Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force Archived Announcements

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January 2007 The U.S. Department of the Interior Fish & Wildlife Service produced a beach vitex video through their Coastal Program. The 10 minute video explains the origin of the invasive plant and the problems it causes for coastal dunes, the activities of the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force and the eradication/restoration efforts. David Nash and Betsy Brabson, NC and SC coordinators for the Task Force and Jerry Dudley, Coastal Ecoscapes, were interviewed. This video, in DVD format, will be an effective tool for Task Force members when speaking to groups about beach vitex.

January 18 Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force partners held a 2007 planning session at Clemson’s Baruch Lab. The group reviewed accomplishments in 2006, got updates from NC and the SSPD grant and mapped out a strategy for the upcoming growing season. Tuesday, March 20, 2007 was selected as the date for the 4th Beach Vitex Symposium to be held at Kimbel Lodge at Hobcaw Barony, Georgetown, SC.

February 2007 The Village of Bald Head Island declared that it had won the war against invasive beach vitex and submitted a final report to the Task Force. Although large colonies of the plant have been eradicated, treatment of regrowth and seedlings will be ongoing. Restoration with native dune vegetation will begin this spring.

February Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service sponsored a Beach Vitex Eradication and Dune Restoration Workshop for horticulture professionals along the north coast of South Carolina. The workshop was held at the Myrtle Beach campus of Horry Georgetown Technical College. Betsy Brabson, Task Force SC coordinator, addressed the problems with beach vitex. Jack Whetstone, Clemson, spoke about herbicide trial results. David Nash, NC Cooperative Extension Service, shared information about successful eradication and dune restoration methods in NC. Clemson technicians Chuck Gresham and Hal Droto demonstrated the correct way to wound the beach vitex stem and mix and inject the herbicide. Jerry Dudley, Coastal Ecoscapes, showed how to plant and fertilize native dune plants such as sea oats and bitter panicum. Clemson technicians stressed that they were available to help horticulturists eradicate beach vitex, dispose of it and advise them in the replanting process. Carlyn Munnerlyn, Clemson Extension Service, gave a power point presentation on herbicide mixing and application safety. Those attending the workshop received pesticide recertification credits.
February 15-18 The 25th Southeastern Wildlife Exposition, held in Charleston, SC, featured a beach vitex booth under the Fish and Wildlife tent at Marion Square. Task Force members manning the display helped educate Expo visitors about the problems and progress being made with eradication and restoration. Many people were aware of beach Vitex, in contrast to two years ago at the Expo when the problem with the invasive plant was relatively new. The media has been very effective in getting the word out to the public. An estimated crowd of 50,000 visits the Expo over the 4 days.

February 20 A presentation on beach vitex was made to the Georgetown Rotary Club by SC Task Force coordinator Betsy Brabson.

February 22-28 The International Sea Turtle Symposium was held at the Embassy Suites in North Myrtle Beach, SC at Kingston Plantation. The ISTS is a global network of diverse peoples, professions and cultures sharing knowledge, ideas and inspiration to ensure healthy sea turtle populations worldwide. A special Carolinas Session, attended by about 200, was held on Saturday, Feb. 24. Sally Murphy, retired SC DNR Sea Turtle Coordinator, spoke about the trendsetting role of SC sea turtle volunteers over the years. Jean Beasley, Topsail Island Sea Turtle Hospital, gave a presentation about the role of NC volunteers in turtle rehabilitation. Betsy Brabson, Task Force SC coordinator, gave a Power Point presentation about the importance of the sea turtle volunteer network in documenting beach vitex locations for the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force. While at the symposium, a sea turtle volunteer was exploring the oceanfront dunes in front of the hotel and discovered a large stand of beach vitex. GPS coordinates were made and an online reporting form was filled out on the website.

A large stand of BV was discovered at the conference hotel

Sally Murphy speaking about the trendsetting role of SC turtle volunteers

Demonstrations at the Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service sponsored Beach Vitex Eradication and Dune Restoration Workshop for horticulture professionals along the north coast of South Carolina
February 28 Clemson staff readied the newly acquired chipper to begin the removal phase of beach vitex. Under the Savannah Santee PeeDee Restoration Fund grant, 75 sites along the SC coast were treated with herbicide last fall. Beginning March 1, the dead vegetation will be cut back, chipped up and blown into the back of a truck. It will then be taken to a disposal site and mulched.

March 2007 Clemson University technicians began clearing beach vitex from oceanfront properties which had been treated last fall with herbicides. The dead vegetation is being chipped up, blown into the back of a truck and taken to a disposal site at Hobcaw Barony, Georgetown, SC. In April, technicians will begin to replant the dunes with native vegetation.

Wildland Weeds, published by Florida Exotic Pest Plant Council, featured an article by Carla Vitez entitled A Vital Link in Making a Difference on the Carolina Coast. The article focused on efforts by Betsy Brabson, Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force (SC) coordinator, to bring public attention to this invasive species as a threat to the fragile dune ecosystem and loggerhead sea turtles.

Defenders of Wildlife, a national organization dedicated to the protection of all native wild animals and plants in their natural communities, created a 2 page article Invasive Species in South Carolina. The article listed beach vitex as one of 7 exotic plants or animals that have invaded SC.

March 15 The Coastal Observer (Pawleys Island, SC) featured an article notifying its’ readers about the 2007 Beach Vitex Symposium to be held at Hobcaw Barony on Tuesday, March 20.

