



TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE

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PRESS RELEASE

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BREAKING NEWS

Galveston judge's ruling could halt Seawall beach project

State District Judge Susan Criss' controversial ruling clouds Texas' Open Beaches law

AUSTIN — Efforts to shore up the Galveston Seawall could grind to a halt if a ruling by state District Judge Susan Criss goes unchallenged.

Criss ruled Thursday that much of Galveston's beaches are in fact privately owned and not under jurisdiction of the state. Criss' ruling could endanger numerous state beach stewardship efforts, the most important being the \$10 million Land Office emergency project to reinforce the Galveston Seawall.

The ruling was issued in a case involving the Porretto family, which has been fighting with the state over beach ownership.

“Does Judge Criss' ruling mean the beaches in Galveston are no longer public?” Patterson asked. “Our lawyers are obviously going to respond.”

Under Criss's ruling, the Land Office could not legally renourish the beaches east of 57th Street because state money cannot be spent to improve private property. Patterson reiterated that while the state cannot fund a project to improve a private beach, he has no plans to stop the Galveston beach renourishment project.

“The sand trucks are rolling,” Patterson said. “I will continue to do what's right for Galveston regardless of this ruling. I challenge Judge Criss to stop the project, because I won't.”

Land Office attorneys are working with the Attorney General's office to prepare a response. Patterson stated the primary goal is to ensure the public's right to access Galveston's beaches and continue the renourishment project — a top priority in the recovery from Hurricane Ike.

Hurricane Ike's storm surge devastated Galveston, and in some places threatened to undermine the timber underpinnings of older sections of the Galveston Seawall. The emergency beach project, which will stretch from 61st Street to 10th Street, aims to protect the future stability of the historic seawall.

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Patterson said the seawall project will protect hundreds of millions of dollars worth of public infrastructure, from roads, water and sewer systems, to the homes and businesses that make up the Galveston tax base.

For nearly four weeks now, trucks have been hauling what was expected to be as much as 400,000 cubic yards of sand onto Galveston beaches.

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