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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **St. Johns County Parks and Recreation Department Announces Scheduled Removal of Invasive Plant Species for 30 Acres of Dune Habitat**

ST. JOHNS COUNTY, Fla. (March 11, 2019) – According to the United States Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service, invasive plant species compete directly with native species for moisture, sunlight, nutrients, and space. Because of this, ecosystems can see a decrease in overall plant diversity, degraded water quality, and an increase in soil erosion.

Those are a few of the reasons why St. Johns County dunes qualified for treatment per the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission’s (FWC) Upland Invasive Exotic Plant Management Program. A certified contractor under FWC will target the treatment and removal of invasive plant species choking our local dune habitat. The area of dunes described are among the most adversely impacted by these plant species in Northeast Florida and thus qualified for full funding by the State of Florida.

The project will remove Brazilian pepper-tree and Asparagus fern, both classified as non-native to Florida by the University of Florida’s Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants, from 30 acres of county dunes from Owens Avenue to Matanzas Avenue in the Southeast part of St. Johns County. Public beach walkovers in this area will be temporarily restricted while certified specialists complete the removal of the invasive species.

“Brazilian pepper-trees are listed on the Florida State Noxious Weed List and is considered a serious threat to Florida Agriculture and natural areas,” explained Kelly Ussia, Park Naturalist for St. Johns County Parks and Recreation Department. “It is in the same family as poison ivy and causes native species, including wildlife, to be pushed out. It’s important to manage non-native invasive plant species at our beaches for a balanced ecosystem.”

The invasive plant species will be treated with herbicide. Once dead, the trees at the entrance of the beach access points will be removed and the dune habitat replanted with native vegetation including Red Cedar, Sand Live Oak, Saw Palmetto, Wildflowers, Yaupon Holly, and Prickly Pear Cactus.

### **Temporary Beach Access Closures (Weather Permitting):**

- Monday, March 25<sup>th</sup> closed from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. at East Palmetto Avenue Walkover and East Magnolia Avenue Walkover.
- Monday, March 25<sup>th</sup> closed from 12 p.m. to 5 p.m. at East Orange Avenue Walkover and Redick Lane Foot Path.
- In case of inclement weather, treatments will be conducted on Tuesday, March 26<sup>th</sup>.

- An additional temporarily closing of the beach walkovers will occur two to three weeks after the initial treatment to remove dead trees at the entrance. St. Johns County will update residents once dates have been set.

For more information regarding invasive plant species, visit [UF/IFAS Center for Aquatic and Invasive Plants](#).

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