



New director; new approach



Photos by Rip Woodin

Steve Murphey, new director of the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, wants to emphasize science-based management of the state's marine resources.

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

Steve Murphey could be retired right now, chasing big bluefish at Cape Lookout in his boat and otherwise enjoying the fruits of a 30-year career with the N.C. Division of Marine Resources. Instead, he's taking on the managerial challenge of his life as director of the often-maligned division.

In early January, Gov. Roy Cooper appointed Murphey to lead the division and within hours the new director had issued his first proclamation closing the season on speckled trout because of cold stuns. The online

grumbling was loud among diehard trout fishermen, both commercial and recreational.

"You've got to be willing to make the calls that can get you fired," Murphey said about tough, politically charged issues. If the day comes when Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Michael Regan tells Murphey to go fishing, he will leave the director's corner office in Morehead City with no regrets.

Until that call comes, he's got ambitious plans to re-focus the division staff on the science of fisheries management.

"Our role defined in the Fisheries Reform Act (of 1997) is to collect the data, develop the science of stock

assessments then develop management recommendations for delivery to the Marine Fisheries Commission," he added. "And our management recommendations under the law have to take into consideration sustainability of the stock, as well as food production, recreational opportunities and protection of essential habitat."

That's going to be Murphey's focus because he believes DMF "has gotten out in the weeds a little bit. We've probably played in the commission's ballpark, and they've probably played in ours a little too much. That's why I want to create that separation of the sci-

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Early numbers show Southern flounder stock declining

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

The long-delayed Southern flounder fishery management plan now is grinding its way through the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries planning process and could be ready for implementation some time in 2019.

It's been 13 years since the last flounder plan was implemented then amended in February 2013, but it failed to solve the overfished and overfishing conditions that have been pushing stock numbers down for more than two decades.

Supplement A to Amendment 1, which was intended to reduce catch from the Southern flounder fishery by up to 60 per-

cent, was approved by the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission in November 2015 but was quashed when the N.C. Fisheries Association sued, claiming the amendment did not meet legal criteria. The MFC agreed to a court-ordered injunction that keeps certain rules in place until a new FMP is adopted.

Division biologist Michael Loeffler, who

is co-leader on the flounder management team, said the stock assessment data through 2015 accumulated from North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida shows that the stock is overfished and overfishing still is occurring. A stock is overfished when the population size

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MURPHEY

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ence versus actual management adoption,” he explained candidly, sipping on a cup of hot tea.

There’s got to be a point in the division where “management and policy have to grab the science then hand it off. That’s my role.” Nor does the director want to be involved in developing the division’s science. He explained that teams are working on three fishery management plans.

“I’m not going to those meetings; I’m not trying to influence that process,” Murphey said. “I’m letting those scientists on the plan development teams do their job to develop that good science. I didn’t get involved with the stock assessments. I don’t tell people this is where I want you to be.”

This line of thinking ties into a big reason Murphey took the director’s job. He knows most of the 300 people in the division.

“And over the years, I’ve seen a sort of bunker mentality develop. There is a lot of trepidation in making the calls that need to be made because of political pressure, because of pressure from one side or the other and because of things written about us or individuals on social media.”

Murphey said he plans to stand behind

his people and give them the freedom to do what they’re supposed to do, which he says is “very important. That hasn’t happened over time; it’s been a gradual process.” Talking like a CEO of a private company, “If you run a business and have to approve everything your employees do, it’s not going to last very long.”

Conversely, Murphey wants to hire good people, train them to competency, then allow them to do their jobs.

“I want to unleash this division to do what it’s good at because we’ve got so many very, very smart people,” he said. “It’s going to take awhile for them to feel that freedom and come out to do that good work.”

He wants to see the division do a better job of communicating its positions to the public in understandable language but scientific enough to explain that the division is doing. He already has launched a newsletter called “Insight” that features a message from him, an update on the Southern flounder stock assessment and plain English explanation of the peer review process. Murphey also said he doesn’t particularly like the division’s own terminology used to classify a stock status, such as “viable,” “of concern” or “depleted.”

“My first question to the staff was, ‘What does viable mean?’ It’s not a fisheries management term. It just means alive. That’s why in July you’ll see more

language like the federal councils use,” he continued. “We’re going to tell you if a stock is overfished or if overfishing is occurring since those are the two factors that trigger action. In some cases, we’ll tell you we don’t know.”

A stock is overfished when the population size is too small; overfishing means the removal rate is too high.

Turning to specific stock assessments as examples, Murphey said the blue crab assessment was accepted “as is” and shows the stock is overfished and overfishing is occurring. That means the blue crab advisory committee will have some tough decisions to make on what to do because by law the MFC has to adopt management recommendations that will end overfishing within two years.

The Southern flounder stock assessment that covered four states from North Carolina to Florida won’t be complete until landings from 2016-17 are added in to satisfy peer reviewers, he continued. Those peer reviewers are outside experts in biology and mathematics from universities and federal commissions or councils. Once that stock assessment, which already shows overfished and overfishing, is completed then the flounder advisory council will make management recommendations for the division and MFC to consider.

“Then it’s up to the commission to adopt our recommendations or differ-

ent ones,” said Murphey, explaining he wants to start giving the MFC a wide range of choices in recommendations that push the boundaries.

