



**United States Department of the Interior
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**

**FIRE ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE
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IN REPLY REFER TO:

September 22, 2017

L7615 (ACOE FIMI 2014)
N1433 (Lighthouse Dune Grass Planting-ACOE FIMI 2014)

To: Files, Fire Island National Seashore

From: Chief, Resource Management, Fire Island National Seashore

USB

Subject: Analysis Dune Grass Planting-Fire Island National Seashore Lighthouse Tract

The following information is provided to document the planting of American Beach Grass (*Ammophila breviligulata*) on the constructed dunes fronting the Fire Island Lighthouse, Fire Island National Seashore.

In 2015 The US Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), State of New York and U.S. Department of Interior completed a mutually acceptable one-time stabilization plan along the Fire Island barrier island to provide protection until implementation of the recommendations of the overall Reformulation Study. This project is called the Fire Island to Moriches Inlet (FIMI) Plan. Included were three projects phases. The stabilization efforts were considered one-time sand placement projects and included no beach nourishment cycles. The efforts were meant to provide protection until the implementation and construction of final recommendations of the overall Reformulation Study.

Beginning in Nov. 2015 and ending early spring 2016 the first phase of the FIMI project was completed. This phase included sand placement/dune construction on the Atlantic Ocean beach from Robert Moses State Park through the Village of Saltaire. This phase of the project included building a dune and berm on the ocean beach the entire length of the Fire Island National Seashore's Lighthouse Tract.

The USACOE Environmental Assessment and the US Fish and Wildlife Service's Biological Opinion called for, and approved of, planting American Beach Grass on the constructed dunes. The plan did not call for planting American Beach Grass on the dunes built in front of the Lighthouse. During the dune grass planting phase, the contractor mistakenly planted over 330 meters of dune grass at 18" center spacing. By time it was recognized by the NPS, it was determined that pulling up the plantings would be more destructive, so the plantings were left.

The American Beach Grass was planted via a contract that the ACOE had with Scenic Designs of Garden City Long Island. Scenic Designs bought the American Beach Grass from 2 nurseries. One was Peat and Sons in Westhampton Long Island and the other was Church's Garden Center in Cape May NJ.

In trying to determine where the beach grass plantings originated from, I contacted Scott Snell, Natural Resources Specialist, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's Cape May Plant Materials Center (PMC) in Cape May NJ. In my conversation with staff at the PMC, it turns out the source material, *Ammophila breviligulata*, originated from naturally occurring sand dune systems in Cape Cod Massachusetts in the 1950's. The Plant Material Center developed and released this geno-type under the cultivar name "Cape" in recognition of it's place of origin, Cape Cod. The PMC is the primary supplier of beach grass to nurseries up and down the east coast.

This is not the first time that dune grass has been planted on re-nourished beaches on Fire Island. Many communities have had dune building projects over the years and many of these projects were then planted with American Beach Grass brought in by contractors. Because the Cape May PMC is the primary supplier of beach grass for dune projects, one could speculate that the plantings were accomplished with plant material from the same source, the Cape May PMC.

What I cannot say for sure, is whether or not any dunes on federal tracts of land (besides the recent plantings on the dunes with in the federal tract at the Fire Island Lighthouse) have ever been planted with dune grass from off Fire Island. It may be interesting to determine if there are any areas of Fire Island where dune grass may be in natural occurring populations. With proper funding or in partnership with local academic institutions, the park should pursue future research on genotyping American Beach Grass across federal tracts of land within the boundaries of the seashore.

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