

Joint Statement of Support for the Resolution Advocating Increased Funding For Voluntary Cost-Share Programs

In 2023, the North Carolina Environmental Management, Marine Fisheries, Coastal Resources, and Soil & Water Conservation Commissions unanimously adopted the resolution presented below advocating for increased funding for the voluntary cost-share programs that will help landowners improve their property and significantly reduce nutrient loading in North Carolina's coastal waters. Cost-share programs and best management practices (BMPs) are non-regulatory tools proven to help landowners reduce excess nutrients entering the state's waters, however, the existing programs available to landowners are underfunded and in need of support.

In 2021, the state's agriculture cost-share programs received \$4 million of the requested \$17 million. In comparison, Virginia's agriculture cost-share and technical assistance programs have totaled \$50-83 million, reaching as high as \$123 million for FY2023. Nonagricultural cost-share programs also received a fraction of the requested cost-share funds. Current funding levels do not meet the demand for technical and financial resources needed to address the threat of nonpoint source pollution and improve water quality.

The undersigned join the four commissions in this statement of support for the attached resolution.

Statement Endorsed By:

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**RESOLUTION ADVOCATING INCREASED FUNDING FOR VOLUNTARY COST-SHARE
PROGRAMS THAT WILL HELP LANDOWNERS IMPROVE THEIR PROPERTY AND
SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE NUTRIENT LOADING IN NORTH CAROLINA’S COASTAL WATERS**

We, the undersigned, endorse and approve immediate implementation of the non-regulatory actions described below. We strongly advocate that this Resolution immediately be shared with key State and Federal agencies and decision-makers that have the authority to significantly increase funding for landowner cost-share programs already proven to greatly reduce harmful nutrient loading in the State’s coastal waters.

Resolved:

WHEREAS, Article XIV, Section 5 of our Constitution, entitled “Conservation of Natural Resources,” expressly provides: “It shall be the policy of this State to conserve and protect its lands and waters for the benefit of all its citizenry, and to this end it shall be a proper function of the State of North Carolina and its political subdivisions to acquire and preserve park, recreational, and scenic areas, to control and limit the pollution of our air and water, to control excessive noise, and in every other appropriate way to preserve as a part of the common heritage of this State its forests, wetlands, estuaries, beaches, historical sites, open lands, and places of beauty.”

WHEREAS, much of the coastal economy in North Carolina depends on clean water to thrive and grow;

WHEREAS, excessive amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus currently entering the State’s coastal waters are well-documented as significantly contributing to one of North Carolina’s most widespread, costly, and continuing water quality problems;

WHEREAS, while nitrogen and phosphorus are nutrients that are natural parts of our aquatic systems and important for the growing of crops, when too much nitrogen and phosphorous enter the State’s waters they cause a wide range of pollution issues that have negative effects on our streams, rivers, lakes, bays, sounds, and other coastal waters, and are causing serious environmental and human health issues that adversely affect our fisheries, wetlands, estuaries, beaches, parks, recreational areas, open lands, places of beauty, and the ability of our citizens to safely use and enjoy these important public resources – all to the detriment of property owners, fishermen, recreational businesses, tourism, real estate, local communities and our entire State economy;

WHEREAS, these excessive nutrients cause algal blooms that result in large fish kills, significant loss of submerged aquatic vegetation, and otherwise endanger public health;

WHEREAS, the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan Amendment approved by the Environmental Management Commission, Marine Fisheries Commission and Coastal Resources Commission in 2021 calls for adoption of voluntary measures to help landowners reduce the amount of these nutrients entering the State's waters;

WHEREAS, there are a wide range of proven best management practices and cost-share programs already available to landowners that are proven non-regulatory ways to significantly reduce the amount of excess nutrients that reach the State's waters;

WHEREAS, these proven non-regulatory programs currently are underfunded and in need of data-driven strategic efforts to focus them where the needs are greatest;

WHEREAS, these same best management practices frequently provide concurrent benefits that can help our citizens to increase the productivity of their lands, reduce flooding, and make land uses more resilient to extreme weather;

WHEREAS, the current funding levels for these landowner assistance programs have not kept pace with population growth or price increases in our economy;

WHEREAS, these programs are needed by landowners in both rural and urban areas, and especially in watersheds that are near the State's coastal waters and the rivers, streams, creeks and tributaries that flow into these coastal waters;

WHEREAS, the 2021 CHPP Amendment recommends forming a public-private partnership of stakeholders to advance voluntary water quality protection to safeguard coastal habitats such as SAV, wetlands, and oyster reefs through a variety of strategies; and

WHEREAS, a public-private stakeholder group was organized by North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, and that group requests that interested parties endorse this resolution to help expand voluntary cost-share programs to improve coastal water quality.

NOW IT IS RESOLVED THAT:

The undersigned fully support a significant increase in one-time, but more importantly in reoccurring funding for cost-share programs that will assist landowners in managing and

reducing the amount of nutrient runoff into the State's waters. We call upon our State's decision-makers to expeditiously address and evaluate how to most effectively expand these already proven and effective cost-share programs with sufficient annual planning, staffing, and funding. We further call upon our State's decision-makers to use their best efforts to further increase the effectiveness of these proven programs by communicating and coordinating with appropriate Federal agency partners.

We, the undersigned, pledge to work together with each other and our state's decision-makers and leaders to expeditiously increase funding and staff support for these proven cost-share programs, thereby significantly reducing unhealthy nutrient loading in our State's waterways and thereby greatly enhancing our State's economic health.