

# State officially bans vitex, ‘kudzu of the coast

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A plant that was first promoted by North Carolina has now been outlawed by state officials.

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Rules to ban the sale, transport and possession of beach vitex by nurseries, garden shops and private property owners passed their final regulatory hurdle on Thursday.

The plant will be officially added to the state’s “noxious weed” list on Feb. 1.

Fast-growing, salt-tolerant, disliked by animals and sporting a beautiful purple flower during the summer, vitex was marketed as a coastal landscaping plant by N.C. State University in the 1980s.

But vitex started worrying researchers earlier this decade when it began overtaking dunes, crowding out the native sea oats and sea grasses.

The shrub that’s native to the Pacific Rim also lacks the dune-building benefits of the native vegetation and is a hazard to nesting sea turtles and shorebirds.

Beach vitex, beside being a prolific seed producer, also can grow up to 15 feet a year – a characteristic that has earned the plant the moniker of “kudzu of the coast.”

Melanie Doyle, the state’s beach vitex task force coordinator, said Thursday’s approval by the N.C. Rules Review Commission will allow officials to build upon last year’s strong momentum as worries about the invasive weed saw town after town along the coast pass ordinances outlawing the plant.

“This is just one more tool we get to use,” she said of the state ban. “It’s going to make the task at hand that much easier.”

Doyle, who also is the horticulturist at the N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher, said officials intend to step up their surveying, education and eradication efforts in 2009.

Beach vitex has been found all along the North Carolina and South Carolina coasts, including on most barrier islands in Southeastern North Carolina.

It also has been reported in Virginia, Georgia and along the Gulf Coast.

For more information about the invasive plant or to report an infestation, go to [www.beachvitex.org](http://www.beachvitex.org).

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