

# ALBEMARLE-PAMLICO ADVOCATE

... the newsletter of the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine Study

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## Follow-up survey reinforces public concern for estuary

A survey commissioned by the A/P Study has reinforced conclusions from an earlier survey (July 1991 *Advocate*) that indicated widespread support for strong environmental protection programs in the Albemarle-Pamlico region.

This follow-up survey, which included responses from across North Carolina and sections of Virginia in the A-P drainage area, focused heavily on how the respondents viewed various policy alternatives. The survey also targeted public officials in order to gauge their feelings on the issues.

Although the report is still in draft stage, the numbers reflect support for better protection of the estuary and broader public participation in management, as the following samples show:

*Over two-thirds (67%) of the public favored spending new public funds on protecting the A-P sounds rather than on the following:*

- highway construction
- economic development programs
- welfare and assistance programs
- agricultural programs

*The public did, however, significantly favor supporting crime control and public education over A-P protection.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*69% of the public and 60% of the officials felt that the average citizen had "too little" opportunity to influence government decisions on the environment. Only 1% of the public and 4% of officials felt the public had "too much" influence.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*90% of the public and 73% of officials felt there was "too little" enforcement of existing water quality regulations.*

*Officials rated the following as the most significant factors in limiting the effectiveness of environmental management efforts:*

- conflicting interests*
- low public knowledge*
- poor enforcement*
- low public participation*

\*\*\*\*\*

*When officials were asked to rate the influence that 12 interest groups had on management decisions, the group that most officials (47%) felt had "too little" influence on management decisions was county government.*

*The group that most officials (54%) felt had "too much" influence was developers and builders.*

\*\*\*\*\*

*And out of 10 suggested funding sources for environmental management programs, these five got support from at least 75% of the officials polled: pollution fines; sporting license fees; public facility user fees; building permit fees; and water/sewer rates.*

### THE ALBEMARLE-PAMLICO ESTUARINE STUDY

Initiated in 1987, the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine Study is a five-year program of research and education on the Albemarle and Pamlico sounds and the rivers that feed them. The Study is charged with developing a Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) to help guide long-term environmental protection of the estuary. The schedule for the drafting, review and publication of the CCMP is as follows:

PROGRAM GOAL	PROJECTED COMPLETION	STATUS AS OF MARCH 1992
First draft of CCMP	March 1992	In committee review
Public review of draft	May 1992	On schedule
Revisions to CCMP draft	June-August 1992	On schedule
Second draft of CCMP	August 1992	On schedule
Public review of second draft	September 1992	On schedule
Final revisions to CCMP	October 1992	On Schedule
CCMP approved and published	November 1992	On schedule
Implementation Summit	December 1992	On Schedule

*Coming together is a beginning;*

## Workshops promote dialogue, insight on management strategies

A series of workshops focusing on how the A/P Study might affect seven user groups generated frank discussion and provided insight on ways to make the Study's management alternatives more effective.

Representatives of groups likely to be impacted by specific management strategies were invited to provide comment on various options being considered for the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). The representatives were polled as to which options they viewed most favorably and which they felt would be received with some controversy in their communities. The workshops were strictly a focusing exercise; options will not be precluded from the CCMP simply because they may be controversial.

A full report on the meetings is being prepared and will be available to the public. Below is a list of the top two favored and controversial alternatives for each group. (The workshop with environmental groups covered the realm of all options and thus did not involve a vote on which they favored or found controversial.) It should be noted, however, that in some cases there was disagreement within the group on these issues, and in other cases representatives rated options as controversial not so much to keep them out of the CCMP, but simply to point out that the option would likely would stir controversy.

### FAVORED OPTIONS

#### Pamlico Area Elected Officials

(1) Require and fund Land Use Plans (LUPs) in all cities and counties of the A-P basin. (2) Strengthen enforcement of existing regulations.

#### Albemarle Area Elected Officials

(1) Require and fund LUPs. (2) Expand incentives for private protection of critical areas.

#### Agriculture/Forestry

(1) Improve state's Best Management Practices Cost-Share Program. (2) Conduct study to examine how management options might affect private property issues.

#### Development Interests

(1) Expand private land protection incentives. (2) Expand public acquisition of critical areas and wetlands.

#### Pipe Dischargers

(1) Provide financial incentives and flexibility in discharge regulations. (2) Create standardized system for setting permit limits and standardized fines for violations.

#### Fishermen (Sport and Commercial)

(1) Adopt stronger water quality standards and critical habitat regulations. (2) Intensify regulatory programs to protect Primary Nursery Areas.

### CONTROVERSIAL OPTIONS

#### Pamlico Area Elected Officials

(1) Establish more restrictive criteria for septic tanks and alternative systems. (2) Expand coastal stormwater regulations throughout A-P basin.

#### Albemarle Area Elected Officials

(1) Require post-development stormwater runoff to be equal to pre-development quality and volume levels. (2) Mandate water conservation fixtures be installed in new construction.