March 20 The 2007 Beach Vitex Symposium was held at the Kimbel Lodge at Hobcaw Barony in Georgetown, SC. A group of 45 stakeholders met to learn about Carolinas Beach Task Force accomplishments and future plans for the eradication of beach vitex from coastal North and South Carolina. The overall theme of the symposium was that while much has been accomplished over the past 3 years in terms of research, documentation of locations and education, the Task Force is looking to Congress for significant funding for eradication of the invasive plant and to set up long term monitoring for re-growth of seedlings. The group will be working in the upcoming months to get the attention of legislators.
Attendees also viewed a new DVD documentary about beach vitex produced by US Fish & Wildlife Service. DuBose Griffin, SC Dept. of Natural Resources sea turtle coordinator, reported on the surveying efforts by the SC sea turtle network of volunteers. She said Chuck Gresham, Clemson, will be accompanying her on an aerial flight to survey remote areas for large stands of beach vitex along the SC coast. Maureen Dewire, Bald Head Island Conservancy, gave a power point presentation on the successful beach vitex eradication program on Bald Head Island. Dr. Randy Westbrooks, US Geological Survey, gave an update on the status of beach vitex being listed as a Federal Noxious Weed. The delay is due to the theory that the plant is native to Hawaii and therefore cannot be listed. Dr. Westbrooks contends that beach vitex was brought to Hawaii from the Pacific Rim and therefore is not native. North Carolina has begun the process of considering listing beach vitex as a State Noxious Weed. The process was explained by Rick Iverson with the NC Dept. of Agriculture. Dr. Chuck Gresham, Clemson University, gave a progress report on the SSPD grant which is funding the eradication of 75 sites north of Charleston. The group ended the symposium with a low country oyster roast and barbecue.

March 21 The Sun News (Myrtle Beach, SC) featured an article on the local news front page about the 2007 Beach Vitex Symposium, ‘Scientists work to ease beach vitex’s chokehold’.

March 22 ‘Money key to eradicating beach vitex say opponents’ was the title of the Coastal Observer’s (Pawleys Island, SC) front page story recapping the 2007 Beach Vitex Symposium.

March 23 The Times (Georgetown, SC) ran a front page article summarizing the 2007 Beach Vitex Symposium entitled ‘Money needed to eradicate beach vitex’.

Betsy Brabson spoke to 85 fifth graders at McDonald Elementary School in Georgetown, SC as part of Career Week. Brabson spoke about the sea turtle volunteer program and her work as the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force SC coordinator.
March 28  David Nash, NC Beach Vitex Task Force coordinator, participated in an Invasive Community Forum on Bald Head Island where beach vitex has been successfully eradicated. The plant was at the top of the agenda.

Nash, who is also a specialized agent with the NC Cooperative Extension Service, has also been conducting an environmental scan by mailing a survey to all the beach communities in NC. Out of 21 responses received so far, 16 list beach vitex eradication as either a very important or most important issue to be addressed by Extension programs. This is very encouraging as some of those responding do not even have a beach vitex problem. It shows that the efforts of the Task Force to make people aware of the problem are paying off.

April 2007 The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation approved an award of $40,000 in federal funds to the Belle W. Baruch Foundation to support the Pulling Together to Eradicate Beach Vitex in the Carolinas project. The award was made on the condition that these funds be matched by $41,500 in additional non-federal funds raised by the Belle W. Baruch Foundation specifically for this project. This is the 4th grant the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has provided to the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force.

April 2  Clemson technicians, working under the SSPD grant, began replanting the dunes that had been cleared of herbicide-treated beach vitex. Locally grown sea oats and bitter panicum were first soaked in a moisture-holding polymer gel and then planted. A teaspoon of time-released fertilizer was added to each hole. The vegetation is planted on an 18 in. grid according to specifications in The Dune Book (Spencer Rogers & David Nash).

April 9-13 Beach vitex began leafing out for the season.

April 18 NRCS State Biologist Dick Yetter, Area Biologist Sudie Daves and Debbie Mann from the Georgetown, SC office of NRCS toured several beach vitex sites at Pawleys Island. Hosting the tour was Clemson’s Chuck Gresham who showed the group 3 sites. The first site had beach vitex leafing out and covering the frontal dune. The second site’s beach vitex had been treated with herbicide last fall. The third site had beach vitex removed and had been replanted with sea oats and bitter panicum. An unexpected benefit for the dunes has been that some of the other native plants, previously retarded by the beach vitex, are making a comeback and will help fill in the dune vegetation.

Chuck Gresham, Clemson University, showed a group of NRCS biologists several beach vitex sites on Pawleys Island.
April 19  *Native Plants lead new dune invasion* was the title for an article in Pawleys Island’s Coastal Observer. Reporter Jackie Broach focused on the restoration of beach vitex cleared dunes with the planting of native dune species.

May 2007 The spring issue of Coastal Heritage, a quarterly publication of the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium, focused on invasive species. The cover photograph of the magazine titled *Knocking Back Biological Invaders*, featured Clemson’s Chuck Gresham eradicating invasive beach vitex. View Volume 21, Number 4, Spring 2007 at the Sea Grant web site: [http://www.scseagrant.org/oldsite/library/coaher.htm](http://www.scseagrant.org/oldsite/library/coaher.htm)

May 11 The USDA National Resources Conservation Service’s (NRCS), Brooksville (FL) Plant Materials Center partnered with Clemson University in a research trial using sweetgrass, a native coastal grass. 300 plants were donated to Clemson for use on 10 properties. They will be planted behind the primary dune where beach vitex has been eradicated. An article about this partnership appeared in the NRCS newsletter, *South Carolina’s Current Developments* (May/June 2007 issue).

May 15 The US Fish & Wildlife Service announced grants totaling more than $7.2 million will go to private landowners and groups in 36 states for conservation projects to benefit endangered, threatened and other at-risk species through the Private Stewardship Grants Program. **Clemson University was awarded a grant of $135,000 for eradication of beach vitex and restoration of native dune vegetation on 71 private beachfront properties along the South Carolina coast.**

May 17 The Sun News (Myrtle Beach, SC) featured an article, *Keeping shy creatures safe*, about the beginning of loggerhead sea turtle nesting season and the vigilance of the volunteers who protect them against such things as beach vitex.

May 24 The Coastal Observer (Pawleys Island, SC) ran a notice, *Federal grant boosts efforts to remove beach vitex*, about the US Fish & Wildlife Service grant to Clemson University for $135,000.

May 30 *Beach vitex eradication continues* was the headline of an article in the Georgetown Times focusing on Clemson’s eradication/restoration efforts and the new US Fish & Wildlife Stewardship grant.

June 2007 Land and Water Magazine is a bi-monthly publication edited for those working in the field of natural resource management and restoration from idea stage through project completion and maintenance. The May/June 2007 issue featured an article on vegetation management titled *Ordinary People, Extraordinary Change: Attacking invasive weeds on the South Carolina Coast*. The article focused on the successful eradication of beach vitex and phragmites in the Pawleys Island/Winyah Bay area through the use of the aquatic herbicide Habitat.