It takes a huge effort to create a fisheries management plan, he added, using 15-20 staff members who often get interrupted. There’s never enough data so the plan reflects what data is available. The results aren’t known for several years afterwards, which is why plans are reviewed after five years.

While Murphey used the proclamation tool in January, he said he thinks it’s been abused in the past, used unwisely sometimes because of political pressure. “It’s an extremely important tool to have in a plan, but it can’t be arbitrary and capricious in nature.”

The division is ramping up its effort to repair some of the state’s 42 artificial reefs by seeking a blanket permit from the U.S. Corps of Engineers. This would eliminate the need to go through the painstaking process of seeking an individual permit for each reef.

Having partnerships with fishing clubs and groups like CCA NC that can supply financial help or in-kind services, Murphey believes he can greatly improve recreational fishing.

“We’ve got a lot of commercial acquaintances so we need to build some recreational acquaintances, too,” he said.

FLOUNDER

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is too small while overfishing means the removal rate is too high for the stock to recover naturally.

Meeting in person during December 2017, the peer reviewers approved the assessment with the proviso that DMF add in landing data for 2016 through 2017 from the four participating states, Loeffler said in an email. “Data are due from each of our partner states by June 30,” he wrote. Once all the raw data is received, it will be formatted for inclusion into the assessment model.

“Our timeline puts us presenting the results of this updated model run to the MFC and the Southern flounder advisory committee as early as November 2018,” he added. The advisory committee will make its recommendations to the flounder management plan team that will in turn hand over final recommendations to DMF Di-

rector Stephen Murphey for presentation to the MFC.

Dr. Chris Elkins, chairman of CCA NC’s fisheries committee and a retired UNCH microbiologist, said it is unlikely that two more years of landings data from the four states will significantly alter the preliminary findings of the stock assessment. Another CCA NC board member, Capt. Tom Roller, is a member of the Southern flounder advisory committee and is actively engaged in seeking management rules that will recover this stock. The flounder committee is chaired by Dr. Fred Scharf, professor in the Department of Biology and Marine Biology at UNC-W, who also served on the Southern flounder stock assessment working group. The committee will meet bimonthly through the remainder of the year.

Charlton Godwin, a biologist supervisor at the division, further explained the role of the flounder advisory committee.

“As in most situations when stock assessment results indicate overfishing and/or overfished status is occurring, the next

step is to make projections from the model to determine what level of reduction in harvest is needed to bring the fishing mortality below its target reference point, and spawning stock biomass above its target reference point.”

The Fisheries Reform Act requires the division to develop science-based recommendations to end overfishing within two years and achieve sustainable harvest within 10 years from the date of adoption of the plan.

The role of the advisory committee is to assist the division with various options that will meet the required reductions necessary to get the stock back where it belongs relative to the overfishing/overfished reference points, Godwin said.

“Projections from the model tell us how much reduction is needed, then the advisory committee figures out the best way the various sectors want to achieve those reductions,” he said.

The advisory committee will decide on how it wants to achieve those reductions — using a quota, increased size limits, slot

limits, reduced harvest seasons, reduction in gear, etc., Godwin explained.

“The options are usually exhaustive as every user group often wants something a bit different. Even stakeholders in the same user group (recreational or commercial) will have different wants depending on what part of the state they live in,” he added, explaining why formulating a plan takes a long time.

The advisory committee and the division will make recommendations that the MFC can choose from to implement management.

“And don’t forget, sometimes the advisory committee might come up with recommendations that are different from the division. The committee and the division are separate bodies,” Godwin concluded.

Division staff currently is drafting plan sections for the advisory committee’s review.

Loeffler said he does not expect Southern flounder to appear on the MFC agenda “until we are prepared to provide the results of the updated assessment.”

CCA helps launch major habitat project

By Callie Freeman
CCA NC Writer

In the continuing effort to build fish habitat, CCA NC gave the City of Jacksonville \$50,000 to support its New River Oyster Highway project. The project will create oyster habitat “stepping stones” within the New River Estuary from Southwest Creek to Stone’s Bay.

The N.C. Division of Water Resources historically has classified the New River Estuary, located in the White Oak river basin, as nutrient-sensitive waters. For nearly two decades efforts to improve water quality and fisheries productivity have been mounted by several groups.



DONOVAN-
BRANDBURG

To improve water quality in the upper NRE, the City of Jacksonville built a new wastewater treatment plant in 1998, halting entry of wastewater discharges from Wilson Bay. Likewise, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, which surrounds the majority of the estuary proper, built a new advanced wastewater treatment plant in 2001, further reducing input to the river.

The “Oyster Highway” concept is the idea of marine biologist Pat Donovan-Brandenburg, the Stormwater & Habitat Manager for the City of Jacksonville. Oysters filter up to 60 gallons of water per day per oyster, she said. Reefs harboring thousands of oysters drastically will improve water quality and habitat along the NRE.

According to Donovan-Brandenburg, the project will occur in two phases. “Phase I will see six half-acre reefs placed from outside of Stone’s Bay to just above AR-398. Half of each reef will host 90 oyster catchers with sub-adults to adult oysters on them while the other half will have 90 oyster castles for fish aggregation devices,” Donovan-Brandenburg stated.

