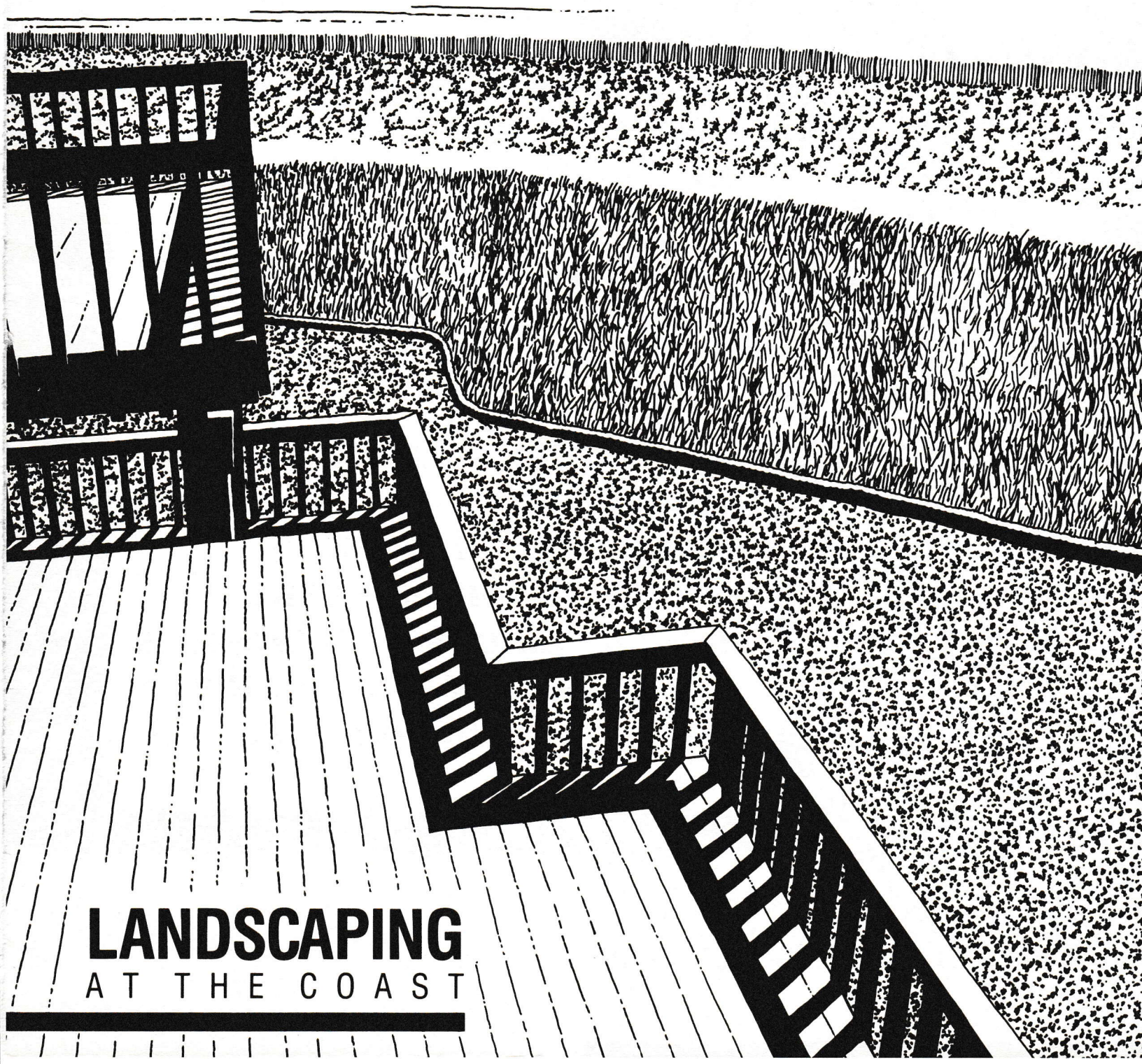


COAST WATCH



LANDSCAPING
AT THE COAST



LANDSCAPING


By Sarah Friday

For some people, an attractive yard is as essential to their homes as furniture or carpet.

So they dig and mulch and plant the seeds they hope will sprout into fertile, stabilizing greens.

But at the coast, heat, wind and salt spray sometimes make landscaping a lawn story.

To make your job easier, start planning now. February is one of the best times of the year to pull out your rake and hoe.