*Expeditions with Patrick McMillan* is a Clemson University television production shown on SC ETV featuring naturalist Patrick McMillan. A recent episode, *Sea Turtles – Carolina Residents and Seasonal Tourists*, followed the path of sea turtles from the local resident - the loggerhead - to the largest and of sea turtles, the leatherback. McMillan spoke about invasive beach vitex, the problems it causes for nesting and hatching loggerheads and Clemson’s efforts to eradicate it in South Carolina.

Chuck Gresham, Clemson’s Baruch Institute, suspended all replanting of the dunes where beach vitex has been eradicated because of the dry conditions. When planting resumes, Clemson technicians will erect signs on the restored dunes asking beach walkers not to disturb the dunes and new vegetation. The oceanfront home at Pawleys Island pictured below had beach vitex eradicated and the dunes replanted with sea oats and bitter panicum.
South Carolina Wildlife, published by SC Dept. of Natural Resources, featured a special section called *Invasion of the Aquatic Exotics* in the July-August issue. Beach vitex had a presence on several pages with an article stating that, "the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force is seen as a shining example of conservation partnership." Beach vitex was also listed as one of the state’s 7 Most Wanted Aquatic Invasive Species.


The July issue of Southern Living Magazine featured an article on sea turtles and beach vitex in its’ South Carolina People & Places section which goes to SC subscribers. Entitled *Turtle Love – Hands-on help gives threatened sea turtles a better chance for survival*, focused on the many obstacles these reptiles encounter including invasive beach vitex and the efforts by volunteers to protect them.

Beach vitex was selected as one of six invasive plants to be featured on the 2008 official poster for National Invasive Weed Awareness Week (NIWAW) to be held Feb. 24-March 1, 2008 in Washington, DC. The poster’s title is “Weeds won’t wait: Don’t hesitate”.

### June 28
The Charleston, SC Post & Courier had an article about the beauty of native dune vegetation and its’ role in building dunes written by columnist David Quick. Colette Degarady, president of the Lowcountry chapter of the SC Native Plant Society, was interviewed about beach vitex. Degarady cited the problems with the invasive plant in displacing native vegetation and interfering with sea turtle nesting habitat.

### June 30
Task Force SC coordinator, Betsy Brabson, spoke to the Inlet Point South Homeowners Assoc. at their annual meeting. Brabson spoke about beach vitex which is so prevalent at this southern end of S. Litchfield Beach in Georgetown County, SC. With the news of the US Fish & Wildlife Stewardship grant, property owners were interested to learn which oceanfront properties would qualify for beach vitex eradication. Brabson gave a list of sites that would be injected in summer/fall 2007. Homeowners expressed interest in contacting their Congressmen about assistance in funding beach vitex eradication efforts along the SC coast.
A loggerhead sea turtle nest was laid at Inlet Point South (see above) in beach vitex. Mary Schneider, turtle project co-ordinator, said it was amazing the turtle was able to dig the chamber through all the roots. 6 eggs were broken which Schneider attributed to the woody roots, with one going right through the chamber. The nest was relocated to an area free of beach vitex. This incident demonstrates the problem with beach vitex and the need to eradicate it from the Carolinas coastline.
On behalf of the BHI Village Council and Staff, BHI Conservancy and all the property owners on Bald Head Island, I would like to thank individual property owners, BHI Club, and POAs for their cooperation and patience during this first year of our attempt to eradicate Beach Vitex. To say we started with limited knowledge would be a gross understatement, as there is little scientific data available to give us specific direction for this project. We started with approximately thirty-six identified sites and now have identified over two hundred with Vitex plants. Approximately fifty sites were landscape plantings by property owners the remaining sites were spread from plant parts related to mulching and/or seed germination. This says all that is necessary about the invasive nature of this plant. Phase I (physical removal of plants) is complete. Phase II (herbicide application) is now complete for 2006 as the Vitex plants are dormant. Phase III (restoration) has started in a few areas that have been determined to be Beach Vitex free. It is now clear that the major push for Phase III will be next spring after we have a chance to see how much Beach Vitex survives our herbicide spraying and the winter. Dune areas have dramatically recovered with native vegetation without specific intervention other than removing the Vitex. Phase II has been very successful as the herbicide applications have been very effective in killing the plants. However, where Beach Vitex has been removed and new growth killed, seed germination has occurred with hundreds of small plants that also had to be killed. Each time we thought all the plants were gone more germinated. This has significantly delayed implementation of Phase III. Phase II will begin again in the spring when we see how much Vitex returns. Needless to say Beach Vitex is a formidable enemy but it now appears that it can be successfully eradicated. However, it is very important for property owners to report any Vitex they find to the Village or Conservancy. This program will continue for years with monitoring but hopefully most of the work will be completed by this time next year. Property owners that have had Beach Vitex removed from their property will receive a letter instructing them how to apply for reimbursement for replacement plants. David Nash has called this project a major success and a model for all coastal communities faced with the eradication of Beach Vitex. Finally, I would like to specifically acknowledge all the individuals responsible for the success of this project.

Chris McCall, Village Hall, Director of Planning and Assistant Village Manager, who provided administration support for the project.

Neal Taylor, One World Design Landscaping, Principle contractor Phase I

Suzanne Dorsey, PhD, Executive Director, BHI Conservancy, for the support of the Conservancy during this project.

Maureen Dewire, BHI Conservancy Environmental Education Coordinator, for her early efforts to bring this problem to our attention and for providing supervision for the Interns during Phase II as well as helping with spraying herbicide.

Melissa Hedges, Naturalist, Sea Turtle Biologist

Lindsey Merriman, BHI Conservancy Environmental Education Intern,

Justin Dellinger, Jeff Edge, and Shawn VanSlooter, BHI Conservancy Wildlife and Vitex Interns who were responsible for the actually work of spraying herbicide.
David Nash and Sarah Love, Brunswick County Agricultural Extension Service, for their technical support, research efforts, and verification of site eradication of Beach Vitex.
INVASIVE SPECIES IN SOUTH CAROLINA

What is an invasive species?
Invasive alien species are plants, animals, or other organisms that are introduced to a given area outside their original range and cause harm in their new home. Because they have no natural enemies to limit their reproduction, they usually spread rampantly. Invasive alien species are recognized as one of the leading threats to biodiversity and impose enormous costs to agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and other human enterprises, as well as to human health.

