# Vegetation Monitoring at Sacred Heart Northwest Florida Water Management District Non-FDOT Mitigation Site

Fall 2023

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Sacred Heart Mitigation Site project compensates for impacts to jurisdictional wetlands associated with the construction of Sacred Heart Hospital near the intersection of US 98 and Mack Bayou Road in Walton County. The goal of this mitigation is to restore 82 acres of hydric pine flatwoods at Devils Swamp, an area that is owned and managed for ecological integrity by the Northwest Florida Water Management District (NWFWMD) and is part of the Choctawhatchee River Water Management Area. The offsite mitigation area is located approximately 15 miles east of the impact along an unnamed dirt road east of the unincorporated community of Bunker. The site is adjacent to the Bayport Mitigation Site which was monitored at the same time (Figure 1). Prior to NWFWMD acquisition in 1992, the Devils Swamp site had been converted to slash pine plantation.

The mitigation area is divided into two polygons. According to NWFWMD, mitigation activities implemented to date include baseline monitoring (August 2017), shrub and tree density reduction, prescribed fire, repeat panoramic photography, herbicide treatments to reduce shrub regrowth, and post-baseline quantitative vegetation monitoring.

Quantitative and qualitative monitoring was used to document the current plant species composition and vegetation structure of these targeted areas. The site vegetation was previously monitored by FNAI biologists in Fall 2022.

### **METHODS**

Percent vegetation cover was measured in 1-m<sup>2</sup> quadrats at 10-foot intervals along four 150-foot transects in October 2022 (Figure 2). Along each transect line, eight 1m x 1m quadrats were placed along the left side, beginning at 10 feet and then spaced every 10 feet thereafter. Data recorded in each quadrat consisted of the visually estimated percent cover of each plant species, including individuals rooted in the quadrat as well as overhanging. Canopy over 2 m in height was excluded from cover estimates. Only the lower 2 m portions of larger individuals were counted as cover, including the lower portions of tree trunks rooted in quadrats. Bare ground was estimated in each quadrat as a percentage of ground not obscured by plant cover up to 2 m tall. Plant cover estimates were converted to mid-point values and averaged across each transect. Relative cover (in which all plant cover and bare ground is given as a proportion of 100 percent cover) was also calculated and is reported in separate pie charts.

Rooted shrub stem density was monitored using five 1 m<sup>2</sup> quadrats established at random (Table 6).

The qualitative monitoring consisted of recording the species and vegetation structure observed along meandering pedestrian transects throughout the mitigation site. Field surveys were performed by FNAI botanists Jenna Annis, Kelly Anderson, and Ethan Hughes on November 15, 28, and 29, 2023.



Figure 1. Location map of Devils Swamp non-FDOT NWFWMD mitigation sites monitored by FNAI.



Figure 2. Location of transects at Sacred Heart Mitigation Site.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

A total of 132 plant taxa were recorded in the surveyed area of Sacred Heart Mitigation Site during the 2023 monitoring period (Table 1). Thirty-nine new taxa were found during the 2023 monitoring (i.e., species or varieties not observed during 2021 or 2022 site visits). Taxonomy follows Wunderlin, R. P., B.F. Hansen, A.R. Franck, and F.B. Essig. 2017. Atlas of Florida Plants (htpp://florida.plantatlas.usf.edu/), Institute for Systematic Botany, University of South Florida, Tampa.

Table 1. Species observed at Sacred Heart Mitigation Site, November 15, 28, and 29, 2023 (bold name = new species, \* = state-listed threatened or endangered,  $\dagger$  = non-native invasive).