“Phase 1 is a two-year project with monitoring to make sure we have maximized our returns on both the oysters and fish and will not need a change in methodology,” she continued. Once the second phase gets the green light, six additional half-acre reefs will be introduced from Phase I up to Wilson Bay. In total, the project will create six new acres of reefs on both ends of AR-398, spanning a 20-mile stretch or “highway.”

“An additional benefit from this reef creation effort will be fish utilization and the establishment of destination sites in the mid-estuary region for recreational fishing,” noted CCA NC Executive Director David Sneed. “Habitat restoration (including artificial reefs) and augmentation have become major tools in efforts to conserve coastal fishery resources, as well as improve water quality,” Sneed stated.



Above, the water in the two tanks is from the same time and place. The tank on the right has oysters in it. At left, CCA NC Executive Director David Sneed presents a \$50,000 check funded by the Eddie and Jo Smith Foundation to Jacksonville Mayor Sammy Phillips. More than \$300,000 has been raised for the New River Oyster Highway project.

CCA NC is a non-profit community of recreational anglers working to protect our marine resources for future generations to experience and enjoy.

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in our fight to preserve
recreational angling for
future generations. Annual
memberships are available
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New chairman sets chapter growth as top goal

Editor's note: Billy Byrd of Greenville took over as chairman of CCA NC in February from Bud Abbott of Burlington. Byrd became a member of CCA around 1988 with this two-year term being his third time leading the conservation organization. In between terms, he has served as state chapter treasurer and a member of the executive committee. To say he's seen a lot at CCA NC would be an understatement.

Since I've been around CCA longer than I can remember, I've seen years when membership and banquet numbers were much higher than they are now. This gave us extra support to protect our estuarine and marine fisheries for our kids and their kids, so my top goal is to develop 20-25 local chapters in the next five years.

Currently, there are 12 chapters with some under development in Edenton, Winston-Salem, Asheville and maybe Fayetteville. It takes awhile to build a new chapter because folks don't understand how important the resource is for North Carolina.

I'd like to see 300-400 people at every banquet along with three or four state senators and representatives that would indicate growing support from the legislature. Everything is so screwed up in fisheries because of the inshore gill nets. They've got to go, and

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



BILLY
BYRD
Chairman

the legislature is only body that can do that. We've got to get the legislators tuned in with what we want to do.

The development model I like is what CCA Louisiana did. By working smart, they went north away from the coast to start new chapters. Eventually, the upstate chapters outnumbered the coastal chapters and with them came legislators who didn't have a bear in the fisheries fight. With fact-based arguments, Louisiana was able to get a lot done, including getting the nets out.

CCA NC will also be increasing its effort to conserve and rehabilitate estuarine habitat. We've obtained money for on-going projects like Dr. Joel Fodrie's oyster reef study by UNC graduate students in Morehead City and development of the Oyster Highway in the New River by the City of Jacksonville. I'd like to have more scholarship money for those kids of opportunities. I want to develop, strengthen and promote habitat conservation.

Virginia mandated clean water education in schools. I'd like to see CCA NC go into some schools and let the kids pour reef balls. Part of our money needs to be spent helping with reefs in coastal areas. The water becomes cleaner, which attracts more fish for recreational opportunities. Something like that would be

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Being too clever can get you ... busted

As always, an offshore trip out of Hatteras Inlet is an adventure. Choosing the right day, getting good weather, having calm or at least moderate seas and navigating the inlet all are necessary challenges for a pleasant trip and comfort of the crew. Of course, the fish have to cooperate as well.

As usual, the inlet was difficult to run given the lack of "official" markers. The U.S. Coast Guard hasn't marked the inlet for a while so navigating the makeshift poles is the only option. We made it to the sea buoy by carefully following the poles.

Once at the sea buoy, we embarked on the half hour ride out to our fishing spots. With some nice bottom fish in the cooler, we decided to call it a day. The seas had freshened some, so I pulled out my marine beanbag chair, a Christmas gift from my wife, for one of our crew. He remarked how comfortable he was for the ride in.

As we approached the inlet, we all stood up and looked sharply for the markers.

We made it through to the sound and put the hammer down as we headed for port. As we unloaded the boat back at our beach house, I noticed the beanbag chair was missing. I searched the boat carefully but no chair.

I got in the car and frantically searched the trail back to the marina. A recent hurricane's debris made the search more difficult but provided no results. My whole crew went out looking; still no result. Needless to say, my wife would not be happy with me for losing my Christmas gift from her. It even matched the colors on the boat.

I hatched a plan to order a new one as soon as I got home and have it delivered while she was at work. Brilliant! I called the beanbag company and had them



BILL
MANDULAK
The Lighter Side

search for the exact order she had placed to make sure I got the same thing. I ordered the chair with my credit card and knew I was safe with the order confirmed and shipment in a couple days.

A few minutes later I received a call from my wife concerned that someone may have hacked her order for a beanbag chair and ordered one. Uh, oh! The beanbag chair company used the old order as a template for the new chair, which included my wife's email address not mine to confirm the order. I was busted and had to come clean. She was not happy but very understanding.

Beanbag chairs are very light and can easily bounce or blow out of a running boat if left on deck unattended. The beanbag company said it happens all the time. One poor soul lost two on the same trip. I just hope his wife didn't buy them as a Christmas present. I learned a \$125 lesson to stow all gear. And I shouldn't try to fool my wife. She always will find out.

