Texas Gulf Region CWMA: Dune Management & Restoration on Mustang Island, Phase II 22-045-010-D107

Final Report March 16, 2023

Prepared By:

Leigh Perry, Project Manager
Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program
1305 N Shoreline, Suite 205
Corpus Christi, TX 78401
lperry@cbbep.org
361-336-0310

This report was funded in part by a Texas Coastal Management Program grant approved by the Texas Land Commissioner, providing financial assistance under the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, awarded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Office for Coastal Management, pursuant to NOAA Award No. NA21NOS4190136.

The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of NOAA, the U.S. Department of Commerce, or any of their subagencies.





Project Background:

Barrier island dunes are dynamic habitats that interact with geology, climate, and vegetation. Dunes provide critical habitat for wildlife and serve as defense for inland areas against storm surge and beach erosion by absorbing the impact of waves and water intrusion. Brazilian peppertree is an invasive, noxious, and prohibited species in Texas that negatively impacts dune habitats and other coastal environments. The Texas Gulf Region Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) has removed Brazilian peppertree from over 240 acres and improved management on over 9,370 acres of public and managed lands. The CWMA now includes 9 partners and over 30 participating members, including representatives from the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (CBBEP).

CBBEP used CMP Cycle 26 funds to advance the local Brazilian peppertree management efforts of the CWMA and restore dune habitats that have been highly impacted by Brazilian peppertree. CBBEP and the CWMA removed Brazilian peppertree from impacted dune habitat on Mustang Island and then replanted the treated dune areas. The removal efforts of the project focused on four zones of dune habitat located in Port Aransas on Mustang Island. These areas have high concentrations of Brazilian peppertrees, are owned by CWMA partners, and most areas have been previously treated using CMP funding. The restoration of treated areas began by using CMP Cycle 25 funds, but additional efforts were needed to continue these dune restoration efforts.

This project will provide habitat and dune stabilization, while also preventing the reintroduction of peppertrees by limiting the germination of seeds that are otherwise easily dispersed.



Map 1. Map showing CWMA activities during the CMP 26 contract period, including project site, workday and community event locations in Port Aransas, TX.

Task 1 Summary: Cooperative Weed Management Area Coordinator

The CWMA Steering Committee members selected Christina Marconi, with the University of Texas, Mission Aransas-NERR, to continue serving as the CWMA Coordinator. The contract was executed on October 28, 2021 between the Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program (CBBEP) and the University of Texas (UT). The CWMA Coordinator duties included the implementation of the CWMA management plan, hosting bi-annual meetings, coordinating workdays and community events, leading monthly Steering Committee telecommunications, and producing outreach materials.

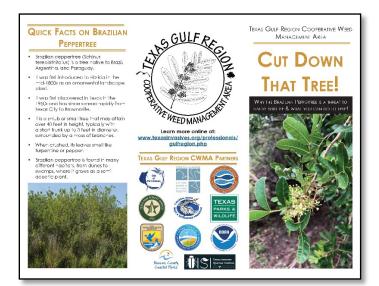








Figure 1. Outreach material produced by the CWMA Coordinator. Top: Trifold flyer, Bottom: 4x9 Rack Card

Task 2 Summary: Biannual CWMA Meetings and Monthly Steering Committee Meetings

Biannual CWMA Meetings - Two biannual meetings were held during the project period.

Spring Meeting, February 24, 2022: The meeting was held in the Seminar Room of the Estuarine Research Center on the UT Marine Science Institute campus in Port Aransas, TX. A presentation was given by the CWMA coordinator and other Steering Committee members explaining the mission and goals of the CWMA and a brief history of the organization. Members went on to discuss and update the meeting attendees on current CWMA projects as well as future funding opportunities. Demian Gomez with the Texas A&M Forestry Service ended the meeting with a presentation on the continued study of thrips (Pseudophilothrips ichini) as biological control against Brazilian peppertree followed by a question-and-answer session.

