

August 2015 NCDMF Meeting Public Comments

I am Chris McCaffity, a commercial fisherman and fisheries advocate. Please keep an open heart and mind as you think about the solutions in these comments.

The Visioning Project summary I submitted last year suggested we focus on improving our fisheries by stocking native species and enhancing habitat. There is broad support for implementing these proven solutions while funding seems to be the primary obstacle. Here are a few funding options we should consider.

1. Allow stakeholders to vote on how our license fees will be used.
2. Use existing taxes that are already earmarked for promoting recreational fishing and domestic seafood to fund hatcheries and habitat enhancement.
3. Set official guidelines for how much of each species can be stocked and what kind of habitat enhancements would be allowed. Each sector should be allowed to fund these projects and be rewarded with higher limits.

The Edenton National Fish Hatchery is already stocking herring and could stock many more. I propose we start a pilot program for River Herring that establishes Hatchery Supported Quotas based on a fraction of herring released and allow each sector to come up with funding for their share. This solution could also be applied to other seafood such as flounder, trout, oysters, and scallops.

Stocking would allow targeted species to thrive at the highest levels our existing habitat can support even as we harvest more without overfishing. Habitat enhancement would help marine ecosystems support more life. These solutions would be the perfect union of aquaculture and wild-caught seafood that lives free and self-sufficient until harvested. They would increase recreational opportunities and seafood supplies while protecting our fisheries for future generations.

It is time to focus more on enhancing our fisheries and food supply than restricting the public's freedom to access them. It is time to incorporate compassion and proven solutions into management measures that benefit everyone and our marine resources. It is time for a paradigm shift in our fishery management philosophy.