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Basnight Wins Lifetime Award From N.C. Coastal Federation

MANTEO -- Marc Basnight won the 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award from the N.C. Coastal Federation for his commitment to the N.C. coast while serving almost three decades in the N.C. General Assembly.

"He was the best champion the coast ever had," noted Todd Miller, the federation's founder and executive director. "We're not likely to see the likes of him again."

Basnight was one of 15 recipients of Pelican Award this year. The annual award recognizes the exemplary work of people and groups to protect and enhance the N.C. coast. Other winners along the northeast coast this year are Troy Outland, a commercial fisherman in Manteo; Bill Edwards, an employee of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in Goldsboro; and federation volunteer Ernest Boyce of Tiner.

All will receive the awards Saturday at a luncheon at the N.C. Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores in Carteret County.

During his 26 years in the state Senate-the last 17 as president pro tempore-Basnight grew to be the most politically powerful man in the state. He outlasted governors, opponents and many of his closest colleagues. He also developed a

reputation for ferociousness when it came to defending favorite causes—a number of which included protections for coastal waters.

The N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund became one of Basnight's most cherished legacies to conservation. Since its inception in 1996, the fund has distributed almost a billion dollars in more than 1,500 grants. The money has been used to buy sensitive lands threatened by development, clean up hog lagoons, improve sewer plants and reduce stormwater runoff. It also bankrolled major planning initiatives, including a blueprint for restoring the state's once-great oyster population.

Long a supporter of jetties at Oregon Inlet, Basnight shepherded through a bill that banned hardened structures along much of the beach elsewhere. However, conservation groups were disappointed a few years later when a Basnight-led Senate passed a bill to weaken the seawall ban to allow small jetties, or terminal groins, at several more inlets.

"Such was the yin and yang of Marc Basnight," Miller said. "We didn't always agree with him but he got many good things done precisely because he had little patience for bureaucratic red tape. His proud accomplishments demonstrate his love for the coast and its people. This award is our way of saying thank you."

A native of the Outer Banks and lifelong commercial fisherman, Outland is a pioneer of cooperation among recreational and commercial fishing interests in northeastern North Carolina. Most recently, Outland's efforts preserved traditional commercial access to the historic Manns Harbor Marina. In collaboration with the federation, Outland helped establish the Manns Harbor Commission, a county-appointed board comprised of commercial and recreational fishermen. He's now the chairman of the commission.

Edwards is charged with implementing the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Wetland Reserve Program in eastern N.C. He helped place over 30,000 acres of land into easements in Hyde and Carteret counties. These lands have become federation signature projects known as the North River Farms and the Mattamuskeet Drainage Association wetland restoration projects.

"Bill provides expert guidance and insight on best management practices for restoration of these farm lands," Miller said. "He makes sure that the program does as much good as possible to benefit our coast."

"Boyce supports every aspect of the federation's work along the northern coast with such dedication that it seems as if he is a trained staff member," Miller noted. He has been an educator and taken on the task of leading activities during outreach events. Boyce has also helped with restoration work and endured the heat of hot, windless days and he's been an advocate distributing newsletters and explaining the federation's mission.

"Ernest approaches every task with confidence and never hesitates to do more or stay longer," Miller said. "The northeast staff usually has to remind him to take a break, if it were up to him, he wouldn't."

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About the North Carolina Coastal Federation:

"Working Together for a Healthy Coast"

The N.C. Coastal Federation 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. The federation's headquarters are at 3609 N.C. 24 in Ocean between Morehead City and Swansboro and the office is open Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The federation also operates field offices in Wrightsville Beach and Manteo. For more information call 252.393.8185 or check our website at www.nccoast.org.

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