

Coastal Report Card



Each year the Coastal Federation issues grades on how well governments and citizens have protected and restored our coast. This year's grades reflect a growing dynamic of increased demands on coastal resources and decreased capacity of government agencies to enforce coastal protection laws.

Gov. Easley and His Administration*

1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001
C-	C+	I	B	D+	C+	I

*Note: 1994 - 2000 grades reflect Gov. Hunt's administration

■ **COMMENTS:** As a candidate for Governor, Mike Easley promised in his Comprehensive Clean Water Plan that within two years of taking office, he would implement his *River Back* approach to identify pollution sources and clean them up. He said that no source of contamination could be excused from the responsibility of cleaning up our waters, and that "adequate borders, buffers and wetlands, along with other 'best management' strategies will be a necessary part of curbing 'non-point' source pollution." Governor Easley also pledged to abolish swine waste lagoons, strengthen environmental enforcement, and inform state and local environmental agencies about proposed sitings of industrial facilities early in the process.

Shortly after Easley assumed power, the state's budget crisis was revealed to the public. The new governor began to slash the budgets of most state agencies and environmental programs, froze staff, cut travel and reduced the number of meetings of regulatory commissions. It can be argued that the Governor had no choice but to cut back on spending. Even so, the Easley administration's lack of initiative to move forward with his environmental agenda sends a loud and troubling message. The one encouraging note is that he has three years to fulfill the expectations created during his campaign. This year, we are giving Gov. Easley an **Incomplete**.

■ **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:** The Governor needs to develop a coastal agenda that provides a clear blueprint for accomplishment. We hope his agenda includes the adoption of an effective CAMA land use planning program, enhanced wetlands protection, good use of the EPA Phase II Storm Water Program, a long-term management strategy for NC's migrating barrier islands, and adoption of Coastal Habitat Protection Plans. The Governor needs to increase funding for state regulatory agencies, and fully fund the Clean Water Management Trust Fund. He also needs to make visionary appointments to state environmental regulatory commissions and not just fulfill political favors. Above all, he'll need to make protecting the environment a priority issue.

NC Senate

1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001
D	B	B+	B-	B	C	C

■ **COMMENTS:** Under the leadership of President Pro-Tempore Marc Basnight, the Senate has championed the Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF) since its inception in 1996. If this were the only issue on which we graded the Senate, we would have given them an **A+**. We give the Senate a **B** for passing the Clean Smokestacks bill (SB 1078), and a **D** for cutting more than 50 positions in DENR. However we give them an **F** for passing a bill (SB 1037) at the last minute that would allow industries to construct new plants before securing air permits. Overall, it's been a lackluster year and our final grade is a flat **C**.

■ **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:** The CWMTF is slated to receive \$40 million this year and \$70 million next year. Environmental agency staffing is suffering and desperately needs reinforcements. If the economy continues to sink, the pressure will mount to cut the budget even deeper. Next year, the Senate will need to insure that the CWMTF is fully funded and increase the number of environmental agency staff.

NC House

1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001
D	C-	B+	C	C-	C-	D

■ **COMMENTS:** We are disappointed with the State House. Although the Senate included \$40 million for the CWMTF, the House cut this amount in half in its approved budget. For not fully recognizing the value of the CWMTF, but finally agreeing to the Senate's mark of \$40 million, we give the House a **C**. For holding up a Senate air quality bill (SB 1078) that could reduce mercury emissions and hence concentrations in coastal fisheries, we give the House a **D**. And for proposing a bill (HB 418) that would create a commission and funding mechanism to push scads of beach nourishment projects, we also give them a **D**. Overall, we charitably give the House a **D**.

■ **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:** It is not clear why the House Environment Committee is dominated with legislators who do not seem to favor environmental protection. We would like the House to prove us wrong. They could do that by not tinkering with Phase II stormwater rules, new

wetland rules and land use planning rules that are slated to go into effect next year, and by sticking with \$70 million for the CWMTF in next year's budget.

Local Governments

1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001
D+	D+	D+	D+	C	D+	D

■ **COMMENTS:** Only a handful of the nearly 100 local governments on the coast have figured out that they are in the best position to protect their environment. Instead, too many counties and towns complain that federal and state agencies are intervening in their business by imposing stricter environmental laws and regulations. *What do they expect?* If local governments don't step up to the plate and do their jobs effectively, someone else will have to take control of these natural resources.

■ **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:** Get busy implementing the new CAMA land use planning rules and the EPA Phase II stormwater program. Hats off to the counties that have voluntarily embraced the new rules. Failure by others to do so will be at the peril of the local governments themselves since new federal requirements make them responsible for protecting and restoring water quality.

Citizens

1994-1995	1995-1996	1996-1997	1997-1998	1998-1999	1999-2000	2000-2001
B	A	A	B+	B+	B+	C-

■ **COMMENTS:** Normally, we're accused of being self-serving when it comes to the grades we give to citizens. Quite simply, the willingness of so many people to share their talents, limited time, and resources to help protect their coast never ceases to amaze us. We're still impressed. But we must face facts. Rapid development and intensive land uses are causing environmental problems on our coast to grow faster than citizens are working to resolve them.

■ **AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT:** Plenty of people care about the coast. There are more than a million full-time and seasonal residents who depend on the coast as a place for work and play. We must have more vigorous public participation to hold decision-makers accountable for how they manage our coast if there is any hope that government will be effective in coastal protection.

