

OUR COAST



USHERING IN 2024
ON THE COAST

SEE PAGE 5
FOR DETAILS ON
OUR NEW
SALT MARSH PROGRAM



North Carolina
Coastal Federation
Working Together for a Healthy Coast

Dear Friends and Supporters,

When you read this column, my role as the executive director of the North Carolina Coastal Federation will have come to an end after 41 years. This exciting transition took place on Feb. 1 at my request because it was time for me to make space for new leadership that could better navigate the ever-evolving needs of the coast and our remarkable organization. I wanted this change to occur when it wasn't a necessity, but just a good idea, and we had a remarkable and accomplished individual who was willing to take on this very demanding job. I'm very pleased that Dr. Braxton Davis has now come aboard as our new leader having previously directed the N.C. Division of Coastal Management since 2011. In the future, this column will be his to write.

These past decades at the helm of this remarkable organization have been nothing short of transformative. Together, we've weathered storms — both metaphorically and literally — navigating the delicate ecosystems of our beloved North Carolina coast. I've had the privilege of working alongside an exceptional team of dedicated individuals whose passion for environmental stewardship knows no bounds. To each staff member, volunteer, and partner, I extend my deepest appreciation for your unwavering commitment to the coast and the work of the Federation.

Our shared journey has been defined by purpose and tangible progress. From wetland restoration projects to advocacy for improved coastal water quality, we have left an indelible positive mark on our coastal landscape. It's heartening to witness the many changes we've instigated, a testament to the power of collective action in safeguarding our coastal treasures.

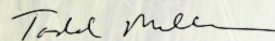
From the very beginning, the Federation's work has linked the needs of coastal communities to the protection of the coastal environment. The two obviously go together, and our work has resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars of investments in coastal restoration and protection has served as an economic engine, and created many jobs in the region. I'm proud that our work is consistently on the cutting edge of innovation, while we've been cautious not to get out so far in front that we have fallen over the cliff in terms of building public support for our efforts.

I am confident in the Federation's continued success under new leadership. The challenges that lie ahead are formidable, but so is the spirit of hard work and resilience embedded in the DNA of this organization. The Federation will persist in its efforts to protect and restore our coast for generations to come because so many talented generations of people are engaged now in our work.

To our supporters, donors, and champions of the coast, your generosity has been the wind in our sails. Without your unwavering support, none of our achievements would have been possible. I urge you to continue to stand with the Federation to amplify our voice for our coastal treasures.

In parting from the position that I have held for so long, I express my deepest gratitude for the privilege of serving as your executive director. The memories we've forged together will forever hold a cherished place in my heart. As I embark on a new chapter, I hope to continue to share some of the lessons I've learned, the friendships forged, and the profound love for North Carolina's coastal wonders, with the Federation family in a way that helps to advance our work while not getting in the way of new leadership, ideas, and strategies.

With heartfelt gratitude,

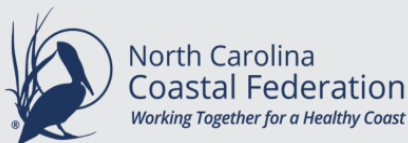


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INTRODUCING OUR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I am honored to introduce myself as the new director of the North Carolina Coastal Federation. While I am new to the organization, it is certainly not new to me. I have long admired the Federation for its significant achievements in coastal protection, its meaningful engagement with diverse partners and communities, and its talented and dedicated staff. I am truly excited to lead the organization through the next chapter of its wonderful journey.

What began as Todd Miller's insightful vision, and grew over the years through his and his team's dedication, has resulted in an incredibly effective and well-respected organization. In so many ways, the Federation has stepped up over the years to support the needs of coastal communities by working with partners at all

levels to improve water quality, restore oysters and seagrasses, protect salt marshes with living shorelines, remove marine debris from sensitive habitats, support planning for coastal resilience, and advocate for sound coastal policies.

The mission of the Coastal Federation - working together for a healthy coast – perfectly captures the spirit of the organization. The Federation began with a commitment to engage people from all walks of life to foster a collective and active voice that helps shape the stewardship and management of our coast. Over the years, the Federation has listened to, respected, and learned from many perspectives. This mission recognizes that we all benefit from the diverse experiences and viewpoints

of those who value the coast for many reasons, including its economic impacts, an abundance of wildlife and prized habitats, cultural significance, recreational opportunities, raw beauty, and general quality of life. The Federation embraces these perspectives and brings people together to learn from each other and work toward shared goals.

This has been the successful strategy of the Federation for over four decades and will continue to guide our work. I fully embrace the Federation's mission because I believe that the more engaged people are about the future of the coast, the more effective we will be. I am proud to join this amazing organization and look forward to working with you for a healthy coast in the years ahead.

