Director's Note

Winter greetings!

I hope many of you are returning from the holidays refreshed and energized. This is the season for adopting new resolutions, and APNEP is no exception. In 2012, we resolve to coordinate with our partners to develop targets for the environmental goals set forth in our management plan. We will continue to consult with our policy board, advisory committees and agency experts during this process, but please feel free to contact a staff member if you have insights you'd like to contribute.

Of course, the new year is also a time for reflection. Thanks to each of you who attended, offered presentations, or presented posters at our successful "State of the Sounds" Symposium back in November. We received many flattering comments, but also some constructive advice about how to make the next event even better. I also offer a special thank you to those who attended the public comment sessions for our draft management plan. These events sparked excellent discussions and will be instrumental in the completion of the plan. The public comment period remains open through Jan. 17. Finally, I extend my appreciation to our many partners that led or contributed to efforts to improve our region and ecosystem in 2011. We look forward to hearing of your new efforts in 2012, and hope you'll take part in a few of our new initiatives as well.

Regards,

Dr. Bill Crowell, APNEP Director

Inside this issue:

New Restoration Projects Funded

In November, APNEP awarded $136,141 in grant funding to support three environmental restoration projects in the Albemarle-Pamlico region.

Building on previous work with the program, 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. 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 will also serve as a rich source of data to guide and improve oyster restoration efforts in the Albemarle-Pamlico estuary and beyond.

In the second project, 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 fish habitat and protect this National Natural Landmark, which receives 1.2 million visitors per year.

In the third project the Nature Conservancy received $74,500 to undertake large-scale hydrological restoration projects at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge and the Great Dismal Swamp. The conservancy will work with APNEP to restore the flow of water to lands previously drained by agricultural ditching. This will enhance native ecosystems and reduce 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."

State of the Sounds Symposium

On Nov. 17, APNEP hosted its "State of the Sounds" symposium in New Bern. Nearly 200 people attended the event, which showcased more than two dozen initiatives that are improving our estuarine ecosystem.

Notable speakers at the event included Assistant Secretary for Natural Resources David Knight, APNEP Policy Board Chair Tony Reevy, and Dr. Kirk Havens, a nationally recognized expert in ecosystem-based management who also serves with APNEP's Science and Technical Advisory Committee. Dr. Nancy White, of the UNC Coastal Studies Institute, offered the keynote address, with her remarks focused on the importance of engaging local communities in our collective efforts to improve the estuarine ecosystem.

In addition to highlighting the excellent work being conducted by many APNEP partners, the conference offered a preview of some information that will be included in APNEP's upcoming "State of the Sounds" report. Due in spring 2011, the report will analyze 24 indicators of the estuarine ecosystem's health.

APNEP Accepting Comments on Draft Plan

For the past few months, APNEP has sought feedback on its draft Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan at a series of public meetings in the region. If you were not able to attend, we would still like to hear your thoughts on our plan. Until Jan. 17, you can submit comments online by visiting our website, www.apnep.org. The draft plan and comment form are both available under the "featured content" section of our page.

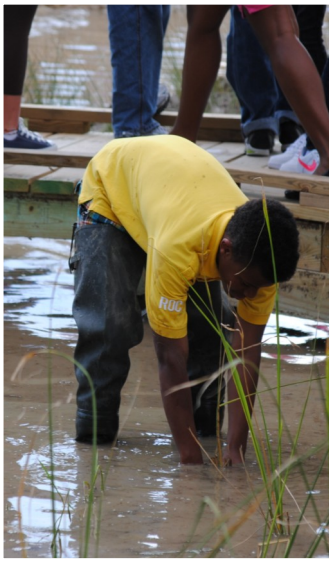
Left and below: Dr. Nancy White offers the keynote address at the State of the Sounds Symposium while attendees listen intently. Above: APNEP director Dr. Bill Crowell (top) looks on with other attendees at APNEP's Raleigh public meeting. Opposite page: photos from the construction of Elizabeth City Middle School's new wetland.

