

**Review: The Last Beach**

By Orrin H. Pilkey and J. Andrew G. Cooper

**Reviewed by Ryder W. Miller**

*San Francisco, California, USA*

Pilkey, Orrin H. and Cooper, J. Andrew G. *The Last Beach*. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2014. 256 pp. ISBN 9780822357988, US\$ 89.95, cloth; ISBN 9780822358091, US\$ 19.95, paper. Illustrated, acid-free paper.

Sand is disappearing from beaches all over the world at an alarming rate to the extent that beaches where people can recreate are disappearing. Efforts to protect these beaches are failing. The problem is not just economic, but also environmental with beach wildlife in danger and the loss of places in cities and the nearby for eco-tourism. *The Last Beach* from Professor of Geology Orrin H. Pilkey (Duke University) and Coastal Studies Professor J. Andrew G. Cooper (University of Ulster) provides an international description of this problem.

The book's chapters describe most of the problems beaches across the world face including beach-sand mining, the building of hard-structures, beach replenishment, trash on the beach, oil spills, beach pollution, and international politics. These forces, in tandem, can result in the loss of the beach habitats and parks that we value. Some of the research results are counter-intuitive, especially the fact that building hard structures and sea walls will lead to sand depletion. Beach replenishment, the process by which sand is brought back to the beach, is really only a patch job that needs to be re-enacted to maintain the beach.

The beach is acknowledged as a wonderful resource that needs to be protected. Pilkey and Cooper do a competent job of describing the players that will damage the beach environment. With some of the same status as a park, beaches also need to be protected from the consuming masses.

One of the main problems is that there is housing that crops up nearby. There are those who also build and buy seashore homes. As shown in *The Last Beach*, what homeowners decided to live nearby is being degraded by pollution, oil spills, trash, sewage runoff, and over consumption. The shrinking beach, access to which is not always free, is well captured in photographs. Near these places are large apartment buildings. As told, the dream of living by the sea has its responsibilities and duties; the longevity of a sea house has decreased, and as a long-term investment it was a mistake for some.

As presented the seashore is a wonderful place that changes and adapts. It should be protected sometimes from those who would become residents there. Those who read the book will make better plans than some of those in the past. It also rightly argues that

some of these areas should be preserved. Sadly, the book does not provide a lot of solutions, especially for those who live close to the sea. Hard structures like sea walls and sand replenishment projects have also failed. There also does not appear to be enough accessible sand, a commodity that the sea will reclaim.

Though not a celebration of the sea, which is still a force of Nature, the book helps protect the seashore as a resource. Those special moments by the sea have been created by the efforts of others, not only preservationists. Global warming producing sea level rise is also going to exacerbate the problem, and on those warm days by the shore, one should remember that someone out there on those ocean islands will be suffering because of it. As shown, the same is true for those who have a vested interest in the seashore.

*The Last Beach* will appeal to many readers. It is great for seaside homeowners and investors, city planners, coastal managers, geologists, and oceanographers. Those who seek to build by the ocean would do well to understand many of the factors that are presented in this book. This book also describes many of the factors that influence coastal management, some of which might boggle the imagination.

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