



The Beach Vitex Task Force Archived Announcements AUGUST TO DECEMBER 2010

August 2010

SOUTH CAROLINA UPDATE

August 11-13, 2010 The SC Aquatic Plant Management Society held its annual meeting at Pawleys Plantation, Pawleys Island. Task Force SC Coordinator, Betsy Brabson, gave a presentation during the afternoon session on Aug. 11 and spoke about Recent Invaders and Invasive Plant Listing featuring beach vitex.

August 20, 2010 The Pawleys Island Coastal Observer featured an article, Task force continues fight against beach vitex, asking property owners to contact the task force if they found regrowth of the invasive plant. In October, a grant from the US Fish and Wildlife Service will provide funding for treatment of beach vitex. The Georgetown Soil and Conservation District will administer the grant. (Coastal Observer article from 8-20-10 in the appendix)

As a result of the Aug. 20 Coastal Observer article, numerous property owners have contacted the Task Force reporting new sites as well as regrowth of beach vitex.

August 27, 2010 Low Country Day School invited Task Force Coordinator Betsy Brabson to give a presentation about loggerhead sea turtles at the school's Friday morning devotional. Brabson, in speaking about the many problems that sea turtles encounter, addressed the threat of beach vitex to nesting habitat.

NORTH CAROLINA UPDATE

Sites on Topsail Island have been resurveyed and much regrowth of beach vitex has been observed from sites treated in 2009. The Task Force has been working with towns to send out permission letters for new sites to property owners for treatment. Given the current economic situation, quite a few beach homes are for sale and properties have changed hands. Task Force members are making sure current owners are up-to-date on the beach vitex on their property. Treatments will hopefully begin by mid September to early October.

Melanie Doyle, NC Task Force Coordinator, was contacted by a gentleman who owns property in Gulf Shores, AL and has a colony of beach vitex that is taking over the native vegetation. With the help of Dr. Randy Westbrooks, US Geological Survey, Doyle was able to direct him to specialists in both AL and MS who may be able to help.

VIRGINIA UPDATE

This month was spent preparing for a two-prong eradication effort to occur in September in both Norfolk and Virginia Beach. Approximately fifteen sites will be addressed in Sandbridge (Virginia Beach) and approximately 30 residual plants will be treated with Habitat in Norfolk. A more extensive public education effort is needed in Sandbridge given that the majority of beach vitex plants are found on private property. Many homeowners are reluctant to have any plant killed that is currently stabilizing the sand dunes. For this reason, the first year's

eradication effort has been scaled back with the intent of creating more tangible results of what happens after the plant is killed.

As noted in last month's update, there was a discovery of more beach vitex on Assateague Island. Fortunately, the new plants were misidentified and turned out not to be beach Vitex. More extensive surveys will be conducted by The Nature Conservancy to make sure that beach vitex has not become established on some of the remote barrier islands.

September 2010

SOUTH CAROLINA UPDATE

Clemson University staff working on beach vitex had two research papers published in the July-September issue of *Invasive Plant Science and Management*. Contributors to the articles were: Matthew M. Cousins, Jeanne Briggs, Chuck Gresham, Jack Whetstone and Ted Whitwell. The publication's front cover featured a photograph of beach vitex covered dunes at Pawleys Island taken by Task Force SC Coordinator, Betsy Brabson. (Invasive Plant Management cover in the appendix)

NORTH CAROLINA UPDATE

Task Force members have been working with town staff and contractors on treating regrowth and new sites of beach vitex at: *Atlantic Beach, Pine Knoll Shores, Morehead City, Emerald Isle, N. Topsail Beach, Surf City, Topsail Beach, Wrightsville Beach and Ocean Isle.*

VIRGINIA UPDATE

An extensive eradication effort commence this month. Remaining plants in the *City of Norfolk were treated with Habitat as well as the few remaining plants at the Norfolk Botanical Gardens.* The day before treatment, a search was conducted well beyond where vitex had previously been found on Willoughby Spit. That resulted in finding one single plant that had apparently escaped detection. Unfortunately, the property owner went ahead and pulled up the plant before calling our office. The plant was collected from their trash can and incinerated. We will keep watch on this site to see if new growth comes back next season.

In addition, the first efforts were made in *Sandbridge* in Virginia Beach to treat beach vitex in that community. The *Sandbridge* effort included the treatment of 12 private properties and two public beach access points. The total treatment covered over 14,000 square feet. There are additional sites to be treated next fall as well as a need to replant areas where vitex has been eliminated. *As in Norfolk, an additional plant was found outside the known infestation area, i.e., in the community of Croatan (just south of the Virginia Beach resort strip). The property owner is cooperating and fully supportive of eliminating this single plant.*

We received word from Joe Scalf with The Nature Conservancy (Virginia Coastal Reserve) that their staff along with a few volunteers searched on foot the following barrier islands on the Eastern Shore of Virginia: *Smith, Myrtle, Ship Shoal, Cobb, Hog, Parramore, Metompinkin, Little Cobb and Cedar Island Sandbar.* The good news is no beach vitex was found on any of the islands.

