



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Release: Immediate

Date: Jan. 4, 2011

Contact: Jim Hawhee

Phone: (919) 707-8632

New environmental restoration projects announced for Albemarle-Pamlico region

RALEIGH – The Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program announced grant awards totaling \$136,141 today for three projects aimed at improving the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem, which covers parts of northeastern North Carolina and southeastern Virginia.

All three projects support APNEP's mission to identify, protect and restore the natural resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system. Details about each project follow.

- Building on previous work with APNEP, researchers from the University of North Carolina's Institute of Marine Sciences will create oyster reefs in North Carolina's low-salinity tidal creeks using lost crab pots. Fishermen lose hundreds of crab pots each year in coastal waters, where they are recovered by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries. Using the \$45,361 grant, the pots will be recycled, reshaped and placed in estuarine waters to provide prime oyster habitat and eliminate unintended bycatch. The project also will serve as a rich source of data to guide and improve oyster restoration efforts in and around the Albemarle-Pamlico estuary.
- The North Carolina Coastal Federation was awarded \$16,280 to naturally restore and protect the eroding estuarine shoreline at Jockey's Ridge State Park. By planting marsh grass and creating oyster reef barriers, the project will improve water quality, improve fish habitat and protect this National Natural Landmark, which receives 1.2 million visitors per year.
- Using a \$74,500 grant from APNEP, The Nature Conservancy will undertake large-scale hydrological restoration projects at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge and the Great Dismal Swamp. By restoring the flow of water to lands previously drained by agricultural ditching, native ecosystems will be enhanced while reducing the risk of large, peat-fueled wildfires such as last year's 45,000-acre Pains Bay Fire. These properties are among the largest forested areas in the eastern United States and provide important freshwater flows to sounds. They also support several globally-rare natural communities, two federally endangered species and a rich diversity of wetland-dependent wildlife.

"We're proud to support each of these projects, which will enhance the health of our regional ecosystem and improve water quality in the sounds," said Bill Crowell, director of the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program. "In addition, the strong research and monitoring aspects of these projects provide an excellent learning opportunity for natural resource managers while ensuring accountability of public funds."

Estuaries are areas where river and ocean waters mix, supporting a rich array of terrestrial and aquatic life. The Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system provides coastal storm protection and a key nursery area for many coastal fish and shellfish, which support the region's fishing and tourism industries.

For more information, see www.apnep.org, or contact Jim Hawhee, APNEP's community specialist, at (919) 733-0121 or jim.hawhee@ncdenr.gov.

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Diana Kees, Communications Director
Phone: (919) 707-8626
1601 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, NC 27699-1601

diana.kees@ncdenr.gov
Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/ncdenr>
RSS feed: <http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/opa/news-releases-rss>
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