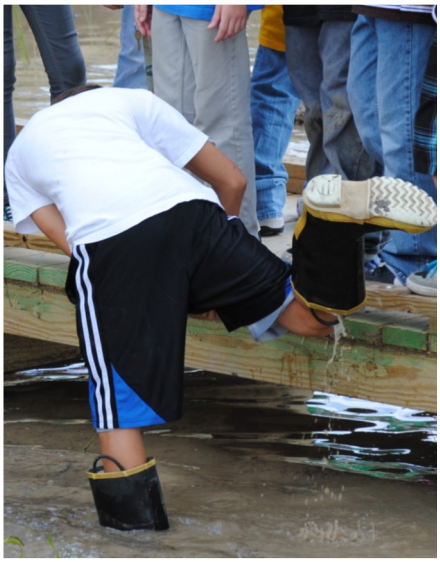
Wetland at Elizabeth City Middle School Complete

On a beautiful late September day, a planned wetland became a reality for the students and faculty at Elizabeth City Middle School. Hundreds of students came out to see the wetland, with a lucky few donning waders and planting vegetation onsite.

The project, funded by APNEP and led by the North Carolina Coastal Studies Institute, created a wetland to filter stormwater runoff from the school and parking lot. This constructed wetland protects an adjacent cypress swamp forest and the nearby Pasquotank River.

Months later, the project is still going strong. "The students continue to protect and embrace our wetland," said Darrell Walker, a teacher at ECMS. They are also branching out to visit the swamp, and recently found some old artifacts which may be of historical significance. After taking pictures, the students are eagerly awaiting a reply about their find from the nearby Museum of the Albemarle.





APNEP Hosts Chinese Delegation

In late November, APNEP staff hosted a delegation of six Chinese political officials and environmental managers affiliated with the Duke Center for International Development. After APNEP staff provided the delegation with a brief overview of the program, meeting attendees enjoyed conversation on a variety of conservation issues and approaches.

Among the topics discussed were relationships between federal and state environmental agencies, coordination with non-profit organizations, and techniques for engaging local communities in environmental protection efforts. While participants found many areas of common ground on these points, at other times the bridges between our countries seemed vast. Of note was the difference in China and America's legal structures regarding property rights, which has profound implications for conservation. America's eminent domain laws and the use of conservation easements were of particular interest to the delegation, as all land in China is owned by the government.

On the Calendar

1/26/12: Policy Board Executive Committee Meeting, Morehead City, NC.
1/31/12: STAC Meeting, Greenville, NC.

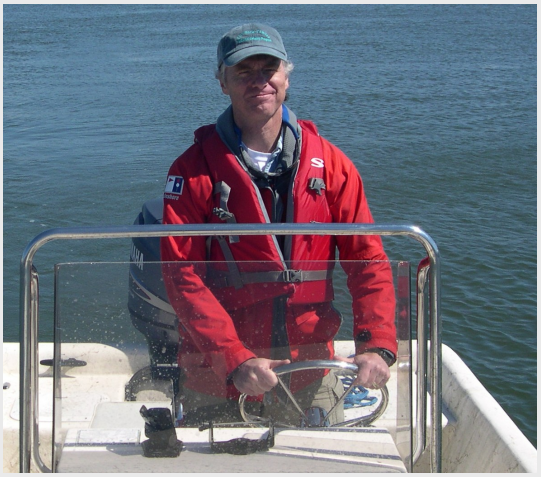
APNEP on Facebook

APNEP is on Facebook! We've used this space to highlight our other social media options, but for the moment Facebook is king. In addition to substantive program updates, we'll share our photos, link news stories and pass along some interesting facts. Because we know you probably use Facebook off the clock, we'll be sure to keep it brief. To follow us, click on the Facebook logo on our website, then click "Like."

