

# North Carolina Marine Debris Action Plan: 5 Years of Accomplishments (2020 - 2024)

The [North Carolina Marine Debris Action Plan](#) (Action Plan) provides a strategic framework for prevention and removal of marine debris along the North Carolina coast. From 2020 - 2024, it inspired strategic coordination and direction for the organizations and communities that address marine debris.

- These are highlights captured through work groups. Action Plan partners and many others conducted an impressive amount of work that may not be reflected here.



## GOAL 1: LEAD AND COORDINATE

Efforts for applying the Action Plan were led by the NC Marine Debris Action Plan Leadership Team.

- Multiple subcommittees met throughout the years to develop and implement projects, as well as facilitate and track progress.

## GOAL 2: PREVENT



Partner groups created multiple curriculums and educator resources, including:

- [UNCW Marine Quest's Turtle Trash Collectors](#),
- [Duke University Marine Lab's Marine Debris Curriculum](#),
- and the [K-12 Marine Debris Educator Guide](#).

The NC Marine Debris Symposium and Coastal Carolina Riverwatch brought together plastic pollution and marine debris partners each year for collaboration, networking, and solution development.



Educators at UNCW Marine Quest, Coastal Carolina Riverwatch, Duke University Marine Lab, NC Aquariums, North Carolina Coastal Federation (Coastal Federation), Sturgeon City, NC Sea Grant collectively educated over **30,061 K-12 students and 34,754 adults and families** about marine debris.

The launch of a @DebrisFreeNC social media campaign helped highlight coastwide efforts.

Thanks to support from local government partners, the N.C. General Assembly took the following actions:

- Included resilient building requirements for coastal residential docks in the state's building code to reduce extreme storm damage.
- Granted authority to coastal municipalities to pass ordinances that allow removal of abandoned boats from jurisdictional waters.
- Passed legislation requiring the polystyrene foam inside floating docks to be fully encapsulated, within all NC coastal waters.
  - This makes NC the first state in the country to require polystyrene encapsulation!
  - This will drastically reduce the amount of polystyrene foam in our waterways.



## GOAL 3: REMOVE

Over **3,590,000 lbs.** of debris were removed from coastal shorelines with help from hired contractors and community volunteers.

- In 2024, the Coastal Federation led four field crews, totaling 12 commercial fishers, working in Brunswick, New Hanover, Pender, Onslow, Carteret, Dare, Hyde, Perquimans, Pasquotank and Camden counties who collected 464,549 lbs/232 tons of debris.



## GOAL 3: REMOVE (continued)

The Coastal Federation led the Lost Fishing Gear Recovery Project working with commercial watermen and women to **remove 9,532 crab pots from coastal waters since 2020.**

- This work was in coordination with NC Division of Marine Fisheries and NC Marine Patrol, and funded by the NC Commercial Fishing License Resource Fund.

NC Clean Marina launched a program to applaud marina operators who safeguard the environment, and began the Adopt Your Shoreline program to keep marina shorelines clean.



## GOAL 4: PREVENT AND REMOVE ABANDONED & DERELICT VESSELS

With nearly 200 removed by the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, 164 by the Coastal Federation, and 42 by local governments and other agencies, **a total of 406 Abandoned & Derelict Vessels (ADV) have been removed** since 2019 in NC coastal waterways.



NC Wildlife Resources Commission will continue to maintain and update the current state-wide ADV database as vessel removal projects are completed and new vessels are reported. The database is updated by utilizing the ArcGIS Online Collector application.

- Data management efforts from the NC Division of Coastal Management and NC Wildlife Resources Commission aims to provide an opportunity for partners to contribute vessel data updates, as well as assess the vessel data for ADV removal work.

## GOAL 5: RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT

NC State University and NC Sea Grant produced [educational materials](#) and published a [journal article](#) on their research in the Upper Neuse River to establish links between littered macro and micro plastics in urban areas.

NC Sea Grant secured funding from the NOAA National Sea Grant Office to protect the Neuse River Estuary from litter in up-stream urban waters.

- This will include studying human behaviors that contribute to littering, investigating litter movement, and analyzing the effectiveness of litter prevention strategies.

Waterkeepers Carolina with its member organizations launched a study to collect surface water and sediment samples to better understand the volume of microplastics and macroplastic pollution in North Carolina's streams, rivers, lakes, and bays.



As part of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration-facilitated Southeast Marine Debris Action Plan, NC Sea Grant contributed to the creation of "Tangled in Trash" - the first reporting tool designed to document when and where marine debris harms animals in the Carolinas and Georgia.



Photo by Gloria Putnam

These logos represent partners who participated in the Leadership Team. Many additional organizations not identified here were engaged in Subcommittees and continue to support the actions of the plan. We welcome others to join the efforts! We cannot do it alone. Please email [sarajh@ccoast.org](mailto:sarajh@ccoast.org) if interested.

