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Watch the rainforest, please

Environmental group targets Wildwood Boardwalk reconstruction; mayor dismisses concern

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WILDWOOD — The pending reconstruction of the city's Boardwalk has been classified a "rainforest emergency" by one environmental groups, and Mayor Ernie Troiano Jr. said the organization has jumped to conclusions.

"They don't know what's going on," Troiano said. "They're a bunch of alarmists."

Rainforest Relief, a New York-based organization, has set its sights on the Boardwalk project because it fears the city will replace its aging boards with tropical hardwood from Brazil's rainforest.

Its Web site features the project on its homepage and reads, "Wildwood, NJ is about to order tens of thousands of board feet of old growth rainforest wood from the Brazilian Amazon, most likely from illegal logging operations."

The New York-based group has organized protests in cities that planned to use hardwoods take from the rainforest for their boardwalks or other projects, and the group's executive director, Tim Keating, said the group will organize in Wildwood next.

"We're going to argue this right to the end," Keating said.

Keating said his organization considers logging the single greatest threat to tropical rainforests and a driving force behind deforestation in the world. But Troiano said the city is exploring its options and has no plans to sacrifice the rainforest.

"I am not going to put wood up there that comes from the rainforest," Troiano said Monday.

He continued, "I'm going to see what's out there. I was told there are hardwoods out there grown in farms that are then restocked. We'll look at what's available."

Troiano said the city is looking at certified hardwood that do not come from the rainforest, but Keating said those certifications mean very little unless they come from the Forest Stewardship Council, which tracks the chain of custody of wood products.

The city has requested bids for the reconstruction of a section of the Boardwalk, which will include the area from Wildwood to Schellenger avenues along with the Cedar Avenue section.

The bid materials list includes 57,000 square feet of hardwood decking.

Troiano said he will not consider southern yellow pine, the commonly used wood that he said wears out too quickly, and it is unlikely he would consider using plastic products, which he said become too hot.

The city has turned to alternative sources of wood in the past, once using wood taken from bleachers used at President Richard Nixon's inauguration.

"We need to put something up there that's going to last, Troiano said.

And he suggested Keating and others not assume what the city will do.

"We're capable of making the right decisions," he said.

The Wildwoods Boardwalk measures 9,771 feet, or about 2 miles, and all but 10 blocks of the famous beachfront walk are in Wildwood. The rest are in North Wildwood.

North Wildwood used pine in its most recent Boardwalk renovations.

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