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Over 70 Volunteers Participate in Strengthening the Island's Dune System

South Padre Island, March 16, 2016: Sand dunes are the City of South Padre Island's first line of defense from Mother Nature's destructive tidal surges caused when severe weather moves in from offshore benefitted from 71 volunteers planting 6,000 native species plants, Sea Oats and Bitter Panicum, to establish a foundation for a healthy dune system.

The planting group was largely made up of 40 students from Beach Reach South Padre, City staff, and a large number of visiting families with young children. The planting was located at Beach Access 9, Blue Water Circle in front of the Suntide III condominiums, just before noon today. The planting captured the attention of families and individuals many of which asked about the types of plants that were being used, why it was necessary and what the plants actually did for the dunes.

Sea Oats are very drought tolerant and produce a broad root system, and will tolerate salt spray and brief submersion under salt water. The stem of the plant has bulges near the soil surface that root down, anchoring into the soil surface as winds build sand up around the plant as it grows. Sea Oats are part of the natural shoreline protection by catching the blowing sand and establishing dune systems.

Bitter Panicum was also planted because of its deep root system that stabilizes from below, keeping the sand stable above ground preventing it from being blown away. Bitter Panicum's tolerance of salt spray, storm surges and burial by drifting sand, made it one of the first colonizers in natural dune ecosystems. It is useful for inclusion in dune restoration and sea oats plantings to increase plant diversity.

As picturesque as they are, coastal sand dunes serve a more important purpose for coastal areas. They natural barriers that protect low-lying areas and help preserve the integrity of barrier islands as well as provide a habitat for many animals, including migratory birds. The dunes can help provide protection for houses and other buildings from strong winds or wave events.

The City of South Padre Island would like to thank Steve Mercer from Coastal Transplants for providing the plants used, Beach Reach for providing a large group of planters, Rob Nixon and the Surfrider Foundation and each individual the volunteered as they walked by. Together we can keep the Island's beaches stable and the dune system strong for years to come.