- The cost to control invasive species and the damages they inflict upon property and natural resources in the U.S. is estimated at $137 billion annually.

Invasive Species in South Carolina: A Quick Look
South Carolina has been invaded by a number of harmful exotic plants and animals. Here is a quick look at some of the worst current and potential invaders:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Name</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Extent</th>
<th>Damage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chestnut blight</td>
<td>Fungus</td>
<td>China; probably introduced on nursery stock in the 1890s. It was first detected in New York city in 1904.</td>
<td>By 1926, the disease had devastated chestnuts from Maine to Alabama</td>
<td>Chestnut once comprised one-fourth to one-half of eastern U.S. forests, and was prized for its durable wood, and as a food for humans, livestock and wildlife. Today, only stump-sprouts from killed trees remain.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dutch elm disease</td>
<td>Fungus</td>
<td>Asia; one strain arrived in the 1930s in Cleveland, OH on infected elm logs from Europe; a more virulent strain arrived in 1940s</td>
<td>American elm originally ranged in all states east of Rockies- most of this area is infested</td>
<td>Elms were once the nation’s most popular urban street tree, have now largely disappeared from both urban and forested landscapes. It is estimated that “Dutch” elm disease has killed over 100 million trees.</td>
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<td>Hemlock woolly adelgid</td>
<td>Aphid-like insect</td>
<td>Japan and China, introduced accidentally around 1924</td>
<td>Found from Maine to Georgia, including 3 counties in western SC</td>
<td>Causes up to 90% mortality in eastern hemlock species, which are important for shading trout streams, and provide habitat for about 90 species of birds and mammals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fire Ant</td>
<td>Insect</td>
<td>South America; accidentally introduced to Alabama in 1930s</td>
<td>300 million acres of Southern U.S., including all of South Carolina</td>
<td>Aggressive, multiple biter with painful venom and chance of allergy; may also damage fruits, berries and young crops; also damage electric boxes; ant mounds are a hazard to farm equipment.</td>
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<td>Beach vitex</td>
<td>Shrub</td>
<td>Pacific Rim; planted for beach stabilization in 1980s</td>
<td>Spreading on dunes and beaches in SC and NC</td>
<td>Crowds out native beach and dune vegetation like wild oats</td>
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<td>Name</td>
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<td>Hydrilla</td>
<td>Aquatic plant</td>
<td>Africa and/or Asia; introduced as an aquarium plant in the 1950s</td>
<td>Infests 50,000 acres of SC waterways</td>
<td>Interferes with boating, fishing and swimming; may harbor a toxic algae that kills eagles &amp; waterfowl; good mosquito habitat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ambrosia beetle</td>
<td>Insect</td>
<td>Asia; first detected on peach trees in Charleston in 1974</td>
<td>Widespread in coastal plain and piedmont of SC</td>
<td>Bores into stems and can kill many fruit, nut, and ornamental trees, including peach, pecan and persimmon</td>
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**What Congress Can Do:**

**A. Make Prevention Our Top Priority**

- Reverse current U.S. policy on the intentional import of live plants and animals, that is, switch from a “dirty” to a “clean” list approach that requires screening for invasiveness before import and which keeps out or limits import of species so as to prevent harm to native species or ecosystems – and make the legislative changes to do so.
- Substantially cut the unintentional introduction of aquatic invaders by overseeing federal standard-setting on the discharge of ballast water in the United States, supporting the development of technology to meet these standards; ensuring that agencies monitor and enforce compliance; and reauthorizing the 1996 National Invasive Species Act in the strongest and most comprehensive form.
- When considering, reviewing, or approving trade agreements, rigorously address invasive species, e.g., by allowing for restriction of imports of non-native species that are invasive elsewhere and by identifying pathways by which inadvertent introductions travel so that they may be interrupted.

**B. Make Federal Agencies More Effective**

- Use oversight authority to ensure that all federal agencies immediately and strongly implement that part of Executive Order 13112 that asks them to identify and reduce actions that introduce or spread invasive species in the United States or elsewhere.
- Appropriate adequate funds so that federal agencies have the resources to address invasive species problems promptly and comprehensively over the long-term.
- Strengthen the structure and leadership of the National Invasive Species Council and prompt more aggressive implementation of its National Management Plan.
- Oversee the work of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to ensure that the agency and its Administrator are committed to protecting biological diversity as well as agriculture.
- Evaluate the serious problems with border inspection for pests, weeds, and pathogens, e.g., in staffing and cross-department coordination, exacerbated by moving these functions into the Department of Homeland Security and amend its authorizing legislation if needed.

**References:**

How to Identify and Manage Dutch Elm Disease. http://na.fs.fed.us/spfo/pubs/howtos/ht_ded/ht_ded.htm#intro
Hydrilla Fact Sheet. http://www.invasive.org/eastern/biocontrol/7Hydrilla.html

*For more information, please contact Aimee Delach at Defenders of Wildlife 202-682-9400 x271 adelach@defenders.org*
Scientists work to ease beach vitex's chokehold

Group building plan to follow systematic poisoning of plant

By Kelly Marshall Fuller

The Sun News

- Take a look at three varieties of plants that can cause problems in the Carolinas (PDF)

MURRELLS INLET - Experts are watching dormant beach vitex plants for signs of life, to determine the next steps needed to kill the invasive, spreading vine.

Plants along the coastal Carolinas have been packed with poison designed to strike its roots, but environmental experts say more money is needed to continue their work.

Information on how far the plant has already spread, and the continual efforts to stop its steady growth, were presented Tuesday during the fourth annual beach vitex seminar, held at Hobcaw Barony.

Vitex is a concern because it strangles native plants, such as sea oats, and prevents the continual build up of the sand dune system. The plant also prevents sea turtles from nesting on the dunes, because of the thick, tangled root system.

Tuesday's seminar drew experts from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, S.C. Department of Natural Resources, S.C. United Turtle Enthusiasts, N.C. Department of Agriculture, Clemson University and others interested in ridding the area of the pesky plant.

