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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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N. C. Coastal Federation Northeast Office Opens, Conservation Programs Expand

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Manteo – The public is invited to attend the official opening of the North Carolina Coastal Federation’s northeastern regional office on September 15 from 4–6 p.m. The federation now has a full program up and running that is focused on the state’s Outer Banks and north coast region. The open house will highlight the federation’s work, and provide opportunities to meet and talk with its staff and board members.

The federation has worked since 1982 to protect the health and productivity of the coast. Even when it first started in a small home office on the central coast in Carteret County, the federation spent several years working in northeastern North Carolina helping fishermen and other local residents protect Pamlico Sound from being polluted by massive plans to strip mine 120,000 acres of peat deposits. After mining plans collapsed, the federation programs expanded, and are credited with protecting and restoring more than 50,000 acres of shellfish waters, fresh and saltwater wetlands, oyster beds, as well as rivers and creeks. It has programs that today involve thousands of children in growing wetland plants and building rain gardens on their own schoolyards, and in helping to restore coastal habitats through community service projects. The federation is a leading voice in the state and nationally in coastal environmental protection.

“We have always found that we’re most effective when we work within the communities in which we live,” says Todd Miller, the federation’s executive director and founder. “By opening this regional office in Manteo, and staffing it with people who live here, the federation’s programs will be more responsive and effective for northeastern North Carolina.”

The federation now has three fully-staffed offices in Manteo, Ocean and Wilmington. In 2003, it hired Jan DeBlieu as its Cape Hatteras Coastkeeper where until recently she operated out of her home on Roanoke Island. Early this year northeast staff was expanded to include Outreach Specialist Sara Hallas and Coastal Scientist Erin Fleckenstein.

They work out of the federation’s regional office building on Grenville Street in Manteo, just off Highway 64. The territory served by the northeast staff stretches from the Virginia state line to the southern tip of Ocracoke Island and up the Albemarle and northern Pamlico sounds.

The open house will begin at 4:00 p.m. with a ribbon-cutting ceremony performed by the Chamber of Commerce. Federation staff and board members will be available to discuss new projects being undertaken in the northeast and provide tours of the office and grounds. The grounds were designed to showcase Low Impact Development features, including rain barrels, rain gardens, pervious pavement and a soon-to-be installed cistern. Although the lot is only 7,500 square feet and not subject to the new stormwater regulations, these voluntary features control stormwater from all but the heaviest rains.

Stormwater is now the primary pollutant of coastal waters. Strengthened stormwater control regulations were adopted by the NC General Assembly this summer after much debate and will take effect October 1.

“Homeowners can absorb polluted runoff on their properties with a few simple, inexpensive stormwater reduction measures,” DeBlieu said. “Anyone who’d like some ideas for how to do that is welcome to come by the office.”

The office is next to a site where the town of Manteo will soon build a wetlands park to control stormwater runoff from roofs and parking lots in the neighborhood. Once the park is completed, it will be used as a public amenity and for environmental education programs.

Staff members are also working with school children and adult volunteers to restore an eroding marsh on the waterfront at Jockey’s Ridge State Park. Using environmentally-friendly solutions to shoreline erosion is a centerpiece of the NCCF program. Students will grow wetland grasses in their classrooms this winter and plant them at the site next spring. Outreach Specialist Hallas will be working with science classes all year, stressing the importance of wetlands as a component of the natural system.

NCCF staff members have completed rain gardens at Manteo Middle School, and have plans to build another at Kitty Hawk Elementary. “The rain gardens fit really well into the curriculum,” Hallas said. “They become outdoor classrooms for the kids.”

On the mainland, NCCF’s northeast team has received a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to restore natural habitat in the Albemarle-Pamlico region. NCCF and partners plan to rebuild wetlands and decrease the amount of stormwater being discharged into prime oyster habitat in Pamlico Sound.

“It’s effective to work in areas where we can restore habitat and hydrology on a landscape-level scale,” Fleckenstein explained.

Members of the media are invited to attend the open house. NCCF staff and board members will be available for interviews.

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 NCCF also operates regional offices in Manteo and Wilmington. For more information call 252-393-8185 or 252-473-1607 or check out NCCF’s website at www.nccoast.org