

[From Spring 1993]

Beach Grass Planting

After the January 1992 nor'easter, the primary dune system on the refuge (most of Assateague Island for that matter) was virtually flattened, leaving important habitat vulnerable to storm surges. Refuge personnel responded by sculpting sand with bulldozers to form a protective dune line. Now one million stems of beach grass are being planted along 2.5 miles of dune. The grass is dormant now but in the spring it will begin to grow and send out an extensive root system which will help to anchor the dune. Not only will this grass help prevent erosion of the dunes but it will also help build up the dunes by collecting and holding wind-blown sand.

Who is planting all this grass? Volunteers are! Through a Cooperative Agreement with the Committee to Preserve Assateague Island and the involvement of the William F. Kirwin, Inc. (an environmental and landscape consulting firm), the refuge is utilizing volunteers to help plant beach grass. Project Manager Glen Page originally proposed the use of volunteers, suggesting, "This is the perfect opportunity for people to participate in a restoration project, and feel good about protecting natural habitat."

As of January 31st, 59 volunteers have helped plant over 200,000 stems of grass. Because of all the enthusiastic help from volunteers, the goal of planting 1 million stems before April is well on its way to being a reality.



FWS photo of planting American Beach Grass in 1965

More volunteers are always welcome. Teams meet at the refuge visitor center at 8:30 and 12:30 each day, Wed. - Sun. For more information please contact Chris or Patrick at 804/3363230 or call the refuge at 804/336-6122.

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