ABOUT DR. DAVIS

Before joining the Federation, Dr. Braxton Davis served as director of the N.C. Division of Coastal Management since 2011. He also served as director of the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries from 2016-2018 and is a past chair of the Coastal States Organization in Washington, D.C. Braxton served as director of Policy and Planning for the South Carolina coastal management program in Charleston and as a research assistant professor at the University of South Carolina. He has provided congressional briefings and testimony on climate and coastal resilience issues.

A Virginia native who resides in Carteret County with his family, Braxton holds a doctorate in marine affairs from the University of Rhode Island, a master's degree in biological sciences from Florida International University, and a bachelor's degree in environmental sciences from the University of Virginia.



2024 GOALS & BENCHMARKS

The North Carolina Coastal Federation is dedicated to safeguarding and revitalizing our amazing coast, home to one of the largest, most productive, and pristine estuarine systems in the continental United States. Our coast is a critical habitat for diverse communities of people, fish, and wildlife. To fulfill our mission, we establish annual goals and benchmarks to ensure a proactive approach to address the existing and emerging challenges our coast faces, steering clear of mere responses to current headlines or crises. Our central role involves empowering diverse coastal communities to enhance their resilience through collaborative efforts that protect and restore our coastal resources. We work to maintain and restore healthy coastal ecosystems to perpetuate a vibrant environment and economy that benefit coastal residents and visitors.

The Federation actively engages with the coastal communities where we live, work, and play. Our programs and projects are undertaken collaboratively with residents, visitors, businesses, and a diverse set of stakeholders and decision-makers who contribute to prioritizing, planning, designing, and implementing our initiatives. The Federation relies on nature-based approaches such as maintaining or restoring wetlands, living shorelines, and vegetated riparian buffers to minimize flooding, enhance water quality, reduce shoreline erosion, as well as to adapt to and mitigate climate change. The Federation has four key programs that focus on water quality, marshes, oysters, and marine debris. Over the next pages we share the ambitious goals we have set to guide our work on these programs in 2024.

GOAL: ENHANCE COASTAL WATER QUALITY & REDUCE FLOODING

Intense rainstorms cause flooding and water quality degradation as the runoff funnels pollutants to our coastal waters. The impacts are magnified by the altered landscape that channels rain instead of absorbing it.

Reducing the volume of stormwater runoff is key to minimizing flooding and restoring coastal waters. Clean coastal water is the foundation of our coastal economy and ecosystems and we depend on it for work and recreation. That's why water quality will always be a priority for the Coastal Federation. In 2024, we will join state leadership, local governments, businesses, and communities to ensure nature-based stormwater strategies to reduce flooding and improve water quality are prioritized to help replicate nature to soak up rain and reduce stormwater runoff.

Specifically, we will focus on the following, projects:

- Implementing major initiatives throughout the coast, including working with landowners to reduce nutrient loads to protect and restore submerged aquatic vegetation in the Albemarle Sound region.
- Advancing the Chowan River as a national focus area for water quality improvements.
- Partnering with Hyde County, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to restore Lake Mattamuskeet.
- Working with the N.C. Coastal Land Trust to acquire and restore more than 3,000 acres in Carteret County to reduce flooding and improve water quality in the Newport River.
- Installing stormwater retrofit projects and piloting a project to address nonfunctional coastal stormwater systems permitted since 1988 through a new \$5 million pilot program funded by the N.C. General Assembly.
- Contributing to the state's new flood blueprint strategy and advocating for responsible state construction practices to minimize flood-related damages.
- Launching a public education campaign highlighting the critical importance of wetlands in maintaining fisheries and reducing threats from extreme weather events.



GOAL: PROTECT & RESTORE SALT MARSHES TO FOSTER THRIVING HUMAN & NATURAL COASTAL COMMUNITIES

North Carolina is fortunate to have one of the largest and most productive estuarine systems in the United States. With around 220,000 acres of salt marshes, our estuaries provide important habitats for fish, help improve water quality, and help protect coastal communities from flooding. In addition, healthy marshes store large amounts of carbon, holding back its release into the atmosphere and aiding in our climate resiliency.

Like most coastal ecosystems, our marshes are threatened. To ensure a healthy future for these critical marsh systems, the Coastal Federation is leading a partnership to develop the North Carolina Salt Marsh Action Plan that details a five-year strategy to protect, restore, and allow for the migration of salt marshes in coastal North Carolina so that their existing ecological, economic, and cultural functions are not degraded or lost.

The North Carolina Plan is part of a larger South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative (SASMI) that was formed in 2021 under the leadership and guidance of The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS). This regional plan prioritizes actions for protecting and restoring nearly 1 million acres of salt marshes along the South Atlantic coast from North Carolina to the Atlantic coast of northern Florida.

