

promoter Hugh
photo of wild

ponies galloping across the salt water marshland of
North Carolina's Outer Banks. Cape Lookout
Lighthouse is seen in the background.

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Trees Grow Somewhere Besides Brooklyn, Y'know

There is little engineering certainty on how — or whether — the eroding Outer Banks can be saved, but most experts say it would cost about a million dollars a mile to try.

"The hell with that," Tony Seamon Jr. said. "They tell us we can't do that and we can't do this and, if we do, it will cost more money than anybody can afford. They told us we couldn't grow trees in the sand over at Lookout, too. But we've got trees growing over there."

Seamon, of MOREHEAD CITY restaurant fame (The Sanitary Fish Market), is one of those people who think that if you are for something you ought to support it and if you're against something, you either ought to try to change it or keep your mouth shut.

Three years ago, in early 1969, there was a big splash of publicity when 65,000 pine seedlings were planted at Cape Lookout. But the unofficial reforestation project began long before that.

"We put the first trees out in 1960," Seamon said. "Now they are 18 feet tall." The needles have made a layer of humus on top of the sand, he said. Birds have come to use the trees and their droppings have seeded weeds and small shrubs. In the shade the trees created, some grass has sprung.

Those involved in the work — which they think is more like fun — include Charlie Reeves and Sam Bass of Sanford, who own property on the cape; Sally and Les Moore, who run the sportsman's center there and are the cape's only permanent residents; and Seamon. The supporting cast over the past decade has included Carteret County Boy Scouts and Coastguardmen.

The Outer Banks were once forested (extremely low tides still sometimes reveal the stumps) and populated. But man cut the trees and didn't replace them; salt and sand, wind and tide did the rest.

Nothing special has been done to make the new trees grow, Seamon said. No fertilizer, no water — although they were planted during the wet season. They were set on the leeward side of dunes, to keep salt spray off them, and left to grow or die.

About 1964, Reeves and Bass supplied 5,000



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By Jack Aulis

slash pines, which the Moores and Seamon planted. More than half survived. In 1967 the same team, augmented by 50 Boy Scouts, set out 10,000 more. The survival rate was even better.

In 1969, 65,000 seedlings of 10 varieties were put into 55 acres of sand by the Moores, Seamon, Boy Scouts and the off-duty crew from the Coast Guard Cutter "Chilula."

Those seedlings were provided by the state, mainly at the urging of H. A. (Buck) Tate, a field forester in Goldsboro. "I don't think anybody else thought much of the idea," Seamon said, "but he (Tate) said: 'Let's try it. I've seen a lot more money wasted on a lot less.'" The seedlings cost the taxpayers \$6,000, Seamon said. "The only other costs, we paid."

Last June those trees "had 2½ feet of new growth on 'em — Pow! Just like that," he said. He estimated the survival rate at from under 40 per cent to maybe 90 per cent, depending on the variety.

No more trees have been set, pending the results of that big experiment, but Seamon said he and/or Sally Moore have raised wisteria and chrysanthemums and tomatoes and collards and other things in the cape sand. "I take something (to plant) over there almost every time I go," he said. "Some grows and some doesn't."

And, he and Mrs. Moore have even raised grass in the beach sand, just by providing it with non-salt water, he said. Les Moore thinks that may be going too far.

"He told us," Seamon said with a grin: "Dammit, don't you come over here and get everything growing so I have to start mowing the lawn."