

Protect environment on Sullivan's Island accreted land

Has Sullivan's Island lost its environmental mind? The town is preparing to modify its present land-management practices for 90 acres of accreted land area presently deeded under the Lowcountry Open Land Trust. The town wanted to prevent this barrier island habitat from future development.

For those familiar with Sullivan's Island, this is the wooded area between the dunes and the homes from Station 26 to Station 19.

Now, approximately 75 homeowners whose ocean views cross this important and ecologically diverse area want to tear out all of the vegetation in this area and plant grass so that their ocean views and breezes are not blocked by this protected and rare maritime forested area.

They claim that having the vegetation in front of their homes is creating a safety issue — the increased risk of fire, rats, snakes, mosquitoes and weird people hanging out in the bushes. Presently, residents are allowed to have the vegetation and trees trimmed once a year.

In January the Town of Sullivan's Island had an Accreted Land Management Plan done by Coastal Science and Engineering.

The report concluded the city has four options for how they can



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Some of the accreted land on Sullivan's Island has turned to a maritime shrub forest blocking ocean views.

change their land management plan:

- ▶ 1) Do nothing and allow the land to evolve naturally.
- ▶ 2) Continue the present practice of pruning once a year.
- ▶ 3) Implement more extensive management of vegetation.
- ▶ 4) Modify topography and implement expanded management of vegetation.

The study also concluded that the increased risks are due to trimming back the natural vegetation once a year. By not allowing the natural growth to occur, you end up with a tangled mess in the undergrowth, attracting more animals to the increased habitat.

The study found that plants higher than five feet were considered "of

high priority, representing a more consistent obstruction to surge and wave propagation than smaller ones."

It also found that "changes in vegetation cover and densities, either natural or man-made, will influence resistance of the vegetation to the waves. In general, denser and higher vegetation cover will reduce wave

heights and potential wave damages along interior areas."

The study concludes that "76 species of birds utilize the AL study area." Unfortunately, these birds, including the Wilson's plover, piping plover, red knot, sanderling, semipalmated sandpiper, least tern, prairie warbler and painted bunting (all on the Audubon Watch List and one, the piping plover, on the federally endangered/threatened list) do nothing to add value to these beach-front homes. But they do add value to Sullivan's Island itself, which is what the town should really be interested in.

I hope Sullivan's Island Town Council will look at this issue from an environmental standpoint and not from a dollars-and-cents standpoint.

Sullivan's Island shouldn't become the poster child for how not to manage a barrier island.

All concerned residents can attend a special meeting at Sullivan's Island Town Hall at 6 p.m. Tuesday when this issue will be discussed.

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