Fall Meeting, November 10, 2022: The meeting was again held in the Seminar Room of the Estuarine Research Center on the UT Marine Science Institute campus in Port Aransas, TX. The meeting included background information on how to identify Brazilian peppertree and why it is considered an invasive species. The mission and goals of the Texas Gulf Region CWMA were discussed as well as CWMA accomplishments and lessons learned. Updates on completed and ongoing projects and plans for the future were discussed as well as an update on the use of thrips as biological control. There was also a discussion on how to increase citizen and public participation.

Steering Committee Meetings – A total of 17 Steering Committee meetings were held throughout the duration of the project. CWMA steering committee members discussed the status of current Brazilian peppertree removal and restoration projects, biological control of BP, new project opportunities along with funding opportunities, management plan updates, planned workdays and outreach events and discussed future goals of the CWMA. The meeting agendas and minutes were sent to the GLO-CMP as part of the project's required deliverables.

Task 3 Summary: Contracting a Vegetation Management Firm

A request for proposals to contract with a vegetation management firm to remove and treat Brazilian peppertrees within Zone 4 was developed and approved on December 21, 2022. Triton Environmental Solutions, LLC (Triton) was awarded the contract for the invasive species removal and retreatment services; the contract was executed on February 15, 2022.

During the bidding process the project team realized that more funds were needed to complete the vegetation management portion of the project. CBBEP discussed options with the GLO-CMP project manager and a budget amendment was initiated on February 23, 2022 to add an additional \$19,578 to the contract. The University of Texas (UT) provided \$7,000 to the project budget and an additional \$12,578 was provided by the GLO-CMP.

The budget amendment was approved and fully executed on March 21, 2022. Due to the CMP budget amendment and subsequent budget amendment between the CBBEP and UT, the purchase order for the Brazilian peppertree removal was not approved by UT until May 16, 2022.



Map 2. Map showing Zone 4 (red polygon) and Zone 4.3 (yellow polygon)

Vegetation Removal Summary

Project Timeframe: June 13 - July 6, 2022

June 13-17: cut stump, herbicide application within Zone 4.3

June 20-26: mulching of cut Brazilian peppertree within Zone 4.3

July 6, December 1, December 12: new growth retreatment within all of Zone 4

Acreage

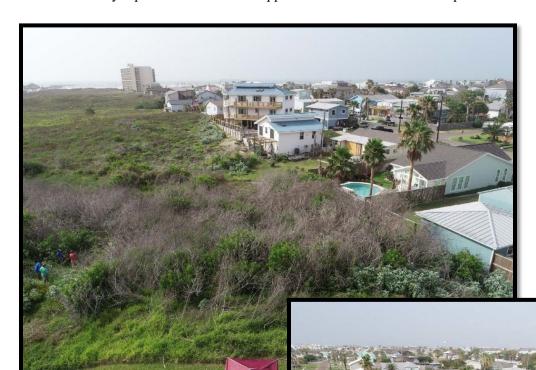
Zone 4: 12.94 acres Zone 4.3: 1.85 acres

Herbicide

4 gallons of foliar applied- Mixed at 4% Triclopyr, 0.5% surfactant, 95.5% water

1 gallon of cut-stump formula applied- Mixed at 96% Triclopyr, 0.0% surfactant, 4% blue dye

Triton's summary report can be found in Appendix A and before and after photos of the areas treated can be found below:



Photos 1-2. Zone 4.3 before treatment photos taken on June 13, 2022.



Photo 3. Freshly mulched Brazilian peppertree within Zone 4.3 on June 26, 2022.

Photo 4. After photo of Zone 4.3, photo taken on November 22, 2022.





Photo 5. After treatment photo taken on November 22, 2022 showing an area within Zone 4.3 that now holds water after Brazilian peppertree removal.



Photo 6-7. November 22, 2022 photos showing Brazilian peppertrees in Zone 4.3 that were cut and treated with an herbicide application in June 2022.