Tragedy of Commons creates atmosphere of exploitation

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries July 2017 Annual Stock Status Report shows that of 22 state-managed coastal shellfish and finfish stocks, only four are rated “Viable.” That is unacceptable to the Coastal Conservation Association North Carolina and should be unacceptable to Gov. Roy Cooper, every elected state official and every North Carolina citizen.

What we are witnessing in the case of North Carolina marine and estuarine resources is the condition called “tragedy of the commons” that typically follows long-term government management of publicly owned resources. The basic tragedy of the commons concept is that when individuals are allowed to personally profit from using resources they do not personally own, there is no economic incentive for those individuals to use the resource in a responsible, sustainable manner.

Instead, because resource use is “first come, first served,” the economic incentive is to personally exploit the resource to the fullest possible extent before someone else uses the resource for his or her own personal benefit. There is no incentive to conserve the resource, because if one individual does not use it someone else will. Moreover, personal loss resulting from overuse and damage to the resource is virtually nonexistent, because the loss is spread among all resource owners — the 10 million citizens of our state.

History has shown that the only way to prevent the tragedy of the commons is for government resource management agencies to impose strict legal measures

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that take into account the long-term interests of all resource owners — whether or not they are resource users — to prevent resource overexploitation. Absent such controls, politics and economic self-interest always will determine management practices for such resources, and user self interest always will result in harm to the public resource.

The New England groundfish fishery off Georges Bank once was one of the richest fisheries in the world and was long touted as being limitlessly exploitable. Nevertheless, as a direct result of commercial overharvest, that fishery collapsed in the 1970s and was a large part of the impetus underlying enactment of the federal Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (commonly referred to as the Magnuson-Stevens Act).

More important for North Carolina, in the decades between 1990 and 2010, North Carolina saw a complete collapse of its river herring fishery — the oldest fishery in the state — despite repeated warnings of its eminent demise due to overfishing. That collapse occurred because state fisheries management agencies ignored the facts, took the politically expedient route and refused to halt commercial harvest of that stock. It is likely that North Carolina also has seen a collapse of its native striped bass fishery in the central and southern parts of

the state, and that collapse of North Carolina’s Southern flounder fishery currently is at risk.

The bottom line for the status of North Carolina coastal fisheries resources in 2018 is that they are in crisis and will remain so until state fisheries resource management changes substantially. The good news is that change may be in the “birthing room” right now.

Stephen W. Murphey, appointed director of the DMF in January, pledges to create a new culture of transparency and science-based management free from political pressures. In a 2½-hour interview, Murphey said he wants the division staff to re-focus on the science of marine fisheries and separate it from actual management adoption. For his part, the 30-year veteran of the division isn’t having anything to do with drafting the three Fishery Management Plans underway nor is he influencing Stock Assessments. Murphey said he believes it’s very important for the staff to be free of political pressure from either recreational anglers or commercial fishermen to do their jobs. And it will take a little while for the 300 employees of the DMF to feel that freedom, come out of the present bunker mentality and do the work they’re supposed to do, he said.

If Steve Murphey is able to institute the attitude change he preaches and, with support from the governor, the Marine Fisheries Commission uses the data for sound management decisions, then rebuilding North Carolina’s estuarine and marine resources will be on an expressway to sustainability.

Legislative fireworks? Maybe not this session

On April 25, we introduced our 2018 Annual Briefing Paper on marine and estuarine resource issues for Gov. Roy Cooper. This paper, written by CCA NC General Counsel Dr. Tim Nifong in collaboration with our Fisheries and Government Relations Committees, describes in great detail the issues we feel are critical to the conservation and management of North Carolina’s coastal fisheries resources.

In addition to stock specific and administrative problems, the paper also lays out a number of legislative issues of importance to progressive fisheries management. At the top of these priorities is enactment of conservation-based coastal fisheries management reform. The idea for conservation-based coastal fisheries management reform was introduced in 2017 by the NC Sound Economy coalition. A bipartisan group of legislators introduced the Coastal Fisheries Conservation and Economic Development Act (CFCEDA) in the form of House Bill 867 (HB 867).

As Dr. Nifong pointed out, “CCA NC adamantly believes that HB 867 or substantially similar legislation is the only path to achieve and ensure long-term conservation and protection of our public, coastal fisheries resources. This one sentence is highlighted because it is the most important in this briefing paper. The effect of an implemented HB 867 would be to proscribe the limits within which politics are allowed to determine best management practices for a publicly owned and public trust resource. As noted at the outset, absent such controls politics and economic self-interest will always determine management practices for such resources, and the tragedy of the commons will ensue.”

HB 867 was intended to overcome the shortcomings of the current Fisheries Reform Act by changing the coastal fisheries management paradigm from one of stock allocation to one of stock conservation, wrote Dr. Nifong.

As stated, the passage of HB 867 or substantially sim-

ilar legislation remains CCA NC’s No. 1 legislative objective. There have been conversations with several key legislators that indicate support still exists within the General Assembly for this type of reform effort. It will not happen, however, in the upcoming short session.

We have been told repeatedly that legislators intend to get in, complete their budget work and get out so they can go home to campaign for re-election. We will use whatever time legislators do spend in Raleigh for the short session continuing to educate more lawmakers in both chambers, and on both sides of the aisle, on the issues facing our state’s coastal fisheries.

