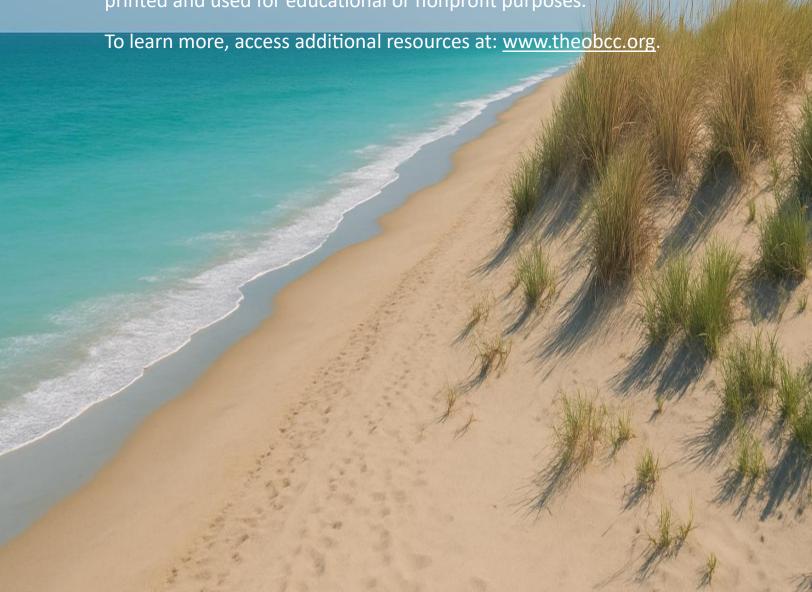


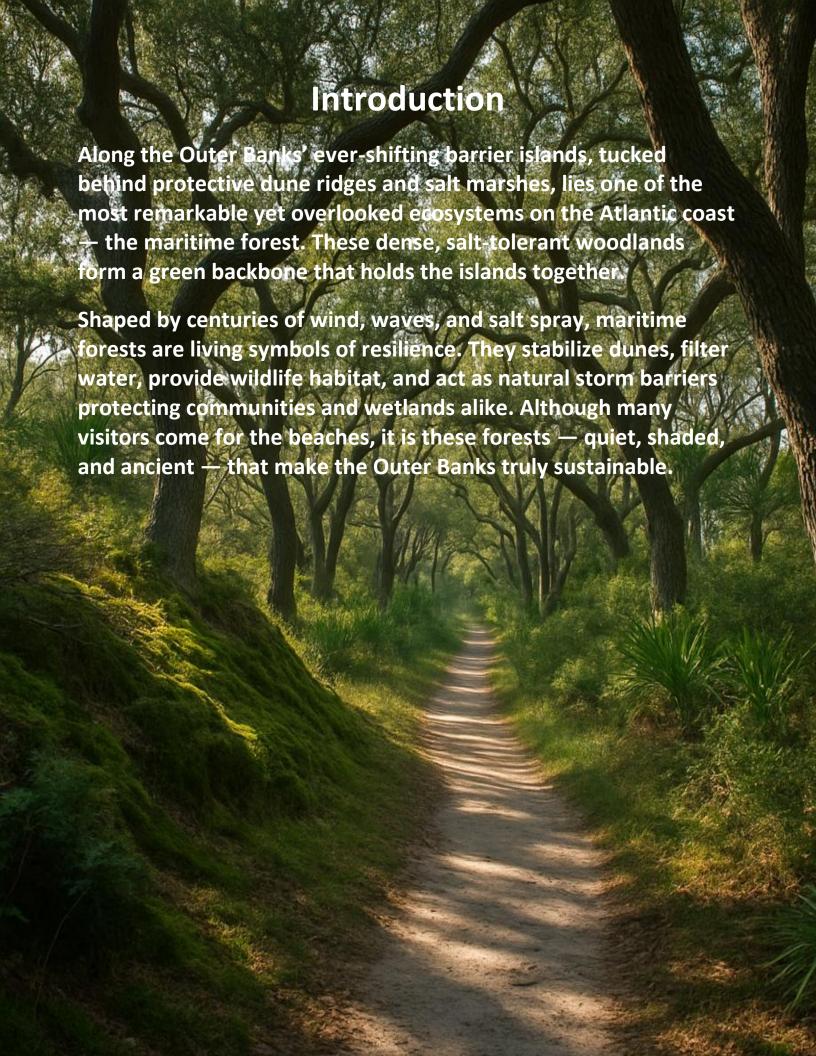
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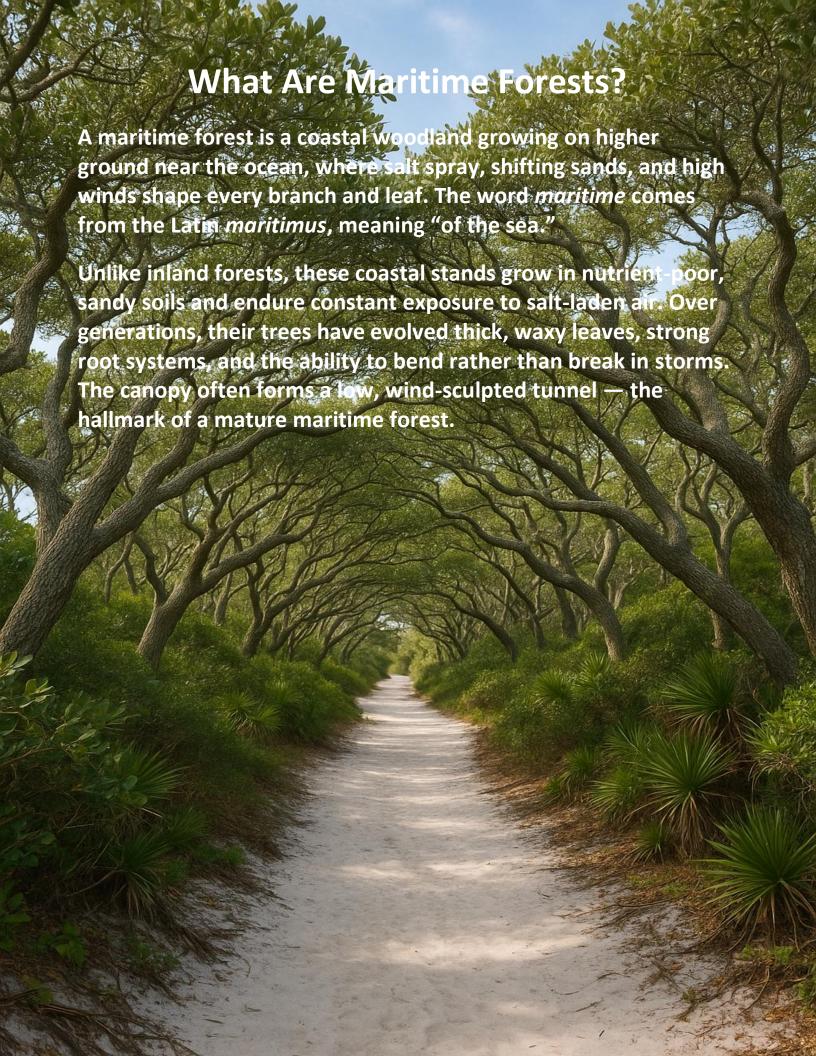
This pamphlet was created by the Outer Banks Coastal Conservation (OBCC), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to foster environmental stewardship and a deeper connection to the Outer Banks of North Carolina through outreach, education, and conservation efforts.

We believe that small stories can spark big change. That is why we have made this book available as a free resource for parents, teachers, and community members.

All materials in this pamphlet may be freely downloaded, shared, printed and used for educational or nonprofit purposes.