Work to stop vitex is ongoing in North Carolina, said David Nash, North Carolina coordinator of the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force.
The plant has been found in Oak Island and Bald Head Island, N.C., as well as Holden Beach and Topsail Beach, N.C.

"The Bald Head Island folks are here," Nash said. "They have set the pace for the program in North Carolina. A lot of beach communities have followed suit."

Beach vitex was found on two undeveloped barrier islands in North Carolina last summer, Nash said. The plant has also been found on North Island, in Georgetown County.

Eradicating the beaches of the weed takes a tough approach.

"The program is called "pack and squirt," said Betsy Brabson, state coordinator of the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force. "They wound it with a machete and paint the herbicide in. It gets in the plant's system. They have to wait six months. It takes a while for the plant to die."

Some dead vitex plants on Pawleys Island are already being cut back and hauled away, Brabson said.

The plants, which were poisoned last year by officials from Clemson University, are being chipped up and carried to a special spoils site at Hobcaw Barony. The wood chips cannot be mixed with other compost, or the seeds will spread vitex to other areas, Brabson said.

"They treated them last fall, and that truck is out there daily chipping it up and hauling it off, so it won't spread throughout the area as mulch," Brabson said.

Many municipalities, including the town of Pawleys Island, have ordinances that ban the planting of beach vitex.

Efforts are being made to have the plant listed as a noxious weed in North and South Carolina, Nash said.

Vitex experts are also interested in having the plant listed on the federal list of noxious weeds, which would mean it could not be planted in any state.

Dubose Griffin, a state sea turtle coordinator with the S.C. DNR, said turtle enthusiasts are helping quash the spread of vitex. The volunteers report new sproutings as they patrol the beaches in North and South Carolina.

"We have come to every task force symposium," said Mary Pringle, a turtle volunteer from the Isle of Palms. "We're anxious to learn what the news is. I'm surprised it isn't listed as a noxious weed. We've seen turtles crawl in and crawl right back out."
Thanks to funding from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, great strides have been made in the battle against beach vitex in Georgetown County since last summer.

If the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force is to continue its progress, however, more money is needed, said Betsy Brabson, the group’s South Carolina coordinator. That means she and other volunteers will be working overtime in the coming months to gain the attention of legislators and, hopefully, get dollars headed to the coast to continue eradication efforts.

Brabson and others hoping to rid the North and South Carolina coast of beach vitex attended the fourth annual Carolinas Beach Vitex Symposium on Tuesday at Hobcaw Barony.

Speakers from the S.C. Department of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Corps of Engineers and other agencies presented information on the past present, and future of beach vitex in the Carolinas.

Funding is being sought from Georgetown County in the form of an accommodations tax grant, the Gaylord and Dorothy Donnelley Foundation, and other agencies.

“It can cost a lot to get rid of beach vitex, but it’s going to be more if we wait,” Brabson said.

“We’ve got to start lining up money now,” said Randy Westbrooks, invasive plant coordinator for the U.S. Geological Survey’s invasive species program.

Beach vitex was introduced to the South Carolina coast about 16 years ago when dunes were being rebuilt after Hurricane Hugo. It was hoped that the plant, brought from Asia, would help control erosion. It has since crowded out native plants that have proven to be better at erosion control and has spread across the coast.

In addition, volunteers monitoring sea turtle nesting are concerned that the thick foliage of vitex may deter turtles from nesting in the dunes and may trap hatchlings trying to emerge from nests.

With a $133,000 grant received last year from the Fish and Wildlife Service, the task force and Clemson University’s Institute of Coastal Ecology and Forest Science teamed up to remove beach vitex and restore the dunes on 75 lots, mostly in Georgetown and Horry counties.

The town of Pawleys Island is the epicenter of the project, Brabson said.

In September, the plants were wounded and painted with a marine herbicide. Removal of the dead plants began March 1 and planting of native species will begin Monday. Waccamaw Middle School students will assist in the replanting.

The sites will be monitored until June 2010 to ensure vitex doesn’t return.

This summer, a number of “B list” sites will be injected and “C list” sites will be treated in the early fall, said Clemson’s Chuck Gresham, a principal investigator for the project.

The task force and Clemson would like to establish a cost-share program that would allow property owners to have vitex removed while footing only a portion of the bill, but that won’t be possible without additional funds, Brabson said.

A short DVD about beach vitex produced by the Fish and Wildlife Service and filmed primarily in Georgetown County will be sent to members of Congress from coastal areas with a letter in an effort to garner support.

The symposium was also a forum for news of the fights in North and South Carolina to have beach vitex listed as a state noxious weed.

The task force and other agencies have been trying for some time to have the plant listed nationally as a noxious weed, but have been unsuccessful because it is listed as native to Hawaii.

Westbrooks said he believes the plant was transplanted to Hawaii from Asia and hopes sparking a debate on the issue could lead to beach vitex being added to the federal list.

Judging from current patterns, Westbrooks said he believes if vitex had been carried naturally to Hawaii, it would also be native to California.

A national listing as a noxious weed would prevent beach vitex from being planted in any state.

A report was given on the process for having a plant listed as a state noxious weed in North Carolina. Westbrooks said he believes that task may be accomplished soon.

An effort is being made to list the plant as a noxious weed in South Carolina, but “it’s not looking so good,” Gresham reported. He said the problem is due in part to the fact that beach vitex is only a problem in the coastal areas of the state.
Attendees also heard from DuBose Griffin, head of the S.C. Department of Natural Resources Sea Turtle program, about the importance of volunteers in the detecting and reporting of beach vitex.

The program relies heavily on volunteers and “they attack with full vengeance any time an issue involving sea turtles comes up,” said Griffin, who grew up on Pawleys Island.

Reports were also given on a successful beach vitex eradication project on Bald Head Island Beach in North Carolina and on the updated task force Web site, www.beachvitex.org. The site provides information on identifying and reporting beach vitex, becoming a volunteer and the latest news about beach vitex.
Money needed to eradicate beach vitex.