We have already held very encouraging talks with Chief Deputy Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality John Nicholson and the new Director of the Division of Marine Fisheries Stephen Murphey on the need to streamline the Fisheries Management Plan process. Both agree that changes are needed in current fisheries statutes and have pledged to provide input using



DAVID
SNEED
Executive
Director

New fish count app helps feds with data

Saving recreational anglers a fair allocation of fish managed in federal waters from three to 200 miles off shore might depend on their voluntary use of a free smartphone app called "MyFishCount." Now let me explain.

The biggest hurdle for valid and fair management of recreational fishing in federal waters is a lack of accurate data on the number of recreational fishers, their yearly catches and fishing effort. There is no specific federal license, stamp or permit required to fish recreationally in federal waters beyond the free permit required for Highly Migratory Species like billfish, swordfish, bluefin tuna and sharks.

The current tool used by NOAA Fisheries to assess recreational fishing effort is the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Limited surveys of anglers extrapolate the recorded catch to estimate the number of fish the recreational angling public is catching and how much they are fishing. The total number of anglers fishing federal waters is estimated from each state's count of saltwater recreational fishing licenses, nearly 1 million in North Carolina.

Then the MRIP recorded number of anglers, their fishing effort and number of fish caught are multiplied by the estimated number of anglers fishing for the species to estimate the entire catch by recreational fishermen. The estimates are used to set the season, size and catch limits for recreationally caught species,

along with the total allowable catch and often the allocation of the fish between the recreational and commercial fishing sectors. The MRIP estimates now are being utilized to differentiate fishing between the for-hire (charter and head boats) and private boat fishers within the recreational sector.

This has led to ideas, justification and potential plans for "sector separation" within the recreational fishery. There are increasing appeals by captains and boat owners within the charter industry to allocate fish separately between the for-hire sector and private boat anglers. Separate allocations also could lead to potential differences in season length, size and bag limits between the sectors. The for-hire sector has a jump on the private boat angler to obtain fair treatment in fisheries because their numbers are documented through requirements for various fishing permits, and they are increasingly pushed toward mandatory electronic reporting of catches for snapper/grouper, dolphin/wahoo and migratory coastal pelagics like cobia.

Fishery managers listen to calls for separation between the sectors of recreational fishing because it could make their job easier under the rule fishery policy and regulations that must be based on good science and documentation. MRIP is rather poor in data and documentation,

and private boat recreational anglers could be placed in a smaller bucket.

CCA currently opposes sector separation within recreational fishing. Sector separation already has occurred however, in the Gulf of Mexico with red snapper. In North Carolina, the Marine Fisheries Commission approved in 2017 and 2018 a separation of the cobia fishery within the recreational sector. For 2018, head boats, charter boats, and guides will be allowed to retain up to four legal fish per boat if four or more anglers are on board, through the season. If a private boat has the same four or more anglers, that boat may retain two fish through May, and only one fish from June 1 until season's end.

Fishery management handwriting is on our wall. We likely will see increasing sector separation within recreational fishing. Many operators in the for-hire sector want and justify it based on a desire to help assure preservation of their business and to maintain continuous access to fish. The argument is loud and clear that fishery managers have no idea or data on the true number of recreational anglers fishing in federal waters, what they catch, how much they fish and how many fish they catch. MRIP is under-gunned to fairly and accurately capture and assess private recreational

fishing effort and catch. A federal recreational fishing permit, license or stamp and mandatory reporting of recreational catches is the answer but is years away. For Red Snapper and Groupers, work on Amendment 46 within the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) was initiated in November 2017. Amendment 46 will put forth proposals and specifics for a recreational license/permit/stamp for Red Snapper and Groupers, and for mandatory catch recording. It will take at least three more years to complete the federal pathway of development, review, public opinion, approval and implementation.

The best way for private recreational fisherman to be assured fair treatment and a powerful voice in any effort to separate the fishing sector, allocate fish, obtain reasonable fishing seasons, sizes and catch limits is to start giving federal fishery managers an honest look at our numbers, the fish we catch, how many, how often we fish and how successful we are per planned fishing trip. Now back to the free smartphone app.

The SAFMC/NOAA in conjunction with the Snook and Gamefish Foundation has implemented a voluntary recreational fishing reporting plan with the MyFishCount app. A voluntary pilot app was tested during the red snapper mini-seasons in 2017. App users could

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**BOB
LORENZ**
SAFMC
Advisory panel

HABITAT

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Dr. Joel Fodrie of the UNC Institute of Marine Sciences will lead a team of researchers in monitoring fish utilization of the new reefs. Dr. Fodrie's team has extensive experience researching oyster habitats of the NRE, as well as red drum and black drum reef exploitation using advanced acoustic tracking methods. Before and after surveys of fish and invertebrates will be conducted at each site to quantify natural recruitment as

well as studies to determine oyster survival and growth rates.

The CCA NC contribution was made possible by the generous support of the Eddie and Jo Allison Smith Foundation. Eddie Smith, CEO of Grady-White Boats, and his family have been long-time supporters of coastal conservation and oyster habitat restoration in North Carolina. The Foundation recognizes the important role oyster habitat plays in water quality and essential fish habitat for the benefit of future generations of North Carolina residents and visitors.

