

Guidance and Best Practices for Removing Vessels from Environmentally Sensitive Coastal Waters and Shorelines

Some vessel removal activities could trigger the need for a CAMA permit from the NC Division of Coastal Management (DCM) before starting work.

Due to your vessel's location within an environmentally sensitive area, it is strongly recommended you notify Division of Coastal Management (DCM) staff of plans for vessel removal by contacting Paula Gillikin, at (252) 838-0886 or by email at Paula.Gillikin@ncdenr.gov prior to conducting removal activities. Please be prepared to provide the following information: vessel registration number, current owner name, vessel location (county and waterbody), method of proposed removal, proposed date of removal, and who will be performing the work (marine contractor/salvor, self). Vessel owners are encouraged to hire a licensed marine contractor or salvor to recover their vessel to provide the safest method possible for your vessel and to protect coastal resources.

To help protect North Carolina's coastal resources and avoid potential environmental violations, vessel owners and removal contractors should implement the following guidelines and best management practices:

- If the vessel is located above, or landward of the normal high water line, or the normal water level as the case may be, the property owner contiguous to the location of the vessel should be contacted for permission to work on their **private property**.
- Vessel removal and marine debris removal activities should be conducted at sufficient tide and water depths to minimize risks to sensitive habitats, including marshes, seagrasses, and oyster beds. Floating the vessel, protecting the marsh surface with mats or roller bags, and pulling the vessel off the wetland during the highest of high tides are encouraged and typically do not require a permit from DCM.
- Incidental dredging, installing temporary structures or pilings, excavation and/or filling associated with vessel removal may require a permit from DCM and possibly other state and federal authorities prior to vessel removal. Contact DCM staff prior to commencing work to see if the activity requires a CAMA permit and avoid possible violations.
- **Restoration** of any disturbed coastal wetlands to previous contours and elevations, including smoothing out ruts, berms and compacted areas, are necessary if incidental scarring/excavation occurs while the vessel is removed. Marsh ecosystems are very sensitive to elevation and grade changes and even minor alterations could adversely impact marsh function and habitat values.
- Perform site visits and work from waterways, paved surfaces, or existing roadways whenever possible to minimize impacts to sensitive marsh habitats. Select machinery, equipment, and removal methods that are least likely to disturb soils/sediments/substrates and keep loading of equipment and machinery to a minimum to reduce ground pressure and footprint.
- **Use wide-tired vehicles** when working in marshes; otherwise use logging or timber mats. This will

help prevent grade and elevation changes in the marsh substrate that may alter the marsh functionality and fragile ecosystem.

- If a vessel will be towed or dragged from its grounding, the **extraction path should be as short as possible** while ensuring that no additional groundings or damage to sensitive habitats, such as nesting areas or submerged aquatic vegetation, will take place during recovery.
- Removal operations should **avoid marked sea turtle or bird nests** and stay low on the beach to minimize contact with unmarked nests. In the event that nesting turtles, birds, or hatchlings are sighted, removal operations in the area should stop and you should notify U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) staff or NC Wildlife Resource Commission (NCWRC) staff. This will help protect endangered species and could also prevent liabilities under the federal Endangered Species Act. If it is necessary to work in the vicinity of or in the direct path of a nest of an endangered species, you should contact the USFWS by calling (919) 856-4520, or the NCWRC by calling (252) 948-3916 before beginning removal work.
- If possible, removal operations should **take place during daylight hours** for safety and to be able to identify any potential threats or risks to endangered species and to minimize adverse impacts to coastal resources. However, some removals may need to take place at night to take advantage of higher than normal high tides. Extra care should be taken for safety and protected species impacts.
- All **equipment and materials should be removed** at the conclusion of operations as soon as possible to minimize impacts to coastal resources and potential risks from mechanical pollutants such as leaking oil, hydraulic fluids, gasoline leaks or spills.