

# Sea Grape Trimming Guidelines

There are a small number of plant species that can endure the extreme conditions encountered along our state's coastline. Dune species such as the Sea grapes thrive in this harsh environment. Sea grape trees and shrubs act as a continuous sand trap. The accumulation of sand by the leaves, limbs and stalks play a major role in the construction of the beach and dune system. Without the stabilizing and accreting effects of Sea grapes and other salt-tolerant plant species, the beach and dune system becomes more vulnerable to erosion. To put it simply, sand stored in the dunes provides protection to homes and other structures from the effects of coastal storms.

The Florida Legislature recognized the importance of coastal plant species. Therefore Florida law states that no person, firm, corporation, or governmental agency shall damage or cause to be damaged sand dunes or the vegetation growing on the dune system (subparagraph 161.053(2)(a), Florida Statutes). Consequently, it is the policy of the Department of Environmental Protection to protect native salt-tolerant vegetation and endangered plant communities. Property owners or their agents proposing to alter the native vegetation seaward of the Department's Coastal Construction Control Line must apply for a permit if the alteration can be expected to damage the plants.

Damage to vegetation refers to the trampling, crushing, breaking, digging up, or excessive cutting of roots, stems or branches of native salt tolerant plants naturally occurring on-site or planted for dune restoration. Excessive cutting means the removal of branches, stems and leaves in excess of the Department trimming guidelines for sea grape or the standards published in ANSI A300 Part 1: Tree, Shrub and other Woody Plant Maintenance - Standard Practices, Pruning. Damage to beach and dune vegetation will be avoided, minimized or mitigated through the permit process.

Vegetation maintenance that does not damage plants as defined above, including trimming, shearing, pruning, dead heading and other accepted horticultural practices is exempt from permit requirements. An exemption from the permitting requirements of the Department of Environmental Protection does not shield the property owner from enforcement action taken by local, state, or federal agencies. Furthermore, proper horticultural practices must be followed to ensure that the plants are not damaged or destroyed. For more information you may contact the Bureau of Beaches and Coastal Systems regulatory program at 850/488-7708.

Persons intending to maintain native vegetation seaward of the Coastal Construction Control Line must consider the impacts to sea turtles. Removal of beachfront vegetation increases the potential for disorientation and subsequent injury or mortality of hatchling sea turtles, which are attracted to light. Pruning or trimming removes vegetation that often prevents lights from shining on the beach and thus protects sea turtle nesting habitat. Vegetation maintenance that increases lighting of the beach must be in compliance with Chapter 370.12, Florida Statutes, "Marine Turtle Protection Act." The property owner must evaluate existing or potential site lighting and take appropriate measures to eliminate the potential for increased light cast on the nesting beach. For information on lighting issues see the attached information on "Sea Grape Trimming and Sea Turtles," or visit the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission website. You may also contact the sea turtle conservation program at 850/922-4330.

Sea turtle mortality resulting from increased illumination is a violation of Chapter 370.12, Florida Statutes, and the Federal Endangered Species Act of 1973. Such a violation could subject the responsible party to prosecution by both the Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with fines up to \$10,000.



## SEA GRAPE (COCCOLOBA UVIFERA):

Is a native, salt-tolerant plant, which is an important component of the beach and dune system throughout its range. Fruit of the sea grape is a berry, which grows in grape-like clusters. The fruit is a source of food for a number of native birds and mammals. The leathery, broad leaves of

sea grape may grow to be 10 inches wide. Throughout its range, the sea grape is important to owners of oceanfront property. The large round leaves trap windblown sand and thereby help to build dunes that protect upland structures. Furthermore, thick stands of sea grape slow storm induced erosion of dunes.

**Exemption Criteria:** The Department will exempt maintenance of sea grapes seaward of the Coastal Construction Control Line from the permitting requirements of Chapter 161, Florida Statutes, when the maintenance will not damage or destroy the plant. The Department has determined that the maintenance will not destroy the plant when following the guidelines listed below:

**Shrub(s):**  
**Less than 72" in height.**

- No more than one third of the leaf mass of each plant may be removed in a single pruning event or in a single year.

**Tree(s): 6' in height, or more.**

- No more than one third reduction in the height of each tree annually,
- Provided there is no more than one third of the leaf mass removed, annually.
- Pruning shall not result in plant being reduced to less than six feet in height.

**Advisory Notes:**

**THIS DOES NOT PRECLUDE LEAF AND STEM TIP SHEARING.  
REMOVAL OF DEAD, BROKEN AND DISEASED LIMBS IS NOT INCLUDED IN ESTIMATES.  
CANOPY REDUCTION GRATER THAN 1/3 OF THE HEIGHT OF THE PLANT WILL REQUIRE A PERMIT.**

- Maintenance of sea grapes, in accordance with the conditions described above, and not in conflict with the standards published in ANSI A300 Part 1: Tree, Shrub and other Woody Plant Maintenance - Standard Practices, Pruning, are exempt from the permitting requirements of Chapter 161, Florida Statutes, for any number of consecutive years.
- Proposed trimming that will result in reducing the plant to a height of less than 42 inches for shrubs and less than six feet for trees, or completely destroy it, will not be exempt from the permitting process. The Department will consider the site-specific information, including the possible adverse impacts to the beach and dune system from the activity, as part of its determination of whether or not to permit the proposed activity.



In addition, maintenance of sea grapes must be in compliance with Chapter 370.12, Florida Statutes, "Marine Turtle Protection Act" and should not result in additional exposure of salt-sensitive coastal hammock vegetation to increased salt spray.