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## Army Corps proposes new hurricane protection plan for Texas

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HOUSTON (AP) – The has proposed 14-foot-high natural sand dunes in the latest version of its up to \$32 billion plan for protecting the Houston and Galveston areas from hurricane-related storm surges.

The plan calls for establishing roughly 44 miles of dunes and floodgates that would run from High Island to San Luis Pass, as well as ecosystem restoration farther south, the Houston Chronicle reported.

The sand dune field is among a series of revisions the recently made to the draft coastal barrier alignment released last year. The original proposal was to build levees that would run parallel to FM 3005 on Galveston Island and Texas 87 on Bolivar Peninsula but behind the dune line. This plan for the harder barrier would have left thousands of homes adjacent to the beach exposed to flooding and likely required extensive eminent domain buyouts.

The update is more ambitious than “the so-called “Ike Dike,” proposed by Texas A&M; researchers and named for the 2008 hurricane that flooded parts of Galveston.

The change to natural sand dunes has been mostly embraced by experts as the most practical and politically expedient next step for storm surge mitigation, even with the project’s substantial price tag.

But questions have been raised about the dunes’ cost, in addition to how much protection they can provide to coastal communities in the event of a powerful tropical storm.

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“We’re talking about a dune system that runs along the existing dune line,” Kelly Burks-Copes, the ‘ project manager, said of the current plan. “Basically, it’s just one solid continuous line, with beach access still afforded, with drive-overs and walk-overs, in compliance with the Open Beaches Act.”

The dunes could also alleviate the continued erosion of the Texas coastline due to sea level increases and sediment moving from coastal tributaries. The Bureau of Economic Geology, which monitors shoreline changes along the Texas coast, estimates that parts of Galveston and Bolivar have lost 5 to 8 feet of shoreline over the last 80 years.

While strengthening the coast’s natural barriers would be less troublesome to coastal property owners, dunes present challenges of their own. The has acknowledged the dunes will not protect stal residents from all storms and will not be as strong as a levee.

Environmentalists also noted a sand dune could contribute to habitat loss for endangered

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species, such as the Kemp's Ridley sea turtle.

The will submit a final proposal for the coastal barrier to Congress for funding in 2021.

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