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Administrative Law Judge Rules Illegal Seawall Must Come Down

On Oct. 23, 2025, the South Carolina Administrative Law Court issued a Final Order requiring that a seawall illegally constructed on Isle of Palms must come down. The case stems from Rom Reddy's construction of two hard erosion control structures, consisting of concrete, rebar, foam, and other non-beach compatible materials, between September 2023 and February 2024, without any permit, and despite three cease and desist orders issued by the Department of Environmental Services (DES).

The South Carolina Environmental Law Project, on behalf of the Coastal Conservation League, intervened in Reddy's appeal of the enforcement order issued by the DES for the installation of a hard erosion control structure on Isle of Palms. A five-day trial was held in the spring of 2025.

Judge Ralph King Anderson issued his order recognizing that Reddy's illegal construction of a seawall has had a deleterious effect on the public beach and will continue to negatively impact the public interest if not removed. In his order, Anderson recognized that erosion control structures "have increased the vulnerability of beachfront property to damage from wind and waves while contributing to the deterioration and loss of the dry sand beach which is so important to the tourism industry." He concluded that "it is evident that hard erosion control devices are generally regarded in this State as harmful to the coastal environment, particularly when placed in close proximity and/or adjacent to the beach and the beach/dune system." While Reddy disputed that the seawall has or will adversely affect the public's interest, Judge Anderson said, "I respectfully disagree."

Instead, Judge Anderson agreed with the Coastal Conservation League and DES that this seawall harms the beach by causing scour, accelerating erosion, and leading to an increased deterioration of the adjacent beach. He ruled that “in cases such as here, where a beach continues to erode, structures like Respondent’s [Reddy] cause a loss of dry sand in adjacent areas — a consequence which will result in further loss of public access laterally along the beach past the structure. . . It is the fundamental responsibility of the Department, and therefore this Court, to protect the public’s interest in the coastal zone.”

“This Order affirms the General Assembly’s declaration that seawalls adjacent to the beach have not proven effective, and instead contribute to the deterioration of the dry sand beach. The law is clear that erosion is a natural process which becomes a significant problem for man only when structures are erected in close proximity to the beach/dune system,” said Senior Managing Attorney Leslie Lenhardt.

Coastal Conservation League Executive Director Faith Rivers James said, “The court affirmed South Carolina’s longstanding policy designed to protect and promote access to the public beach. We are pleased that the court is requiring the homeowner to submit a corrective action plan to remove.”

The Administrative Law Judge struck down the fine imposed by DES, which the League and SCELPA warn may embolden others like Reddy to construct illegal seawalls, but say that the Judge’s important findings about the negative impact this construction has had on the public beach and those citizens who use it will be a valuable tool for beachfront management going forward.