

Island probes illegal cutting of trees, shrubs

BY JESSICA JOHNSON
The Post and Courier

SULLIVAN'S ISLAND — Property owners here can trim some of the shrubs that block their ocean views, but on properties from Station 25 to Station 27 streets, some hardwood trees appear to be missing, and some shrubs have been cut to the ground.

A small group of residents came to a Sullivan's Island Town Council meeting Tuesday wanting the results of an investigation into the illegal cuttings on the barrier island's accreted land, land that builds up over time as sediment slowly accumulates.

Town officials discovered the violation during a routine inspection and asked the Charleston County Sheriff's Office to investigate because Sullivan's Island Town Councilman Gerald "Jerry" Kaynard lives at 2501 Atlantic Ave., near the area where illegal cuttings begin.

Resident Norwood Smoak wanted to know who violated the town's tree ordinance, and asked the council members to share the information they had.

"I would like to know what is going on," Smoak said.

The town allows property owners to hire licensed contractors to trim wax myrtle and eastern baccharis shrubs and the popcorn trees to 5 feet with a permit. People who violate the regulation can be fined

\$500 and sentenced to 30 days in jail per tree or shrub.

In April, 14 residents sent town officials a letter stating they noticed missing trees on the public accreted land during recent walks along the beach.

"We are saddened at the progressive loss of the natural beauty once afforded by the healthy foliage in these public areas. More importantly, we are concerned about the loss of the natural protection against storms and erosion that is provided by a healthy forest," part of the letter reads.

Some wax myrtles were pruned lower than 5 feet, they wrote, and many appeared dead.

Resident Julia Khoury, who signed the letter, said that several hardwood trees had been destroyed and that wax myrtles can die when they are trimmed too low.

Town Administrator Andy Benke said by the time the letter arrived at Town Hall, the investigation had already begun. Two property owners in that area are allowed to trim some shrubs to 3 feet, in part because their homes are at ground level.

Town officials couldn't say when the sheriff's investigation would be complete only the results would be made public once they receive it. Kaynard did not comment on the investigation during the meeting.

Reach **Jessica Johnson** at jjohnson@postandcourier.com.