

**For Immediate Release**

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***Gov. Perdue Declares First Invasive Plant Awareness Week***

Raleigh, NC – Governor Beverly Perdue has declared April 4 – 10, 2011 as North Carolina’s First Invasive Plant Awareness Week to raise awareness of problems caused by invasive plants. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the N.C. Aquarium are actively working with the Beach Vitex Task Force to eradicate over 650 beach vitex sites along the North Carolina coast.

Invasive plants like beach vitex can wreak havoc on endangered species and natural ecosystems. Originally imported from Asia and sold as an ornamental plant to stabilize sand dunes, beach vitex has spread to natural areas along the coast from Maryland to Alabama. “It has spread into areas that are important for sea turtle nesting and shorebird foraging, negatively affecting their reproduction and feeding,” said Melanie Doyle, Conservation Horticulturist at the NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher. “It also grows in areas where the threatened seabeach amaranth might otherwise grow.”

“Unlike kudzu, a highly invasive vine from Asia that is so widespread that little can be done to curtail its growth, there is still time to control and eradicate beach vitex before it becomes more widely established,” said Dale Suiter, a biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

“Now that it is early spring, plants are beginning to green up. We want people to focus on the plants that aren’t supposed to be there,” said Margaret Fields with The Nature Conservancy. “It is too late to put much of a dent in kudzu, but we can stop the next kudzu in its tracks.”

Most invasive plants affecting North Carolina are Asian natives. Our climate is similar to the conditions in Asia so those plants grow well here. However, the animals and diseases that keep them in check in Asia aren’t present here, so they begin to grow and spread crowding out native plants and turning complex ecosystems filled with a variety of plant species into simple communities dominated by just a few plant species. Animals, insects and birds that rely on the native plants are also negatively affected. Invasive plants have the potential to have serious impacts on North Carolina’s important tourism and agriculture industries.

For more information on how to identify invasive plants that affect North Carolina, go to <http://www.se-eppc.org/northcarolina/> North Carolina Exotic Pest Plant Council. <http://www.beachvitex.org/> contains information about the Beach Vitex Task Force. <http://www.ncsu.edu/goingnative/index.htm> North Carolina State University’s “Going Native” web site provides helpful information on landscaping with native plants. <http://ncbg.unc.edu/plants-and-gardening/> North Carolina Botanical Garden web site provides information about invasive exotic plants in the southeast as well as native alternatives for gardens.

To view the Governor’s proclamation, visit

<http://www.governor.state.nc.us/NewsItems/ProclamationDetail.aspx?newsItemID=1700>

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

For photos of beach vitex, please contact Dale Suiter at 919-856-4520 x 18 or Dale\_Suiter@fws.gov.