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CAROLINAS BEACH VITEX TASK FORCE ANNOUNCES ERADICATION GRANT

The Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force announced Thursday, August 03, 2006, that they have received a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to eradicate the invasive shrub beach vitex from at least 50 beachfront locations in Charleston, Georgetown and Horry Counties. This grant will greatly advance the goals of the Task Force by providing the resources to remove the plant from the frontbeach and to re-establish native dune vegetation.

Beach vitex is an exotic invasive shrub that has been planted on the front dunes of South Carolina's beaches beginning in 1990 when the dunes were rebuilt after being destroyed by Hurricane Hugo. Since then, the plant has spread to locations where it was not planted. Recent research by Clemson University has shown that vitex covered dunes do not support native dune species. Also, volunteers monitoring sea turtle nesting are concerned that vitex stems covering the dunes and growing on the front beach may deter female sea turtles from digging a nest and laying eggs, and may trap hatchling turtles when they emerge from the nests.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manage funds for the conservation, management, and protection of fish, wildlife and plants and the habitats upon which they depend in the Savannah-Santee-Pee Dee Ecosystem. These funds, as administered by the Foundation, are comprised of restitution monies or court-ordered settlements resulting from violations of Federal environmental laws. Payments into the fund are the result of settlements from both civil and criminal cases and are paid in addition to any fines levied on the defendants payable to the U.S. Government, states, and courts.

In April of 2005, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation received \$2 million into the Savannah-Santee-Pee Dee Resource Protection Fund, the largest deposit of restitution monies to date. The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a call for proposals earlier this year for environmental projects that incorporate an on-the-ground resource benefit, with emphasis on habitat improvement or restoration, species conservation or protection, or environmental education. The Task Force submitted a proposal through Clemson University to the Foundation with four goals directed toward dune restoration and was notified by the Foundation of their grant award on Monday, July 24th, 2006. The total grant, to be administered by Clemson University at the Baruch Institute of Coastal Ecology and Forest Science in Georgetown, is for \$133,005 and will cover a 12-month period of work.

The Task Force will initially identify 55 beachfront locations of vitex in Charleston, Georgetown, and Horry counties using a list of 11 criteria for site selection. Site

selection is slated to begin in September. After obtaining the property owner's written permission for restoration work on their beachfront properties, researchers involved with the Task Force will treat the vitex plants by injecting herbicide directly into the vitex stems growing on the beachfront site. After a period of 6 months, the plants will die and the herbicide will become inactive. The Task Force will then remove the dead vitex stems and plant sea oats and bitter panicum (both native dune species) in the treated areas. Following the restoration of the dune vegetation, the lot owner will receive written reports and recommendations for follow-up actions. The grant funding will pay for all of the treatments including the replanting.

The Town of Pawleys Island has supported this project since its inception and is the project is the natural follow-up to the Town's Beach Vitex ordinance, requiring property owners that have vitex to keep the plant trimmed at the property boundaries and off the front face of the frontal dune. Since Pawley's Island has the most know locations of vitex, most of the eradication work will be done here on Pawley's Island. Beachfront property owners interested in having their property considered for restoration should call the Baruch Institute at 843 546-6314. This dune restoration project will have the double benefit of ridding Pawley's Island of this aggressive plant and also increasing the prevalence of the signature sea oat covered dunes that vacationers come to see every summer.

Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force Partners:

BASF Corporation
Clemson University
Natural Resources Conservation Service
The Nature Conservancy
North Inlet-Winyah Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service
North Carolina and South Carolina Sea Turtle Networks
SC Department of Health and Environmental Control—Office of Ocean and Coastal
Resource Management
SC Department of Natural Resources
SC Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism
SC Native Plant Society
University of South Carolina
US Army Corps of Engineers
US Fish and Wildlife Service
US Geological Survey