Typical Plant Species

Canopy Trees

- Live oak (Quercus virginiana) long-lived, evergreen oaks with sprawling branches draped in moss.
- Loblolly pine (Pinus taeda) tall, fast-growing pines common across coastal plains.
- Red cedar (Juniperus virginiana) aromatic evergreens that resist salt and wind

Understory Shrubs and Vines

- Yaupon holly (*Ilex vomitoria*) produces bright red berries that feed birds.
- Wax myrtle (Morella cerifera) nitrogen-fixing shrub that stabilizes dunes.
- Greenbrier and muscadine grape climbing vines that weave through the understory.

Ground Layer

- Beautyberry (Callicarpa americana) clusters of vivid purple berries in late summer.
- Bayberry (Myrica pensylvanica) fragrant leaves once used to make candles.

Where They're Found in the Outer Banks

Maritime forests grow in sheltered pockets along the sound side of barrier islands and on stabilized dunes where vegetation has had time to take hold. Some of the best remaining examples include:

Nags Head Woods Ecological Preserve (Nags Head & Kill Devil Hills)

A 1,400-acre sanctuary co-managed by The Nature Conservancy and the Town of Nags Head, featuring ancient oaks and winding freshwater ponds. It's one of the last remaining maritime forests on the East Coast in near-pristine condition.

Buxton Woods (Cape Hatteras National Seashore)

The largest remaining maritime forest on the North Carolina barrier islands, spanning over 1,000 acres. It shelters rare species like the Hatteras Island deer mouse and southeastern myotis bat, and it plays a vital role in protecting Hatteras Village from storm surge.

Currituck Banks Reserve (Corolla)

An accessible, mixed ecosystem of dunes, shrub thickets, wetlands, and maritime forest. Visitors can walk the boardwalk trail and experience firsthand how these habitats merge.

Ecological Importance

1. Coastal Protection

Maritime forests are nature's first line of defense against hurricanes and nor'easters.

- Their root systems anchor dunes and sandy soils, reducing erosion.
- Dense vegetation slows wind speed and dissipates storm energy before it reaches inland areas.
- Forests absorb and store excess rainwater, helping prevent flooding in nearby communities.

During storms, these woodlands can mean the difference between a neighborhood spared and one swept away.

2. Habitat and Biodiversity

Maritime forests are biodiversity hotspots. The thick canopy and moist understory create microhabitats that support hundreds of plant and animal species.

Birds: warblers, owls, woodpeckers, great horned owls, painted buntings, and ospreys.

Mammals: gray foxes, white-tailed deer, raccoons, bats, and rabbits. Reptiles & Amphibians: box turtles, skinks, tree frogs, and black racers.

Insects: pollinators like bees, moths, and butterflies depend on flowering forest plants.

For migratory songbirds traveling the Atlantic Flyway, maritime forests are vital rest stops — safe havens after long ocean crossings.

Ecological Importance (cont.)

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3. Carbon Storage and Climate Regulation

Coastal forests are carbon sinks — they capture carbon dioxide from the air and lock it in roots, trunks, and soil. Maritime forests, in particular, combine the carbon-absorbing power of trees with the nutrient-rich soils of nearby marshes, playing a key role in climate resilience.

Ecological Importance (cont.)

