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Oregon coast, a hidden area of dunes that have been virtually untouched by the species that have overtaken much of the coast's dunes.

The trek began at the end of Joshua Lane, located just east of Heceta Beach. The entrance to the dunes is unassuming, looking almost like an unkempt backyard — a wire fence hidden amongst a row of wild bushes.

Blackwell spoke to a group of a few dozen volunteers before the hike began.

"What we have on our agenda today is, it's about a half mile hike out to where we're going to work," he said. "It's a place we've worked a few months ago, so I'm sure we'll be able to finish that part of it."

The volunteers were an eclectic group of all ages, from children below the age of 10 to a woman in her 80s. They all held different tools for the job — loppers, saws and other weeding instruments.

"I appreciate you guys to come out to continue our work here," Blackwell said. "This is one of the best places to find the dunes in their natural habitat."

The group began hiking eastward. Just a few paces into the trek, the scraggly bushes made way to a beautiful, sand-swept tree island resting in the sands.

Each expedition begins with a group photograph at the spot, which is special for the collaborative. It's one of the first places they helped restore.

"When we first started in the spring five years ago, it was just totally yellow," Blackwell said. "Scotch broom seeds last 50 years, so unfortunately you've got to keep coming back to the same area. They'll re-

sprout. We have to still come back each year to get the new plants coming up, but we have made an impact."

Several non-native species were introduced to the dunes decades ago to prevent sand blowing in to nearby coastal towns. Grasses, such as European beach grass, would dig into the sand, spreading over it completely, thus preventing the strong coastal winds from picking up the sand.

The plan worked only too well. Soon, the invasive species overtook the dunes completely, choking out the native plants. Aerial photography of the dunes taken over the years show a completely different topography than it was before cities began to grow.

So, organizations like the collaborative are working to restore the dunes to their original glory.

After the group photo, the volunteers worked their way east up a tall dune, then headed due south, finding themselves on a sand path surrounded by large trees and various native shrubs.

The Heceta Dunes are very quiet, as far as human visitors are concerned. No one would know that a major highway and shopping complex rest just a few miles west.

It wasn't always so quiet. Around 10 years ago, it used to be open to motorized vehicles, but due to



Volunteers regularly remove Scotch broom, gorse and invasive grasses in the Oregon dunes.

JARED ANDERSON/SIUSLAW NEWS

complaints with noise and parking around the entrance, their use was restricted, Blackwell said.

Now, the majority of visitors to the area are locals, exploring the area by foot or bicycle. It's also a popular dog-walking spot.

"Most of the tourists from out of the area wouldn't even know that it's here," Blackwell said.

After walking for half an hour, a small outcrop of land was found where a plethora of Scotch broom could be seen protruding out of the ground. This plant is one of the non-native species that the collaborative hunts for.

During the springtime, Scotch broom is easy to find, with bright yellow blooms dotting the landscape.

"It's like a beacon when you're trying to find them," Balston said.

But in the summertime, the

broom is a little bit more difficult to spot. The larger plants have dark seed pods on them.

"Ah, there's one right here," Blackwell said, moving toward a large bush. He described the ways one can take out a Scotch.

"There's different methods, depending on your tool," he said. "You can dig these up with a shovel. You can take loppers or hand saws and cut it, but you want to cut it as low as possible. If you leave some, especially on young plants, that will come back up from the stump."

Blackwell began lopping off the branches of the broom, leaving a stump in the ground.

"The older plants won't sprout back," he said. "if you can get it as low as possible, that's better. This one was an old plant, which you can tell because of the wider diameter, so it didn't sprout back. About right here is the top of the roots. If you can get to this point, you can kill it."

For immature plants, the best practice is to simply yank them out by hand.

To dispose of the plants, they put them in piles on the sand where it's more difficult for the seeds to burrow back into the ground. One pile the group worked on that day was nearly five feet tall.

The group took a break to show a

new tool called Wild Spotter that is being utilized to help identify areas that are infested with invasive species.

"It's a campaign that was created by the US Forest Service, the University of Georgia and a lot of other agencies that got together," said Chelsea Monks, forest botanist for the Siuslaw National Forest.

She pulled out a tablet and brought up the app, which had a whole host of information including types of invasive species and how to identify them.

Wild Spotter, which can be downloaded for tablets or phones and can be found at wildspotter.org, helps organizations tag infestations throughout the country.

"If you find something, you can hit report," she explained. "You can attach pictures. It auto-populates your latitude and longitude, which is really handy here. You can put in the time you spent here, the infestation size. You can put in acres and acres of an infestation, or report you just found one or two plants."

The information goes to a mass database that helps agencies get a grasp on how prevalent an invasive species might be in an area.

"If it's something that needs a rapid response, we're going to get out to it as soon as we can, confirm it's there, see how big it is, and see if we can immediately pull it and treat it," Monks said. "The public is much better able, and more likely, to get onto those spots than we are. There's a whole lot more of you than us. The hope is we can get people out there utilizing it and interested in caring, to help us figure out what's going out in the landscape."

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ACCIDENTS from page 1A

Highway 101 was the scene of a three-car accident on Friday evening, near the Rock Creek Campground.

Initial police reports indicate a driver that was attempting to pass a line of cars was involved in a head-on collision.

Traffic was stopped in both directions for approximately an hour as SVFR and WLAD responded.

Three more major accidents occurred on Saturday.

The first was reported on Canary Road just before noon and forced a road closure for two hours while emergency teams from both SVFR and WLAD responded.

The second incident occurred on South Jetty road near the Goose Pasture Staging Area for ATVs and the third took place on Highway 36, east of Swisshome.

Several medical transports resulted from these incidents.

Sunday saw two more major accidents on Highway 101, both took place near Sand Dunes Frontier.

The first involved a rollover with an extraction needed and traffic was delayed in both directions on Highway 101 for approximately two hours.

"The duty chief and operation chief worked in conjunction with many of the professional staff of both WLAD and SVFR to assure that coverage was maintained all weekend," Dickerson said. "The resident firefighters at Station 1 were very busy."

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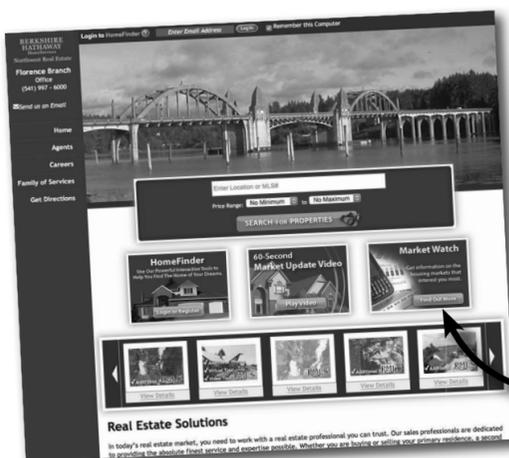
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