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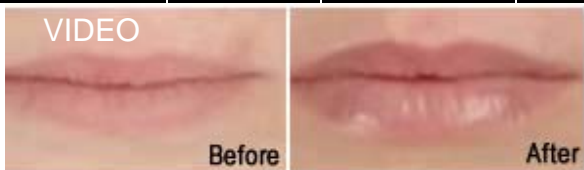
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Fire Island's Future in Question After Hurricane Sandy Leaves Destruction Behind

Travelers Today By [Katie McFadden](#)

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Damaged house is seen after Hurricane Sandy passed through in the greatly affected community of Atlantique on Fire Island, New York.(Photo : Reuters)

Fire Island's future is in question after Hurricane Sandy's surge attacked the island off of New York head on, destroying properties, lives and its protective dunes. However residents and visitors are counting their blessings

and hoping to rebuild the 32-mile-long barrier island again.

The surge created by Hurricane Sandy destroyed 200 homes and destroyed the protective sand dunes around the island, but it could have been worse. Over 4,000 structures survived the storm and can be repaired and many are thanking the 10- 20 foot dunes for that.

"The dunes were demolished, but without their protection it would have been much worse," Malcolm Bowman, a professor of physical oceanography at Stony Brook University told the [Associated Press](#).

The dunes clearly made an impact as they no longer lie among the beaches, but within the streets of the island. The sand of the dunes covers the streets and properties up to half a mile away from the ocean. Sandy diminished the sand structures, leaving properties vulnerable to future destruction, but there is no doubt that the dunes helped protect much of the island.

Fire Island is a vacation hotspot for many New Yorkers. It is accessible by ferry only and lies five miles off the south of Long Island. There are only 300 permanent residents on the island, but it attracts nearly 75,000 visitors during the summer who rent homes and bungalows. It is a little slice of paradise where cars are not welcome and bikes are the main form of transportation.

Hurricane Sandy attacked Fire Island nearly four weeks ago, but many residents and property owners have only been able to inspect the damage within the past week.

Many were shocked to see the condition of the island where nine homes were totally demolished and 200 more received severe damage.

"Decimated," Ocean Beach store owner Kenny Goodman told AP. When he saw the damage that was done to his store, he said he was "really overwhelmed and sad - it's just a gigantic loss."

One of the major concerns of the residents and visitors is having the dunes rebuilt.

"We haven't got any protection now," Retired electrical contractor Hyman Portnoy, whose house was damaged, told AP. "I'd be satisfied with anything. I'd be satisfied with a pile."

The dunes are so important that the property taxes of many homeowners goes towards maintaining the dunes. However Suzy Goldhirsch, president of the Fire Island Association, which represents businesses and homeowners, expects the federal government to fund some of the dune restoration projects since the dunes are so necessary to protecting the island. Those in Hurricane Katrina areas also received federal funding to help restore the area.

The dune restoration project has already begun as workers are picking up the sand from the community and piling it back into dunes on the beaches.

While residents have many lost a lot, they're determined to rebuild Fire Island in some way.

"It will be different. Maybe by my grandchildren's time it will be back," Goodman told AP. "It won't be like it was."

Not every area will be able to be rebuilt and federal, state, county, town and local will work together to determine what can be fixed and how to go about doing it.

"It's part of a new national dialogue," Goldhirsch told AP. "The governor has said he wants to rebuild smarter and better, and I think we have to think about how we are going to do this so it's better in the future. We have a lot to think about; there are no easy answers, no one answer."

Bowman said a long-term will have to be set to try to repair the area as it is no quick fix.

"Not just a rapid-fire reaction to a catastrophe; this is going to happen again," Bowman said. "Some of these things are going to be very expensive decisions, and we need a longer perspective."

While Hurricane Sandy caused destruction in the area, the storm also uncovered some treasures. With the dunes being washed away, [a post-Civil War ship was totally uncovered on the beach.](#)

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