4. Water Quality and Soil Health

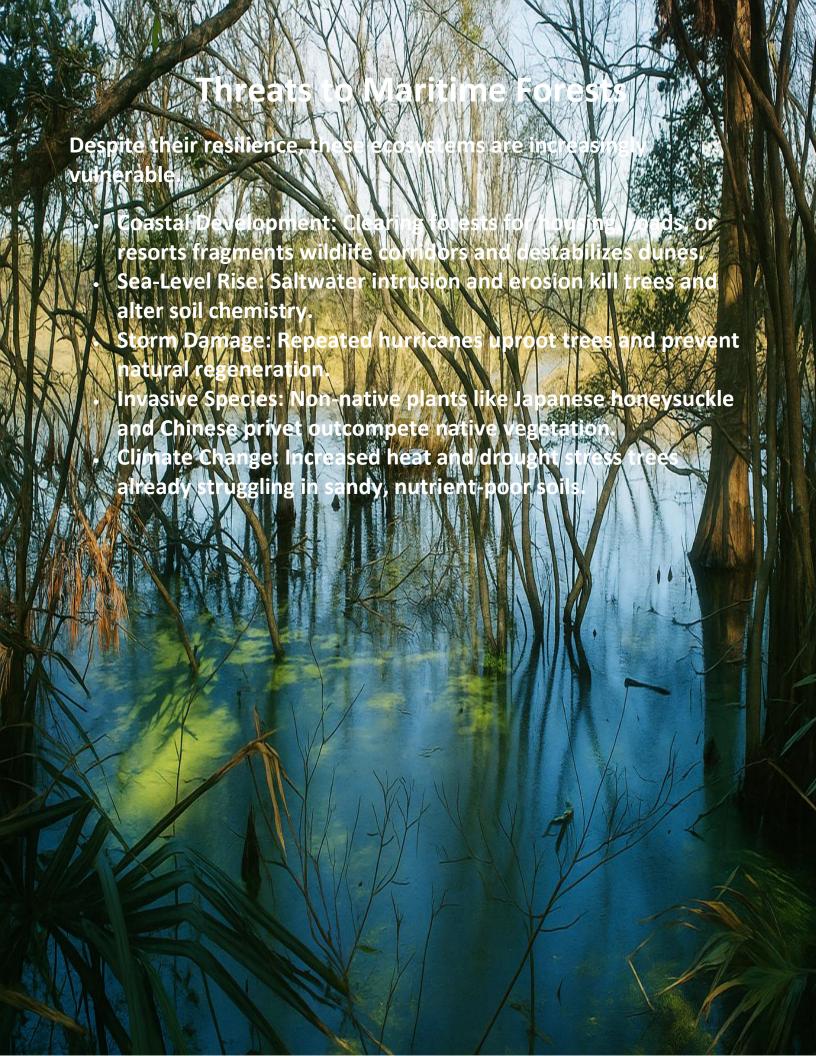
When rainwater flows across developed land, it picks up pollutants. Maritime forests act like natural filters — trapping sediments and absorbing nutrients before they reach estuaries and sounds.

Their root systems also prevent saltwater intrusion by stabilizing the freshwater lens beneath barrier islands, maintaining the delicate balance between ocean and sound ecosystems.

5. Human Benefits

Maritime forests are more than ecological treasures — they are part of the Outer Banks' cultural heritage. Early settlers built homes and boats from live oaks and pines. Today, these forests still provide recreation, research, and inspiration.

Walking beneath their shaded canopies, one can experience the "wild heart" of the islands — a reminder that nature's quiet places often offer the greatest protection.



Stewardship and Conservation

Protecting What's Left

Conservation groups such as The Nature Conservancy, North Carolina Coastal Reserve, and Cape Hatteras National Seashore are working to preserve remaining maritime forest tracts through restoration and research.

Restoration and Replanting

Replanting native trees and removing invasive species help maintain ecological balance. Programs often involve local volunteers who assist in forest monitoring and reforestation after storm damage.

Community Action

You can help protect maritime forests by:

- 1. Staying on designated trails to avoid trampling young plants.
- 2. Planting native coastal species instead of ornamental exotics in yards.
- 3. Supporting conservation easements and land trusts that protect undeveloped parcels.
- 4. Participating in coastal cleanup or tree-planting events.
- 5. Spreading awareness these forests need advocates as much as they need rainfall.



Every live oak, every wax myrtle, every songbird represents resilience — a reminder that in the Outer Banks, nature and people thrive together only when the forest still stands.