When shoppers come to Bill Strope's store in Beaufort, they usually look for three things—style, function and simplicity.

When they leave, they're not wearing the latest fashions. Instead they're toting bundles of beach grass and bags of fertilizer.

With Strope's help, they're dressing up their yards.

He's a coastal landscaper who also runs a garden center and an irrigation business. And business is growing.

The idea of coastal landscaping is taking root in the minds of the state's property owners. They're planting everything from North Carolina-grown yaupons to the exotic purple fountain grass.

And they do it for a variety of reasons.

Like Gail Gentry of Morehead City—she'd take yard-of-the-month every time. And Clawson Hicks of Pine Knoll Shores—he just wants to keep his lawn from washing away.

There's no doubt Gentry puts aesthetics first for her yard. She sometimes spends 30 hours a week to get that "manicured look" around her Williamsburg-style home.

"You have to make your yard fit your house," Gentry says. And it has to look good.

So Gentry plants boxwoods and mondograss in front of her house, azaleas on the side, and felt-like grass all around.

And it's worth it.

She gets compliments even in the winter.

Still, the idea of beauty and the beach differs among residents.

Some prefer to let native species thrive in their yards. They see beauty in swaying sea oats and prickly yucca plants.

With a little clipping and pruning, native species can be as attractive as and more hardy than exotic ornamentals.

But there is often more to coastal vegetation than beauty.

"Some people are just looking to find something to stop their sand dune from blowing away or the beach from blowing across their yard," says Ben Hill, a landscape consultant from Manteo.

Wind and water whisk away two to three feet of North Carolina's shore each year, says Spencer Rogers, Sea Grant's coastal engineer.

Clawson Hicks knows the story. He lives near the water and owns other coastal real estate.

"I want to stabilize the soil so it won't wash away," he says. So he plants plenty of grass and shrubs.

For stabilization, Rogers suggests first installing a barrier such as a sand fence or a discarded Christmas tree to trap the sand. Then plant American beach grass and, later, sea oats. Once the vegetation becomes established, it will thrive on its own, he says.

Erosion also presents a problem on the sound side of the barrier islands.

Marsh grasses work in certain sheltered areas. Other erosion control methods, like bulkheads, are often necessary and have fewer adverse effects than on the oceanfront.

Although landscaping needs vary, most people have the same general goals in mind. They want a plan that requires little maintenance, is attractive, functional and cost-effective.

But landscaping doesn't come cheap.

"People are willing to spend more money on landscaping now," says Hill. "They want things to look right."

"If you're going to have enough money to buy a house down here, you're usually going to have \$3,000 or \$4,000 to landscape your yard," says Franklin Walker, business manager at Lloyd's of Landscape Ltd. in Wrightsville Beach.

That's about the average cost per yard, he says. The fee includes lawn design, installation and maintenance.

Other landscapers' estimates span from \$500 to tens of thousands of dollars.

Sprinkler or irrigation systems often run up the bill. A complete irrigation system can cost up to \$3,000.

Landscapers install them most frequently in the more southeastern counties where the growing season is 245 to 300 days a year.

Barry Batchelor, owner of Azalea Coast Landscaping in Wilmington, says irrigation and landscaping just about go hand-in-hand now.

"In fact," he says, "I can't think of a home we've done in the last three or four months that we haven't put irrigation in."

To cut costs, many residents rely on their own green thumbs.

Continued



Gail Gentry implements her own designs. And she saves by doing the yard work herself.

In addition, nurseries and garden centers stock a generous supply of plants and advice. And N.C. Agricultural Extension Service agents and district soil conservationists offer free help.

Consult such experts on the right plants to use in your area. Plants that survive Wilmington's sweltering summers may not live through Manteo's biting winter winds.

"The best rule of thumb is, 'Don't move a native plant either 50 miles north or south of where you find it,'" says Karl Graetz, a renowned coastal horticulturist.

Along the northeast coast, a colder climate and harsh northeast winds weed out all but the hardiest plants. That's why only 10 or 15 percent

of Ben Hill's clients choose plants for their beauty.