October 2010

SOUTH CAROLINA

October 2, 2010 A rare nesting of a green sea turtle occurred in Garden City Beach and was laid in beach vitex that had been previously treated. The nest was relocated out of the area because of the possibility of root growth into the nest. Roots could also interfere with the hatchlings ability to exit the nest. This event exhibits why sea turtle volunteers are concerned about beach vitex and sea turtle nesting habitat. (GreenNestBV100210)

October 5, 2010 A contract was awarded for the treatment of beach vitex and the contractor began work immediately. He is in the process of reviewing all known sites and information from landowners on any potential new problems. To date, only one new site has been identified. Plans are to have all first treatment rounds completed by the first week of December.

Field checks and follow up of the treatment sites are being completed by the Georgetown Soil and Water Conservation District and USDA NRCS.

NORTH CAROLINA

Progress has been made along the coast treating hundreds of sites of beach vitex for either the first, second or third time.

VIRGINIA

Following a number of treatments of beach vitex in September, the Task Force is beginning to think about next year's program. There are a number of sites in Sandbridge, Virginia where property owner permission needs to be obtained to conduct the treatment. Reluctant property owners need to understand that beach vitex will be treated in the fall and left in place for the herbicide to work to kill the plant over the winter. Approximately 8 months later in the spring, the dead beach vitex is cut to the ground, removed and the area is replanted with native plants. These plants, particularly sea oats, do a better job of building dunes by trapping windblown sand. The thick growth of beach vitex may appear as good dune protection but sand blows right over this canopy and is not trapped. A coordination meeting of the various Virginia agencies and stakeholders will be scheduled in January of next year to develop our plan for continuing the attack on beach vitex next spring and fall.

Task force continues fight against beach vitex

By Jackie R. Broach
Coastal Observer

Thursday, August 20, 2010

Efforts to get rid of beach vitex in Georgetown County have been successful, but “it’s inevitable there will be some regrowth,” said Betsy Brabson, state coordinator for Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force. The group is asking local residents to keep an eye out for the invasive plant and report any sightings so regrowth can be addressed before it has a chance to spread.

“It’s a plant you can’t turn your back on,” Brabson said.

Native to the Pacific Rim of Korea, beach vitex was brought to the Carolinas to help control dune erosion after Hurricane Hugo in 1989. It served that purpose, but several years after its introduction, folks noticed it was spreading out of control. Beach vitex is known as “the kudzu of the coast” for its ability to rapidly take over an area, choking out native plants, such as sea oats, panic grasses and seabeach amaranth. The plants also pose a danger to sea turtle hatchlings, which can become tangled in the thick vegetation as they emerge from nests in the dunes.

The task force was formed in 2003 and has since been working to methodically eliminate beach vitex with the aid of Clemson University, federal funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and local funding from the Town of Pawleys Island. An eradication program treats the plants with a powerful herbicide in the fall when they are going into dormancy. The plant stem is wounded and the herbicide is applied. Over the winter months, the plant dies. In the spring, crews cut the plant to the ground, run it through a chipper and dispose of the debris. The process is environmentally friendly, designed not to harm delicate plant and animal life that live on the coast. It’s important to monitor annually for regrowth, and remove any new plants, Brabson said, so they can’t continue to flower and produce seeds, which are spread by birds, wind and water. There is no cost to property owners for elimination of the plants.

Funding for the project was depleted, but a grant from the Fish and Wildlife Service will begin in October to fund the latest round of treatments. Brabson isn’t allowed yet to say how much the grant is for, but “it’s enough money for us to operate for two years,” she said. The funds will be administered through the Georgetown Soil and Water Conservation District.

Beach vitex has round silvery-green leaves that are about one to two inches long and have a spicy fragrance. When in bloom, it has small clusters of purple flowers and produces small, round, dark purple berries. The plants can grow at a rate of 10 feet or more per year and generally grow to 12 feet in diameter with “runners” up to 60 feet long. Anyone who sees beach vitex on their property is asked to call the task force and not try to remove the plants themselves.

“The success of the treatment depends on having the largest stem possible,” Brabson said.

However, property owners can cut off the flowers and fruits and bag them for disposal. Once owners contact the task force, their properties will be added to a spreadsheet of places where regrowth has been sighted and they will be contacted in the fall, when grant funds for treatment become available. The herbicide will be applied in the fall and workers will return in the spring to remove the plants once they are dead. Even once the plant appears dead, Brabson warns, property owners shouldn’t try to remove it themselves. The herbicide works slowly, taking several months to filter down to the plant’s roots.

To report beach vitex, call Brabson, 546-9531, or e-mail her at wbrabson@sccoast.net.