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Pender County Wins N.C. Coastal Federation Pelican Awards

WILMINGTON – Pender County and the N.C. Department of Transportation received Pelican Awards from the N.C. Coastal Federation for their innovative work in controlling stormwater pollution.

The county and the state agency were among the seven recipients of the 2012 awards for work along the southeast N.C. coast.

Sixteen individuals, groups and agencies across North Carolina won awards this year. The annual Pelican Awards recognize exemplary action to protect and preserve the coastal environment. The winners will receive the awards Saturday at a luncheon at the N.C. History Center in New Bern. The federation will use the occasion to also celebrate its 30th anniversary.

“These awards are our way of recognizing extraordinary commitment to protecting and preserving our coast,” said Todd Miller, the federation’s founder and executive director. “We should never underestimate the power that many people can bring to the effort of assuring that our coast remains a healthy and vibrant place. We can’t thank them enough.”

This year, in honor of its 30th birthday, the federation is giving a special award to Fred and Alice Stanback of Salisbury. Donations from the Stanbacks and their family members have had a huge effect throughout state in protecting the environment and in building the capacity of dozens of conservation groups, including the federation, Miller noted.

“In fact, over the years they have become the single most influential force in building the capacity of citizens to watch out for environmental quality in North Carolina,” he said. “Their financial support exceeds any other form of environmental philanthropic giving.”

The Pender County commissioners in 2010 involved many people and groups in the county to develop and adopt a comprehensive land-use plan and a unified development ordinance. Included in the plan and ordinance are several goals and policies to encourage the use of low-impact development, or LID, which are techniques that reduce stormwater runoff by mimicking natural hydrology.

Recognizing the multiple benefits of LID, Ben Andrea with the Pender County Planning Department wanted to ensure that developers were provided information and tools to better understand and use these methods in future projects. Andrea drafted policies that encourage LID. The commissioners approved the policies in the fall of 2011. Planning staff solicited input from the Business Alliance for a Sound Economy and the federation. Both organizations strongly supported the effort.

It isn't every day that you hear about environmental organizations collaborating with departments of transportation. But the state DOT, the federation and multiple partners looked into innovative ways to capture, infiltrate and treat polluted stormwater runoff from highways.

In the fall of 2011, staff from the DOT Highway Stormwater Program led by Matt Lauffer, worked with the federation, the N.C. Division of Water Quality, Brunswick County and others to organize a two-day workshop for state engineers. Experts from North Carolina and other states explored the potential for using LID techniques in road projects.

DOT then moved the exercise beyond paper and completed a series of LID retrofit pilot projects, mostly in Brunswick County, to test and showcase LID as a stormwater management approach on state roads.

Other Southeast Coast Pelican Award Winners

- **Business: Lovey's Café, Wilmington.** The Wilmington area is lucky to have residents like Marie Montemurro. She moved from New York and opened Lovey's Natural Foods & Café with her business partner, Karen Stewart, in 2002. For 10 years now, Lovey's has offered natural and organic groceries, supplements and hair and skin care products. Not to mention they have the best salad bar in town. During the lunch rush, Montemurro walks among the crowded tables and booths encouraging people to sign the petition against Titan Cement. She has collected hundreds of signatures and helped educate and build a support for effort to stop the cement plant. She has also made her business available for Stop Titan events, posted action alerts when needed, volunteered at events and donated snacks.
- **Education: Terry Brinson, Wilmington.** Most teachers would hesitate when asked if they would participate in a project that involves lots of construction equipment, digging and extra work. Terry Brinson of Alderman Elementary School in Wilmington didn't blink when the federation and the New Hanover Soil and Water Conservation District asked if her school would like to build a rain garden. Brinson saw the project as a chance to get her students outside to experience and learn about their environment first hand. She also saw the connection between flooding on school property and pollution in nearby Hewletts Creek. Terry has worked with the school administration and her fellow teachers to involve the entire third grade over the past three years in classroom and field activities centered on the rain garden. Her students are well on their way to understanding their connection to their local creeks and their opportunity to be environmental stewards.
- **Restoration: J. Taylor Ryan and the St. James Citizen Scientist Volunteers, St. James.** Ryan in 2004 attended a workshop on oysters at the N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher

hosted by the federation and N.C. Sea Grant. As a member of the St. James Stormwater Committee, Ryan thought that using a natural filter like an oyster to help reduce stormwater pollution had a lot of potential. He worked with the members of the committee to pursue an oyster reef project along the Intracoastal Waterway bordering the town. Working with the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, the University of North Carolina-Wilmington and the federation, Ryan worked with volunteers to bag oyster shells and build the reefs. The project is continuing to grow, and the town now donates a scholarship for interns at UNCW to work on the oyster reefs.

- **Local Media: *Lumina News*, Wrightsville Beach.** At a time when readership of print media is declining and coverage of important environmental issues have been reduced, the staff and management of *Lumina News* are the exception. Although the weekly concentrates on covering local news, its coverage also includes regional and state issues, often covering important environmental stories passed over by the larger newspapers and television stations. In short, the paper's reporters show up wherever there is potential conservation news, and they work hard to ensure that they cover a wide range of stories.
- **Statewide Media: Dustin Miller and Heidi Messina, Department of Media Production, University of North Carolina-Wilmington.** Three years after the idea for a documentary was born, the federation video, *Habitats, Heroes & Hallelujah: Stories of Hope from the North Carolina Coast*, debuted at UNCW last fall. Dustin Miller and Heidi Messina are the reason the video made it to the screen. Fearing heights, they climbed a fire tower in the swamps. They bundled up for cold rides on an open boat and lugged camera equipment across hot, soft beaches. Throughout it all, their professionalism and sense of humor persevered, intent on creating a product that reflected the work of the federation and its volunteers in the very best light. The documentary has won a national Telly Award.