The North Carolina Salt Marsh Plan focuses on our state's marsh resources and will serve as the foundation of the Coastal Federation's New Marsh Program Goal to Protect and Restore Salt Marshes to Foster Thriving Human and Natural Coastal Communities. This newly formed Program Goal is kicking off this year and will include our dedicated work to protect and create living shorelines, a focus of the Federation since 1997.

Under the new Marsh Program Goal, we will:

- Implement key actions identified in our newly adopted Salt Marsh Action Plan that establishes strategic goals and benchmarks to maintain their functional productivity as the coast develops and experiences at least a 1.5-foot rise in sea level by 2050.
- Conduct salt marsh conservation and restoration projects on a chain of dredge spoil islands in Bogue Sound.
- Form a North Carolina Coastal Carbon Collaborative that will facilitate the development of salt marsh habitat migration, restoration, and conservation projects to mitigate global warming.
- Collaborate and help to provide leadership to the South Atlantic Salt Marsh Initiative, which includes stakeholders and government agencies from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and the east coast of northern Florida, to obtain expanded federal and state government support for addressing salt marsh migration, restoration, and conservation needs.
- Promote and construct living shorelines as a key strategy, with over 2 linear miles of shoreline projects planned in 2024 working with local, state, and federal agencies as well as private waterfront landowners.
- Seek regulatory reforms that assist in the planning, permitting, and construction of more living shorelines to be used to protect public infrastructure and existing land uses.

Federation Welcomes New Marsh Program Director



To kick off and lead our new Marsh Program Goal, the Coastal Federation welcomes Jacob Boyd as our Salt Marsh Program

Director. As program director, Jacob will serve a critical role in shaping the program's direction, building partnerships, securing funding, and setting programmatic goals. Originally from New Bern, Jacob has always had a passion for the coast. Previously, he worked for the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries for 17 years in multiple roles including as the protected species biologist and most recently serving as the chief of the Habitat and Enhancement Section since 2018. Jacob has served critical roles in several state initiatives including the updated N.C. Coastal Habitat Protection Plan, the 2020 North Carolina Climate Risk Assessment and Resilience Plan, and the 2020 Natural and Working Lands Action Plan, as well as serving on the NC Department of Environmental Quality Interagency Resilience Team. Jacob holds a master's degree in biology from East Carolina University and a bachelor's degree in Environmental Studies from the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.

GOAL: ENSURE AN ABUNDANCE OF OYSTERS THAT SUPPORT THE ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY

Our native eastern oyster (*Crassostrea virginica*) is one of the most important species in our estuaries. Oysters benefit North Carolina's coastal ecology and economy. These benefits can be summarized and referred to as the three "Fs": food, filter, and fish habitat. They filter water, provide food for humans, and create reefs that build homes for more fish. These environmental benefits, in turn, support jobs and provide economic opportunities for coastal communities.

In 2024, the Federation will continue to restore our native oysters through the work below:

- Continuing work prioritized in the Oyster Restoration and Protection Plan for North Carolina: A Blueprint for Action (2021-2025).
- Implementing a \$15 million federal grant to build approximately 100 acres of oyster sanctuary over the next three years.
- Training the next generation of scientists, who are currently enrolled at N.C. Central and N.C. State universities, to monitor the success of oyster habitat restoration strategies and projects.
- Doubling the bushels of oyster shells that were recycled during 2023, and developing a business

strategy for further expansion of the program in future years.

- Conducting an analysis working with Research Triangle Institute International of the benefits of oyster restoration to the coastal economy.
- Initiating construction on the state's first logistics hub so that shellfish farmers who don't own waterfront property have efficient workable access to their leases in Carteret County.
- Focusing on oyster awareness and educational programming to build public engagement in oyster shell recycling efforts and the North Carolina Oyster Trail.