Scientific Name	Common Name
*Andropogon arctatus	pinewoods bluestem
Andropogon glomeratus var. glaucopsis	purple bluestem
Andropogon virginicus	broomsedge bluestem
Andropogon virginicus var. glaucus	chalky bluestem
Anthaenantia rufa	purple silkyscale
Aristida palustris	longleaf threeawn
Aristida purpurascens	arrowfeather threeawn
Aristida stricta	wiregrass
Aronia arbutifolia	red chokeberry
Balduina uniflora	oneflower honeycomb-head
Bartonia paniculata	twining screwstem
*Calamovilfa curtissii	Curtiss' sandgrass
Callicarpa americana	American beautyberry
Carphephorus pseudoliatris	bristleleaf chaffhead
Chasmanthium laxum	slender woodoats
Clethra alnifolia	sweet pepperbush
Clethra alnifolia Cliftonia monophylla	sweet pepperbush black titi
Cliftonia monophylla	black titi
Cliftonia monophylla Coleataenia anceps	black titi beaked panicum
Cliftonia monophylla Coleataenia anceps Coleataenia longifolia	black titi beaked panicum ciliate redtop panicum
Cliftonia monophylla Coleataenia anceps Coleataenia longifolia Ctenium aromaticum	black titi beaked panicum ciliate redtop panicum toothache grass
Cliftonia monophylla Coleataenia anceps Coleataenia longifolia Ctenium aromaticum Cyrilla racemiflora	black titi beaked panicum ciliate redtop panicum toothache grass titi
Cliftonia monophylla Coleataenia anceps Coleataenia longifolia Ctenium aromaticum Cyrilla racemiflora <b>Dichanthelium aciculare</b>	black titi beaked panicum ciliate redtop panicum toothache grass titi needleleaf witchgrass
Cliftonia monophylla Coleataenia anceps Coleataenia longifolia Ctenium aromaticum Cyrilla racemiflora Dichanthelium aciculare Dichanthelium acuminatum	black titi beaked panicum ciliate redtop panicum toothache grass titi needleleaf witchgrass tapered witchgrass
Cliftonia monophylla Coleataenia anceps Coleataenia longifolia Ctenium aromaticum Cyrilla racemiflora Dichanthelium aciculare Dichanthelium acuminatum Dichanthelium ensifolium	black titi beaked panicum ciliate redtop panicum toothache grass titi needleleaf witchgrass tapered witchgrass cypress witchgrass
Cliftonia monophylla Coleataenia anceps Coleataenia longifolia Ctenium aromaticum Cyrilla racemiflora Dichanthelium aciculare Dichanthelium acuminatum Dichanthelium ensifolium Dichanthelium ensifolium	black titi beaked panicum ciliate redtop panicum toothache grass titi <b>needleleaf witchgrass</b> <b>tapered witchgrass</b> cypress witchgrass cypress witchgrass
Cliftonia monophylla Coleataenia anceps Coleataenia longifolia Ctenium aromaticum Cyrilla racemiflora Dichanthelium aciculare Dichanthelium aciminatum Dichanthelium ensifolium Dichanthelium ensifolium var. unciphyllum Dichanthelium laxiflorum	black titi beaked panicum ciliate redtop panicum toothache grass titi needleleaf witchgrass tapered witchgrass cypress witchgrass cypress witchgrass openflower witchgrass
Cliftonia monophylla Coleataenia anceps Coleataenia longifolia Ctenium aromaticum Cyrilla racemiflora Dichanthelium aciculare Dichanthelium aciculare Dichanthelium ensifolium Dichanthelium ensifolium Dichanthelium ensifolium var. unciphyllum Dichanthelium laxiflorum Dichanthelium leucothrix	black titi beaked panicum ciliate redtop panicum toothache grass titi needleleaf witchgrass tapered witchgrass cypress witchgrass cypress witchgrass openflower witchgrass rough witchgrass
Cliftonia monophylla Coleataenia anceps Coleataenia longifolia Ctenium aromaticum Cyrilla racemiflora Dichanthelium aciculare Dichanthelium acuminatum Dichanthelium ensifolium Dichanthelium ensifolium var. unciphyllum Dichanthelium laxiflorum Dichanthelium laxiflorum Dichanthelium leucothrix Dichanthelium ovale	black titi beaked panicum ciliate redtop panicum toothache grass titi needleleaf witchgrass tapered witchgrass cypress witchgrass openflower witchgrass rough witchgrass eggleaf witchgrass
Cliftonia monophylla Coleataenia anceps Coleataenia longifolia Ctenium aromaticum Cyrilla racemiflora Dichanthelium aciculare Dichanthelium aciculare Dichanthelium ensifolium Dichanthelium ensifolium var. unciphyllum Dichanthelium laxiflorum Dichanthelium laxiflorum Dichanthelium leucothrix Dichanthelium ovale Dichanthelium scabriusculum	black titi beaked panicum ciliate redtop panicum toothache grass titi needleleaf witchgrass tapered witchgrass cypress witchgrass cypress witchgrass openflower witchgrass rough witchgrass eggleaf witchgrass woolly witchgrass

