

# Nature sanctuary or island nuisance?

Some on Sullivan's want more leeway in pruning maritime forest



WADE SPEES/STAFF

"The town really needs to come up with a win-win plan that gives front-beach residents a view and still maintains the integrity of the accreted land and its role in preserving and protecting the island from storms," said Sullivan's Island resident Pat Votava, at Station 25 on Monday.

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SULLIVAN'S ISLAND — Dr. Steve Poletti said signs with a skull and crossbones should be posted to warn people of potential danger lurking in the maritime forest.

Thick brush lies about 10 yards from his house, located close to the lighthouse. He worries about the increased possibility of a rabid animal bite because he has seen a fox living in the woods. At least one alligator has been spotted in the area. Hypodermic needles and condoms have been found in the dunes amid the brush and trees, he said.

In 2007, a man dragged a woman from the beach path near Poletti's home and beat her before being scared off by a passing cyclist. Police arrested the culprit in about 30 minutes.

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To follow a link to the accreted land management plan, go to [postandcourier.com](http://postandcourier.com).

# Forest's fate debated

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"If you walk three feet into the thicket, you couldn't be seen. There is going to be another attack on the beach. There is going to be some bad guy who figures out this is a good place to hide," said Poletti, who has been fined \$6,000 for trimming wax myrtles in the dunes near his residence.

Four residents have filed suit against the town and Town Council seeking a court ruling that would allow more extensive pruning of the maritime forest.

The suit includes allegations that the maritime forest obstructs beach views and sea breezes, thus devaluing property, and that council approved the forest-management plan illegally.

One of the residents suing the town, Dr. Ettaleah Bluestein, said maritime forest trees are a danger during a hurricane because they can become projectiles, crashing into houses.

"I think they (experts) showed that the trees really aren't protection and really act like spears," she said.

This weekend, council will meet to discuss maritime forest management. On Friday, council will tour the area. And on Saturday, council will meet at Town Hall to review plans for the forest.

In its response to the suit, council denies allegations that the maritime forest obstructs oceanfront views, diminishes property values and is a safety hazard because of varmints in the brush and the possibility of criminals hiding there.

Trimming and pruning were allowed year-round for all species to a level of no less than 3 feet high. Because council changed the rules, now only certain species can be trimmed to no less than 5 feet above ground between Nov. 1 and Feb. 28.

Island resident Pat Votava questioned the value of pruning. She said the woods provide protection from the ravages of wind and tide for everyone on

the island.

"We've been kicking this around for a long time on the island," Votava said.

She pointed to the woods near Station 25, where she said the wax myrtles and other plants are an eyesore after being cut back. "Stations" on the island refer to streets.

"It looks awful. I was just stunned. What the heck happened?" she said.

The forested area of the beach offers protection for nesting and hatching sea turtles, provides habitat for nesting and migrating land birds and supports more than 125 plant species, said Bob Perry, director of the state Department of Natural Resources' Office of Environmental Programs, in a letter addressed to Mayor Carl Smith.

Coastal scientists recently observed threatened species, such as the Wilson's plover, least tern and piping plover, in the area. Removing the forest likely would impact the endangered loggerhead sea turtle because it depends on a "dark beach to navigate the water," Perry said.

Smith declined comment, citing the ongoing litigation.

The woods are on 90 acres of new beach that has formed over the years from sand that stacks up at the Charleston Harbor jetties. The acreage is mostly on the west end of the island toward Fort Moultrie.

**AND**  
The approval of 75 percent of voting islanders or a unanimous vote of council is required before changes to the woods-trimming rules can happen. According to the suit, neither happened when the new pruning and trimming restrictions were approved.

The town and the Lowcountry Open Land Trust entered a preservation partnership in 1991 that allows for cutting the woods down to 3 feet high year-round. The town has not followed the terms of its agreement with the Open Land Trust, the suit alleges.

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