



North Carolina Wildlife Federation

Affiliated with the National Wildlife Federation

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RESOLUTION

North Carolina Marine Habitat Protection

WHEREAS, North Carolina's roughly 2.5 million acres of estuarine waters, with its important and potentially productive network of sounds, wetlands, waterways and rivers, holds title as the largest nursery area on the Atlantic Coast. These waters provide critical habitat for hundreds of marine and estuarine species to feed, seek shelter, and grow until they mature and are old enough to spawn or migrate to offshore spawning grounds; and

WHEREAS, the many species that comprise North Carolina's marine fisheries rely on the adequate quantity and quality of these habitats to support recreational and commercial fishing industries that have a combined \$2 billion economic impact; and

WHEREAS, with the Public Trust Doctrine and North American Model of Fish and Wildlife Conservation as our guide, the North Carolina Wildlife Federation ("NCWF") holds the belief that North Carolina's marine resources and wildlife are public trusts, and as such, they and their habitats must be protected and sustained for the use and benefit of all citizens, present and future; and

WHEREAS, NCWF's *Sound Solutions* campaign was established to ensure that our sounds and estuaries are protected in order to sustain both commercial and recreational uses of these resources by taking a comprehensive resource-based approach to dealing with the magnitude of issues impacting our sounds. NCWF's objective is to get beyond the simplistic dynamic of coastal landowners vs. public resource participants to look for solutions that will benefit all users; and

WHEREAS, protection of North Carolina's sounds and estuaries from decimation by exploitative development and the resulting sedimentation and pollution of our inshore waters is the most important action the state can take to preserve and sustain our coastal habitat; and

WHEREAS, healthy marine resources require rebuilding overfished stocks, ending overfishing, reducing water pollution, improving water quality, and protecting and restoring critical habitats; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, now the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), created the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (CHPP) after extensive input from stakeholders and experts. CHPP provides a roadmap on how to conserve, protect, and restore North Carolina's coastal water quality and estuarine habitats; and

WHEREAS, CHPP was developed by agencies with natural resource jurisdictions and was endorsed by all concerned constituent groups to address the environmental components and primary causes of habitat loss and water quality degradation. Declines in marine fisheries stocks are primarily addressed in Fishery Management Plans developed by the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) and adopted by the Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) to regulate commercial and recreational fishing so as to end overfishing and to restore fishery stocks to sustainable levels; and

WHEREAS, by recognizing these multiple factors that affect fish stock abundance and the fact we rely solely on fisheries restrictions to address overfishing, the state's resources and citizens benefit by addressing these other factors in order to lessen the regulatory burden on the consumptive user; and

WHEREAS, last year, the CHPP Advisory Committee, which is composed of representatives from the Marine Fisheries Commission, the Coastal Resources Commission, and the Environmental Management Commission, met for the first time in three years to determine how to proceed with the implementation of CHPP. The implementation process will include many state agencies and supporting partners, including NCWF, Wildlife Resources Commission, and DMF. NCWF supports moving forward with the implementation of CHPP, without delay. This comprehensive, inclusive, science-driven plan in which all citizens may actively participate is just the type of document that NCWF can support; and

WHEREAS, CHPP proposes and supports Best Management Practices (BMPs) for protection of the coast and BMPs reduce water pollution from runoff and sedimentation and reduce habitat loss and degradation. NCWF is working within the CHPP process, and directly with state agencies and local governments to implement more efficient regulations and incentives with a view to develop a higher priority for use of BMPs in the coastal environment; and

WHEREAS, North Carolina's natural oyster population has been reduced by 90% in the last 100 years resulting in a proportional loss of the oyster's important role in water quality and habitat protection, not to mention its commercial and cultural significance. North Carolina should prioritize natural oyster reef protection and restoration, establish sanctuaries for oyster reefs, and support oyster mariculture, to improve the coast's water quality, produce jobs, and protect against storm surges and sea-level rise.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the North Carolina Wildlife Federation Board of Directors, at its annual meeting on September 9, 2017, in Raleigh, NC, supports revitalization of CHPP with emphasis on policy recommendations for coastal habitat protection and resiliency contained in the campaign and plan and pledges to use its resources and means to create positive change and meaningful reform to protect, restore, and enhance coastal habitats; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the North Carolina Wildlife Federation urges the DEQ to direct the MFC, CRC, and EMC to implement the plans and action items of CHPP in a timely manner; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the North Carolina Wildlife Federation urges the State of North Carolina and local governments to give priority to, and provide incentives for, the use of BMPs in critical coastal habitat areas, including, but not limited to, building Living Shorelines and utilizing Low Impact Development; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the North Carolina Wildlife Federation urges the North Carolina General Assembly to begin steps to avert the current Tragedy of the Commons in our marine fisheries by providing more funding and higher priority for oyster reef protection and restoration; for marine sanctuaries to protect natural and restored oyster reefs and other vital areas required by marine and estuarine fisheries.

Signed: _____

Dr. Bob Brown, Chairman, North Carolina Wildlife Federation

CC: The Honorable Roy Cooper, Governor, of North Carolina
The Honorable Phil Berger, President Pro Tempore
The Honorable Tim Moore, Speaker of the House
Michael Regan, Secretary, N.C. Department of Environmental Quality
Dr. Braxton Davis, Director, Divisions of N.C. Marine Fisheries and Coastal Resources