Photos 7-8. Photos showing before photo (left) of Zone 4 on June 13, 2022 and after photo (right) of Zone 4 on November 22, 2022.

Task 4 Summary: Contracting a Dune Restoration Firm

A request for proposals for dune restoration services was sent out on 8/15/2022 and Triton provided a signed estimate on October 21, 2022. A purchase order was approved by UT and delivered on that same day (October 21, 2022). Triton began work in early December 2022.



Map 3. Map showing approved borrow sites on UT-MSI property (blue polygons) and Zone 4.3 (red polygon) where harvested plants were transplanted.

Dune Restoration Summary

Project Timeframe: December 13 – December 30, 2022

December 13-14, 2022: harvested plants from approved borrow areas

December 15-16: transplanted native species in Zone 4.3

December 30, 2022 – site visit

Species Transplanted

440 1-gallon planting units of Coastal Little Bluestem (Schizachyrium littorale) taken from borrow areas near the site.

200 1-gallon planting units of Paspalum spp. taken from borrow areas nears the site.

4,400 1-inch planting units of saltmeadow cordgrass (Spartina patens) taken from a borrow area near Rockport, Texas identified by Triton.

The planting units were harvested on December 13 & 14, 2022 and transplanted into the project site on December 15 and 16, 2022. These transplants covered an area of roughly 1-acre. A short, but hard freeze hit the area on December 22 - 24, however a site assessment conducted by Triton showed minimal impact to the plants put in the ground.

Triton's summary and site visit report along with photos can be found in Appendix B.

Task 5 Summary: Workdays and Community Event

Spring Workday Event – February 24, 2022

On February 24, 2022, CWMA members and volunteers gathered to treat an area in Port Aransas, Texas. Despite the cold weather, eighteen CWMA members from Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, the Invasive Species Institute from Sam Houston State University, South Texas Master Naturalists, City of Port Aransas residents, and MA-NERR and UTMSI grounds crew removed Brazilian peppertree from the UTMSI Beach St. property (near the warehouse in Zone 4). The eighteen-person crew worked from 9am to eleven. Roughly 0.25 acres of Brazilian peppertree were removed.

Below are some pictures showing location and techniques used during the event:



Map 4. Map showing area of UTMSI property off Beach St, Port Aransas, TX (Zone 4) where volunteers removed Brazilian peppertree for the Spring 2022 CWMA workday event on February 24, 2022.



Photos 9-10. Volunteers working in a 1-acre area during the CWMA Spring Workday to remove Brazilin peppertree, finding some invasive Guinea grass to remove as well!



Photos 11-12. Volunteers included local members of the TX Master Naturalists and CWMA members with representatives from the City of Port Aransas, the Texas Forest Service, CBBEP, TX Parks & Wildlife Dept and staff from the Mission-Aransas National Estuarine Research Reserve.



Photos 13-14. Volunteers using a chainsaw (top left) and a battery powered Sawzall (right) to cut down larger Brazilian peppertrees. Once the peppertrees were cut down, an herbicide was applied to the stump.



<u>Fall Workday Event – November 10, 2022</u>

The CWMA hosted a Fall workday on November 10th, 2022. Fifteen CWMA members and volunteers worked for three hours to remove Brazilian peppertree on Port Aransas Nature Preserve property near the Leonabelle Turnbull Birding Center. Multiple trailer loads (approximately 0.50 acres) of Brazilian peppertree were removed from this area. Volunteers from the following organizations participated: Mission-Aransas NERR, Coastal Bend Bays & Estuaries Program, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, South Texas Master Naturalists, City of Port Aransas Staff, and Port Aransas citizens.

