matters at the meeting, Richard Strange, national seashore ranger, said that during deer week, the first full week in December, if there exists a hardship in moving bagged deer from some distance in the woods, the park service

will assist. He requested the club members' co-operation regarding existing park rules.

The club president announced the next meeting of the Barnstable County League of Sportsmen's clubs will be held Thursday at 7:30 p.m. at the Falmouth rod and gun club.

Barrier battle due at Cape-tip

By NEIL NICKERSON

PROVINCETOWN — Indications are that Army engineers intend to make needed repairs on the west end breakwater early next year, the Highland Fish and Game Club of Provincetown has revealed.

Matthew Costa, president of the club, said he heard from U. S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, that Army engineers have assured him they will go ahead with repairs in 1970 and the contract would be awarded sometime in May.

This has been a subject of discussion for some time, and an open hearing is set for Monday night, along with the regular meeting of the selectmen, as to how the townspeople feel about it. The session will be held at 8 p.m. in Town Hall.

Protection during storms

Selectmen a month ago in-

dicated they felt that the break in the breakwater should remain, allowing small boats to go through into the protection beyond during storms.

However, a flood of protests have been registered by the fish and game club and other conservationists, to the effect that to keep the breakwater breached, would destroy the marshland.

Costa said that the boat owners use the area because it's there, but indicated that most would be glad to keep their vessels elsewhere, if the breakwater could be repaired.

Club to met

The fish and game club will meet Sunday night, when the matter will be discussed at length.

Costa said he expects a large crowd to attend the hearing, to voice their feelings, one way or another.

Failure to save marsh at Cape-tip 'is suicide'

By NEIL G. NICKERSON

PROVINCETOWN — The west end breakwater "must be repaired," and any delay will result in additional destruction to the marsh and continued shoaling of the west end of the harbor.

These statements are part of a letter from the Highland Fish and Game Club of Provincetown to the Provincetown Board of Selectmen, and made public today.

Marine biologists have proven beyond any doubt the need and value of a marsh, "for when a marsh is damaged or lost, and the ecology disrupted, fish become more scarce. To a marine biologist, the willful destruction of a marsh is a suicidal act by a fishing port," the letter stated.

Contract planned

The club has contacted the selectmen before about this problem, and then sent letters to Congressman Hastings Keith and the two U.S. senators. A letter received by the club early this month from Keith in-

dicated that engineers planned to contract for the repairs during this fiscal year, probably early in 1970.

Selectmen indicated there was some doubt in their minds as to whether or not the majority of townspeople wanted the breakwater repaired — because of the use of the break and the calm areas beyond for safety of boats during high winds and storms. They have set a public hearing for Dec. 8 to get the feeling of the public on the question.

This hearing will be in conjunction with the regular selectmen's meeting. A large crowd is expected, since the question has received much attention since the last selectmen's meeting.

Text of the letter, signed by Matthew J. Costa, club president, in part follows:

"It is not only our firm belief but in the best opinion of marine biologist and Corps of Army Engineers representatives who have made area inspections with us that the west end breakwater must be re-

paired. Delay in repairs will result in additional destruction of our marsh and continued shoaling of the west end of our harbor.

Need 'beyond doubt'

"Marine biologists have proved beyond any doubt the need and value of a marsh, for when a marsh is damaged or lost and the ecology disrupted, fish become more scarce. To a marine biologist, the willful destruction of a marsh is a suicidal act by a fishing port.

"Aerial inspections show the shoaling fast spreading to the east, covering our shellfish bed at an alarming rate. This was brought to our attention by our shellfish warden over a year ago.

"We have been strongly advised of the reason and need of the erection of this breakwater years ago when the value of stabilization of this area was first recognized. We do not think any of us has the right to stand in the way of affecting these repairs.

"We hope you gentlemen will support repairs to this breakwater, thus heeding the warnings of biologists and marine engineers. We do not think you selectmen will ignore the warnings of consulted specialists and thereby go on record as supporting the repairs on the west end breakwater and proceed along the line that this situation has become an emergency.

"If any doubt remains in your minds tonight regarding our sincere effort to do what is right, we then urge you selectmen to consult with professionals in the field of marine biology and marine engineering, before passing judgment, as we have done."









