

Posted on Mon, Sep. 18, 2006

[email this](#) [print this](#) [reprint or license this](#)**ISLAND UNDER FIRE****Round Island's future up for debate**By KAREN NELSON  
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**PASCAGOULA** - No one is giving up on Round Island, its beach erosion and toppled lighthouse... yet.

But storm after storm has beaten down efforts, and Katrina dealt a disheartening blow by wiping out all the years of previous work by the city, county and FEMA. There's even talk about moving the lighthouse to the mainland, a 2½-mile trip.

"For now we're just going to give up," said Steve Oivanki, formerly with Compton

Engineering, the company that worked on the projects for the county. "The storms are too frequent."

The county plans to reappropriate the last \$5,000 it had designated for Round Island erosion control, originally a \$35,000 project.

Pascagoula owns the portion of the island washing away, located on its eastern side. The section also holds the lighthouse.

The vegetation that volunteers and workers planted to hold the beach and soil in place doesn't have time to take root.

Hurricane Georges toppled the lighthouse in 1998. The federal government helped right its base and install around it a protective metal wall driven 60 to 80 feet into the subsurface. Thirteen acres of beach were created and workers planted erosion protection.

Despite the efforts, Hurricane Ivan and subsequent tropical storms wiped the island clean, Oivanki said.

Then Katrina issued a devastating blow to the island. The storm's waters not only cut into the acreage, but also toppled the lighthouse base inside its protective caisson by rushing inside the protective wall and scouring out its supporting sand.

"There's no hope of establishing erosion protection on such a low-lying island," he said. "FEMA agrees that it may not be worth the effort to replant again."

The thing that would help most with beach erosion, Oivanki said, is to complete a 700- to 800-foot gap in the breakwater near the island. That could easily be a FEMA mitigation or tidelands project, he said. He sees that coming.

He said FEMA also would consider trying to right the toppled lighthouse base, but local officials need to determine whether that's the route they want to take, he said.

Oivanki said he doesn't think Pascagoula is interested in trying to rebuild the lighthouse on the island under those conditions.



(Submitted Photo/Compton Engineering)

Hurricane Katrina cut into Round Island and toppled the historic lighthouse base inside its protective metal wall. The storm destroyed previous preservation work done over the years by the city, county and FEMA.

Betty Bensey, the city's grants coordinator, said the city believes Round Island is important in part because it protects the mainland. She sees the city continuing to replenish the beach and perhaps moving the lighthouse to the mainland, but does not have the project high on any priority list, she said.

Pascagoula was hit hard by Katrina's surge and recovery for homeowners, businesses and parks on the mainland takes precedence right now.

#### **Rebuild it off the island?**

Bensey said pieces of the lighthouse recovered after Georges are stored on the mainland.

Since the city plans to develop The Point's barren lands at the west end of Beach Boulevard into a community center and park, the notion of moving the lighthouse to the mainland has come up again.

Supervisor Tim Brossard mentioned the possibility to the rest of the board last week, but didn't say whether he supported the idea or not. Several lighthouses on the East Coast have been moved.

Bruce Parker, former chairman of the Round Island Lighthouse Preservation Society, which sprang up after the structure was toppled, said moving it is not a good idea for several reasons.

"I know a lot of people who don't have boats want to see it moved to The Point," Parker said. "But would you move the Biloxi Lighthouse to a theme park on Interstate 10?"

Moving it could jeopardize its historical significance and chances for recognition and funding, he said.

Parker said its name alone denotes where the lighthouse should stand.

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