Scientific Name	Common Name
Diospyros virginiana	common persimmon
Drosera capillaris	pink sundew
Elephantopus elatus	tall elephantsfoot
Eriocaulon compressum	flattened pipewort
Eriocaulon decangulare	tenangle pipewort
Eupatorium compositifolium	yankeeweed
Eupatorium mohrii	Mohr's thoroughwort
Eupatorium rotundifolium	roundleaf thoroughwort
Eupatorium semiserratum	smallflower thoroughwort
Euphorbia sp.	spurge
Euthamia caroliniana	slender flattop goldenrod
Fuirena breviseta	saltmarsh umbrellasedge
Gaylussacia dumosa	dwarf huckleberry
Gaylussacia frondosa var. tomentosa	blue huckleberry
Gaylussacia mosieri	woolly huckleberry
Gelsemium sempervirens	yellow jessamine
Hypericum brachyphyllum	coastalplain St. John's wort
Hypericum cistifolium	roundpod St. John's wort
Hypericum crux-andreae	St. Peter's wort
Hypericum fasciculatum	peelbark St. John's wort
Hypericum microsepalum	flatwoods St. John's wort
Ilex coriacea	large gallberry
llex glabra	gallberry
Ilex cassine var. myrtifolia	myrtle-leaved holly
Ilex vomitoria	yaupon
Juncus repens	lesser creeping rush
Juncus scirpoides	needlepod rush
Kellochloa verrucosa	warty panicgrass
Lachnanthes caroliana	Carolina redroot
Lachnocaulon anceps	whitehead bogbutton
Liatris gracilis	slender gayfeather
Liquidambar styraciflua	sweetgum
Lobelia brevifolia	shortleaf lobelia
Lophiola aurea	golden crest
Lycopodiella appressa	southern club-moss
Lycopodiella caroliniana	slender club-moss
Lycopodiella cernua	nodding club-moss
Magnolia virginiana	sweetbay
Nyssa biflora	swamp tupelo
Nyssa sylvatica	blackgum
Oldenlandia uniflora	clustered mille graines
Osmunda regalis var. spectabilis	royal fern
Oxypolis denticulata	Piedmont cowbane

Scientific Name	Common Name
Paspalum plicatulum	brownseed paspalum
Pinus elliottii	slash pine
Pinus taeda	loblolly pine
Pityopsis graminifolia	narrowleaf silkgrass
Polygala grandiflora	showy milkwort
Polygala lutea	orange milkwort
Polygala nana	candyroot
Polypremum procumbens	rustweed
Pseudognaphalium obtusifolium	sweet everlasting
Pteridium aquilinum	bracken fern
Quercus hemisphaerica	laurel oak
Quercus minima	dwarf live oak
Quercus nigra	water oak
Quercus virginiana	live oak
Rhexia alifanus	savannah meadowbeauty
Rhexia petiolata Rhus copallinum	fringed meadowbeauty
	winged sumac
Rhynchospora baldwinii Rhynchospora cephalantha	Baldwin's beaksedge
Rhynchospora chalarocephala	bunched beaksedge
	loosehead beaksedge
Rhynchospora chapmanii Rhynchospora ciliaris	Chapman's beaksedge
Rhynchospora debilis	fringed beaksedge savannah beaksedge
Rhynchospora fascicularis	fascicled beaksedge
Rhynchospora glomerata	clustered beaksedge
Rhynchospora plumosa	plumed beaksedge
Rubus cuneifolius	sand blackberry
Rubus flagellaris	northern dewberry
Saccharum giganteum	sugarcane plumegrass
Sarracenia flava	yellow pitcherplant
Schizachyrium stoloniferum	creeping little bluestem
Scleria ciliata	fringed nutrush
Scleria reticularis	netted nutrush
Scleria triglomerata	whip nutrush
Serenoa repens	saw palmetto
Smilax auriculata	earleaf greenbrier
Smilax bona-nox	saw greenbrier
Smilax glauca	cat greenbrier
Smilax laurifolia	laurel greenbrier
Solidago odora	sweet goldenrod
Solidago stricta	wand goldenrod
Sophronanthe hispida	rough hedgehyssop
Symphyotrichum adnatum	scaleleaf aster

