

[From Summer 2003]

## **Coping with Barrier Island Dynamics**

Visitors may have noticed that the Swan Cove Trail has been closed this spring due to on-going repair work. The President's Day storm that caused extensive damage to the beach parking lots also took its toll on the southern end of the trail leading into parking lot 1. Shortly after the storm, an assessment by refuge staff determined that approximately 0.8 miles of the trail had been buried, damaged or destroyed. Following this initial impairment, a constant battery of spring nor'easters combined with full or new moons proceeded to compound the damage throughout the spring. Aware of the likelihood of continual storm problems, the Refuge chose to ride out the turbulent spring before starting restoration work.

Repairs were initiated in early May, in time to reopen for the Memorial Day holiday weekend. The Refuge and National Park Service (NPS) shared equipment, staff and materials in a joint endeavor to repair the parking lots and bike trail. Fortunately, portions of the trail only required removal of several feet of sand. In addition, staff hauled in approximately 20 loads of clay and sandstone to replace the materials that had been washed out. This material was spread, packed and leveled to complete the job.



Despite the completion of trail repairs prior to Memorial Day Weekend, the Refuge was unable to reopen the trail due to continued construction work being performed on parking lot 1 by the NPS. Refuge staff returned the favor by lending equipment and manpower to the NPS to help complete parking lot 1 as soon as possible.

As many as 1000 bicyclists may visit the Refuge on a busy summer day. The Refuge views the Swan Cove Trail as an important avenue for shunting bicyclists away from the heavily congested Beach Road. To serve this function, plans are underway to construct a new, replacement bike trail that will parallel Beach Road trail leading from the Herbert H. Bateman Educational and Administrative Center to the beach parking lots. Upon completion of this new trail, scheduled for 2004, the Swan Cove Trail will be removed.

This will allow the dynamic coastal island forces that have shaped Assateague Island over the centuries to restore the wildlife habitat behind the ever shifting barrier beach.

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