

## **Introduction**

### **Fisheries Reform Act**

The North Carolina General Assembly established the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan program within the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) with passage of the Fisheries Reform Act of 1997. The Act (General Statute or G.S. 143B-279.8) requires preparation of Coastal Habitat Protection Plans (CHPPs) for critical fisheries habitats in the coastal area. The Act states “[t]he goal of the Plans shall be the long-term enhancement of coastal fisheries associated with each coastal habitat.” The Divisions of the Marine Fisheries, Water Quality, and Coastal Management are designated as the lead agencies for the CHPP program. The plans will:

1. Describe fisheries habitats and their biological systems;
2. Evaluate the functions, fisheries’ values, status, and trends in the habitats;
3. Identify existing and potential threats, to the habitats and impacts on coastal fishing; and
4. Recommend actions to protect and restore the habitats.

### **Role of the Commissions**

The Coastal Resources, Environmental Management, and Marine Fisheries commissions must each adopt the plans for them to become effective. Once the plans are adopted, rule making and policy actions taken by all three commissions are to comply “to the maximum extent practicable” with the plans.

The three commissions are to report by 1 September each year to the Joint Legislative Commission on Seafood and Aquaculture and the Environmental Review Commission on progress in developing and implementing the plans. This document reports on progress made on Coastal Habitat Protection Plans during September 2004 – August 2005

## **Recent Progress**

### **North Carolina Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (CHPP)**

The CHPP is complete, and the Coastal Resources, Environmental Management, and Marine Fisheries Commissions adopted it by unanimous votes at meetings in December 2004.

The CHPP focuses on six basic fish habitat: water column, shell bottom, submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV), wetlands, soft bottoms, and ocean hard bottom. A chapter is devoted to each type. Each of the habitat chapters is organized to provide the information specified in the Act:

- Description and distribution of the habitat,
- Ecological role and function,
- Status and trends,
- Threats, and
- Recommended management actions to deal with the threats.