Scientific Name	Common Name
Symphyotrichum chapmanii	savannah aster
Symphyotrichum dumosum	rice button aster
Tephrosia florida	Florida hoary-pea
Toxicodendron radicans	eastern poison ivy
Vaccinium arboreum	sparkleberry
Vaccinium myrsinites	shiny blueberry
Vernonia angustifolia	tall ironweed
Viola lanceolata	bog white violet
Vitis rotundifolia	muscadine
Xyris ambigua	coastalplain yellow-eyed grass
Xyris brevifolia	shortleaf yellow-eyed grass
Xyris flabelliformis	savannah yellow-eyed grass
Xyris serotina	acid swamp yellow-eyed grass
<i>Xyris</i> sp.	yellow-eyed grass
Total number of taxa: 132	

**Qualitative sampling.** A total of 132 plant taxa were identified at this site in 2022 (Table 1). Species include two state-listed threatened species (Curtiss' sandgrass and pinewoods bluestem). No non-native invasive species were observed. This is a pine plantation in various stages of thinning. Slash pines are young with basal areas ranging from 10-30 ft<sup>2</sup> per acre up to 150-200 ft<sup>2</sup> per acre, depending on how much canopy reduction has taken place. There is heavy soil disturbance from past bedding plus scattered low artificial mounds. There are patches of dense, tall titi shrubs, but otherwise, shrubs are around 1 meter or shorter, mostly gallberry, black tit, and woolly huckleberry. Herbs are primarily weedy bluestems with a mix of other mostly graminoids. Laurel greenbrier is found throughout, forming some thick patches.

#### Quantitative sampling.

- Transect 1 (Figure 3, Table 2) had a total of 35 taxa with 28% average bare ground cover. Woody species made up around 13% average cover per quadrat. Compared to 2022, this represents little change in species diversity (34 in 2022), a little change in bare ground (30% in 2022) and a small decrease in woody cover (24% in 2022).
- Transect 2 (Figure 4, Table 3) had a total of 44 taxa with 40% average bare ground cover. Woody species made up around 22% average cover per quadrat. Compared to 2022, this represents a small decrease in species diversity (49 in 2022), a small decrease in bare ground (51% in 2022) and little change in woody cover (21% in 2022).
- Transect 3 (Figure 5, Table 4) had a total of 35 taxa with 29% average bare ground cover. Woody species made up around 18% average cover per quadrat. Compared to 2022, this represents a small decrease in species diversity (40 in 2022), a small increase in bare ground (17% in 2022) and a decrease in woody cover (46% in 2022).

• Transect 4 (Figure 6, Table 5) had a total of 29 taxa with 17% average bare ground cover. Woody species made up around 8% average cover per quadrat. Compared to 2022, this represents a decrease in species diversity (41 in 2022), a small decrease in bare ground (15% in 2022) and a decrease in woody cover (28% in 2022).



Figure 3. Percent relative cover of plant species in Transect 1.

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Common name	Average percent cover per quadrat
pinewoods bluestem	4.27
purple bluestem	18.87
bluestem	0.50
broomsedge bluestem	6.63
wiregrass	3.00
sweet pepperbush	0.03
black titi	0.03
titi	0.73
rough witchgrass	3.50
witchgrass	0.27
	pinewoods bluestem purple bluestem bluestem broomsedge bluestem wiregrass sweet pepperbush black titi titi rough witchgrass

Table 2. Percent cover	of plant species in Trans	sect 1 sampled on Nove	mber 28, 2023.

