



## **Pyramids for preservation**

**Conservation organization places wave reduction devices to help protect delicate, endangered ecosystem**

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**By RUSS HENDERSON**

**Staff Reporter**

DAUPHIN ISLAND -- Fishermen stared Wednesday as they motored their boats past yellow earth-moving machinery slowly lowering massive concrete pyramids into the water near Alonzo Landing, the busiest boat landing on Mobile County's populated barrier island.

"Looks like they're protecting the island from the alien navy," said Branford Ford, 42, after he pulled his 15-foot boat onto its truck-hauled trailer. Ford hadn't noticed that the waves from his boat approached the pyramids, then broke up.

The structures, called wave attenuation devices, are part of an effort by coastal conservationists and the island government to protect the 25-acre salt marsh that neighbors the landing. The marsh is the larger of the two remaining on the island.

In the past five years, persistent waves from the busy landing have eroded about an acre from the eastern edge of the marsh, said LaDon Swann, director of the Mississippi/Alabama Sea Grant Consortium. The wave attenuation project was Swann's idea.

"We need to be more proactive about conservation. We're always trying to fix major problems, when we should be preventing them in the first place," Swann said. "This is an effort to do that."

Workers placed about half of the 182 concrete objects along the edge of the marsh on Tuesday, and the other half should be in place by this morning, Swann said. Over the next few weeks, a local volunteer will plant 1,200 cordgrass plants along the marsh's edge, behind the concrete objects, Swann said.

"That should stabilize the beach very well," he said.

Swann said he came up with the idea for the project about 18 months ago. Six months later, he'd received a \$38,000 grant from the Gulf of Mexico Foundation. The Mississippi/Alabama Sea Grant Consortium matched that with another \$25,000. The consortium is a partnership of federal agencies and universities focused on conservation and sustainable development along the Gulf Coast.

The town of Dauphin Island also spent \$33,000 to remove sunken vessels from the marsh beach, he said.

Town Councilman Mike Tafra said his 16-year-old son, Michael Tafra Jr., has volunteered to plant the cordgrass plugs. The junior at McGill-Toolen Catholic High School and avid Boy Scout hopes to use the project to fulfill community service requirements to earn the rank of Eagle, the elder Tafra said.

"It sounded like a good thing to do. Plus, I fish down there, and I'd be protecting those natural resources," Michael Tafra Jr. said. He said Swann had invited him last year to take part in the project.

The wetlands are owned by the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The town of Dauphin Island first purchased the wetland acres from a local landowner in 2003, then sold the property to the state. The state, in April 2003 leased the land to the town for \$10 for 50 years.

Later this year, the Sea Grant plans to begin another project at the boat landing -- a 200-foot wooden walkway that will extend from the current public bathrooms to an observation deck over the wetlands, Swann said.

That project will be funded by \$10,000 from Bridgestone-Firestone Inc. and \$10,000 from the coastal projects division of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

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