



Town of North Topsail Beach

Nature's Tranquil Beauty

Shoreline Protection 2021 FAQ: Sea Oats

The Town has been receiving many inquiries about the planting of sea oats on the recently restored dunes in Town. This FAQ sheet will try to answer most of those inquiries.

Question: Who is paying for the cost of planting sea oats into the restored dunes?

Answer: *The Town has included this cost in the FEMA reimbursement program for Hurricanes Florence and Dorian.*



Question: What are sea oats?

Answer: *Sea oats are in the grass family and native to the NC coast. Sea oats get their name from the flower stalks that develop in summer and look like 'cereal grain oat seed heads' as illustrated in the picture above.*

Question: Why are sea oats the plant of choice for restoring unvegetated dunes?

Answer: *Sea oats are native with a root system that can survive the winters here on the coast. Another key feature is that as a grass growing low to the ground, sea oat stems trap blowing sand (mostly only 6 inches high above beach level) and holds it just like snow fencing along mountain roads keeps the snow from drifting across the road. As the sand piles up year after year, the sea oats stems grow longer and thus a repetitive cycle is created year after year for natural dune building.*

Question: Why is it important to vegetated dunes?

Answer: *Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) rules in NC dictate that pilings (posts) for beach access cross-overs cannot be placed in unvegetated dunes. While this is an inconvenience for property owners with private cross-overs and town CAMA public accesses, stabilizing the dune as described above is the ultimate goal.*

Question: Where will the sea oats be planted?

Answer: *Everywhere throughout Phases 2-4 where the dune was restored this year AND last year.*

Question: How many sea oats will be planted?

Answer: *Approximately 577,500 plants over the entire project area. Each section of dune will be planted with roughly 30 rows of plants on 2'x2' spacing going across the dune from the ocean side toe of the dune, up the slope, over the crest, and down to the level of the restored dune on the street side.*

Question: When will the planting start and about when will it end?

Answer: *On site planting should begin the 1st week in August and should take about 60 days. Most planting must be completed by hand because of the slope of the dune.*

Question: What should people expect if they've already planted sea oats or American Beachgrass? Will those plants will be replaced? Should they remove the plants themselves?

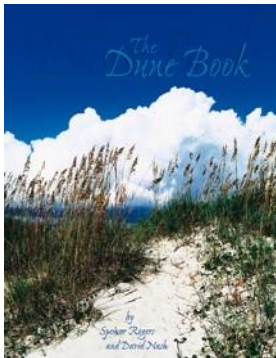
Answer: *If owners have already planted sea oats to the specified density we will just work around their area. If the density is less than 2x2 we will supplement the plantings. If they've planted American Beachgrass (*Ammophila breviligulata*) instead of sea oats (*Uniola paniculata*), we will interlace with those plants. Please don't remove what's there. That's just a waste. Some folks are probably hoping that we will increase the density beyond 2x2 spacing. However, having too high a density is detrimental to the root/rhizome system of the plants and will cause increased die-off.*

Question: What if there any excess plants?

Answer: Any excess plants will be provided to the Town to distribute on a first-come, first-service basis. The current plan is for the Town to provide any excess plants to owners to plant landward of the planned planting area.

Further reading:

An excellent source of information about sea oats and sand dunes is *The Dune Book* by Spencer Rogers and David Nash, 2003 North Carolina Sea Grant, (reprinted in 2016).



You can read an online version of the guidebook on Spencer Rogers' North Carolina Sea Grant Program webpage at <https://ncseagrant.ncsu.edu/about-us/our-team/spencer-rogers/>

Please keep your beach questions coming in to the Town Clerk at townclerk@ntbnc.org so that we can continue to update our FAQ Shoreline Protection fact sheets