Below are some pictures showing location and techniques used during the event:

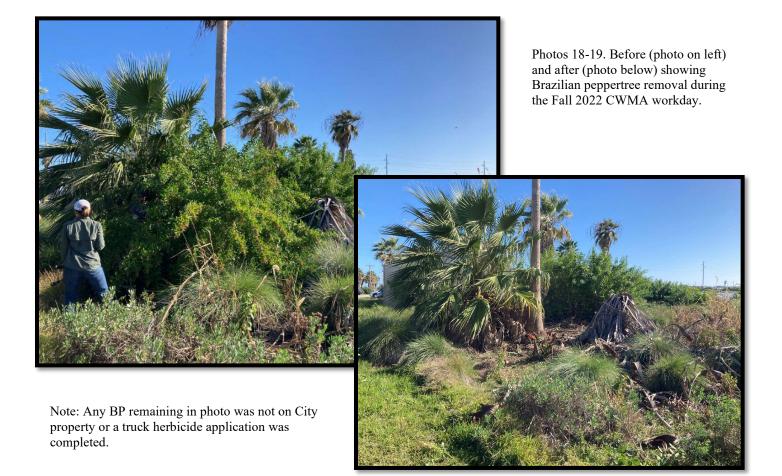


Map 5. Map showing area of Port Aransas Nature Preserve property where volunteers removed Brazilian peppertree for the Fall 2022 CWMA workday event on November 10, 2022.



Photo 15. CWMA members and volunteers at the Port Aransas Nature Preserve during the Fall 2022 CWMA workday.





Community Event – February 24-26, 2023

The CWMA hosted their Spring Community Event on February 24-26, 2023 in conjunction with the 2023 Whopping Crane Festival held in Port Aransas, TX. CWMA members volunteered to provide outreach on the importance of invasive species control for native habitat and wildlife. Volunteers were posted at each of the Port Aransas Nature Preserve sites, as well as at a booth in the Whooping Crane Festival Trade Show. At the booth, brochures about the Texas Gulf Region CWMA, Brazilian peppertree removal, and free goodies were handed out anyone that stopped at the table. At the 2023 Festival, seven CWMA members volunteered. 329 individuals stopped by the table at the Trade Show booth and were educated on Brazilian peppertrees and native South Texas plants. Other Nature Preserve Sites were visited over 3,000 times. Some of these people were educated on Brazilian peppertrees, but all of these people were on site to enjoy the native, local habitats and wildlife.

A map of the volunteer locations and the CWMA booth can be seen below:



Map 6. February 2023 CWMA Community Event Volunteer Locations



Photos 20-22. CWMA volunteers talking with the public about the invasive Brazilian peppertree during the CWMA 2023Community Event. 329 individuals stopped by the CWMA table at the Whopping Crane Festival Trade Show.

Task 6 Summary: Project Monitoring & Reporting

A total of 5 quarterly reports were submitted to the GLO-CMP project manager over the course of the project. The draft final report will be submitted by March 15, 2023, and the final report and closeout form will be submitted by March 31, 2023.

Appendix A

Summary Report and Photo Documentation for Brazilian Peppertree Removal
Submitted by Triton Environmental Solutions, LLC



University of Texas Marine Science Institute 1.85-Acre Site (Zone 4.3)
Brazilian Peppertree Cut Stump Herbicide Application Services
(Zone 4) HerbicideTreatment 12.94 Acres
Timeframe: June 13- 26, July 6, 2022

Prepared By:

Triton Environmental Solutions, LLC P.O. Box 1755 Rockport, TX 78381



6/14

6/15

6/16

6/18

6/24

UT Marine Science Institute (UTMSI)

750 Channel View Dr. Port Aransas, TX 78373-5015

Prepared for:

Map Notes:

For planning and permitting purposes only, not for construction.

Map Preparation Date: July 7, 2022 (RKW).

Base Map Source: Low-Altitude Aerial Imagery Obtained from

Connect Explorer; Photo Date: January 26, 2021.

