

New NC island was expected to eventually disappear, but not like this

July 28 2017, by Mark Price, The Charlotte Observer

North Carolina's new island may not be an island much longer.

The 50-yard channel that separated Shelly Island from Hatteras Island is filling in so quickly with sand that it's now only inches deep at low tide, and getting more shallow by the day, federal officials say.

Just a few weeks ago, visitors had to swim to the island in waters that got more than 6 feet deep at high tide. In the past week, they've begun walking and not getting their ankles wet.

Cape Hatteras National Seashore Superintendent Dave Hallac said Hatteras Island and Shelly Island are now connected at low tide, and he said it's possible the once swiftly flowing channel of water will fill in completely.

That's not to say the mile-long island—or sandbar, as sticklers prefer—is here to stay, he said. A really big storm could still wash it away.

Meanwhile, Hallac is looking into who would have official ownership of Shelly Island once it's connected to the Cape Hatteras National Seashore. The island is currently under the control of Dare County.

"It's exciting and fun to talk about, but not all that surprising," said Hallac. "You think about the iconic national parks out west, and people go back to those places time and again, counting on seeing the same thing ... Here, it's dynamic. People come here because it's constantly

changing and this is an example of that."

Hallac said he isn't sure how deep the channel remains at high tide, which is why park officials are still warning island visitors to take some kind of floatation device during visits.

NASA photos released this month show the mile-long slip of land began forming last November and came to the world's attention in April. It was originally considered dangerous to visit the island, because the channel separating it from Hatteras Island was filled with swift waters, sharks and stingrays.

Even more disconcerting, a World War II training device resembling a torpedo washed up on shore, causing an evacuation on July 14.

Hallac said he's not concerned with the ongoing debate about whether the island should be dismissed as just another sandbar.

He understands the world's fascination with it.

"I was there Monday and it's a wonderland," said Hallac. "On the east side, you have a new series of waves breaking at low [tide](#), and I saw a dozen surfers getting incredible rides. At the north end, there were kite surfers zipping across the water. And all across the island, I saw 100 people with small bags and pails, collecting shells. It's remarkable."

©2017 The Charlotte Observer (Charlotte, N.C.)

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: New NC island was expected to eventually disappear, but not like this (2017, July 28) retrieved 5 October 2025 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-07-nc-island-eventually.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.