



Operational beach: Pictured above, Marines were training on the beach with AAVs while the volunteers and staff were planting sea oats.

## **Planting effort preserves beach**

Story and photos by  
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A few good Marines and sailors were sowing their wild oats ...sea oats, that is. Approximately 40 volunteers, both military and civilian, came together on a training area at Onslow beach Friday to plant sea oats, a native, warm season grass, in an effort to protect the beach from erosion by keeping the sand dunes intact.

The effort was spearheaded by the Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune Environmental Conservation Branch. The Environmental Conservation Branch also handles the base hunting and fishing program, wildlife and fish-pond management, other soil conservation programs and nuisance wildlife issues, among other programs, aboard base.

“It is a way to trap the blowing sand and allow nature to rebuild the dunes,” said Martin Korenek, wildlife biologist with the Land and Wildlife Resources Section, in explaining the importance of sea oats in beach preservation. “It’s pretty simple. Put something there to stop the wind. The sand falls down. The process repeats itself.”

For the past several years the Environmental Conservation Branch has been planting the grass twice a year; once early in the season and once late in the season, Korenek explained.

The early summer planting “gets a bunch of grass in early and, if we don’t have any hurricanes, it gives the chance for it to grow,” said Korenek.

If there is bad weather during the summer, the second planting is a another chance to get some grass in the sand.

The volunteers gathered early Friday morning to receive their instructions. Some were set to work “boring” holes in the sand with a metal bar with water running through it. Following behind them, other volunteers placed small scoops of fertilizer in the holes. Next came the planters who placed a plant in each hole. Then the holes were filled in. “It usually takes a few moments for all of the volunteers to find their niche, but once we get moving everyone picks it up really fast,” said Korenek.

The sea oats used in the planting are nursery-grown plants and are a species native to the area. The seeds for the plants are gathered from beaches in North Carolina.

Cpl. Joan Skipper, a supply administrator from Headquarters Support Battalion, Marine Corps Base, put the plants inside the bore holes. She said she enjoyed volunteering.

“It’s fun. You get to be out in the sun enjoying the nice day. You get to meet new people and get to see new things. I’ve never done this before. This is the first time,” she said. Hospital Corpsman Petty Officer 2nd Class Miram Maides, a Navy corpsman from the Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune Orthopedic Clinic, agreed that volunteering was fun. “I’ve always been into the environment, so this is fun to me,” she said.

Staff Sgt. Terrance Jackson, of the Resource Conservation Division, acts as a military liaison among the military units regarding environmental issues. His understanding of coastal ecology comes from personal experience. “My family is from Gulfport, Miss., which Hurricane Katrina destroyed. So I know the importance of having dunes on the beach,” he said.

As the volunteers and staff were out on the beach planting sea oats, Marines were training nearby on AAVs. Korenek, a former Marine who used AAVs during his time in service, commented on the importance of the conservation efforts on training.

“Without the barrier island here, these guys wouldn’t have a training beach here necessarily,” he said. “The beach is important for training, but it’s important for the wildlife habitat as well.”

Korenek was pleased with the efforts the staff and volunteers made in the planting.

“I guess the real message is education. [This grass planting] allows these guys to learn a little about barrier island ecology while allowing them to do something for the base while working outside for a day,” said Korenek.

Editor’s Note: For more photographs from this story, see The Globe Web site at [www.camplejeuneglobe.com](http://www.camplejeuneglobe.com).