All created layers on this map are georeferenced from PDF files and are approximate



University of Texas Marine Science Institute (UTMSI)

Brazilian Peppertree Control: Treatment and Removal Project

Project Summary

Project Timeframe: June 13 – July 6, 2022
 Cut Stump and Herbicide Application: June 13 – 17, 2022

Mulch Distribution: June 20 – 26, 2022

New Growth Re-Treatment: July 6, 2022

Approximate Acreage of Brazilian Peppertree Treated and Removed: 1.85 Acres



Zone 4.3: Brazilian Peppertree Removal (Cut Stump and Mulch) and Herbicide Application -Representative Photos of Cut Stump, Treatment, and Piling of Cut Brazilian Peppertree

- -Treatment and Removal Area: 1.85 Acres
- -Project Initiation: June 13, 2022



Zone 4.3: Brazilian Peppertree Removal (Cut Stump and Mulch) and Herbicide Application -Representative Photos of Cut Stump, Treatment, and Piling of Cut Brazilian Peppertree

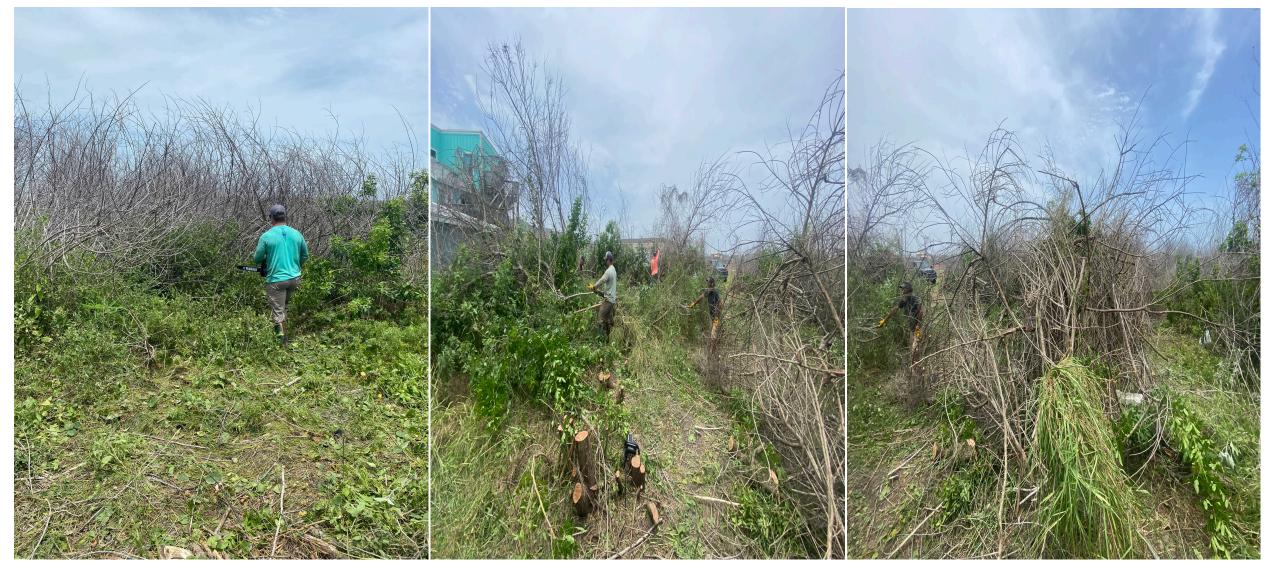
- -Treatment and Removal Area: 1.85 Acres
- -Project Initiation: June 13, 2022



Zone 4.3: Brazilian Peppertree Removal (Cut Stump and Mulch) and Herbicide Application -Representative Photos of Cut Stump, Treatment, and Piling of Cut Brazilian Peppertree

-Treatment and Removal Area: 1.85 Acres

-Project Initiation: June 13, 2022



Zone 4.3: Brazilian Peppertree Removal (Cut Stump and Mulch) and Herbicide Application -Representative Photos of Cut Stump, Treatment, and Piling of Cut Brazilian Peppertree

- -Treatment and Removal Area: 1.85 Acres
- -Project Initiation: June 13, 2022



Zone 4.3: Brazilian Peppertree Removal (Cut Stump and Mulch) and Herbicide Application -Representative Photos of Cut Stump, Treatment, and Piling of Cut Brazilian Peppertree

