

The New York Times

## N.Y./Region Opinions

 Opinion
  All NYT

Search

WORLD U.S. N.Y. / REGION BUSINESS TECHNOLOGY HEALTH SPORTS OPINION ARTS STYLE TRAVEL JOBS REAL ESTATE AUTOS

EDITORIALS COLUMNISTS CONTRIBUTORS LETTERS N.Y./REGION OPINIONS READERS' OPINIONS THE PUBLIC EDITOR

LONG ISLAND

[More Articles in Opinion »](#)

## Save the Lighthouse: Move It

Published: November 19, 2006

The ground around the Montauk Point Lighthouse is crumbling, and if nothing is done, a powerful storm may someday rob us of a historical jewel and beloved tourist attraction, a monument that dates to George Washington's day and is perhaps the greatest symbol of Long Island, if you don't count the Big Duck of Flanders.

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL THIS

PRINT

SAVE

ARTICLE TOOLS

SPONSORED BY

THE LAST KING OF SCOTLAND

NOW PLAYING

[As Corey Kilgannon of The Times revealed last week](#), the United States Army Corps of Engineers has a plan. The plan involves boulders, to be placed in a wall, 840 feet long and 40 feet thick, like a dental cap on Long Island's easternmost incisor. The project would cost \$14 million and protect the lighthouse from the kind of giant storm that occurs once every 73 years.

The plan was moving along until strong objections were raised by the Surfrider Foundation, an environmental advocacy group, speaking on behalf of members who cluster under the lighthouse at a famed surfing spot called Alamo. The group conducted a study and concluded that all those boulders would ruin the waves at Alamo and possibly another spot nearby.

This would be a catastrophe for surfers, who flock to Montauk from all over the world. The group has offered an alternative: leave Montauk Point alone and move the lighthouse to higher ground, 800 feet away, a job estimated to cost \$27 million.

The Corps and its local allies say that moving the lighthouse would be too expensive, too difficult, maybe impossible.

It is beyond our ability to say which side's science is the more defensible. But it seems entirely reasonable, if not painfully obvious, to say that the Surfrider plan sounds fundamentally better than that of the Corps, which reflects a dated, discredited philosophy and sends exactly the wrong message about how to deal with coastal erosion.

Bitter experience up and down the Atlantic coast has proved repeatedly that shore hardening, as the tactic is known, can be a short-sighted, wasteful strategy that meddles in natural processes and often makes erosion worse. It is the general and inexorable habit of sand in this region to move from east to west. Trap the sand on this beach and you starve that one. Yes, you can dump ever more boulders and sand on a problem. It gives the engineers something to do and allows politicians to leave problems to future budget periods.

The victories, however, are always short-term.

We also find dubious the claim that moving the lighthouse is impossible, given all the other historic lighthouses — on Block Island and on Cape Hatteras and Cape Cod — that have been shifted successfully. Add global warming and rising sea levels to this equation, and the Surfrider argument becomes powerful, if not compelling.

The best argument for moving the lighthouse to high ground is that it takes the problem forever out of the realm of stopgap solutions and disputed erosion studies. It benefits everyone. It gives us all the luxury of being able to forget about stopping the ocean ever

again. We should save the lighthouse, but we should save it only once.

[More Articles in Opinion »](#)

**Related Articles**

- For Montauk, It's Lighthouse vs. Surf's Up! (November 14, 2006)
- It's Surfers vs. Turf as Long Beach Votes on Plan to Build New Dunes (May 4, 2006)
- IN BRIEF; Shoreline Study to Continue, Senator Clinton Says (June 13, 2004)
- Different Fight, Same Battleground (May 23, 2004)

**Related Searches**

- Long Island (NY)
- Army Corps of Engineers
- Oceans
- Kilgannon, Corey

**INSIDE NYTIMES.COM**



**TimesSelect**



Applebome: Bracing for Flood No. 4

MEDIA & ADVERTISING »

### Coming Up, Transition at 30 Rock

Imagining NBC Universal without Bob Wright.

TRAVEL »



T Travel Magazine: The New Frontiers

MAGAZINE »



What China's Doing in Africa

**TimesSelect**

### Roberts: Nascar Wants Its Roar to Join the Jackhammers

ARTS »



I Remember Magritte

[Home](#) | [World](#) | [U.S.](#) | [N.Y. / Region](#) | [Business](#) | [Technology](#) | [Science](#) | [Health](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Arts](#) | [Style](#) | [Travel](#) | [Job Market](#) | [Real Estate](#) | [Automobiles](#) | [Back to Top](#)

Copyright 2006 The New York Times Company | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [RSS](#) | [First Look](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Work for Us](#) | [Site Map](#)