Ask an Ecologist

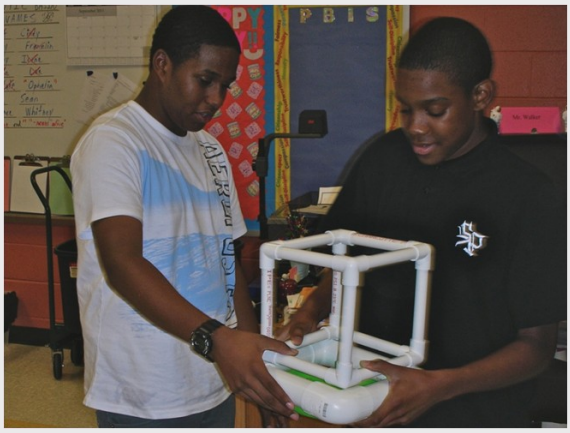
The Albemarle-Pamlico region hosts an impressive array of university, agency and NGO scientists working to better understand our environment. As part of APNEP's engagement mission, we'd like to help connect interested people with our region's most knowledgeable experts.

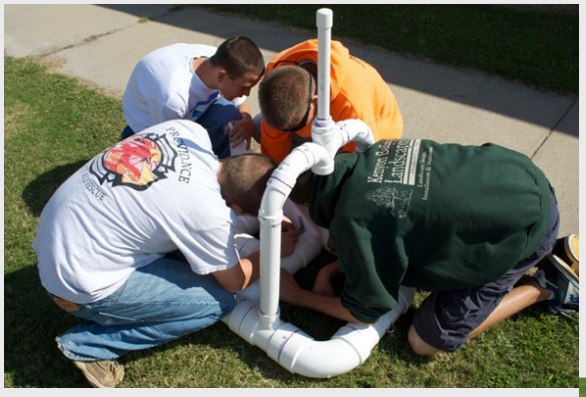
Take a moment to visit our new "Ask an ecologist" webpage. Better yet, ask us a question. We'll post the best responses on our website. See if you can stump the best and brightest in our region!



Our mission: To identify, protect and restore the significant resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system..

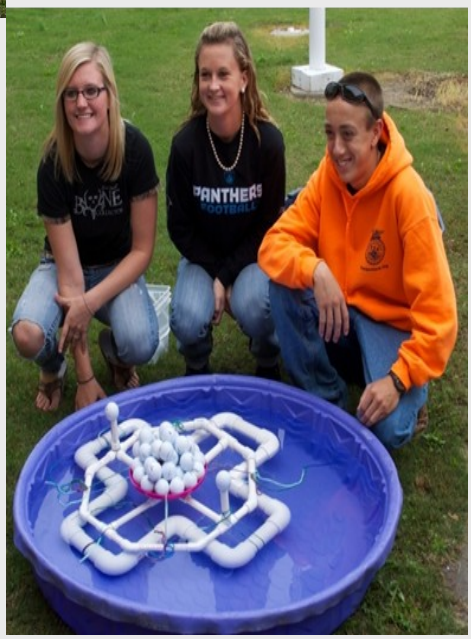
All work and No Play? Make Jack a (not so) Dull Buoy





This fall, the UNC Coastal Studies Institute led an APNEP-funded initiative to bring basic observation buoys (BOBs) to six regional high schools. The BOBs are designed and built by students and teachers using commonly available materials, then deployed in rivers, sounds or nearshore marine areas to collect atmospheric and water quality information. Among other parameters, the BOBs measure pH, salinity, dissolved oxygen, and water and air temperatures.

The high school students who participated in the project learned about more than just water quality. "Construction of the BOB research buoy provided students with insight into engineering principles," said David Sybert, of the Coastal Studies Institute. "Students learned about technologies used in aquatic environments while working with the data collection sensors."



The benefit is not just for the students, though. In addition to integrating this information into a monitoring network for the southeastern United States, APNEP staff members are considering new ways to integrate citizen monitoring information like this into its planning and research efforts.

From top: High school students from throughout northeastern North Carolina build and test different buoy designs (photo credits, UNC Coastal Studies Institute), APNEP scientist Dr. Dean Carpenter will coordinate APNEP's "Ask an Ecologist" efforts, a deployed buoy collects water quality and atmospheric data for later analysis and inclusion into a regional data network hosted by SECOORA (photo credit, UNC Coastal Studies Institute)