



North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

Pat McCrory
Governor

Susan Kluttz
Secretary

January 25, 2016

Mr. Braxton Davis, Director
NC Division of Coastal Management
400 Commerce Avenue
Morehead City, NC 28577

Dear Mr. Davis:

The North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation appreciates the opportunity to comment on the study for the removal of the southern component of the "New Inlet Dam" along the western boundary of the Zeke's Island component of the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve. The Division would like further information on how the project could affect Fort Fisher State Recreation Area and Baldhead Island State Natural Area. Our questions are related to potential water quality impacts; the possibility of extensive erosion of the shoreline associated with Fort Fisher State Recreation Area and Bald Head Island State Natural Area; and potential impacts to rare, threatened and endangered species.

The New Inlet was opened in 1781 during a storm event at a site associated with the traditional location where fisherman had hauled boats over the Barrier Island between the Cape Fear River and the ocean. In the 1870's Congress authorized the closure of the New Inlet and the inlet was physically closed in 1879. Additional structures were added to ensure the permanent closure of the New Inlet. This closure allowed for dredging of the current channel with increased tidal flow due to continued deepening and widening by the USACE.

The Division has several questions related to the proposal to reopen the New Inlet. The reopened inlet would allow the influx of ocean water with a greater salinity as compared to water that currently occurs in the area around Fort Fisher State Recreation Area. These water quality changes should be studied to determine the potential biological impact on the surrounding region.

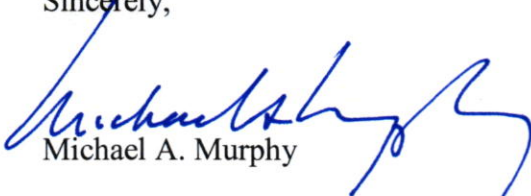
Secondly, creation of a tidal inlet could have significant impacts on the shoreline adjacent to the proposed inlet location. Opening the New Inlet could impact littoral transport rates and could result in large scale erosion and recession of the adjacent shoreline. These impacts could have a significant effect on both the recreation and natural resource values of Fort Fisher State Recreation Area and Baldhead Island State Natural Area.

Braxton Davis
January 25, 2016
Page 2

The final concern is associated with potential impacts to rare, threatened and endangered species. Fort Fisher is home to a number of species rare to the state. Federally endangered species recorded from this location include Leatherback Sea Turtle and West Indian Manatee. Federally threatened species include Seabeach Amaranth, Loggerhead Sea Turtle, Piping Plover and Green Sea Turtle. Federal Species of Concern include Painted Bunting, Dune Bluecurls and Diamondback Terrapin. The proposed reopening of the New Inlet has the potential to significantly impact habitat which supports these federally listed species. Additional research is needed to determine how these species could be impacted by the proposed reopening of the inlet.

The Division appreciates the opportunity to provide our comments to the Division of Coastal Management regarding this important issue. If you have any further questions regarding this matter please contact Brian Strong at (919) 707-9323.

Sincerely,



Michael A. Murphy

Cc: Brian Strong, Chief of Planning and Natural Resources
Jeff Owen, Superintendent, Fort Fisher State Recreation Area