

Court waves may erode beach plan

By Wayne Tompkins
Staff Writer

Environmental groups and Boca Raton officials will be kicking sand in each other's faces over the city's beach renourishment project later this month in federal court.

U.S. District Judge Norman C. Roettger has agreed to hold a hearing on March 25 in Fort Pierce over a lawsuit filed earlier this year by area environmental groups to halt the city's renourishment project.

The lawsuit is the last obstacle standing in the way of plans to replace 1.2 miles of beach between Red Reef Park and Spanish River Park. The state Department of Environmental Resources gave its official go-ahead Monday for the project.

Kenneth Lipman, a Boca Raton attorney who is representing the environmental groups, said if his clients lose the

hearing for an injunction it will be too late to stop the project.

And if Lipman's group wins the hearing, it would be a crippling blow to the city's plans to replace a beach they say is eroding at a dangerous rate.

The only option available for the loser of the hearing would be an appeal to a federal court, which Lipman said could take as much as 3 to 4 years to be heard.

A coalition of environmental groups, including the American Littoral Society and the nationally known Sierra Club, have long argued against the plan, which calls for several tons of sand to be dredged off shore for transplant onto the beach. City officials also say the plan would improve nesting conditions for sea turtles.

The coalition members say the project would stir up enough

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