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Contact: Sam Bland

Phone: 252.393.8185

Email: samb@nccoast.org

N.C. Coastal Federation Offers Eco-Experiences

OCEAN – If you’re planning a beach trip this year, you might want to consider adding a day to your visit. The N.C. Coastal Federation is offering visitors and residents the chance to work alongside scientists and restoration and education specialists – and to leave the coast a better place.

The federation staff and Hammocks Beach State Park will be restoring salt marshes and oyster reefs on Jones Island every Tuesday starting in June and running through August. The small, uninhabited island in the White Oak River near Swansboro is one of three islands that make up the park. The federation acquired much of the island in 2004 and donated it to the park. The non-profit group and the park now conduct several restoration projects on the island.

“We’re creating new oyster reefs and restoring eroded shorelines along the island to improve habitat and water quality in the river,” explained Lexia Weaver, a coastal scientist with the federation. “It’s a major, multi-year undertaking that requires lots of man hours. By recruiting volunteers, we combine the needed work with a unique educational opportunity – and the satisfaction of knowing that you’ve helped to improve the coast.”

Volunteers can expect to get their hands dirty and their feet wet. They will travel on a park boat to the island. There, they might fill mesh bags with oyster shells, create oyster reefs by hoisting filled bags into the water, plant wetland grasses along the island’s shoreline or pick up litter from the underbrush. Volunteers should expect to encounter heat, sun, insects and fellow visitors who share a concern for the coast.

The N.C. Coastal Federation has worked since 1982 to protect the state’s coastal creeks, rivers, sounds and beaches. The federation is the state’s only non-profit organization focused exclusively on protecting and restoring the coast through education, advocacy and habitat preservation and restoration. Its headquarters is in Ocean, about halfway between Morehead City and Swansboro, and regional offices are located in Manteo and Wilmington.

Those looking for a less adventuresome coastal experience might want to check out the federation’s educational offerings including Marsh Cruises and the Bear Island Ecology Program. Details on the federation and its programs can be found on their Web site at www.nccoast.org or call the federation at 252-393-8185.