With recent contributions from CCA NC and the N.C. Wildlife Habitat Foun-

dation, the City of Jacksonville was able to order the first 4,400 oysters patties from the Sandbar Oyster Company that will form the foundation of the oyster reefs. CCA NC Board Vice-President Rocky Carter chairs the newly created CCA NC Habitat Committee.

"As a resident of the coastal community this New River Oyster Highway will benefit, I could not be more excited to see this project get started, and I look forward to building not just this New River Oyster Highway, but duplicating this success throughout coastal North Carolina through our 2018 Coastal Habitat Initiative," Carter said.

The New River Oyster Highway project brings together a coalition including the City of Jacksonville, Camp Lejeune, the N.C. Wildlife Habitat Foundation, the UNC Institute of Marine Science and CCA NC. To date, these groups, along with N.C. Wildlife Resources Commissioner Nat Harris and the N.C. General Assembly, have raised \$300,000, which is nearly half-way to the \$738,000 needed for Phase I.

If you would like more information on how to support or get involved with CCA NC's North Carolina Coastal Habitat Initiative, please call our office at (919) 781-3474.

August features Shootout, Kids' contest

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

A sporting clays shootout and a kids' fishing tournament highlight CCA NC's late summer efforts to boost Life Memberships then introduce the next generation of children to the joy of saltwater fishing.

The Fourth Annual Sportsman's Conservation Legacy Shootout will be held Saturday, Aug. 25 at the Drake Landing sporting clays range near Fuquay Varina. The goal of the event is to tell CCA NC's conservation story that will recruit new Life Members. The \$1,000 fee helps CCA NC work for science-based fisheries management to preserve the state's marine resources for future generations, said Clark Hutchinson, eastern Regional Director for CCA NC.

This year's sponsors include Grady White Boats, Drake Landing, Fish Hippie clothing and Regulator Marine. All the sponsors get a four-shooter team in the competition, Hutchinson said. "Each shooter will receive a gift bag, a catered breakfast and lunch plus 25 practice rounds," he added.

Hutchinson, who is a master class shooter in the National Sporting Clays Association and a level one certified instructor, will be available to teach anyone who needs a few tips on blasting clays. While Drake Landing has two courses with 13 stations on each, the Legacy Shootout will be on what he called an "intermediate" level range, which means it has some easy and challenging stations that simulate open field hunting.

Entry fees are \$150 per person and \$500 for a team. Event sponsorships are \$5,000, \$2,500 and \$1,000. All fees include shells for the 50 targets each competitor will shoot in addition to the 25 practice rounds. Mulligans will be sold if a



Photo by Rip Woodin

The 'rabbit' station provides a challenge and laughs as shooters blast a sporting clay skipping across the ground.

shooter misses a target. Shotgun rentals also are available.

The team with the highest total score wins. Last year, new Life Member Ozza Tysor led his team to a 159 that took the "Cheney," the trophy given to the winning team. New Life Members also will receive premium clothing, gear and fishing outfits, Hutchinson added. If six new Life Members are recruited, there will be a special raffle among them for a major prize.

Contact Hutchinson at (252) 422-3839 or CCA NC at (919) 781-3474 to sign up.

The Third Annual CCA NC Fishing for the Future youth tournament is another big event scheduled for Aug. 11 in Swansboro. It's free and open to all children under 18, said Executive Board Member Shelley Smith, who co-chaired the first two tournaments in 2016-17.

While the Shootout is important for the

funds it raises, the Fishing for the Future kids' contest rivals it in significance because it teaches the next generation of anglers about the rich estuarine and marine resources on North Carolina's coast, said David Sneed, CCA NC executive director.

Besides being outfitted with a free rod and reel, the kids learn about various marine life displayed by Dr. Joel Fodrie's UNC Institute of Marine Science, he continued. To prove its popularity, Sneed said there were 119 entrants last year, nearly quadrupling the 34 in the tournament's inaugural year.

This free tournament will take place in conjunction with the Hook & Bones Redfish Open. The fishing tournament will be divided into two divisions, 13-17 years old, and 12 and under.

Children registered online by July 31 will receive a free swag bucket. All par-

ticipating youth anglers must attend the Captain's Meeting with a parent or adult at 7 p.m. Aug. 10 in the Salt Water Grill at 9 W. Church St. in Swansboro, where participants will be instructed on how to record their catch, Smith said.

The tournament will be an inshore catch and release only contest. All youth anglers are welcome to fish from land, boat or kayak. Prizes will be awarded for the longest redfish and flounder, and for the most fish caught in both age divisions along with a few additional fun categories.

The website for the tournament is <http://www.ccancfishingforthefuture.com/> and has been updated with 2018 information.

Former CCA NC Chairman Bud Abbott added, "The annual tournament provides an opportunity to show the coastal communities, its citizens, the participating children and their families that CCA NC is first a conservation group leading the effort to restore our fisheries for future generations and curtailing the use of destructive gears that most states have already banned."

Through the generosity of sponsors, Smith said each child will be given a five-gallon swag bucket containing items like a hat, t-shirt, fishing pole, fish grips, stickers for local tackle and clothing companies, dip nets, small toys, circle hook brochures, a free New Tide youth CCA membership, a bag of plastic bait, DMF tackle boxes with tackle, and other small items," Smith explained.

