

**STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE NORTH CAROLINA
COMMERCIAL FISHING RESOURCE FUND**

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I. PURPOSE

The purpose of the North Carolina Commercial Fishing Resource Fund (hereafter referred to a “Fund”) is to provide funding for projects to develop and support sustainable commercial fishing in the State. The purpose of the *Strategic Plan for the North Carolina Commercial Fishing Resource Fund* is to define criteria and goals to establish annual funding priorities for disbursement of funds from the North Carolina Commercial Fishing Resources Fund.

II. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

North Carolina General Statute (N.C.G.S.) §113-173.1(a) established the North Carolina Commercial Fishing Resource Fund as a non-reverting special revenue fund in the office of the State Treasurer is to provide funding for projects to develop and support sustainable commercial fishing in the State.

The North Carolina Commercial Fishing Resource Fund shall be used only for the following purposes, in order of priority:

1. First, the Fund shall fully fund the State’s incidental take permits for the commercial fishing industry under the federal Endangered Species Act of 1973 (Public Law 93-205) or the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972 (Public Law 92-522).
2. After the priority set forth in subdivision (1) of this section has been fully funded, the Fund may be used for other projects to develop and support sustainable commercial fishing in the State.

Funds remaining after the State’s incidental take permits have been fully funded, the Fund may be used for other project to develop and support sustainable commercial fishing in the State (hereinafter referred to as “(b)(2) funds”).

With respect to (b)(2) funds, the State Treasurer shall disburse the principal of the Fund only upon the written direction of both the Marine Fisheries Commission and the Funding Committee for the North Carolina Commercial Fishing Resource Fund following the procedures set forth in signed Memorandum of Understanding between the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission and the Funding Committee for the North Carolina Commercial Fishing Resources Fund.

III. GOAL

The overall goal for the use of the funds designated in N.C. Gen. Stat. §113-173.1(b)(2) is to provide funding for projects to develop and support sustainable commercial fishing in the State. As provided in the Memorandum of Understanding between the Commercial Resource Funding Committee and the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission, the purpose of this Strategic

Plan is to further the identification and development of funding objectives and strategies, as well as the establishment of funding criteria and priorities. This plan sets forth a framework of objectives and strategies to meet this goal.

IV. PROGRAM AREAS

There are several important programmatic areas under which strategies have been developed to achieve the goals of the North Carolina Commercial Fishing Resource Fund.

- A. Fish/Fishery: Biological research and surveys that provide crucial information on abundance of fish stocks, and other data necessary for development and implementation of fishery management plans, particularly with regard to those fisheries with significant commercial effort and participation, so that through the development of best practices the maximum sustainable yield (harvest by users) of the resource may be achieved. To conduct research to identify best practices, including through the reliance on particular gear types and gear configuration, which allow for sustainable harvests while also reducing unintended impacts to non-targeted species and habitat that reduce commercial fishing bycatch, discards and mortality of untargeted species. To conduct research to minimize commercial fishing interactions with endangered and protected species while sustaining commercial fishing operations.
- B. Habitat: Activities related to protecting, managing, conserving, enhancing and mapping critical aquatic habitats that support fish, crustaceans, and shellfish that commercial fishing activities depend for a sustainable industry.
- C. People: Activities related to public outreach, education and the economic benefits of sustaining the N.C. commercial fishing industry to the economies of the coastal counties, State and Nation.

The following are priorities to consider as a guidance for funding of projects that support development and support sustainable commercial fishing in the State, but should not be considered all-inclusive as other priorities supporting the goal of the fund may be identified throughout the annual funding cycle.

FISH/FISHERY

The following priorities are for the funding of projects related to biological research and surveys that provide crucial information on abundance of fish stocks, and other data necessary for development and implementing fishery management plans so that the maximum sustainable yield (harvest by users) of the resource may be achieved. To conduct research to reduce commercial fishing bycatch, discards and mortality of untargeted species. To conduct research to minimize commercial fishing interactions with endangered and protected species while sustaining commercial fishing operations.

