

Lower Cape Fear River Blueprint

From the broad coastal estuary to the slow meandering blackwater streams, the Cape Fear River contributes to a vibrant coastal economy, providing rich natural resources, recreational opportunities and cultural heritage for its residents and visitors.

Historically, the Cape Fear River region has experienced major alterations and often conflicting uses of the river. Today, short-sighted and unsustainable development practices, including draining of wetlands, high-intensity clear cutting of forested areas, unregulated dumping of industrial contaminants and unmanaged stormwater runoff compound historic issues within the region.

The North Carolina Coastal Federation continues to address these issues by actively engaging with local governments, state and federation agencies, and other entities, as part of a three-year, federation-wide initiative to:

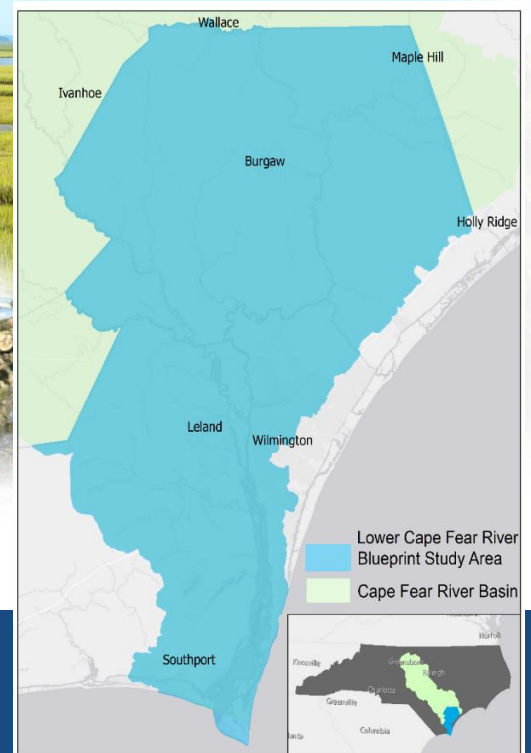
- Advocate for compatible industrial development in the coastal zone;
- Restore coastal habitats and protect water quality;
- Improve our economy through coastal restoration.

The **Lower Cape Fear River Blueprint** is a collaborative effort to focus on the river's estuarine and riverine natural resources. It examines the impacts of short-sighted and unsustainable developmental practices and water quality issues of the coastal, lower Cape Fear River. The Blueprint recommends site-specific, sustainable solutions to address these and other issues threatening our valuable resource.

Wetlands act as natural barriers, absorb floodwaters, protect inland areas from storms, and provide that first line of defense from sea level rise and climate change.



Well known for its unique and diverse ecosystems, many species of birds, mammals, fish and other wildlife can be found within the Cape Fear River estuary.



The Blueprint: Goals and Strategies

Today, the lower river needs improved environmental safeguards and a clear vision for compatible and sustainable economic development. Effective leadership is needed to address existing pollution and habitat loss and prevent projects that threaten the health of the community and the river. The Lower Cape Fear River is continually affected by both local and upstream actions. The continued degradation of these essential functions threatens the well-being of all who live, work or visit southeastern North Carolina.

Following the strategies established within the federation's Coastal Resilience Initiative, the *Lower Cape Fear River Blueprint* targets specific issues and identifies implementable solutions centered on water quality and resiliency of the Lower Cape Fear River estuary ecosystem. The Blueprint expands upon existing efforts by the Cape Fear River Partnership and Cape Fear Arch by creating a holistic platform of support and advocacy for the river and its resources. The Lower Cape Fear River Blueprint has been made possible through funding provided by the Orton Foundation, an affiliate of the Moore Charitable Foundation.

The plan establishes four main goals and associated implementation strategies to address the environmental challenges and pressures that threaten the long-term health of the lower estuary:

Water Quality

- **Goal 1.** Protect and Restore Water Quality.

Living Shorelines

- **Goal 2.** Have resilient Living Shorelines that protect water quality and natural estuarine function and provide thriving habitat for fish and wildlife.

Oysters

- **Goal 3.** Have oyster habitats thrive and support vibrant fisheries, good water quality, and resilient estuarine shorelines.

Invasive Species

- **Goal 4.** Protect and preserve native coastal wetland populations that are free of invasive species *Phragmites australis*.

The Blueprint is a living document, and it will be updated to address progress and needs.

The Blueprint and additional resources can be found at nccoast.org/capefearblueprint

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