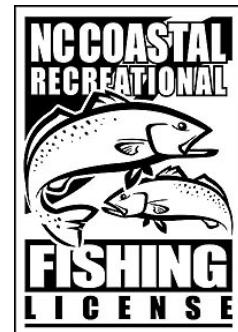


**North Carolina Marine Resources Fund and Marine
Resources Endowment Fund
Strategic Plan to Manage, Protect, Restore, Develop,
Cultivate, Conserve, and Enhance North Carolina's
Marine Resources**

May 2018



Executive Summary

In 2005, the N.C. General Assembly enacted N.C.G.S. § 113-174.1, and the requirement for coastal recreational fishing licenses began on January 1, 2007. Revenues from license sales are deposited into two funds, depending upon the type of license: the N.C. Marine Resources Fund and the N.C. Marine Resources Endowment Fund. The legislation directs that the funds will be used “*to manage, protect, restore, develop, cultivate, conserve, and enhance the marine resources¹ of the State.*” Furthermore, the State Treasurer will disburse these revenues “*only upon written direction of the Division of Marine Fisheries of the Department of Environmental Quality.*” These funds will assist the Division of Marine Fisheries in ensuring sustainable marine and estuarine fisheries and habitats for the benefit and health of the people of North Carolina.

To guide expenditures funded by the N.C. Marine Resources Fund and N.C. Marine Resources Endowment Fund, hereinafter referred to as the ‘funds’, the Division of Marine Fisheries developed this Strategic Plan to ensure the funds are used consistently as outlined in General Statute. As with all management plans, this plan is a working document that will be modified as objectives are accomplished and priorities change. The plan identifies two broad program areas: 1) Marine Resources and Habitat Management, and 2) Access and Education. The two strategic program areas include:

GOAL 1: Marine Resources and Habitat Management

Support research, surveys, and investigations that provide essential information for the management of marine resources and habitats, including administrative and compliance activities necessary to obtain management objectives

GOAL 2: Access and Education

Enhance public fishing access and angling opportunities and support public outreach and education that are essential to management of marine resources and habitats

I. Introduction

A Coastal Recreational Fishing License statute was enacted by the N.C. General Assembly in 2005 (N.C.G.S. § 113-174.1) and the requirement for coastal recreational fishing licenses began on January 1, 2007. The license is required to recreationally fish for finfish in the state’s coastal fishing waters, which include sounds, coastal rivers and their tributaries, and out to three nautical miles in the ocean. Recreational anglers who catch fish in the ocean further than three nautical miles offshore are required to have this license to land fish in North Carolina. Persons fishing in joint fishing waters (areas managed by both the Marine Fisheries Commission and the Wildlife Resources

¹ Marine and Estuarine Resources. – All fish, except inland game fish, found in the Atlantic Ocean and in coastal fishing waters; all fisheries based upon such fish; all uncultivated or undomesticated plant and animal life, other than wildlife resources, inhabiting or dependent upon coastal fishing waters; and the entire ecology supporting such fish, fisheries, and plant and animal life. § 113-129 (11)

Commission) are required to purchase either the Coastal Recreational Fishing License or a Wildlife Resources Commission inland fishing license.

Revenues generated from the sale of a Coastal Recreational Fishing License are deposited in the N.C. Marine Resources Fund or the N.C. Marine Resources Endowment Fund, depending on the type of license purchased, to provide monies for the enhancement of the marine resources of the state. The Division of Marine Fisheries is authorized to disburse these funds *to manage, protect, restore, develop, cultivate, conserve, and enhance the marine resources of the state*. It should be noted that this plan is a working document subject to change or modification as objectives are met and priorities are adjusted.

II. Coastal Recreational Fishing License Mission

The mission for the use of funds is *to manage, protect, restore, develop, cultivate, conserve, and enhance the marine resources of North Carolina based on sound science, compliance to fisheries management measures and public access and education*. This plan sets forth a framework of goals, strategies, and objectives to meet this mission. The plan provides the basis upon which to disburse Coastal Recreational Fishing License revenues from the funds. The strategies and objectives described have been compiled and established in support of the goals based on priority research needs in:

- fishery management plans;
- issues and research priorities identified in the [Coastal Habitat Protection Plan](#);
- needs identified cooperatively with other state and federal agencies;
- annual [Research Priorities for the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries](#);
- Other N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries planning documents such as *Coastal Recreational Fishing License Operational Plan, Artificial Reef Plan, and the Strategic Plan for Angler Education*

III. Plan Goals

There are two important Strategic Goal areas identified within the Strategic Plan:

A) Marine Resources and Habitat Management

Support research, surveys, and investigations that provide essential information for the management of marine resources and habitats, including administrative and compliance activities necessary to obtain management objectives

