Orrin H. Pilkey, Jr., Dinesh C. Sharma, Harold R. Wanless, Larry J. Doyle, Orrin H. Pilkey, Sr., William J. Neal, and Barbara L. Gruver
Living with the East Florida shore
Living with the shore

Series editors
Orrin H. Pilkey, Jr.
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The beaches are moving: the drowning of America's shoreline,
new edition
Wallace Kaufman and Orrin H. Pilkey, Jr.

Living with the West Florida shore
Larry J. Doyle, Dinesh C. Sharma, Albert C. Hine, Orrin H. Pilkey, Jr.,
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Living with the East Florida shore

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Foreword

During the 1920s, that anomalous period of American history when consumption of alcohol was forbidden by law, a great deal of illicit booze entered the country across the beaches of Florida. Prosperous Palm Beach was a community with a great thirst for illegal liquids, and as a consequence there were frequent flurries of late-night clandestine activity on local beaches. Young John Rybovich, later to become famous as the builder of the country’s premier yachts, made the magnificent sum of $15 per night by giving a helping hand. Rybovich and other young men of the island carried burlap bag after burlap bag of whiskey and beer from small boats bobbing in the surf, across the beach, through a tunnel under the road, and up to the beautiful mansion whose owner was conveniently absent. There cars and limousines waited to speed through the night and deliver their precious loads to thirsty customers.

The task of hauling booze across the beach was hard work. The beach was a lot wider in those days than it is now. Today, in many stretches of Palm Beach, the crates of booze could probably be transferred almost directly from a boat to a car parked on a road atop a seawall or revetment. Like many stretches of South Florida shoreline, the beaches of Palm Beach are a mere shadow of what they once were. They have disappeared for two reasons: buildings were built too close to the beach, and the eroding shoreline caught up with the houses. Beach erosion, which is caused by a variety of natural processes including a rise in sea level, is affecting all of Florida. Twenty-story condominiums, unheard of in John Rybovich’s youth, are hugging the shoreline from Jacksonville Beach to Miami Beach, and more and more beaches are getting narrower and narrower.

Still, there are many miles of East Florida shoreline where beaches are broad and beautiful and the vista of the sea is unencumbered by seawalls and groins. The beautiful beaches are a primary reason for Florida’s unprecedented growth and prosperity. Today, beach-front property is at a premium in the state.

But the rush to the Florida shore has created problems, the most important of which is a real danger to the inhabitants. Most of Florida’s beach-front property lies on thin, narrow strips of sand called barrier islands. These islands are low in elevation and are subject to flooding during storms and hurricanes. Some of the construction of buildings is poor, adding to the hazards facing homeowners, most of whom come from other parts of the country with little awareness of the hazards of beaches.

Those who live on Florida barrier islands and those who live next to beaches should understand how these dynamic systems work. This is important for both their physical and economic well-being. More than one transplanted Floridian has plunked down $150,000 for a beautiful condominium with a sea view only to find that in order to keep the building from becoming part of the view,
a lot more money must be spent to build and repair seawalls or to
pump up new beaches by dredging sand from offshore.

Lots of other surprises may await the unwary property owner
along Florida's shoreline, and one important purpose of this book
is to provide a good basis for where and what to buy and not buy.

As with all things in life, there is a right way and a wrong way.
The right way of living near the beach is to live with the forces of
nature rather than to confront them. The right way is to learn
respect for the big storms that will inevitably strike the shoreline
and to build homes and condominiums that will minimize the
hazards if one must ride out the storm. The right way is to clearly
understand the escape routes from an island. Most important of
all, the right way is citizen support for a strong local and state
coastal zone management program that will ensure that the beau-
tiful beaches of Florida will still be around for our children and
grandchildren to enjoy.

In this book we sometimes may seem to be critical of the efforts
of engineers, developers, and state officials in their role in the
development of the East Florida shoreline. But we fully recognize
that usually they are simply carrying out the dictates of a public
that is ever-anxious to get a better view of the sea. During the
last couple of decades, however, coastal scientists and engineers
have made great advances in understanding the nearshore oceanog-
aphic environment. The time has come when developers can no
longer say, "How were we to know?"

This book is one of a multivolume series called the "Living
with the Shore" series. Eventually there will be a book for each
coastal state as well as for Lake Erie and Lake Michigan. All
will be published by Duke University Press. We also have pub-
lished an "umbrella" volume entitled Coastal Design through Van
Nostrand Reinhold (1983, $25.50). The Living with the Shore
series emphasizes, state by state, very detailed site-safety analyses
of the American shoreline. Coastal Design is a generalized volume
intended to be applicable for all coastal areas, with emphasis on
principles of safe construction for near-the-shore areas. The pru-
dent coastal dweller will own both Coastal Design and the in-
dividual state volume.

A word about the authors: Orrin Pilkey, Jr., is a James B.
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