- F1: Estimate commercial fishing effort, catch, harvest, bycatch and mortality of important coastal species and to conduct research and develop commercial gear to reduce bycatch and minimize interactions with protected species.
- F2: Conduct fisheries-independent and dependent sampling of species to fill data gaps and develop and expand statistically sound juvenile and adult fishery-independent sampling programs.
- F3. Conduct validation studies for scientific research and monitoring programs.
- F4: Conduct bycatch and discard mortality studies of commercially important species and fisheries. Ensuring the continuation of the collaborative efforts of the Division, N.C. Commercial Fishermen/Industry, and NOAA for bycatch reduction research.
- F.5: Develop gear and methodology for reducing bycatch and discard mortality from commercial fishing.
- F6: Conduct studies and develop commercial fishing gear methodology to reduce and minimize interactions with protected and endangered species while allowing commercial fisheries to continue to function and operate.
- F7: Conduct disease and pathology studies and monitoring to determine causes and impact on fishery resource stocks and aquaculture products that may prevent sustainable commercial fishing.

HABITAT

The following priorities are to protect, manage, conserve, enhance and map critical aquatic habitats that support fish, crustaceans, and shellfish that commercial fishing activities depend for a sustainable industry.

- H.1: Establish standard indicators of estuarine and near-shore ocean habitat conditions and conduct coastal habitat status assessments using those indicators.
- H.2: Contribute to Department of Environmental Quality initiatives to improve comprehensive water quality monitoring.
- H.3: Enhance education of commercial fishermen and the public concerning fish habitats, how they function, and what people can do to protect them.
- H.4: Provide tools and educational materials to law enforcement officers to help deter habitat damage and recognize/report environmental violations.
- H.5: Map coastal fisheries habitat such as submerged aquatic vegetation, shallow bottom and other bottom types.

- H.6: Identify and delineate candidate sites for designation as Strategic Habitat Areas.
- H.7: Conduct research and monitoring to determine status of and trends in the six basic fish habitats (submerged aquatic vegetation, shell bottom, wetlands, water column, hard bottom, soft bottom).
- H.8: Conduct research to clarify the linkages between coastal fish habitat and fish production and identify the key aspects of habitat function and how these functions are affected by commercial fishing activities.
- H.9: Implement restoration measures where habitat has been degraded or lost.
- H.10: Conduct monitoring programs to evaluate success of restoration and enhancement projects.
- H.11: Conduct research and refine restoration/enhancement techniques to maximize long-term ecological function and structural integrity of these efforts.
- H.12: Conduct research to determine the long-term effect of designating an area as a primary nursery area and the prohibition of using bottom disturbing gear in that area.
- H.13: Expand oyster shell recycling program outreach and public participation to enhance public awareness and foster volunteer, government agency, and non-government organization partnerships.
- H.14: Conduct research on alternative methods of producing shellfish such as biodegradable substrates to improve production of native oysters for commercial harvest, and restoration of oyster habitats.
- H.15: Development of oyster habitat, shellfish seeding of public bottoms and stocking of commercially important fish species.
- H.16: Conduct research and sampling to determine what pollutants are present in the ecosystem and implement restoration measures where the habitat has been degraded or lost.

PEOPLE

Activities related to public outreach, education and the economic benefits of sustaining the N.C. commercial fishing industry to the economies of the coastal counties, State and Nation.

- P.1: Conduct research and prepare an economic analysis of the impacts and benefits of sustainable commercial fishing and the seafood industry to the State of North Carolina using an economic model or models that incorporates both the sales and value-added contribution of the seafood commodity and the expenses of catching, processing, transportation and sales of the product and the durable goods expenditures of the industry.

- P.2: Develop workshop, clinics, courses and curriculums, and marketing initiatives on ethical commercial fishing practices, conservation methods, bycatch reduction, sustainable commercial fishing practices and interaction with protected and endangered species.
- P.3: Expand and initiate research, education and outreach opportunities, and marketing initiatives relating to current issues affecting the sustainability of North Carolina's commercial fishing industry, the North Carolina coast, and its communities.
- P.4: Develop programs and provide unbiased science-based information to enhance the sustainable use and conservation of ocean and coastal resources to benefit commercial fishing, communities, the economy and environment.
- P.5: Develop working waterfronts to provide commercial fishermen with access to commercial fishing opportunities to sustain the industry.

Effective Date: July 26, 2018

Revisions: