

Native salt resistant vegetation helps to preserve and build beaches and dunes. The root systems of plants retard erosion of sand while leaves, limbs and stalks act as collectors of sand to build the dunes and beaches. Without the stabilizing and accreting effects of vegetation, dunes will be eroded. Salt-resistant vegetation is therefore essential to maintain a viable beach and dune system which provides protection to coastal structures and property from storm damage.

Therefore, it is a policy of the Department of Environmental Protection to "protect native salt-resistant vegetation and endangered plant communities" (62B-33.005(8), Florida Administrative Code). Individuals may apply for a permit to conduct landscaping activities seaward of the Coastal Construction Control Line. However, the Department's policy to protect native salt resistant vegetation will be applied during the permit review process.

Pruning of sea grapes and saw palmetto, in accordance with the attached species specific guidelines, may be exempt from the Department's permitting requirements. However, to be considered exempt, a property owner must provide reasonable assurance to the Department that the maintenance activities will not harm the vegetation or dune system.

An exemption from the permitting requirements of the Office of Beaches and Coastal Systems does not shield the property owner from enforcement action which may be taken by local, state, or federal agencies. All local permitting requirements must be satisfied. Furthermore, proper horticultural practices must be followed to ensure that the plants are not damaged or destroyed.

Property owners who wish to prune seagrasses or saw palmetto seaward of the Coastal Construction Control Line must consider the impacts to marine turtles. Potential for disorientation and subsequent injury or mortality of hatchling marine turtles exists due to increased illumination of the nesting beach as a result of pruning. The property owner must evaluate existing or proposed site lighting and take appropriate measures to eliminate potential illumination of the nesting beach. No landscaping activities or pruning shall be permitted if the activities will result in increased illumination of the beach which has the potential to cause disorientation of marine turtles.

Marine turtle mortality resulting from increased illumination shall be considered a violation of Chapter 370.12, Florida Statutes, and the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973. Such a violation could subject the responsible party to prosecution by both the Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with fines up to \$10,000.

## **Sea Grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*):**

Sea grape is a native, salt-resistant plant which is an important component of the beach and dune system throughout its range. Fruit of the sea grape is a berry which grows in grape-like clusters. The fruit is a source of food for a number of native birds and mammals. The leathery, broad leaves of sea grape may grow to be 10 inches wide. The leaves protect sensitive understory plants from lethal salt spray. Throughout its range, sea grape is important to owners of ocean front property. The large round leaves trap windblown sand and thereby help to build dunes that protect upland structures. Sea grape leaves also protect structures from the destructive forces of windblown salt. Furthermore, thick stands of sea grape slow storm induced erosion of dunes.

The Department will exempt trimming of sea grapes seaward of the Coastal Construction Control Line from the stringent permitting requirements of Chapter 161, Florida Statutes, when the trimming will not damage or destroy the plant. In order to ensure that the trimming will not destroy the plant the following guidelines shall be followed:

- I. No more than one-third of the height of a tree and no more than one-third of the total leaf surface area of a tree may be removed in a single pruning event or in a single year.
- II. The trimming techniques and timing should be in accordance with accepted horticultural practices (see the attached Crown Reduction Pruning Standards).

Trimming of sea grapes, in accordance with the conditions described in the preceding paragraph, may be exempt from the permitting requirements of Chapter 161, Florida Statutes, for any number of consecutive years. However, trimming of sea grapes to heights of less than six (6) feet will not be exempt from the permitting process.

In instances where the proposed trimming will reduce the plant to a height of less than 6 feet or completely destroy it, the applicant will be required to submit an application for a permit. The Department will consider the site specific information, including the possible adverse impacts to the beach and dune system from the activity, as part of its determination of whether or not to permit the proposed activity.

Trimming of sea grapes will not be exempt from the permitting process or permitted if the trimming results in additional lights being visible from the beach or exposure of salt-sensitive coastal hammock vegetation to increased salt spray.

Dead leaves and limbs should not be removed unless they are creating a safety hazard because they protect sensitive understory plants and new growth from salt spray.

**Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*):**

Saw palmetto is an important plant throughout the southeastern United States. This native, salt resistant shrub provides food and cover for native wildlife.

Trimming of leaves of saw palmetto is exempt from the permitting requirements of Chapter 161, Florida Statutes. However, trimming shall be limited to one event per year.

Botanists refer to the "cabbage" or "heart of palm" as the apical meristem. The apical meristem is located at the tip of the trunk and is responsible for plant growth. Unlike many woody plant species, when the apical meristem is removed from a saw palmetto the plant dies. Because trimming of the trunk of saw palmetto removes the apical meristem and thereby destroys the plant, this type of trimming is not exempt from the stringent permitting requirements of Chapter 161, Florida Statutes.

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