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UNH Economist to Determine Value of Erosion Control Methods

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NH and Maine Residents Will Evaluate Cost, Benefit and Consequence of Holding Beaches in Place

By Amy Callahan
UNH News Bureau

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DURHAM, N.H. -- Jetties and seawalls along the coast of New Hampshire and Maine are evidence of the struggle to prevent the inevitable: beach erosion. But while methods to control the natural displacement of coastal sand have long been in use, only now is the economic value of these efforts being measured.

Ju-Chin Huang, an economist at the University of New Hampshire's Whittemore School of Business and Economics, this summer will send surveys to random residents of New Hampshire and Maine seeking their views on the costs and effects of erosion control methods.

"Erosion control is not something you can purchase in the marketplace, and different erosion control programs will have an impact on beaches in multiple ways," Huang, assistant professor of economics, explains. "We need to come up with some measurement of the economic value of erosion control and the positive and negative consequences of those efforts."

The survey will determine the importance of several factors related to erosion control, including public safety, beach use, water quality, protection of wildlife, preservation of beachfront property and the public's level of awareness of beach erosion.

This research is being conducted with Professor Joan Poor at the University of Maine with funding from the NH/Maine Sea Grant College Program of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and UNH's Office of the Vice President for Research and Public Service.

Beach erosion is a naturally occurring phenomenon, and geologists estimate that in 60 years, 25 percent of the houses along the coast of Maine will succumb to the encroaching sea. Because issues of beach preservation, property values, coastal-related business and state

funding are integral to the discussion of erosion control, Huang argues that an economist's input is critical.

"Eventually, economics is involved," she says, noting that everything related to oceanfront development and erosion involves a cost. "We're talking about big money," she says.

But Huang points out that a community's value of a stretch of beach should not be measured exclusively by marketplace factors such as property sales figures and business revenues.

"The survey is more of an overall value. For example, just because someone doesn't go to the beaches or use them currently, does not mean they won't go in the future or that they don't value beach preservation and wildlife habitat," she says.

Accordingly, the survey is complex and will require each recipient to evaluate different erosion control methods and varying possible impacts. The survey will be sent in late July and early August to 1,200 residents--600 in Maine and 600 in New Hampshire.

For further information on the economics of erosion control, contact Ju-Chin Huang at (603) 862-3279 or email at jchuang@cisunix.unh.edu.

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