

PERSPECTIVE

These plants need your help



Beach vegetation anchors dunes, shelters and feeds wildlife. SUBMITTED

Beach vegetation traps sand and stabilizes coastal dunes



Your Turn
Britt
Patterson-Weber
Guest
columnist

“Season” in Southwest Florida means a bevy of activities in our coastal communities. Chief among them: beach trips. The beach is one of our most celebrated natural resources, and rightly so. We know beaches as tourist magnets and economic drivers. But we less often consider the beach as habitat, a wildlife corridor spanning over 800 sandy miles along the state’s perimeter. Sea turtles, shorebirds, crabs and more depend on beaches for food and shelter. ● From our beach chairs, we may subconsciously note swooping shorebirds and scurrying crabs. Do we do the same with coastal plants? Doubtful. In fact, we turn our backs to them! Yet, the beach ecosystem wouldn’t be without plants. Sand-trapping vegetation literally anchors the beach, forming dunes up and down the coastline. These dunes provide food and shelter for wildlife, and they help shield the human environment against coastal flooding and high waves. ● These plants need your attention — and your help.

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Proposed transfer of mail operations from Fort Myers cause for concern



Your Turn
Sam Wood
Guest columnist

The Fort Myers P&DC Jet Port Loop Postal Facility is a vital hub for mail delivery in our region. It serves the cities of Cape Coral, Fort Myers, Naples, Punta Gorda, Port Charlotte, and surrounding communities throughout Southwest Florida. Any disruption to its operations could have a significant impact on businesses and residents alike.

I am particularly concerned about the potential for this move to slow down mail delivery. The increased

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SPARKER’S SOAPBOX

How Florida’s primary election works



Your Turn
Sandy Parker
Guest columnist

This is the first of several articles in a “Be a More Informed Voter” series by Sandy Parker of Sparker’s Soapbox that will appear in the coming months.

As the election season gets underway, an understanding of Florida’s primary election process is crucial if you want your vote to make a difference.

That’s because the laws governing primary elections in Florida are different from those in other states, and some rules even vary by political party.

Here is some information to help you be a more informed voter in the upcoming primaries.

Partisan vs. nonpartisan elections

Partisan elections involve political parties. In partisan primary elections, voters choose the parties’ candidates to

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Help

Continued from Page 1B

First, I challenge you to look carefully at what's growing along the shoreline. At first glance, you may see merely a patch of green. Look again. How many species do you observe?

Each is doing a special job. Plants like railroad vine grow quickly and hold onto sand with their roots, stems and leaves. They are considered "dune-initiating" plants. Once the initiators have done their job, slower-growing species like bitter panicgrass can take root. This clumping grass traps sand and elevates dunes. These are just two examples of the many plants that have adapted over time to thrive in loose, nutrient-poor sand, tolerate salt spray, and survive periodic battering by storms. Together, they make a resilient ecosystem.

Shorelines exist in a state of dynamic equilibrium — that is, there are ever-changing adjustments made to ever-changing conditions. You've probably noticed this: one day, you may see rough and tumbling surf; the next, the Gulf may look like perfectly still glass. Sometimes, the tides give us only a narrow band of sand upon which to set our beach chairs; other days, you have enough room for a game of football. The one constant: plants.

Think of the beach ecosystem like it's a bank. The dune is a savings account, and the wind and waves make daily deposits and withdrawals of sand. Beach vegetation traps sand and stabilizes dunes, essentially keeping the elements from depleting the account.

When you imagine dunes, though, you might picture towering sand mounds. While "mound of sand" is the very definition of a dune, a dune's size is determined by tidal range, onshore winds, sand particle size and available sand. The dunes on our coast will never be imposing behemoths, but that doesn't mean they are unimportant. Even our smaller-scale structures offer protection against storm surge, as they dissipate wind and wave energy. There is a caveat. Nothing can prevent damage from storms on the scale of Hurricane Ian. However, a healthy, biodiverse coastline provides better sanctuary for our wildlife and more resilience to everyday stress from wind, waves and storms without names.

Britt Patterson-Weber is the Vice President of Education & Interpretation at Naples Botanical Garden.



Naples Botanical Garden offers a few ways to learn more about beach ecosystems both at the garden and at the beach itself. SUBMITTED

How to help coastal plants perform their critical work

Give plants a chance

Feet, chairs, and umbrellas damage dune plants. Stay on the sand during every beach visit.

Pack it in, pack it out

Litter can damage plants, harm marine wildlife, and make it difficult to enjoy the beach. Remember to take all your trash with you.

Speak up for plants

The presence of diverse plants throughout our community is vital to our safety and well-being, but plants can't speak for themselves. Be a voice and advocate for the restoration and protection of plants and their habitats.

Learn more

Naples Botanical Garden offers a few ways to learn more about beach ecosystems both at the Garden and at the beach itself. You can find out more about these education programs, supported by the Collier Community Foundation, on our website, www.naplesgarden.org/beach-dune-restoration. Programs at the Garden are included with admission (free for members). Those at the beach are free, but advanced registration is required. In February, you can find our educators at Lowdermilk Beach at 9 a.m. on Feb. 4, 13, and 20, weather permitting.

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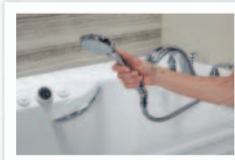
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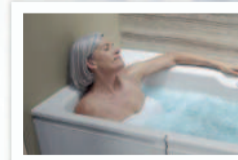
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