Scientific name	Common name	Average percent cover per quadrat
Eriocaulon decangulare	tenangle pipewort	0.70
Gaylussacia dumosa	dwarf huckleberry	0.47
Gaylussacia mosieri	woolly huckleberry	0.27
Hypericum brachyphyllum	coastalplain St. John's wort	3.97
Hypericum microsepalum	flatwoods St. John's wort	0.50
llex cassine var. myrtifolia	myrtle-leaved holly	0.23
llex coriacea	large gallberry	0.23
llex glabra	gallberry	1.60
Kellochloa verrucosa	warty panicgrass	1.47
Lachnocaulon anceps	whitehead bogbutton	0.13
Lophiola aurea	golden crest	0.60
Lycopodiella alopecuroides	foxtail club-moss	0.33
Pinus elliottii	slash pine	0.03
Polygala lutea	orange milkwort	0.10
Quercus hemisphaerica	laurel oak	0.03
Rhexia alifanus	savannah meadowbeauty	0.10
Rhynchospora chapmanii	Chapman's beaksedge	2.97
Rhynchospora ciliaris	fringed beaksedge	0.27
Rhynchospora debilis	savannah beaksedge	0.50
Rhynchospora plumosa	plumed beaksedge	0.33
Rhynchospora sp.	beaksedge	0.27
Scleria sp.	nutrush	0.83
Smilax laurifolia	laurel greenbrier	4.87
Xyris ambigua	coastalplain yellow-eyed grass	1.93
<i>Xyris</i> sp.	yellow-eyed grass	0.03
Bare Ground		27.77



Figure 4. Percent relative cover of plant species in Transect 2.

Scientific name	Common name	Average percent cover per quadrat
Andropogon arctatus	pinewoods bluestem	2.93
Andropogon glomeratus var. glaucopsis	purple bluestem	4.17
Andropogon sp.	bluestem	0.03
Andropogon virginicus	broomsedge bluestem	0.73
Aristida palustris	longleaf threeawn	0.03
Aristida stricta	wiregrass	1.17
Cliftonia monophylla	black titi	2.40
Coleataenia longifolia	ciliate redtop panicum	0.47
Dichanthelium ensifolium	cypress witchgrass	0.47
Dichanthelium sp.	witchgrass	0.03
Dichanthelium strigosum	roughhair witchgrass	0.10
Eriocaulon decangulare	tenangle pipewort	0.33
Eupatorium compositifolium	yankeeweed	0.03
Eupatorium rotundifolium	roundleaf thoroughwort	0.23

Table 3.	Percent cover	of plant species	in Transect 2	2 sampled on	November 29, 2023.
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Scientific name	Common name	Average percent cover per quadrat
Euthamia caroliniana	slender flattop goldenrod	0.03
Fuirena breviseta	saltmarsh umbrellasedge	0.27
Gaylussacia mosieri	woolly huckleberry	0.10
Gelsemium sempervirens	yellow jessamine	0.03
Hypericum brachyphyllum	coastalplain St. John's wort	1.10
Hypericum cistifolium	roundpod St. John's wort	0.17
Hypericum crux-andreae	St. Peter's wort	0.33
llex glabra	gallberry	0.17
Juncus scirpoides	needlepod rush	0.50
Kellochloa verrucosa	warty panicgrass	8.50
Lachnanthes caroliana	Carolina redroot	0.13
Lachnocaulon anceps	whitehead bogbutton	0.77
Oldenlandia uniflora	clustered mille graines	0.07
Osmunda regalis var. spectabilis	royal fern	1.30
Pinus elliottii	slash pine	0.70
Quercus minima	dwarf live oak	0.13
Rhexia petiolata	fringed meadowbeauty	0.33
Rhynchospora baldwinii	Baldwin's beaksedge	0.23
Rhynchospora cephalantha	bunched beaksedge	0.50
Rhynchospora chapmanii	Chapman's beaksedge	2.77
Rhynchospora sp.	beaksedge	0.53
Scleria reticularis	netted nutrush	0.10
Serenoa repens	saw palmetto	8.17
Smilax glauca	cat greenbrier	8.70
Smilax laurifolia	laurel greenbrier	0.37
Toxicodendron radicans	eastern poison ivy	0.03
Viola lanceolata	bog white violet	0.10
Xyris ambigua	coastalplain yellow-eyed grass	1.47
Xyris brevifolia	shortleaf yellow-eyed grass	0.10
Xyris sp.	yellow-eyed grass	0.27
Bare Ground		40.13



Figure 5. Percent relative cover of plant species in Transect 3.

