

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF NORTH CAROLINA TIDAL SALTWATER CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

Classifications	SALTWATER QUALITY CHARACTERISTICS			CONSTRUCTION & DEVELOPMENT			STORMWATER CONTROL ^{④ ⑤}	
	Best Uses	Max. F. Coli. Counts ^① (No. /100 ml)	Wastewater Discharges	Dredge & Fill Activities	Erosion and Sedimentation Control Rules	Recreational Activities	Low Density Option	High Density Option ^⑥
DIVISION OF WATER QUALITY: PRIMARY CLASSIFICATIONS								
Saltwater (S) C	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aquatic life propagation; and • Secondary Recreation including recreational fishing, boating, and water related activities involving minimal skin contact. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not to exceed 200 (geometric mean of five consecutive samples in a 30-day period); and • not to exceed 400 in 20 percent of samples. 	No categorical restrictions. However, DWQ may prohibit discharges on a case-by-case basis for protection of water quality.	Refer to Supplemental Classification, and to the N.C. Division of Coastal Management, N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, and N.C. Shellfish Sanitation and Recreational Water Quality Section.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard erosion protection and sedimentation control required for projects greater than 1 acre. • Required to manage 10-year storm runoff. • Refer to the N.C. Division of Land Resources ^② 	Protected for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low intensity skin contact, such as wading, or informal swimming areas. • Boating/marina development. • Recreational fishing and water craft. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 foot minimum buffer from perennial waters and shorelines. • 30 percent maximum built-upon area density restrictions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems must control runoff from 1.0 inch of rainfall and be designed for 85 percent Total Suspended Solids (TSS) removal. • Refer to Stormwater Management Rules 15A NCAC 2H .1000 for specific design information.
Saltwater (S) B	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary Recreation activities; such as swimming which occurs on a frequent or organized basis; and • SC Best Uses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not to exceed 200 (geometric mean of five consecutive samples in a 30-day period); and • not to exceed 400 in 20 percent of samples. 	No categorical restrictions. However, DWQ may prohibit discharges on a case-by-case basis for protection of water quality.	Refer to Supplemental Classification, and to the Division of Coastal Management, Division of Marine Fisheries, and Shellfish Sanitation and Recreational Water Quality Section.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standard erosion protection and sedimentation control required for projects greater than 1 acre. • Required to manage 10-year storm runoff. • Refer to the Division of Land Resources ^② 	Protected for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swimming, snorkeling, etc. • Marina development, depending on local fishery and swimming activities. • Recreational fishing and water craft. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 foot minimum buffer from perennial waters and shorelines. • 30 percent maximum built-upon area density restrictions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems must control runoff from 1.0 inch of rainfall and be designed for 85 percent TSS removal. • Refer to Stormwater Management Rules 15A NCAC 2H .1000 for specific design information.
Saltwater (S) A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial shellfish harvesting; • Primary Recreation activities, such as swimming which occurs on a frequent or organized basis; and • SC Best Uses. • All SA waters are HQW (see below). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not to exceed median of 14; and • not to exceed 43 in 10 percent of samples. 	No domestic discharges.	Refer to Supplemental Classification, and to the Division of Coastal Management, Division of Marine Fisheries, and Shellfish Sanitation and Recreational Water Quality Section.	The Sedimentation Control Commission has as many as five increased design standards for projects in HQW zones. See Sedimentation Control Rules for Design Standards in Sensitive Watersheds (15A NCAC 4B .0024) ^②	Protected for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Swimming, snorkeling, etc. • Marina development, depending on local fishery and swimming activities. • Recreational fishing, shellfishing and water craft. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 foot minimum buffer from perennial waters and shorelines. • 25 percent maximum built-upon area density restrictions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systems must control runoff from 1.5 inches of rainfall and be designed for 85 percent TSS removal. • Refer to Stormwater Management Rules 15A NCAC 2H .1000 for specific design information.
DIVISION OF WATER QUALITY: SUPPLEMENTAL CLASSIFICATIONS ^③								
High Quality Waters (HQW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent quality saltwater. • All SA waters, Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW), and Primary Nursery Areas (PNAs) (or other functional nursery areas) are also HQW. 	Water quality standards are associated with Primary Classification.	New or expanded discharges must meet higher treatment requirements.	Refer to the Division of Coastal Management, Division of Marine Fisheries, and Shellfish Sanitation and Recreational Water Quality Section.	The Sedimentation Control Commission has as many as five increased design standards for projects in HQW zones. See Sedimentation Control Rules for Design Standards in Sensitive Watersheds (15A NCAC 4B .0024) ^②	Protected for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary Classification Uses. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stormwater management measures in the 20 coastal counties are the same as the primary classification requirements. • Refer to the Stormwater Management Rules for specific stormwater control requirements in the 20 coastal North Carolina counties. 	