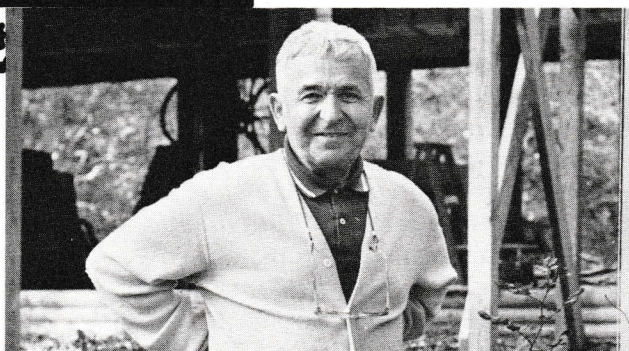
As you move down the coast, warmer weather permits a wider variety of growth.

Strope uses more ornamentals than he used to, and he imports plants from California, Texas, Georgia, Louisiana and Florida.

"We're able to now start using the more elaborate landscape materials," he says.

But Strope admits only some of the fancier plants work. Making it through the seasons is the test. ●

(Sea Grant has two booklets with more tips on stabilization. Write us for *Planting Marsh Grasses for Erosion Control*, UNC-SG-81-09; or *Building and Stabilizing Coastal Dunes with Vegetation*, UNC-SG-82-05.)



If it weren't for the cold weather and a few inconveniences, John Alpar would probably live outside.

You see, Alpar loves plants.

Every inch of his yard in Emerald Isle is tilled for one green thing or another. And a good part of his house is a nursery.

He comes by his avocation honestly. It's also his vocation.

A horticulturist and landscape architect, Alpar treats his yard as he would a good friend. He nurtures it, gives it his time and strives to make the most of the land that encircles his house.

"I really enjoy it very much," says Alpar. "I like things to grow. I like living things, color."

After 17 years in North Carolina, he's learned what can grow at the coast.

"Many, many plants will grow just like anywhere else. You have to work. You have to be there and look after it."

Pamper the plants while they are small and let them get established, he advises. "Then nature will take it from there."

As far as landscaping goes, Alpar leaves most of the work to nature.

When he started planning a few years ago, the first thing he did was see what was already growing on his property.

"Nature's always correct," Alpar says.

He was lucky. His property was closer to the sound than the ocean and allowed for more growth.

So Alpar left the tall pines and holly trees, and found native plants that would complement them. Exotic plants, he says, would give him a lot of headaches.

He has no grass. He doesn't like to mow.

So, for ground cover, Alpar uses juniper, partridge berry, English lavender and lots of pine straw.

And he plants perennials like chrysanthemums and day lilies for color and "years of enjoyment."

He also finds pleasure in his small garden, a patch of herbs and roses—his favorite.

A purist of sorts, Alpar germinates his own seeds and uses no chemicals.

You get a better plant that way, and it's less expensive, he says.

"People spend \$4 to \$5 for a single plant. At the same time, I get a package of seeds and get hundreds of them," he adds, grinning.

Alpar's meticulous care continues as the seeds grow. Every morning he waters his yard and checks for insects. In the evenings, he looks over his plants again, pruning or fertilizing them when needed.

When spring comes, Alpar is glad he hasn't cut corners.

Despite the dry soil, the heat and the salty air, his yard blooms with life.

His secret?

"I can see the beauty in the land like God and nature put it there. I want to keep it going the way it was." ●

Photo by Scott Taylor



A GREEN THUMB'S GUIDE TO

Cultivating the Coast

BY NANCY DAVIS

It's a never-ending battle for survival.

Day after day, wind thrashes the blades of sea oats and beach grass. Salt spray settles onto the leaves of the live oak. And, in the summer, temperatures on the sand's surface rocket above 100 degrees.

For plants, the coast is not an easy place to live.

For landscapers, it will take more than a green thumb to turn this harsh environment into a vegetated vacation spot. It will require planning, perseverance and a short lesson on coastal horticulture.

Karl Graetz, a horticulturist and author of *Seacoast Plants of the Carolinas*, says homeowners can't expect to change North Caroli-



Karl Graetz (above); sea oats on a dune

na's barrier islands into a tropical paradise.

It's not likely, for example, that you'll see swaying palm trees rising above a lush, green forest of trees and shrubs.

If it's palm trees you want, he says, "you might as well buy the tree trunk and put plastic leaves up there."

With a little research and a copy of *Seacoast Plants*, Graetz says you can succeed at a do-it-yourself landscape project. And this month is one of the best times of the year to plant things such as beach grass and small shrubs.

(For a copy of *Seacoast Plants*, write Sea Grant. Ask for UNC-SG-73-06. The cost is \$2.)