Table 4 Percent cover of	f plant species in Transect 3 sam	nled on November 28, 2023
	plant species in manseet s sam	

Scientific name	Common name	Average percent cover per quadrat
Andropogon arctatus	pinewoods bluestem	0.33
Andropogon glomeratus var. glaucopsis	purple bluestem	2.63
Andropogon sp.	bluestem	0.43
Andropogon virginicus	broomsedge bluestem	6.80
Andropogon virginicus var. glaucus	chalky bluestem	7.83
Aristida palustris	longleaf threeawn	0.53
Aristida stricta	wiregrass	3.00
Clethra alnifolia	sweet pepperbush	0.03
Cliftonia monophylla	black titi	0.03
Coleataenia longifolia	ciliate redtop panicum	0.47
Dichanthelium ensifolium	cypress witchgrass	3.07
Dichanthelium scabriusculum	woolly witchgrass	4.20
Dichanthelium sp.	witchgrass	0.70
Gaylussacia dumosa	dwarf huckleberry	0.07

Scientific name	Common name	Average percent cover per quadrat
Gaylussacia mosieri	woolly huckleberry	0.10
Hypericum brachyphyllum	coastalplain St. John's wort	0.50
Hypericum crux-andreae	St. Peter's wort	0.50
Hypericum microsepalum	flatwoods St. John's wort	0.03
llex coriacea	large gallberry	10.67
llex glabra	gallberry	2.00
Kellochloa verrucosa	warty panicgrass	2.53
Lachnocaulon anceps	whitehead bogbutton	0.43
Lophiola aurea	golden crest	0.23
Lycopodiella alopecuroides	foxtail club-moss	0.83
Pinus taeda	loblolly pine	0.10
Rhexia petiolata	fringed meadowbeauty	0.03
Rhynchospora chapmanii	Chapman's beaksedge	7.07
Rhynchospora ciliaris	fringed beaksedge	0.37
Rhynchospora fascicularis	fascicled beaksedge	0.13
Saccharum giganteum	sugarcane plumegrass	1.17
Serenoa repens	saw palmetto	0.23
Smilax glauca	cat greenbrier	0.07
Smilax laurifolia	laurel greenbrier	3.70
Xyris ambigua	coastalplain yellow-eyed grass	0.37
<i>Xyris</i> sp.	yellow-eyed grass	0.03
Bare Ground		28.83



Figure 6. Percent relative cover of plant species in Transect 4.

Scientific name	Common name	Average percent cover per quadrat
Andropogon arctatus	pinewoods bluestem	3.77
Andropogon glomeratus var. glaucopsis	purple bluestem	13.30
Andropogon virginicus	broomsedge bluestem	17.43
Andropogon virginicus var. glaucus	chalky bluestem	1.17
Aristida palustris	longleaf threeawn	0.03
Aristida stricta	wiregrass	13.00
Aronia arbutifolia	red chokeberry	0.13
Ctenium aromaticum	toothache grass	3.00
Dichanthelium ensifolium	cypress witchgrass	1.23
Dichanthelium sp.	witchgrass	0.23
Dichanthelium strigosum	roughhair witchgrass	0.13
Gaylussacia dumosa	dwarf huckleberry	0.73
Gaylussacia mosieri	woolly huckleberry	0.63
Hypericum brachyphyllum	coastalplain St. John's wort	0.03
Hypericum microsepalum	flatwoods St. John's wort	1.43
llex coriacea	large gallberry	0.40

Scientific name	Common name	Average percent cover per quadrat
llex glabra	gallberry	4.07
Kellochloa verrucosa	warty panicgrass	0.80
Lachnocaulon anceps	whitehead bogbutton	0.83
Lycopodiella alopecuroides	foxtail club-moss	0.87
Rhynchospora chapmanii	Chapman's beaksedge	2.67
Rhynchospora ciliaris	fringed beaksedge	0.90
Rhynchospora fascicularis	fascicled beaksedge	0.40
Rhynchospora glomerata	clustered beaksedge	0.33
Rhynchospora plumosa	plumed beaksedge	1.03
Rhynchospora sp.	beaksedge	0.97
Smilax glauca	cat greenbrier	0.17
Smilax laurifolia	laurel greenbrier	0.30
Xyris ambigua	coastalplain yellow-eyed grass	0.13
Bare Ground		16.83

# Shrub Quadrats

Table 6. Rooted Shrub Stems per Square Meter (Fall 2023)

Shrub Quadrat	Shrub Stems per m <sup>2</sup>
1	7
2	24
3	14
4	12
5	8
AVG Stems per m <sup>2</sup>	13.0