Outstanding Resource Waters (ORW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent quality saltwater; and • Outstanding fish habitat areas or fisheries; or • High existing recreation; or • Special Federal or State designation; or • Part of State/National Park/Forest; or • High ecological/scientific significance. • ORW are also HQW (see above). 	Water quality standards are associated with Primary Classification.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New nondischarge permits include reduced loading restrictions. • Public hearing is mandatory for new or proposed permit. 	Not allowed where significant shellfish or vegetation occurs except for maintenance (such as maintaining access ways), or for agricultural purposes.	The Sedimentation Control Commission has as many as five increased design standards for projects in HQW zones. See Sedimentation Control Rules for Design Standards in Sensitive Watersheds (15A NCAC 4B .0024) ^②	Protected for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary Classification Uses. • Specific restrictions on allowable boat sizes and types may be assigned for marina developments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New developments located within 575 feet of the mean high water level of ORW class saltwaters must meet, at a minimum, the Low Density Option specified in the Stormwater Management Rules for SA class saltwaters. Specific stormwater control strategies for protecting ORW class saltwaters are developed during the process to reclassify waters with the ORW supplemental classification. 	
DIVISION OF COASTAL MANAGEMENT (DCM)								
Estuarine Areas of Environmental Concern (AECs)	Coastal water and land areas of significant economic and biological values to the State.	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards.	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects require major Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) development permit. • Projects must conform to Specific Use Standards. 	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards, and to Division of Land Resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific Use Standards apply to marina developments affecting construction, location, size and service. • Private docks and piers require CAMA development permit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refer to the DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications, and the Stormwater Management Rules. • A 30-foot CAMA buffer applies in the 20 coastal counties. 	
DIVISION OF MARINE FISHERIES (DMF)								
Primary Nursery Areas (PNAs)	Growing areas where populations of juvenile finfish and shellfish of economic importance occur. PNAs are also HQW (see above).	Refer to Shellfish Sanitation Branch requirements.	Refer to DEH, or DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards.	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards, and to DCM CAMA rules.	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards, and to Division of Land Resources.	Marinas that will require dredging in or through PNAs are not allowed.	Refer to the DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications, and the Stormwater Management Rules.	
DIVISION OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH (DEH) - SHELLFISH SANITATION AND RECREATIONAL WATER QUALITY SECTION								
Approved	Suitable growing area for harvesting shellfish for direct marketing to public.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 (either the median or geometric mean); and • 43 in 10 percent of the samples. 	Refer to DEH, or DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards.	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards, and to DCM CAMA rules.	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards, and to Division of Land Resources.	Marinas in shellfish growing areas degrade the classification to Prohibited.		
Conditionally Approved	Growing area subject to predictable intermittent pollution but suitable for harvesting shellfish for marketing when Management Plan conditions are met.	Management plans for these areas, which are subject to known intermittent pollution, are developed on a case-by-case basis.	Refer to DEH, or DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards.	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards, and to DCM CAMA rules.	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards, and to Division of Land Resources.	Marinas in shellfish growing areas degrade the classification to Prohibited.		
Restricted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing area suitable for shellfish harvesting by permit only. • Shellfish must be purified by approved process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 88 (either the median or geometric mean); and • 260 on 10 percent of the samples. 	Refer to DEH, or DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards.	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards, and to DCM CAMA rules.	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards, and to Division of Land Resources.	Marinas in shellfish growing areas degrade the classification to Prohibited.		
Prohibited	Area unsuitable for harvesting shellfish for direct marketing due to presence of high fecal coliform, point source discharge, or marina, or no current sanitary survey.	Fecal coliform counts are higher than allowed for restricted growing areas.	Refer to DEH, or DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards.	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards, and to DCM CAMA rules.	Refer to DWQ Tidal Saltwater Classifications and Standards, and to Division of Land Resources.	Marinas in shellfish growing areas degrade the classification to Prohibited.		

^① Refer to the DWQ Classifications and Water Quality Standards Applicable to Surface Water Rules for complete listing of water quality standards.

^② Turbidity limited to 25 Nephelometric Turbidity Units (NTUs).

^③ Refer to *A Guide to Surface Freshwater Classifications in North Carolina* for discussion of Swamp (Sw) & Nutrient Sensitive (NSW) supplemental classifications.

One primary classification (SW = Saltwater Wetlands) and one supplemental classification (UWL = Unique Wetlands) are not discussed here because no water bodies currently carry these designations.

^④ Apply when CAMA Major Development or Sedimentation and Erosion Control Permit is required.

State stormwater rules cited in this document can be viewed at <http://ncrules.state.nc.us>

^⑤ See footnote 14 on *A Guide to Surface Freshwater Classifications in North Carolina*.

^⑥ Engineered stormwater controls are required.