

Morris Island light gets support

Rep. Hutto works to speed environmental permitting

BY YVONNE WENGER,
Sunday, May 23, 2010

COLUMBIA -- The Morris Island Lighthouse will undergo a key restoration project to shore up the pilings at its foundation before the worst of hurricane season falls on Charleston.

Work is set to begin within the next two weeks.

The state budget crisis will stop lawmakers from chipping in any money this year toward the lighthouse's preservation, but Rep. Anne Peterson Hutto, D-James Island, wanted to step in to cut any red tape that might have slowed down the restoration work.



Photo by Brad Nettles

The Post and Courier

State Rep. Anne Peterson Hutto, along with others, has concerns whether the Morris Island Lighthouse can make it through a hurricane. She is shepherding through a provision in the state budget bill to shorten the time it takes for restoration work on South Carolina lighthouses to move through the permitting process.

"It is a part of our maritime heritage in this state and I think it's one of Charleston's symbols," she said. "Everywhere you go you see the lighthouse used in paintings and logos. We need to preserve it for future generations to see what life used to be like."

Hutto introduced a provision in the pending state budget to shorten the time it takes for restoration work on the handful of lighthouses in South Carolina to move through the environmental permitting process, so long as there is no opposition to the work. But in the last week, supporters at the nonprofit Save the Light Inc. got word the permits would be in for work to begin as early as Monday. Weather conditions might delay the start on the outdoor restoration. Workers have been preparing the inside of the lighthouse for the work in recent weeks.

Al Hitchcock, chairman of Save the Light, said the work is expected to be complete by Sept. 1. The group raised nearly \$2 million for the latest phase of preservation work at the lighthouse from private and public funds, including a \$100,000 grant from the U.S. National Park Service.

Palmetto Gunitite Construction Co. from Ravenel is contracted to do the work, Hitchcock said. It involves replacing the old pine timber pilings that support the lighthouse and have deteriorated in part because of marine worms, he said. Sixty-eight "micro pilings" will be installed under the foundation to support the 4,000-ton structure.

Beachgoers will see a large barge -- similar to the one that raised the H.L. Hunley submarine off the floor of the Atlantic Ocean -- outside the lighthouse that will be used in the restoration. Hitchcock said it will arrive within the next two weeks.

Hitchcock asked the public to watch the restoration work from a distance and not try to get too close to the lighthouse because of safety concerns. A good spot to see the action is on the east end of Folly Beach at the old Coast Guard station, he said.

The latest preservation efforts are only a part of the process. Save the Light will continue its efforts to raise enough cash to complete the work, which includes replacing the broken-out glass in the lighthouse windows, renovating the metal work and repainting the structure.

The lighthouse was a working beacon from 1876 until 1962.

For more information, go to the group's website: savethelight.org