



TEXAS GENERAL LAND OFFICE

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PRESS RELEASE

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Texas General Land Office launches TexasBeachAccess.org *Temporary 4.5-foot elevation line marking the post-Ike public beach boundary ends*

AUSTIN — Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson, the state's top steward of public access to Texas beaches, today released detailed new maps showing the post-Ike boundaries of the public beach in Galveston and Brazoria counties with the debut of a new Web site, TexasBeachAccess.org.

Patterson said Monday the Texas General Land Office is transitioning away from the temporary 4.5-foot elevation line used to determine the boundary of the public beach after Hurricane Ike. The new maps on TexasBeachAccess.org show the post-Ike boundary of the coast, as determined by the Texas Open Beaches Act.

“As promised, I gave the natural line of vegetation a year to recover,” Patterson said. “In those areas where it has recovered it will be the boundary of the public beach. In areas where it hasn't, I've drawn the line at mean low tide plus 200 feet.”

The mean low tide line is the average of all the daily low tide lines over a 19-year period. The 200 foot mean low tide line (MLT+200ft) is a line 200 feet landward of the average low tide line.

Patterson said despite the new line, he is not preparing a list of properties for enforcement actions under the Texas Open Beaches Act.

“The key is public access,” Patterson said. “If a structure is on the public beach but doesn't block public access and is not a health and safety risk for beachgoers, then it's likely no action will be taken.”

As Texas Land Commissioner, Patterson is trusted not only with the stewardship of Texas beaches, but also with ensuring the right of every Texan to enjoy those beaches.

“The Texas Open Beaches Act is the law of the land and until the Legislature or voters say otherwise, it is my job to uphold it,” Patterson said. In November, Texans will be asked at the polls if they want to enshrine the Texas Open Beaches Act in the state Constitution.

Hurricane Ike wiped out the dunes and the natural vegetation that grows on them along miles of the beach in Galveston and Brazoria counties. According to the Texas Open Beaches Act — which guarantees the public's right to enjoy Texas beaches — this natural line of vegetation determines the landward boundary of the public beach.

With so much of the natural boundary destroyed, Ike created unprecedented challenges for the Texas General Land Office and local governments regarding permitting decisions and determining the extent of the public beach easement.

To speed along reconstruction, Patterson established a line at 4.5-feet above sea level as a temporary permitting line for local governments and the Texas General Land Office to use in the interim for emergency permitting and rebuilding. Additionally, this 4.5-foot line was used as a guide for debris clean up for the beach system.

“With the cleanup over and recovery progressing, the 4.5-foot line has served its purpose,” Patterson said.

Patterson said TexasBeachAccess.org will serve as an important tool for both beachgoers and Texans who own coastal property when it comes to understanding their rights and responsibilities under the Texas Open Beaches Act.

TexasBeachAccess.org is easy to use, allowing users to click on a map of the Texas coast to see detailed local beach and dune protection plans. At TexasBeachAccess.org, Texans can find the closest access point to their favorite beaches and property owners can pull up detailed maps showing the line that defines the public beach. TexasBeachAccess.org also has a section devoted to helping Texans understand their rights under the Texas Open Beaches Act, which has ensured the public’s right to enjoy Texas beaches for 50 years.

“TexasBeachAccess.org will give Texans the facts they need about this vital and unique Texas right,” Patterson said.

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