There will be 16 prize categories across two age groups. And these kids can fish. In 2017, Ryder Hearn caught a monstrous 32.5-inch redfish to win the "Under 12" category while Scarlett Futrell hauled in a 22-inch red to claim the claim the "Lady Angler," more appropriate "Little Girl" title.

**BROWN DOG
HOSIERY co.**



Official cooler of CCA NC

ENGEL
Coolers and Freezers

DMF sets new rules for Cobia harvest

The recreational cobia season began May 1 under new regulations released in April by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries.

The recreational cobia season will run until Dec. 31 with a minimum size limit of 36 inches fork length (tip of the snout to the fork in the tail) and a possession limit of one fish per person per day.

For private boats, from May 1 to May 31, the maximum limit will be one fish per person per day, not to exceed two fish per vessel per day, regardless of the number of anglers on board. That changes from June 1 onward when the maximum vessel limit drops to one fish per vessel per day, regardless of the number of anglers on board.

Charter boats, head boats, guide boats and any other for-hire operators will be able to harvest four fish per vessel per day, or one fish per person per day if fewer than four people are on board. This runs for the entire season.

Anglers must return all cobia not meeting the harvest requirements to the water in a manner that ensures the highest likelihood of survival.

The change in regulations was prompted by a huge harvest from an exceptionally large year class in 2016 that exceeded the Annual Catch Limit. Last year, the DMF went out of compliance with the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council that closed the cobia season in federal waters early in the summer. This caused consternation among charter boat operators on the Outer Banks and southern Virginia



Neal Jordan of Charlotte caught a nice cobia with Waterdog Guide Service.

because the cobia migrate northward during the summer and wouldn't have been present before the proposed season closed. The 2018 regulations is an effort to reduce the harvest yet satisfy the charter business.

Dr. Chris Elkins, chairman of CCA NC fisheries committee, said both the South Atlantic Marine Fisheries Council and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission want to move cobia

management to the individual states because the fish mostly are caught inside the three-mile limit close to the beaches.

"It makes some sense to have the states, rather than having a federal council since the majority of fish are caught in state waters," he said.

There are other factors, however, that should be considered, including the historical success of certain state regulatory agencies.

Elkins, who is a member of the SAM-FC cobia advisory committee, said the stock assessment is old and a new one is underway. The new assessment includes genetic studies that are beginning to delineate various "strains" of cobia that inhabit certain geographic areas, he explained. This already has been shown for S.C. cobia in certain waters. That outcome will have greater impact on which agencies, state or federal, set management regulations on the fish.

Meanwhile, after reviewing public comment and considering various management alternatives and timing, members of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council decided in March to delay approval of an amendment to remove Atlantic cobia from the current federal management plan.

The amendment is designed to reduce complicated regulations and improve flexibility in the management of Atlantic cobia in federal waters from Georgia to New York. If approved by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, the move would allow for the fishery to be managed solely by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC).

The decision came after council members discussed the need to wait for preliminary results from a cobia stock ID workshop scheduled for April, according to a news release on the SAFMC website.

For more information on regulations, contact Steve Poland, cobia species lead with the Division of Marine Fisheries, at 252-808-8159 or Steve.Poland@ncdenr.gov.



FISH COUNT

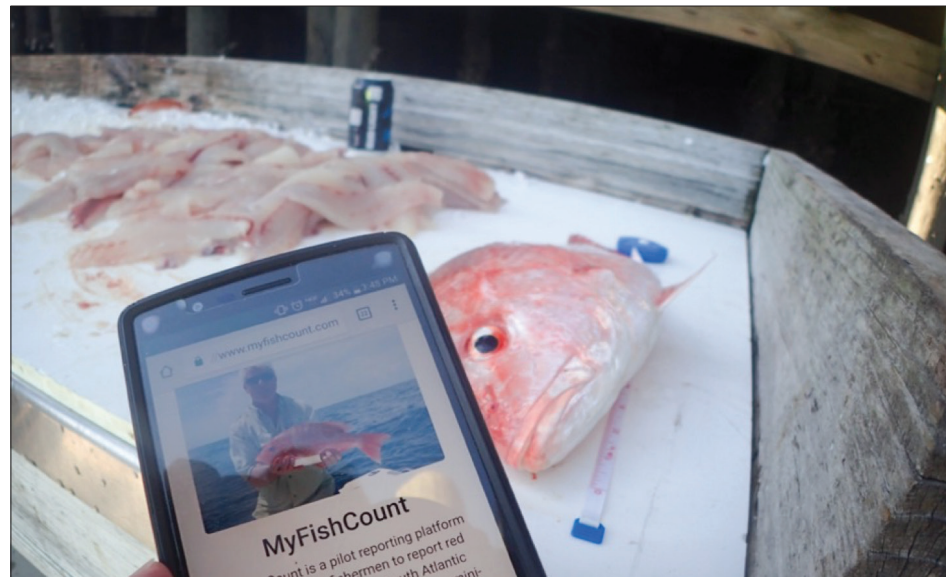
From Page 6

record angler profiles, reports and a catch log that included depth fished, geographic area, fish retained, fish released and their condition. There was a feature where an angler could pre-load an intended fishing trip, then report if the trip was completed or cancelled.

