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Press Release

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Polluted Runoff Focus of State of Coast Report

Ocean, N.C. – North Carolina, after 20 years of failure, needs an effective program to control polluted runoff that makes thousands of acres of oyster and clam beds unsafe to eat and popular swimming beaches unsafe to swim.

That's the take-home message of the N.C. Coastal Federation's annual *State of the Coast Report*, which was released today in Raleigh. The report focuses on the devastating effects that polluted runoff, now the largest source of water pollution on the coast, has had on the state's most-sensitive waters. It explores the science of stormwater and recounts the fractured, 20-year history of regulations that the state acknowledged only in 2005 have failed to protect coastal waters.

"We know the system is broken, and we have to fix it," Dr. Charles "Pete" Peterson says in the *State of the Coast Report*. He is a distinguished professor at UNC's Institute of Marine Sciences in Morehead City and the vice chairman of the N.C. Environmental Management Commission (EMC), the state's major environmental rule-making body.

The EMC passed an effective set of rules in April to replace the failed program that's been in place since the mid-1980s. The new rules are scheduled to take effect Aug. 1, but powerful development interests are lobbying the N.C. General Assembly to kill, weaken or delay the new rules. The federation's report also debunks many of the misconceptions opponents have used to scare people about the new rules.

The federation released its 13th annual *State of the Coast Report* at noon on the Halifax Mall behind the Legislative Building in Raleigh. Legislators joined people from across the state at a lunch on the mall before the release. The federation sponsored three buses that brought coastal residents to Raleigh. They spent much of the day lobbying legislators to support the new, more effective rules.

Twenty-one people, organizations, businesses and groups were also recognized for their work last year to protect the coastal environment. This year's Pelican Award winners from the Northeast coast are:

- Currituck County for working with residents and conservation groups on identifying land that could be bought and preserved as conservation corridors.

- Citizens Against the OLF of Washington and Beaufort counties for battling and eventually beating the Navy over the site of a proposed Outlying Field.
- Coastal Plains Conservation Nursery and owner Ellen Colodney for championing clean coastal waters by helping design rain gardens and supplying plants.
- John McCord of UNC's Coastal Studies Institute for his hands-on approach to environmental education such as a program at Cape Hatteras Middle School that allows students to spawn and grow oyster spat.
- Thomas White Jr. for a conservation easement on Roanoke Island that preserves large maritime dunes.
- Ginger Webster of Dare County for the hundreds of hours she has spent volunteering for the federation. She chaired committees, planted rain gardens, reviewed applications for new staff and helped expand the federation's programs in the Northeast coastal counties.

Rain, though, was the main topic of the day — rains that washes off roads, parking lots, driveways and other hard, constructed surfaces carries. This runoff carries with it bacteria and a host of other pollutants that have fouled more than 100,000 acres of shellfish beds and trigger swimming advisories each year. The report's centerfold lists 351 water bodies in the 20 coastal counties that have been impaired by ditches, culverts and land runoff.

Scientists have long known that stormwater can pollute rivers and streams. The *State of the Coast Report* details some of their research, which dates to the 1970s and spans the globe. The report focuses on the work that Dr. Mike Mallin, a marine and estuarine ecologist at UNC-Wilmington, did in tidal creeks New Hanover County in the 1990s. It showed that the concentration of bacteria in the creeks rose with the amount of development in a watershed. When hard, or "impervious," surfaces reach 20 percent of the watershed, the water was too polluted with bacteria to safely eat its oysters or clams. Research later done in South Carolina confirmed Mallin's results. Those studies highlighted the flaws in the state's old coastal stormwater program, which allowed up to 25 percent of impervious surface without meaningful controls.

Despite the years of research, opponents advocate delaying the new rules until more research is done. Tom Reeder, who headed the N.C. Division of Water Quality's wetlands and stormwater program, doubts the results will be different. "Every shred of scientific literature that has been written on impervious surface and shellfish waters...all say that when you exceed 10 percent impervious surface without structural controls, you affect water quality," he says in the report. "Opponents of the new rules have had three years to put together scientific evidence to prove us wrong. They haven't done it because it's not out there."

The science is clear, Peterson says. So is the state's responsibility.

"We need these (new) rules to protect and sustain the coastal economy, which is dependent on clean water..." Peterson says in the report. "We're not talking about a conceptual issue about how an ecosystem works. We're talking about people and their ability to enjoy what nature gives us free of charge as long as we do the minimal things to keep them clean."

To download a copy of the *State of the Coast Report*, go to www.nccoast.org.

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About the North Carolina Coastal Federation: "Citizens Working Together for a Healthy Coast"

The North Carolina Coastal Federation (NCCF) is the state's only non-profit organization focused exclusively on protecting and restoring the coast of North Carolina through education, advocacy and habitat restoration and preservation. NCCF headquarters are located at 3609 Highway 24 in Ocean between Morehead City and Swansboro and are open Monday through Friday from 8:30 am to 5 pm.

The headquarters include NCCF's main offices, the Cape Lookout Coastkeeper office, a gift shop, Nature Library, Weber Seashell Exhibit, ShoreKeeper Learning Center, and adjoining nature trail. The NCCF also operates field offices in Wilmington and Manteo. For more information call 252-393-8185 or check out NCCF's website at www.nccoast.org