If you're still hesitant, your district soil con-

Continued on next page

ervationist of the U.S. Soil Conservation Service can provide advice. Local nurserymen also can help with the selection of species and their planting.

Begin by making some mental sketches of your lot. Think of coastal property as a series of zones, Graetz says.

The grass or pioneer zone is closest to the ocean and has the most direct exposure to the elements. Only the most tolerant beach grasses and low-lying plants can survive here.

Photo by Scott Taylor



Even in winter, thick foliage lines the walkway to Graetz's beach house

The middle, or "scrub zone," begins behind the protection of the first dunes. Here you'll find plants such as yaupon holly, wax myrtle and live oak.

Most beachfront lots never advance beyond the scrub zone, Graetz says.

Farthest from the shore is the forest zone, containing pine and hardwood trees, shrubs and vines.

Since the zones often overlap, your yard may be able to support a variety of plants.

After you determine the characteristics of your lot, check with a local nursery to find out what plants are available and their recommended planting seasons.

If you're constructing a new home, ask your builder to leave as much of the natural vegetation as possible. This will make your landscaping job easier.

And Graetz says you'll have better success if you stick with native plants.

Those plants have adapted to the coastal environment and they're salt hardy, Graetz says. "Besides, the native plants are really gorgeous, and most people don't recognize that."

If you have beachfront property, begin your landscaping project on the dunes. This is the most important area because its stabilization is essential to the protection of your property.

Graetz recommends a combination of American beach grass, sea oats and bitter panicum interspersed with a low ground cover such as

lippia, trailing wildbean or yuccas.

Plant beach grass in the fall and winter. Then, in the summer, add bitter panicum and sea oats.

You can buy the grasses and the proper fertilizer from a nursery. (It is illegal in North Carolina to dig sea oats.)

Behind the first row of dunes, a wider variety of plants can survive. "When these plants get their heads down below that salt wind, you can grow much more," Graetz says.

Choose from plants such as wax myrtle, live oak, red cedar, red bay, yaupon and American holly. Another of Graetz's favorites is the Carolina cherry laurel tree.

These plants can be used for landscaping around your cottage. But be sure not to plant too closely to your building.

"Have an idea of what it will look like when it's grown," Graetz says. "Most people put a 2-foot-high plant 2 feet away from the building. But it'll be 6 feet wide when it's full grown."

Next, you're ready to tackle the lawn grasses.

The best choice is centipede. It requires the least care and management and takes only three years to get a good sod. Bring in 4 to 5 inches of topsoil to mix in with the sand.

Bermuda grass is another possibility, but it requires a lot more management.

For salt hardiness and resistance to wave action, choose the native bitter panicum. In a recent northeaster, this grass withstood the waves better than any other. It must be purchased from a nursery or transplanted from a natural area; it can't be grown from seed.

For show, Graetz lines his driveway with seacoast bluestem. In some parts of the coast, bluestem makes up about 70 percent of the native grasses behind the frontal dune.

Bluestem grows about 1½ feet tall, has a chalky blue color and sprouts feathery seed heads.

"A low fall sun slanting across stands of this grass might remind you of a frosted fairyland," Graetz says.

If you want your yard to have that natural look, Graetz suggests planting seaside goldenrod. You know it as a weed that causes hay-fever. But Graetz says that's a fallacy. The pollen of the goldenrod is so heavy that it falls to the ground instead of floating through the air.

The goldenrod will add a bright green color to your yard, and in October, its blooms add a showy yellow color.

Keep in mind these are only a few suggestions, Graetz says. And even though native plants have a better chance at survival, some exotic species from as far away as Japan have done very well on the North Carolina coast.

THE BACK PAGE

"The Back Page" is an update on Sea Grant activities — on research, marine education and advisory services. It's also a good place to find out about meetings, workshops and new publications. For more information on any of the projects described, contact the Sea Grant offices in Raleigh (919/737-2454). For copies of publications, write UNC Sea Grant, NCSU, Box 8605, Raleigh, N.C. 27695-8605.



Sea Grant researchers believe the hybrid striped bass is about to make a big splash in the seafood market.

And to help the hybrid on its way, we've organized a team of Sea Grant experts to study various aspects of its marketing.

- Jim Easley, marine economics specialist, will conduct a study to determine the costs of producing hybrids.

- Marketing specialist Skip Kemp will survey consumers and seafood dealers to find out what market names are used for the hybrid and which is favored by consumers.