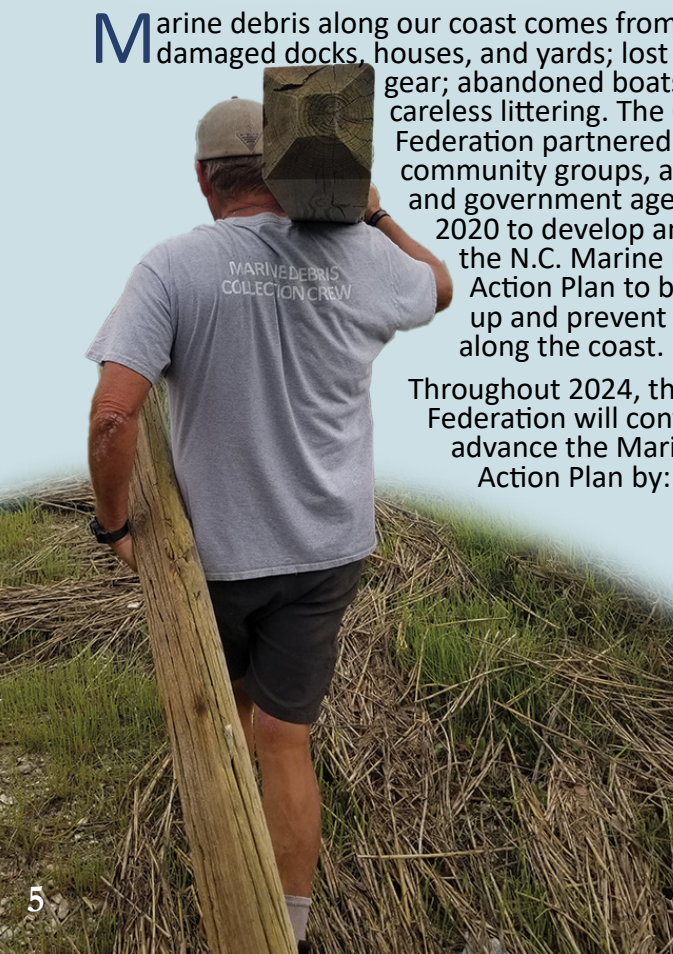


GOAL: ENSURE THE COAST IS FREE OF MARINE DEBRIS

Marine debris along our coast comes from storm-damaged docks, houses, and yards; lost fishing gear; abandoned boats; and careless littering. The Coastal Federation partnered with community groups, academia, and government agencies in 2020 to develop and adopt the N.C. Marine Debris Action Plan to both clean up and prevent debris along the coast.

Throughout 2024, the Federation will continue to advance the Marine Debris Action Plan by:

- Continuing to partner with fishermen and women crews and government agencies to proceed with coastal cleanup efforts that have removed nearly 1,500 tons of marine debris since 2019.
- Removing another 50 abandoned and derelict boats relying on the existing collaboration with federal, state, and local agencies that have removed 400 boats since 2018.
- Continuing the lost fishing gear winter cleanup program working with commercial fishers.
- Advancing the implementation of newly adopted building code requirements that will make residential docks less susceptible to storm damage, so they do not cause marine debris.
- Educating waterfront property owners on responsible dock and shoreline construction and maintenance.
- Developing and implementing a permanent public/private program to remove abandoned and derelict boats.
- Establishing sentinel sites for volunteer-based monitoring of progress in removing and preventing marine debris.



SUPPORTING PROGRAM GOALS

In addition to these core programs, six specialized staff teams at the Federation provide expertise, resources, and support that are necessary to advance all of our core goals and benchmarks, ensuring comprehensive, effective, and inclusive approaches.

These teams focus on:

1. **Education and Outreach:** ensuring diverse public understanding and engagement in the Federation's program goals.
2. **Coastal Management and Policy:** ensuring alignment of laws, rules, policies, and appropriations with programmatic priorities.
3. **CoastalReview.Org:** providing a professional news service that is a member of the North Carolina Press Association to provide balanced and fair coverage of environmental issues along our coast.
4. **Communications:** promoting and communicating the Federation's mission, impact, and brand via a multitude of media outlets.
5. **Development:** raising funds needed to support the Federation's mission while providing supporters ways to engage with the coast.
6. **Administration and Accounting:** ensuring the highest levels of fiscal transparency and accountability through the management of the Federation's day-to-day operations as well as major on-the-ground projects that direct millions of dollars into the coastal economy.

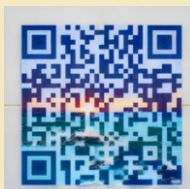


COASTAL HAPPENINGS

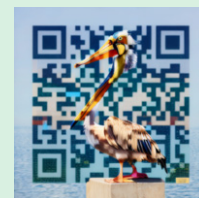
We're excited to announce that this year we will begin construction on our new Center for Protection and Restoration on Bogue Sound in Carteret County. This 10-acre education center, where the beauty of the coast is both a backdrop and a classroom, will connect even more people to the coast through community meeting and event spaces, educational programming, and recreational experiences while serving as the future headquarters of the Federation.

This flagship center will allow us to do more of what we do best—engaging people in ensuring a bright future for our coast.

Scan the QR code below to tune into updates on construction and special events this year!



Subscribe to our monthly Newsletter to catch all the exciting events, programs, and happenings at the Federation!



Subscribe to CoastalReview.Org, a daily news service of the Federation, for in-depth and investigative reporting about issues on the NC coast.





www.nccoast.org

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Two ways to celebrate!

1. Adopt for your sweetie

2. Adopt for a group & print Valentines at home



Celebrate the Coast in 2024!

We hope you'll make plans to join us for these great events in 2024:

March 23
Roast for the Coast
Wilmington



May 24 - 26
King Mackerel & The Blues are Running
Morehead City



August 3
Pelican Awards & Taste of the Coast
Morehead City



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