Beach Vitex Task Force

In 2003, a workshop on beach vitex was hosted by the North Inlet-Winyah Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve in Georgetown, SC. This workshop brought together private citizens, personnel from different state and Federal agencies, and representatives from non-profit organizations, resulting in the formation of the South Carolina Beach Vitex Task Force. In 2005, North Carolina joined the effort and the name was changed to the Carolinas Beach Vitex Task Force. Virginia became a member in 2009 and the name simply became the Beach Vitex Task Force. The objectives of the Task Force are to:

1. Detect and map beach vitex populations.
2. Conduct an ecological assessment to determine beach vitex's impact on native plants and animals.
3. Research and implement environmentally sound methods for removal.
4. Restore affected areas with native plants.
5. Educate homeowners, landscapers, and the general public about beach vitex.

What can you do to help?

1. *Don't plant beach vitex.* Contact the Beach Vitex Task Force for a list of beneficial native plants that can be used in landscaping.
2. *Notify the Task Force of any potential beach vitex you may find. Learn how to identify beach vitex and how to distinguish this plant from native plants.* Don't try to do any removal yourself. The Task Force is mapping all locations in an effort to monitor this plant. Take note of where you have seen beach vitex and submit an online report at www.beachvitex.org. Photographs can also be submitted.
3. *Volunteer!!* The Task Force needs volunteers to monitor our beaches and to help with projects. Get involved!!

BEACH VITEX TASK FORCE

Task Force Partners Include: *Federal and state agencies, municipalities, universities, non-profit groups, corporations, private foundations and environmental organizations.*

For more information and to report any suspected beach vitex locations, please contact:

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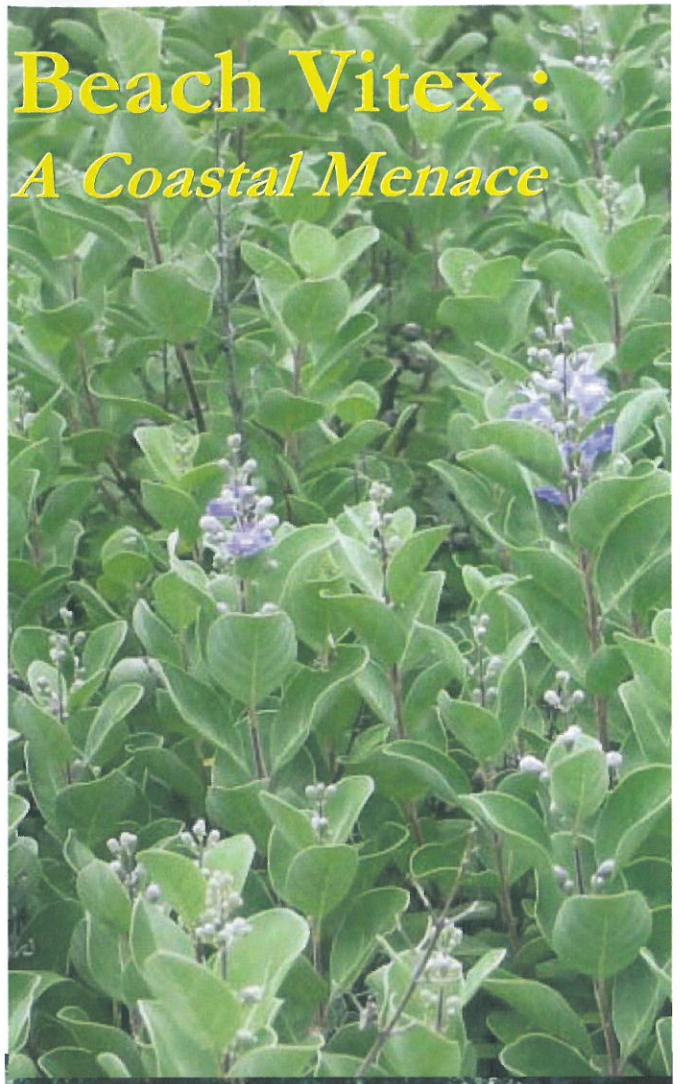
or visit the website at:

http://www.beachvitex.org

Beach Vitex :
A Coastal Menace



Beach Vitex (*Vitex rotundifolia*)
A deciduous woody vine native to Korea and other countries in the western Pacific, this plant was introduced to the Southeastern United States in the mid-1980's for use as an ornamental and also for beach stabilization. By the mid-1990's, plant specialists began to notice beach vitex spreading from original plantings on South Carolina's beaches, crowding out native dune plants and altering sea turtle nesting areas.

Identification
Beach vitex leaves are round, silvery gray-green, 1-2 inches long, and have a spicy fragrance. The flowers are purplish-blue, 1 inch in width, and produce small clusters at the ends of branches. The round fruits are 1/4 inch in diameter and purplish-black when ripe. Growing at a rate of 10 feet or more per year, the plant typically can produce runners up to 60 feet long.

Good Plants...Bad Plants
Invasive species affect each of our lives, all regions of the U.S., and every nation in the world. One report indicates that the economic cost of invasive species to Americans is an estimated $138 billion every year. Not only are there economic costs, but invasive species are costing the lives of our precious natural resources. Up to 46% of the plants and animals that are Federally listed as endangered have been negatively impacted by invasive species. Beach vitex joins an ever-growing list of exotic invasive species.

Besides being drought tolerant, salt tolerant, and fast-growing, beach vitex is a prolific seed producer. Seed production can be as high as 10,000 to 20,000 seeds per square meter with seeds remaining viable up to 4 years. Seeds and other plant parts that are dispersed via animals, wind, or water easily colonize other areas besides the beaches. Beach vitex has recently been documented growing in salt marshes and on undeveloped barrier islands.

Sea Turtle Impacts
Beach vitex on the beaches of the Carolinas and Virginia is altering sea turtle nesting areas and is also costing the lives of newly emerged sea turtles. Hatchlings become trapped in the thick tangle of vegetation, exhausting themselves and perishing before reaching the ocean.

Impacts on Native Vegetation
Sea oats, beach panic grasses, the Federally threatened sea-beach amaranth, and other native dune plants grow in unison to build dunes. Beach vitex, with its tight canopy of leaves and vines, deprives plants and seedlings below of water and sunlight. It eventually outcompetes other dune plants and forms monocultures.

Beach Stabilization
A plant introduced to help stabilize our beaches is instead proving just the opposite. Beach vitex lacks the fibrous root system that native plants have and thus, lacks the ability to adequately trap sand. As beach vitex dies back each winter, the root systems can be found exposed where the beach has literally eroded from underneath the plant, further jeopardizing our protective dune ecosystem.