#### Agriculture/Forestry

(1) Phase out agriculture/forestry exemptions from wetlands and sedimentation permitting. (2) Develop statewide wetlands definition and enforcement policies.

#### Development Interests

(1) Develop statewide wetlands policies. (2) Expand Areas of Environmental Concern size.

#### Pipe Dischargers

(1) Adopt new or strengthened water quality regulations. (2) Establish pollution loading fees.

#### Fishermen (Sport and Commercial)

(1) Provide authority to Marine Fisheries Commission to limit entry to fisheries. (2) Prepare state fishery management plans to deal with overharvesting.



## A/P STUDY RESEARCH FOCUS

**Project:** An Examination of the Blue Crab Fishery in the Pamlico River Estuary

**Project Leader:** Sean McKenna, N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries

(Report is in its initial stages. Information below is that which is available to date.)

**Environmental Concern** - The potential effect on various fisheries from both potting and trawling for blue crabs has been a hotly debated issue in recent years. In particular there has been concern that the "bycatch" (catch of species other than crabs) from trawling may harm other fisheries, especially flounder. Trawling is permitted in most North Carolina estuaries except for the Albemarle Sound region.

**Research Goal** - The study provides the first extensive direct comparison of crab potting and crab trawling. The objectives were to examine harvest rates and bycatch in the pot and trawl fisheries, and injury and mortality to crabs from both methods. Sampling occurred during 1991.

**Findings** - Statewide, crab potting accounts for about 95% of the blue crab harvest and trawling for the other 5%. In the Pamlico, however, trawling accounts for about 14% of total crab landings.

\*\* From 1979-91 there was a general downward trend for blue crab landings in the Pamlico, though the record catch (4 million lbs.) came in 1990.

\*\* The average number of pots used by commercial potters has been increasing, but the average catch per pot has been decreasing.

\*\* Post-harvest survival rates for the trawl- and pot-caught crabs were 64% and 93%, respectively.

\*\* In the winter (Nov.-March) crab trawl samples, 59% of the total landings were flounder. Of those flounder, over half were of sublegal size and were culled out; the fate of the culled fish is unknown.

\*\* Excluding flounder, the average finfish bycatch in trawls was 3.9 lbs. per tow.

\*\* The study estimated that some 31,000 lbs. of sublegal crabs are lost annually to injury or waste through trawling, and nearly 178,000 lbs. may be wasted through potting, but the largest waste of crabs could be occurring in "ghost pots" (untended pots), which may snare up to 241,000 lbs. per year.

**Management Implications** - Based on these and other findings from the study, a number of management options can be suggested for enhancing the blue crab stock. Options could include:

\*\* Modifying trawling gear to reduce bycatch of sublegal crabs, and prohibiting summer trawling in crab nursery and shedding areas.

\*\* Reducing bycatch of sublegal flounder and finfish through gear modifications.

\*\* Examining use of biodegradable panels in crab pots.

## Policy Committee okays Action Plans; CCMP now in review

At its regular meeting March 4, the A/P Study Policy Committee approved the basic action plans that will serve as the foundation for the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP).

Each of the Study's five focus areas -- critical habitat, human environment, fisheries, water quality and public involvement -- will have its own action plan within the CCMP. The action plans will contain individually:

- 1) particular concerns in the focus area
- 2) the status and trends of each concern

3) goals and objectives that will create a framework for addressing the concerns

4) specific management options that will allow the goals and objectives to be achieved

The approval of the action plans was one of the final steps in getting the CCMP ready for review. The first draft of the CCMP has now been distributed to all members of all Study committees (Policy, Technical, and Citizen Advisory). Once revisions are made based on comments from the committee members, the CCMP will be made available for public review in May.



*Sound Bites*

news, notes and information about the A/P Study

**BLINKOFF PRESENTS PAPER**

Robbie Blinkoff, Project Director of the A/P Study's Citizens' Water Quality Monitoring Program, presented a paper entitled "Management and Utilization of Volunteer-Collected Data," at a national conference on monitoring in Austin, TX, last February.

**COMMITTEE MEETINGS, APRIL-MAY**

Citizen Advisory workshop April 14, Washington  
Technical . . . . . April 16, Raleigh  
Policy . . . . . April 21, Nashville  
Citizen Advisory . . . . . May 5, Washington  
Technical . . . . . May 19, Raleigh

The public is welcome at all meetings. Call (919) 946-6481 for location, and agenda specifics.

**IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING APPROVED**

Funding to complete the CCMP and oversee implementation of its management strategies after completion of the A/P Study next Fall has been approved by the Environmental Protection Agency and the State of North Carolina.

A total of \$925,000 will available to fund staff, projects, monitoring, and further research necessary for the Study to move into its prescribed future role as an active participant in estuarine management. The funding is somewhat higher than had originally been anticipated.

Allocation of the funds to support implementation in various ways was approved by the Policy Committee in March. The decision on specific projects to be funded will be made later.

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