- -Treatment and Removal Area: 1.85 Acres
- -Project Initiation: June 13, 2022





Zone 4.3: Representative Photos of Mulching in Place
-Approximate Acreage of Brazilian Peppertree Removed from Project Area: 1.85 Acres
-Project Timeframe: June 13 – July 6, 2022





Zone 4.3: Representative Photos of Mulching in Place
-Approximate Acreage of Brazilian Peppertree Removed from Project Area: 1.85 Acres
-Project Timeframe: June 13 – July 6, 2022





Zone 4.3: Brazilian Peppertree Removal (Cut Stump and Mulch) and Herbicide Application -Representative Photos of Clearing Brazilian Peppertree and Mulch Distribution

- -Treatment and Removal Area: 1.85 Acres
- -Project Timeframe: June 13 July 6, 2022





Zone 4.3: Brazilian Peppertree Removal (Cut Stump and Mulch) and Herbicide Application

- -Representative Photos of Clearing Brazilian Peppertree and Mulch Distribution
- -Treatment and Removal Area: 1.85 Acres
- -Project Timeframe: June 13 July 6, 2022





Zone 4.0: Brazilian Peppertree Herbicide Re-Application-Representative Photos of Re-Treatment Area: 10.0 Acres

-Project Timeframe: June 13 – July 6, 2022

Appendix B

Summary Report and Site Visit Report for Dune Restoration Work

Submitted by Triton Environmental Solutions, LLC



Zone 4.3: Native Transplant and Restoration Services: Beach Street Property (Purchase Order No. 2023A06659)

University of Texas at Austin Marine Science Institute (UTMSI)

750 Channel View Dr. Port Aransas, Texas 78373

Harvest & Transplant Summary:

- -Triton harvested from approved UTMSI borrow areas and transplanted the following species:
- Approximately 400 1-gallon planting units of coastal bluestem (*Schizachyrium littorale*).
- Approximately 200 1-gallon planting units of *Paspalum spp*.
- Approximately 4,400 planting units of 1-inch planting units of saltmeadow cordgrass (*Spartina patens*).

Harvest Period: December 13 & 14, 2022





Representative photos of Triton harvesting coastal bluestem (*Schizachyrium littorale*) from approved borrow area, plant harvest location #2, located within UTMSI property off Beach Street in Port Aransas, TX. All coastal bluestem and *paspalum spp*. for the transplanting services were harvested from this location.



Representative photo of approved borrow area for saltmeadow cordgrass (*Spartina patens*). Borrow area is located in Rockport, TX and is one of Triton's preferred plant harvest locations.







Representative photos of Triton transplanting native species within the transplanting and restoration area (Zone 4.3). Transplant units were spaced on 3-foot centers. Saltmeadow cordgrass transplants were planted throughout the entire site but were primarily concentrated at lower elevations surrounding the ponded area. The coastal bluestem and paspalum spp. transplants were planted at slightly higher elevations throughout Zone 4.3 with planting concentrations focused on the dune slopes and open ground areas.



Representative photo of individual saltmeadow cordgrass transplant.



Representative photo of individual coastal bluestem transplant.



Representative photo of individual Paspalum spp. transplant.





Representative photos of native transplant and restoration service area (Zone 4.3), post-transplanting.



Representative photo of native transplant and restoration service area (Zone 4.3), post-transplanting and Triton staff performing irrigation of transplanting units.



Representative photo of Triton's water pump set-up utilized for irrigation. Triton used water sourced from the ponded area on-site to irrigate transplanting units.