Eradication of beach vitex, a non-native invasive plant species growing on local beach dunes, is continuing. However, more funding is needed to make sure this "weed" does not take over the beaches on the East Coast. Officials and concerned citizens from the coastal regions of North and Carolina met Tuesday at the Kimbel Lodge at Hobcaw Barony for the 2007 Carolinas Beach Vitex Symposium. "It is exciting because we are moving into another phase," said Betsy Brabson, coordinator of the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force. "We've researched it, found a lot of locations and found some money to eradicate it. So, we are actually doing what we said we were going to do to get rid of it, but we need to do more."

Presentations on several topics informed attendees about the history of beach vitex, an update on the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force, the status of funding support, detection and reporting by volunteers, an update on Bald Head Island beach vitex eradication project, the progress in listing beach vitex as a federal and state noxious weed, an overview of the state noxious weed listing process in North and South Carolina, the eradication and restoration demonstrations on 75 sites in Charleston, Horry and Georgetown Counties, and short term approaches and long term commitments.

Chuck Gresham, with Clemson University at the Baruch Institute, reported on his local project with beach vitex eradication. He says that with 75 high priority sites identified — many of which are on Pawleys Island, Litchfield Beach, Garden City and DeBordieu — they have already effectively wiped out this weed in about half of the known sites. "We injected the herbicide into those sites in the fall," Gresham said. "During the winter, the herbicide has moved throughout the plant during the warm days." Now they have started to cut the vitex which they have injected just above ground level to make sure the plant is dead. If they need to, Gresham said, they can inject the stubs with herbicide so it will be carried down to the roots. "In first week or so in April, we will replant the areas where the vitex was removed with your typical dune species: Sea oats and bitter panicum," Gresham said. "These are standard warm-season beach grasses." These two native species of dune plants, which are bought as seedlings from a local nursery, are "good growers and good dune stabilizers," he said. "In terms of density, sea oats are a little slow on growing and they don’t spread as rapidly, but they are very at home on the dunes," Gresham said. "Bitter Panicum is much better at growing, but it doesn’t have the same visual appeal. It can hold the sand. You can bury it and it will pop back up again." He says that people who would like to purchase these two plants should contact Ecoscapes in Aynor. Gresham warns that people should make an effort to purchase stock that is native to this area. As far as beach vitex eradication, Gresham says that people need to keep up the fight because "weeds don’t wait." "Most invasive plants have gotten past the point of being small local populations that are easily controlled," Gresham said. "Fortunately, with beach vitex, it is not widespread and we know pretty much where it is. In South Carolina and North Carolina, eradication on the beach front areas is a feasible goal.

Randy Westbrook, an invasive species prevention specialist with the U.S. Geological Survey, spoke about how important it is to list beach vitex as a state and federal noxious weed, which
would stop importation and selling of the plant, as well as requiring eradication. He also spoke of
the history of the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force which began out of an interest by the South
Carolina United Turtle Enthusiasts (SCUTE) for the safety of sea turtles trying to nest near beach
vitex. “When SCUTE volunteers became concerned about this and they asked me for help, I said
the first thing you’ve got to do is figure out who cares about this and organize them into a
coalition,” Westbrooks said. “The agencies who grant the funding for eradication programs want
to know who cares. We found out who cares and started a task force, so now we are going to
them saying we want to regulate it and find money to control it. So we’ve got our ducks in a row.”
He agrees with Gresham that eradication of beach vitex from our dunes is possible. “When you
figure out how to control it and how much it costs, then you can come up with a realistic figure of
what this will cost in general to achieve the goal of eradication from the coastal communities of
both Carolinas,” Westbrooks said. “You have to control this thing faster than it grows, and control
it until there is no more left. This is going to take several years to a decade or more of
concentrated focused effort to achieve this.”

For more information about beach vitex and the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force, visit their
website at www.beachvitex.org.
NATIVE PLANTS LEAD NEW DUNE INVASION

BY JACKIE R. BROACH

COASTAL OBSERVER

It will take a couple of years for the dunes on Pawleys Island to return to their natural state, but the process is well on its way.

Beach vitex, an invasive plant that has crowded out native dune plants in recent years, has now been eradicated from about 40 sites on the island and replanting of native species is under way, said Clemson University’s Chuck Gresham, a principal investigator for the dune restoration project.

The project, by Clemson’s Baruch Institute of Coastal Ecology and Forest Science, is funded by a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service grant.

Last year, 75 vitex-infested sites were treated with a marine herbicide painted onto the plant stems and the results have been very successful. The plants were killed, cleared away and do not appear to be returning.

“That was our biggest concern, but I’ve been overwhelmed by how effective both the herbicide and the method for applying it have been,” Gresham said. “So far, we’ve only had a few green leaves popping up on two of the larger sites, so we’re 99 percent certain this is a very usable technique.”

For those few sprouts, a plan is in place to ensure their existence will be short. Gresham said a very mild herbicide will be used on the plants and, if that doesn’t work, a stronger herbicide will be used.

With the vitex taken care of, native plants, including sea oats and bitter panicum, are being brought back in.

Planting began April 2 at one of the Pawleys Island sites and is proceeding more quickly than was expected.

Forestry students from Horry-Georgetown Technical College had to be specially trained for planting on the dunes. The tools and techniques needed to plant grass seedlings in dry beach sand is drastically different from those required for planting tree seedlings in firm soil, Gresham said. Thus the process required special attention.

With thousands of seedling to be planted at each site, no one was certain how long it might take to plant a site, Gresham said. But once the training was completed, crews began to move at a surprisingly quick pace.

Two of the larger sites on Pawleys Island have already been planted and crews are waiting for a shipment of seedlings due at the end of the month. In May and June, shipments will be received weekly, allowing planting to proceed more rapidly and, hopefully, wrap up by the end of June.

Of the 75 sites, about half are located on Pawleys Island, with the other half divided between DeBordieu, Litchfield, Garden City and Sullivan’s Island.

The seedlings were purchased from an Aynor grower and are being planted with a slow-release fertilizer and a water-holding polymer to help promote survival and growth, Gresham said. Each seedling must be planted individually in an 8-inch hole.

The seedlings are about 12-15 inches long, but only about 6 inches of the plants are visible above ground, so it will take a while before the dunes are returned to their natural appearance.

In pilot trials, it was found that once beach vitex was removed, some native vegetations started to grow back on their own.

