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Contact: Jan DeBlieu

Phone: 252.473.1607

Email: jand@nccoast.org

Town of Duck Wins 2010 Pelican Award for Sand Bag Ban

Manteo – Many town officials have talked about banning the installation of sand bags on ocean beaches, but none have followed through—until this year. The town of Duck on the Outer Banks in Dare County became the first municipality in the state to outlaw sand bags as a means of controlling oceanfront erosion. The vote by town council members was unanimous.

For taking that action, the town has won a 2010 Pelican Award from the N.C. Coastal Federation as the Local Government of the Year along the Northeast coast.

The award was one of 15 Pelican Awards the federation gave to individuals, groups and agencies across North Carolina. The annual awards recognize exemplary action to protect and preserve the coastal environment. The winners were recognized today at a ceremony at the federation's headquarters in Ocean in Carteret County.

While the use of sand bags in North Carolina is legal to provide temporary erosion control, it has proven tricky to force homeowners to remove them when their permits expire. Andy Garman, Duck's planning director, noted that the council's opposition to sand bags built as members watched property owners in other towns defy orders to remove the bags.

The council followed up its sand bag ban with amendments to town ordinances that make it easier for property owners to move oceanfront structures back from eroding beaches.

The new regulations ease normal setback, parking and drive aisle requirements for buildings that are moved westward from the high tide line.

Two other Pelican Awards winners were recognized in the Northeast Region:

Education Partner of the Year Award, N.C. Center for the Advancement of Teaching, Ocracoke Campus: Based in the historic Coast Guard Station in the middle of Ocracoke village, the center offers numerous seminars each year for several hundred public school teachers. The seminars give teachers a chance to learn about the coast's natural systems and bring hands-on activities about natural habitat back to their classrooms. During a week-long seminar called Planet Wetlands, taught twice by federation Northeast staff members, teachers helped plant a living shoreline along the edge of the campus that fronts Pamlico Sound. The center's staff members, under the direction of Laurin Baker and Lena Dolon, were active partners with the federation in designing the living shoreline and planting thousands of marsh grasses behind the sill. The end result is a beautiful marsh where local residents and teachers from across the state can learn about the estuarine system.

Volunteers of the Year Award, Tom and Lynn Thomason: In 2006 when the Northeast staff issued a call for volunteers to help plant a rain garden at Manteo Middle School, a retired man from Nags Head out-worked everyone, including people half his age. "He was unstoppable," Coastal Advocate Jan DeBlieu remembers. That man was Tom Thomason, a retired Air Force colonel and former undersecretary of defense who had moved to the Outer Banks with his wife, Lynn. Since then Tom and Lynn have become ever-present faces at federation volunteer events. Always willing to pitch in if they're in town (and if some other volunteer organization hasn't snagged them), they have helped plant rain gardens, bag oyster shells and worked to build a thriving restoration program in the region.

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