Overview Map: Approved Borrow Areas

Zone 4.3: Native Transplant Services Beach Street Property Project Port Aransas, Texas

Prepared For:

University of Texas at Austin Marine Science Institute (UTMSI) 750 Channel Dr. Port Aransas, TX 78373

Prepared By:

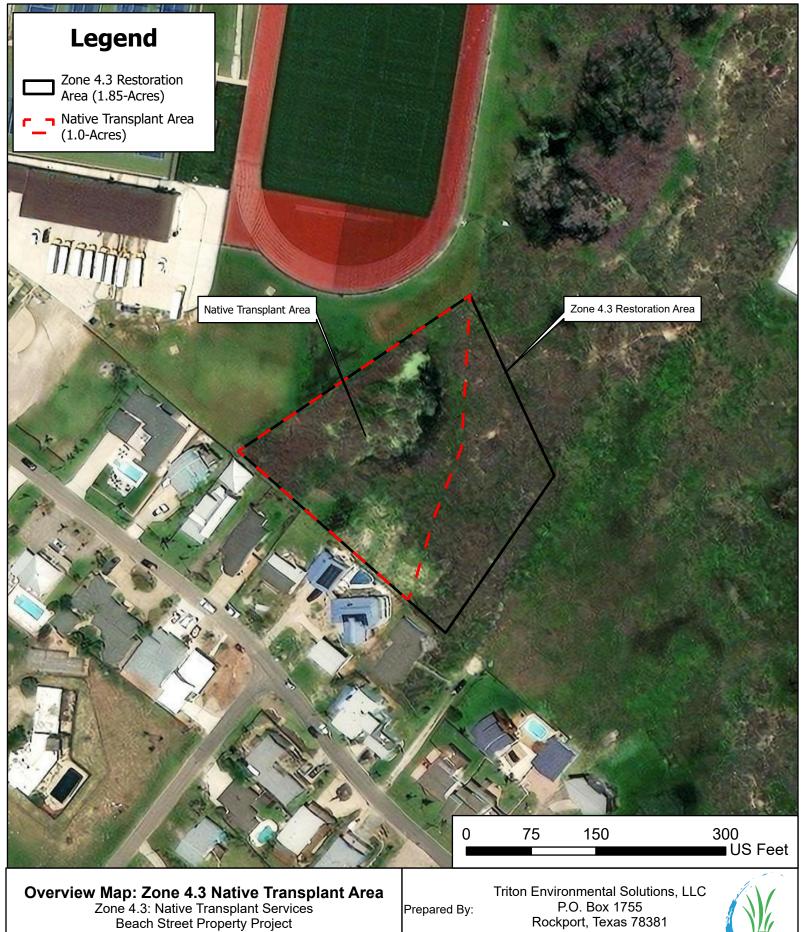
P.O. Box 1755 Rockport, Texas 78381



Map Notes:

For planning and permitting only, not for construction. Base Map Source: ESRI World Imagery. Map Preparation Date: 12/19/2022 (SP).





Port Aransas, Texas



University of Texas at Austin Marine Science Institute (UTMSI) Prepared For:

750 Channel Dr. Port Aransas, TX 78373 Map Notes:

For planning and permitting only, not for construction.

Base Map Source: ESRI World Imagery. Map Preparation Date: 12/19/2022.



Zone 4.3: Native Transplant and Restoration Services: Beach Street Property (Purchase Order No. 2023A06659)

University of Texas at Austin Marine Science Institute (UTMSI)

750 Channel View Dr. Port Aransas, Texas 78373

- Triton conducted a site visit December 30, 2022, to assess the health and condition of the planting units installed December 15 & 16, 2022.
- Site Visit occurred after an extended hard freeze event that moved through the area on December 22nd December 24^{th.}
- No irrigation is recommended at this time.

Transplant Period: December 15 & 16, 2022; Hard Freeze Event: December 22 – 24, 2022; Site Assessment: December 30, 2022



Representative photo of individual coastal bluestem transplant.



Representative photo of individual saltmeadow cordgrass transplant.



Representative photo of individual saltmeadow cordgrass transplant.

Transplant Period: December 15 & 16, 2022; Hard Freeze Event: December 22 – 24, 2022; Site Assessment: December 30, 2022



Representative photos of native transplant and restoration service area (Zone 4.3), post-transplanting and one-week following the December 22nd hard freeze.