“That was a pleasant surprise and we’re hoping to see it happen again on these sites,” Gresham said.

He is considering utilizing fertilizer to help promote that natural growth.

Of the seedlings being planted, bitter panicum will likely grow more quickly than the sea oats and will be able to help build the dunes more quickly. It’s less known than sea oats, but equally or more effective, he said.

Once replanting is completed on the 75 “A-list” sites, Gresham said he hopes to begin the eradication and restoration process on B-list sites in the fall.

That plan hinges on funding, however. The Baruch Institute has submitted two proposals for funding and Gresham said he expects at least one of them will be accepted. One went to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the other to a local conservation foundation that he wouldn’t name. A decision is expected in May.

“I’ll run as fast and as far as the money will allow me,” Gresham said when asked how long he might continue the program.
A “sweetdeal” for South Carolina
by M.J. Williams, NRCS Plant Materials Specialist, Gainesville, Florida
reprinted from South Carolina NRCS’ Current Developments newsletter, May 2007
www.sc.nrcs.usda.gov/news/

The Brooksville NRCS Plant Materials Center (PMC), which serves Florida, the Caribbean Area, and coastal areas of Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina, is cooperating with Clemson University in a research trial to use native coastal grasses to control the introduced exotic invasive, beach vitex (Vitex rotundifolia). Beach vitex is a woody shrub native to the Pacific Rim that was introduced in the 1980s by the North Carolina University Arboretum for coastal erosion control in the Southeast. By the 1990’s, it started to raise concerns on South Carolina beaches because it was spreading rapidly and posed a threat to native plants and animals. Although not yet officially classified as an invasive species, the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force was formed to coordinate interagency efforts to eradicate the plant (www.beachvitex.org).

In November 2006, Dr. Chuck Gresham of Clemson University’s Baruch Institute of Coastal Ecology and Forest Science, and a member of the task force, contacted the staff at the Brooksville NRCS PMC about using muhlygrass (also known as hairawn muhlygrass, Muhlenbergia capillaries) and its relative sweetgrass (also known as gulfhairawn muhlygrass, M. filipes) in their beach vitex eradication and coastal restoration efforts.

Sweetgrasses are native to the coastal areas of the South Atlantic and along the Gulf. They are commonly found just behind the first dune. Besides helping to restore the coastal areas of South Carolina impacted by beach vitex, sweetgrass is the foundation material for African-coiled basketry in the Southeast, particularly in the Gullah/Geechee community around Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. Development in the coastal areas of the Carolinas has reduced the sweetgrass populations to the point that basket makers were going to Florida to find their sweetgrass. This cooperative project between Clemson University and the Brooksville NRCS PMC will address two issues—beach vitex control and restoration of sweetgrass populations in South Carolina.

A sweetgrass accession from South Carolina and nine different muhlygrasses or sweetgrasses from Florida were increased at the Brooksville NRCS PMC for planting on the South Carolina coast in late April. On ten sites from Sullivan’s Island to Garden City, where the beach vitex has been treated with herbicide and any residual beach vitex material has been manually removed, mixtures of sweetgrass, muhlygrass, seaoats (Uniola paniculata) and bitter panicum (Panicum amarum) will be established and monitored for beach vitex seedlings, grass survival, and spread. Results from this study will allow the Carolina Beach Vitex Task Force to develop best management recommendations for beach vitex eradication. The results will also help determine which selections of sweetgrass are best adapted for coastal planting in South Carolina to development of new populations of sweetgrass for the local basket artisans to use.
SC NRCS Wildlife Biologist Dick Yetter said, “Beach vitex is highly invasive, out-competing native dune grasses and forbs. At the same time, vitex develops a complex root system as it spreads that can interfere with Leatherback and Loggerhead sea turtle nesting success. Unless controlled, the extensive root systems of this plant can inhibit the ability of female turtles to excavate a successful nest site. This could translate into a significant impact on the nesting population of Loggerhead turtles along the South Carolina coast. Beach vitex has a relatively limited distribution. If we get involved now there is a good possibility for success in stopping its impact on the primary dune habitat along the coast. NRCS needs to be involved in this project, and we are looking forward to getting more involved so that we can protect and improve our coastal areas.”
TURTLE NESTING SEASON

Keeping shy creatures safe

Turtles' annual crawl to the dunes fretted over by vigilant volunteers

By Kelly Marshall Fuller - The Sun News

Wednesday was no ordinary stroll on the beach for Mary and Phil Schneider.

The two, who wore colorful, matching T-shirts, were on the prowl for misplaced loggerhead turtle nests, sprigs of beach vitex and the possibility of sea creatures who sometimes strand on the beach.

The hard work started this week for the two longtime S.C. United Turtle Enthusiasts: The official start of loggerhead turtle nesting season began Tuesday.

The Schneiders, who help coordinate about 50 turtle volunteers in Litchfield and Pawleys Island, expect to be on the beach two to three times a week this summer.

On their off days, they will continue to take calls from other volunteers who find stranded turtles or need assistance moving a nest out of harm's way.

There have been no turtle nest sightings on the Grand Strand yet, but Mary Scheider expects that to change in the next several weeks.

The couple is optimistic that the loggerhead turtle will show stable numbers this summer along the Grand Strand.

There were five turtle nests found in 2005 at Huntington Beach State Park, said Jennifer Koches, with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In 2006, the park had 14 nests.

The area of Debordieu, Pawleys Island and Litchfield had 62 nests in 2005 and 80 in 2006, Koches said. Three nests were located at Myrtle Beach State Park in 2005. No nests were found at Myrtle Beach State Park last year, Koches said.

SCUTE volunteers have been patrolling a 55-mile stretch, between Little River and Georgetown, for about 22 years. Other parts of the state also have volunteer organizations to protect loggerhead turtles.

"We hope that we will see the results of saving the turtle nests," Mary Schneider said. "We want to do what we can to preserve the species."
The prognosis for this year's turtle nesting season is good, according to the Schneiders.

To improve the turtles' chances of survival, the Schneiders and other volunteers place orange tags on forgotten beach chairs and tents on Pawleys Island, to remind the owners to place them in a safe location for the night.

The turtles can become tangled in the items if they are left on the beach overnight, Mary Schneider said.