- Joyce Taylor, seafood education specialist, will make sure consumers know how to prepare the hybrid; she'll develop recipes for the fish.

- Seafood extension specialist David Green will examine possible products to be made from hybrids, and he'll test the hybrid's freezer life.

- Associate Sea Grant Director Ron Hodson was chosen recently as chairman of a committee to form a national hybrid striped bass association. The proposed association will promote the commercial culture of the hybrid and develop markets for the fish.

Tune in to public television for a better picture of Sea Grant in North Carolina. Feb. 23 and March 1, Sea Grant Director B.J. Copeland will appear on "North Carolina People."

He'll join host William C. Friday for a lively look at North Carolina's coast. He'll explain how Sea Grant research and extension programs are helping us

understand our marine resources.

The 30-minute program airs on North Carolina's public TV stations at 7:30 p.m., Monday, Feb. 23, and again at 6 p.m., Sunday, March 1.



March 14 and 15, it's likely more North Carolina fishermen will be inside than out on the water. That's when Sea Grant and the Carteret County Waterman's Association will host the seventh annual N.C. Commercial Fishing Show.

New boats, gear and equipment will be on display at the Crystal Coast Civic Center in Morehead City. And workshops and seminars on various fisheries topics will be offered.

In addition, the U.S. Coast Guard will provide information on vessel and fishing safety this year. There also will be demonstrations using survival suits.

The show's hours are 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. The civic center is on U.S. 70 in Morehead City.

For more information, call Bob Hines at 919/247-4007.

In conjunction with the 1987 N.C. Commercial Fishing Show, Sea Grant will sponsor a series of workshops for commercial fishermen.

Duncan Amos, a nationally known gear specialist, will conduct a seminar at the show at 2 p.m. Saturday, March 14 on corrosion control and prevention. At 10 a.m. Sunday, Amos will lead a session on electrical systems for vessels up to 100 feet in length.

Amos also will conduct workshops in other areas of the coast. On Thursday, March 12 at the Brunswick County Complex in Bolivia, the topic will be color chromoscopes. Amos will repeat that session in Manteo on Monday, March 16 at 7:30 p.m. at the N.C. Aquarium on Roanoke Island.

For more information, contact the marine advisory agent in your area. Wayne Wescott, Manteo (919/473-3937); Bob Hines, Bogue Banks (919/247-4007); or Jim Bahen, Ft. Fisher (919/458-5498).

UNC Sea Grant is soliciting proposals for the 1988-1989 funding period. If you're a researcher and would like to submit a proposal, call the Sea Grant office in Raleigh or consult the "Call for Proposals" memorandum available at the research office of your university.

All proposals must be submitted by April 24.

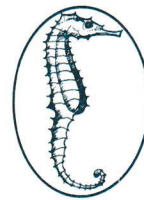


Fishermen who have been around the tournament circuit know the scene: a pile of billfish, tuna, shark or king mackerel, stacked on the dock like cordwood, baking in the hot summer sun. It's enough to offend any concerned fisherman.

To help preserve fisheries stocks and reduce the waste of a valuable resource, Sea Grant has published *Reducing Kill in Fishing Tournaments*. The 10-page guide is geared toward members of tournament committees and fishing clubs, and it presents some alternative ways to conduct a tournament.

For a free copy of *Reducing Kill in Fishing Tournaments*, write Sea Grant. Ask for UNC-SG-86-27.

UNC Sea Grant has received approval for its 1987 budget. The program was awarded \$1,189,000 in federal funds to complete the third year of a three-year program proposal. The federal funds are matched by \$650,000 in state funds.



Three Sea Grant researchers have received funds for a project to develop marine recreational fishing in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Marine Advisory Service Director Jim Murray and East Carolina University anthropologists Jeff Johnson and David Griffith will examine the demand

Continued on next page

for recreational fishing in the area.

They'll poll people who promote and use the fishery resources in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. And they'll try to determine if recreational fishing is a potential product the islands could market.

The project, which is sponsored by the National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Office, will be coordinated with another study. A Puerto Rico Sea Grant researcher will study the ability of the islands to support an increased recreational fishing industry.

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Coastwatch is a free newsletter. If you'd like to be added to the mailing list, fill out this form and send it to Sea Grant, Box 8605, NCSU, Raleigh, N.C. 27695-8605.

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