

W A special town meeting will ask Chatham voters whether they want to spend \$2 million to dredge sand back into the new inlet.

Opening argument

Town divided; permits to take time

By **ROBIN LORD**
STAFF WRITER

CHATHAM—The National Park Service is against it. Orleans to the north is skeptical. And Chatham residents are saying it's the most divisive issue to come along in years.

With the controversy swirling like a roiling surf, the selectmen last night voted to let town meeting decide whether to plug a new inlet in North Beach.

The selectmen called a July 30 special town meeting that will ask voters whether they want to spend about \$2 million to dredge sand back into the inlet, which broke through the barrier beach during April's northeaster. The breach has opened much of the opposite mainland shore to more intense Atlantic surf and threatens the town's harbor with extensive shoaling.

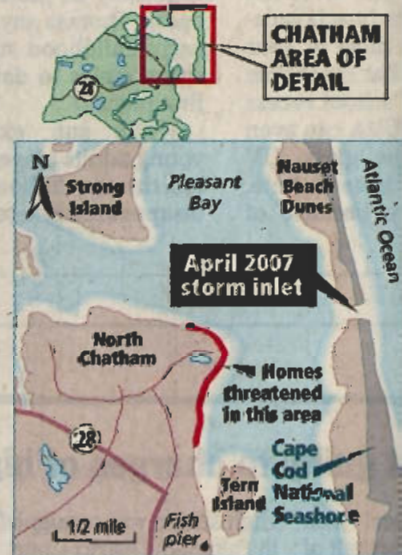
A second question will ask town meeting voters to spend about \$150,000 for an in-depth "threat assessment" of what kind of effects the new, or any subsequent, break in the barrier beach could bring.



STEVE HEASLIP photos/Cape Cod Times
A boater navigates the choppy waters of Chatham Harbor across from the newly created break in North Beach yesterday, seen from the town landing at Scatterree Road.



Two large homes are directly across Chatham Harbor from the new inlet. The breach also threatens the harbor with extensive shoaling.



STAFF/Cape Cod Times

Please see **BREACH /A-6** 6/13/07

Breach: It's up to voters

continued from A-1

A third, nonbinding question will ask voters whether they philosophically agree with filling the breach, but are opposed to spending the money.

A town election to exempt the beach repair money from Proposition 2½ constraints would be necessary if town meeting approves filling the breach. The money would add about one cent to the tax rate, according to Town Manager William Hinchey.

If the project is approved, state and federal permitting authorities will not be granting any emergency permits to speed up the process, Coastal Resources Director Ted Keon told the selectmen. During a meeting at the Statehouse in Boston on Monday, representatives of the state and federal agencies that would have to consider the project told Keon permits could take up to one year to obtain. The agencies represented Monday included the Army Corps of Engineers, National Marine Fisheries Service and the state Department of Environmental Protection,

The National Park Service, which owns the land in which the inlet was formed, perhaps poses the biggest hurdle, Keon said. The agency, which prohibits interfering with overwashes on its land, would require an environmental impact statement, which would take eight months to a year to complete, Keon said.

There have been past instances in which barrier beach inlets on National Seashore property were filled.

In 2003, the federal government and state of North Carolina scrambled to plug a quarter-mile breach that formed in Cape Hatteras National Seashore during Hurricane Isabel. The \$7 million Army Corps of Engineers project started just two months after the storm. However, the North Carolina case differs from the Chatham predicament because Hurricane Isabel cut an inlet through a state highway along the Outer Banks and stranded the town of Hatteras Village, according to Michael Murray, superintendent of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore.

"It would be like a breach at Pilgrim Lake in Truro that cut off Provincetown," said Murray, who was deputy superintendent of the Cape Cod National Seashore from 1997 to 2005.

After last night's selectmen's meeting, several representatives of Save Our Shoreline, a group of property owners in the area opposite the new inlet, said they are prepared to pay for half of the beach repair project.

"We are aware (the \$2 million) is a difficult threshold," said Richard Miller, whose house fronts Chatham Harbor south of the new inlet.

Gerald Milden, whose house is one of the closest structures to the new break, said Save Our Shoreline has compiled research showing 132 threatened houses at risk are valued at \$360 million and generate \$1.3 million in annual real estate taxes. The town would lose a substantial amount in taxes if property values decrease, he said.

Robin Lord can be reached at rlord@capecodonline.com.