



National Park Service

Cape Cod

National Seashore
Massachusetts

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NEWS RELEASE

Vegetation removal at Duck Harbor set to begin

Removal of dead vegetation will clear the way for native saltwater plants to return



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Contact: [Geoff Sanders](mailto:geoff.sanders@nps.gov), (508) 957-0737

WELLFLEET, Mass– Cape Cod National Seashore will soon begin removing dead trees and shrubbery in the Duck Harbor area of the Herring River in Wellfleet to promote the recovery of native salt marsh vegetation in the area. Vegetation removal is expected to begin in late January. The project is managed by Ducks Unlimited with a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Since January 2021, the 120-acre Duck Harbor floodplain has had periodic over wash of saltwater breaking over the dunes on Cape Cod Bay. Higher high tides occurring for 3-5 days during most months allowed saltwater to flow rapidly inland and slowly drain back out through the Herring River and into Wellfleet Harbor. The saltwater accumulation in Duck Harbor caused a massive die-off of upland and freshwater trees and plants that had colonized to the area following the diking of the Herring River in 1909.

Removing the dead vegetation at Duck Harbor will promote the natural recruitment of salt marsh plants and increase the ecological productivity of the area, while helping to minimize breeding habitat for mosquitoes by facilitating flow and drainage of water. Tree and shrub removal will be accomplished with heavy duty mulching equipment and will be accompanied by intensive scientific monitoring to document ecological changes. Park staff will be on-site regularly to monitor the work area. The dead vegetation will be mulched and spread amongst the area to promote growth and vitality for the native species.

Park scientists will work with the Center for Coastal Studies to monitor changes in Duck Harbor and are optimistic about the revival of native salt marsh species, as saltwater tolerant plants have already been observed returning to the area. The near-term future of dune over washes is unknown, but Duck Harbor will eventually experience routine saltwater flow from the Herring River after the dike at Chequessett Neck Road is replaced with a bridge.

Learn more about the project here: <https://www.nps.gov/caco/learn/nature/herring-river-tidal-restoration-project.htm>