Recent erosion caused by sub-tropical storm Andrea is also causing concern, she said.

The sand has been eaten away in some locations in the middle of the island.

The steep slope on the dunes makes it impossible for the turtles to lay eggs, according to the Schneiders.

"We are concerned about the scarfing [erosion]," Phil Schneider said. "We're concerned that she won't climb up a grade. She'll stop right there and lay a nest. The more scarfing there is, the less places there are to lay a nest."

If volunteers find nests in the wrong location, they sometimes move them.

The Schneiders have special permission from the S.C. Department of Natural Resources to relocate turtle nests. It can be tricky.

The nests must be moved before 9 a.m., Mary Schneider said.

The eggs are fragile and cannot be taken from cool sand and placed in a warmer location.

The turtle volunteers also check the many sand fences that are strung along the beach at Pawleys Island.

If the fences don't meet regulations set by Ocean and Coastal Resource Management, the homeowners get a reminder to make changes, Mary Schneider said.

"We've had some occasions where the fences have had to be moved," Phil Schneider said.

Work also is continuing to eradicate beach vitex on the Grand Strand, Mary Schneider said.

The invasive species crowds out native plants and prevents turtles from laying on the dunes.

Clemson University was awarded a grant of $135,000 for eradication of beach vitex and restoration of native dune vegetation on 71 private beachfront properties along the S.C. coast, according to Betsy Brabson, director of the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force.
"I'm pleased with what this community is helping us do," Mary Schneider said.

"We don't mind getting up early to help the turtles. We spend the summer here."

**Tips for protecting turtles**

**Keep them in the dark** | Turn off beachfront lights after 10 p.m. during nesting season, from May through October. Hatchlings can become confused by bright lights and crawl away from the ocean. Indoor lights can also be harmful to nesting turtles.

**Do not disturb** | Avoid interfering with or crowding around a turtle that is crawling to or from the ocean.

**Stay low** | If a female turtle is seen coming on the beach to nest, squat down. Movement could cause the turtle to return to the ocean without nesting.
Beach vitex eradication continues

By Clayton Stairs

Under the direction of Dr. Chuck Gresham with Clemson University's Baruch Institute of Coastal Ecology and Forest Science at Hobcaw Barony, the eradication of beach vitex from the coast of Georgetown County continues. Beach vitex is a non-native, invasive plant which has spread at an alarming rate along our beaches since the early 1990s, when it was planted in an effort to restore dunes destroyed by Hurricane Hugo.

With an emphasis on high priority sites, many of which are on Pawleys Island, the project is now geared to removing the plant from beach-front property and replanting it with native species, such as sea oats and bitter panicum.

“We have half of the high priority sites cleared already,” Gresham said. “I want to continue clearing and planting through the month of June. Then, if the soil is moist we will continue to plant, but if it is a dry summer there is no point planting in dry soil.”

He says they have until May of 2008 to complete the first phase of the project, but they should be finished “well before that.”

Pawleys Island Mayor Bill Otis says that it is important to continue efforts to completely eradicate this plant from the island and that Pawleys Island Town Council is willing to help any way it can.

“We’ve made a really good start eradicating it from the dunes in the front beach area,” Otis said. “However, I think that getting rid of it all is the council’s main concern.”

He adds that property owners on the island have been very cooperative in the process of eradication. Although some of them were initially reluctant to remove the vitex from their property, these property owners soon came to realize that keeping any beach vitex on the island will eventually spread to other parts of the Town.

Pawleys Island now has an ordinance that states that property owners must remove Beach Vitex from the face of primary dunes and they must not allow it to spread to adjoining properties.

“I think there is an understanding by the property owners that they would be in a position, year after year, to remove vitex from adjoining properties,” Otis said. “I think that had something to do with those property owners eventually deciding to remove it from their property totally.”

New grant

Gresham says that a new Private Stewardship grant awarded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will help with the eradication effort.

It was announced recently that this project, presently involving removal and replanting of almost 20,000 square meters of 75 beach-front lots in Georgetown and Charleston counties, has received a grant for $135,000. This additional funding will allow Gresham to expand the project to include 71 more sites.

“This grant allows us to go to our B list, which includes sites not as heavily covered by vitex and not as much of a threat,” Gresham said.

According to a press release from Clemson, the goal of the Private Stewardship Grants Program is to help private landowners manage their land to benefit rare and endangered species. Dr. Gresham’s work is important for promoting nesting habitat for sea turtles, which are all federally listed as either threatened or endangered in South Carolina. When female sea turtles come ashore to lay eggs, they abort their attempt to dig a nest if they encounter vitex at the base of the dune.

Field technicians have already identified the next properties they would like to target, but have not contacted the property owners yet. These priority lots have been evaluated for level of vitex infestation and accessibility to infested areas. It costs approximately $1,500 per lot to remove the vitex and replant native dune grasses.

The labor intensive process takes place in four stages. First, the highest priority areas are identified and evaluated, and written permission from the property owner is obtained.

Next, field crews use a machete to wound larger vitex stems. An herbicide is dabbed into the
wound, and the area is left alone for four months. After four months, the dead stems are sawed off at ground level so that there is minimal disturbance to the dune.

The debris is chipped up into mulch and hauled away. The final phase of work involves hand-planting sea oats and bitter panicum, which are naturally occurring species that trap sand and build dunes.

Gresham says that he is grateful to Betsy Brabson and the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force for all of their work to attain the grant and make this eradication project possible. “We will not rest until all of the vitex is gone form our coast because there is no such thing as a partial eradication,” Gresham said.

Otis says that some property owners on the creek side of the island are concerned about vitex on their land. “There are some property owners on Pawleys Island who have beach vitex in their yards (who) are not on the beach-front,” Otis said. “That may require some additional education of those property owners by Dr. Gresham and the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force.”

Council has set aside $15,000 in this year’s budget for eradication and they will require a five-to-one leverage to make this contribution, he said. That means that in order to use the $15,000, it would require a $75,000 match from other funding sources. “These funds count toward that,” Otis said. “We’ve been pleased to cooperate with this project in order to enhance the eradication of beach vitex generally, and specifically on Pawleys Island.”

For more information about beach vitex or the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force, visit their website at www.beachvitex.org.

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