Volunteers Plant *Spartina* to Enhance Living Shoreline

A group of enthusiastic volunteers helped proved the phrase “many hands make light work” during a June 12 workday to plant S*partina alterniflora,* or salt marsh cordgrass, at the east end of the Rachel Carson Reserve in Beaufort. The planting event was part of a living shoreline demonstration project, led by researchers from the Reserve and the NOAA Center for Coastal Fisheries and Habitat Research (CCRHF). The project aims to showcase effective natural methods for stabilizing an estuarine shoreline, and supplements oyster clutch reefs constructed in 2012. Planted behind the oyster reef, the *Spartina* grass will help prevent erosion, diffuse wave energy during storms, and provide habitat for native marsh species.

Volunteers plant and fertilize *Spartina alterniflora* seedlings.

The volunteer workday began by transporting the *Spartina* seedlings to the project site, with the help of boat transportation courtesy of Island Ferry Adventures in Beaufort. Once at the site, Dr. Carolyn Currin of the CCFHR and Dr. Lexia Weaver of the N.C. Coastal Federation placed markers along the contours of the shoreline to direct volunteers where to begin planting the seedlings, while Reserve staff gave the *Spartina* plants a quick trim to reduce above-ground biomass and allow the new plants to focus energy on establishing underground roots. After a quick orientation to the tools used to plant marsh grass, including a specialized shovel called a “dibbler,” volunteers formed small teams of diggers, fertilizers, and planters to begin the day’s work. Seedlings were planted in rows parallel to the shoreline, about six inches apart, in the hopes that the roots of each plant would intermingle to hold together sand and mud and prevent erosion. Volunteers diligently took turns digging holes, spreading fertilizer, and placing the *Spartina* seedlings at proper depths to ensure viability. Partners from the N.C. Coastal Federation, CCFHR, UNC Chapel Hill’s Institute of Marine Sciences, and the N.C. Division of Coastal Management provided helpful guidance on planting techniques.

After a successful day of planting, volunteers gather for a group photo!

After a busy afternoon of hauling, digging, and planting, approximately 5,000 *Spartina* seedlings were in the ground! Volunteers of all ages and backgrounds contributed time, energy, and manpower to enhancing the demonstration project site and restoring an eroding area of the Reserve. Even though the work was tiring and the sun was hot, the group was all smiles as they headed back to the boat, confident that the *Spartina* they planted would help bolster the natural environment of the Reserve for years to come!