B) Access and Education

Enhance public fishing access and angling opportunities and support public outreach and education that are essential to management of marine resources and habitats

Division of Marine Fisheries data collection programs are extensive, but even so, important data gaps remain. Emphasis will be to ensure that fisheries sampling, monitoring, and research adequately address the target species and fisheries, and that the

resultant data are accurate, unbiased, and representative of the situation. Implementation of the provisions of the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan directly addresses the statutory charge to identify, protect, restore, and enhance critical fish habitats to provide the adequate habitat and water quality necessary to maintain our fisheries at healthy and productive levels. Ensuring compliance to fisheries management measures ensures protection of the state's marine resources. Enhancing public fishing access to coastal waters and providing angling opportunities, along with conservation education programs will build public confidence in the benefits of the Coastal Recreational Fishing License. The Division operations supporting this strategic plan will be documented annually in the *Division of Marine Fisheries Coastal Recreational Fishing License Operational Plan* including annual and multi-year obligations funded from the funds.

IV. OBJECTIVES and STRATEGIES

It should be noted that this plan is a working document subject to change or modification as objectives are met and priorities are adjusted. The following high-level objectives set the universe for the detailed objectives and strategies forthcoming from the establishment of annual funding priorities by the Division. **Annual proposal requests should be congruent with the annual needs identified in the various research priority needs documents.**

GOAL 1: MARINE RESOURCES AND HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Objective 1: Enhance Research and Monitoring

Each year, following review of the Division of Marine Fisheries Stock Status Report, the Biological Review Team prioritizes research needs within a document entitled "[The Research Priorities for the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries](#)". Considered within this list of research priorities are projects identified as important within the [Coastal Habitat Protection Plan](#). The top 2016 priority issues were: oyster restoration, establishment of living shorelines, sedimentation impacts, and generating habitat metrics. Habitat research priorities include topics that address these priority issues as well as other research related to ecosystem functions and threats.

Other research priorities include various surveys of the needs, views, and expenses of recreational fishermen in North Carolina. The collection and analysis of socio-economic data are needed for descriptive and behavioral information relative to the activities of recreational anglers in the coastal fishing waters of North Carolina. These data can provide estimates of the value and economic contributions of recreational fishing, identify outreach needs, and evaluate the impacts of fishery management plans and fishing regulations on anglers.

Objective 2: Enhance Compliance

Enhanced compliance ensures that anglers comply with general statutes and rules that are developed to protect and regulate the harvest of the state's fisheries. Fair and consistent law enforcement is a cornerstone to any implemented marine resource management measure to protect fishery stocks and habitats supporting these stocks. Enforcing coastal

fishing activities includes air, ground, and boat patrol investigations. Effective law enforcement is also dependent on state-of-the-art enforcement resources and training, administrative, technical, and communications support to officers.

Objective 3: Support Fisheries Operations and Infrastructure

Support for infrastructure and administrative (technical, communication, and training) operations is essential to address the objectives of enhanced research and monitoring. Basic infrastructure needs include field sampling vessels and gear, as well as operational support for technical and analytical staff. The critical nature and support of these operations have been legitimized by legislative mandates that provide operational support for staff. This includes, but is not limited to, operational support for license sales, support staff and management of the coastal recreational fishing license funds, and technical infrastructure to house and process data for long-term data support, analysis, and data collection needs.

GOAL 2: ACCESS AND EDUCATION

Objective 1: Provide Access to Marine Resources and Angling Opportunities

The residents of North Carolina, especially the recreational fishing community will benefit from improved access and angling opportunities. Additional public access sites including boat ramps, fishing piers, beach access, and more accessible habitat enhancements such as artificial and other fishing reefs are to be constructed to support and provide broader use of these resources. Careful consideration of habitat disturbance during design and construction of new access structures is necessary, and projects should seek to restore areas of degraded habitat when possible. Coastal access projects should be considered within a larger conservation blueprint that recognizes the need to limit environmental impacts while also providing for recreational opportunities. Collaboration with other agencies including the Department of Transportation, the Wildlife Resources Commission, and the Department of Environmental Quality, will result in multiple use facilities at locations already owned by the State.

Objective 2: Improve Public Information, Education, and Enrichment

Recreational fishing effort in North Carolina is at an all-time high. North Carolina is one of the top states in the country in the numbers and poundage of recreationally-caught fish from coastal fishing waters. As coastal populations and visitation continue to increase, it is imperative that our angling constituency and North Carolina residents in general understand the dynamics of our fisheries management programs, observe conservation-based fishing practices, and become stewards of the resource. It is important to deliver products and services such as workshops, clinics, recognition programs, charitable educational opportunities, and materials to meet the expectations of the recreational fishing community.

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