During the season, fishing reports were issued to the app users along with facts and figures. In North Carolina, our weather was awful during both seasons so about 80 percent of planned trips were cancelled, which is valuable fishing effort data.

The SAFMC intends to have MyFishCount updated and available in June 2018. Though originally intended for red snapper and then grouper species, the app can be used with other species. It strongly urges all recreational fishers to start an account, become familiar with the app and apply the app to other federally managed species when fishing in federal waters.

Sea bass is an example of a federally managed species within the snapper/



A new free smartphone app allows fishermen to report their catch, which better helps federal agencies set season and harvest quotas.

grouper complex that is a near shore fish. Start an account and input your fishing trips. You will find the app useful and enjoyable. Your entries will help us achieve the goal of more accuracy in recording recreational fishing effort and catches

that will result in fair, more accurate management of recreational fishing in the South Atlantic.

To register and start an account, go to www.myfishcount.com. For further information, to make a suggestion, or to

discuss your experience with the app, contact Kelsey Dick by email (Kelsey.dick@safmc.net) or call her at (843) 302-8444 or Chip Collier, Fishery Biologist, (chip.collier@safmc.net) with fishery questions.

A final digital note: Federal Fishing Regulations (SAFMC) moved to the Fish Rules mobile app, effective Jan. 1. The free app has provided regulation information for both recreational and commercial fishermen fishing in federal waters off the South Atlantic Coast.

The council is using the Fish Rules mobile app to keep fishermen updated on federal fishing regulations in the South Atlantic. Fish Rules also hosts state fishing regulations for anglers fishing in state waters.

Information on the mobile regulations application is available from the council's website at: <http://safmc.net/regulations/transition-to-fish-rules-mobile-app/>. Contact Outreach Specialist Cameron Rhodes at cameron.rhodes@safmc.net or call (843) 571-4366 with questions. Recreational fishing regulations for species managed by the SAFMC are also available on its website at: <http://safmc.net/regulations/>.

GROWTH

From Page 4

well received and educational for the kids.

I'm also hopeful that we're going to see a re-dedication to science-based management at the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries. Steve Murphey, the new director (see front page), and Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Michael Regan understand the problems with our fisheries. Steve is a long-time DMF staff member and is not a politician. I look forward to working with him and the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission as they put the resource first, which is what has been needed for a long time.

Join us at CCA NC as we begin a new era of resource and habitat conservation. As the saying goes, "Take care of the fish, and the fishing will take care of itself."

FIREWORKS

From Page 5

HB 867 as the template from the department and the division.

There also is some legislative interest in the request from the Marine Fisheries Commission for lawmakers to consider changes to the current Commercial Fishing License program. This discussion could easily take place under the context of budget and regulatory revisions that are already underway but will more likely end up as part of a study committee discussion for consideration in the 2019 long session.

There will no doubt be a legislative effort by the N.C. Fisheries Association representing commercial interests to introduce bills that would break up the current pro-resource MFC. A petition drive has been ongoing among NCFA members asking the governor to completely disband the current MFC and replace all of the current members.

There certainly again will be legislation seeking to change the make up and authority of the commission. CCA NC will be on the lookout for this and any other efforts to limit the pro-resource movement at the commission. Be prepared for more rhetoric attacking "pro-resource reforms" as "another attempt to deny the public access to fresh, local seafood." We will also continue to support the pro-resource philosophy currently coming from the Governor's Office.

CCA NC event schedule

June 7: Cape Fear Chapter meeting at Fox & Hound, featuring Capt. Seth Vernon, Wilmington

Aug. 11: 3rd Annual Fishing for the Future Youth Tournament, Swansboro

Aug. 25: 4th Annual Sportsman's Conservation Shootout, Drake Landing, Fuquay Varina

Sept. 29: Onslow Bay Chapter Banquet, Swansboro Rotary Club

Oct. 4: Charlotte Chapter Banquet

Oct. 18: Wayne County Chapter Banquet, Goldsboro

Nov. 8: Triad Chapter Banquet, High Point Country Club

Vets spend day fishing with Onslow CCA

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

CCA NC's Onslow Bay Chapter near Camp Lejeune continued its tradition of giving back to veterans of all ages and wars when more than 110 vets, their families, captains and community volunteers enjoyed the fourth annual fall fishing jamboree in Swansboro.

Former chapter president and jamboree stalwart Ray Howell said the weekend event is held twice a year, combining Purple Heart recipients on active duty with the Marine Corps Special Operations Command and Project Healing Waters veterans from around the state.

"We're in a unique situation with the concentration of veterans at Camp Lejeune, so we decided to step up to the plate and this has worked very well for us," Howell said. "Twelve Marines and 40 Project Healing Waters members fished with us in late October."

The Project Healing Waters vets "come from Fayetteville, Raleigh, Durham and up to High Point," Howell continued. "Some suffer from wounds and mental health issues; others are wheelchair-bound. They're from the Korean War through Vietnam, Desert Storm and present conflicts." Last year, the oldest participant was 89, he said.

There were 45 boats and captains who took the veterans fishing this fall, Howell said.

"We covered the whole spectrum of fishing for these guys from chasing stripers in New Bern, to sharks offshore, kings near shore and drum, flounder or trout inshore," he explained. "There's a tremendous support base of individuals who want to give back and treat these guys to a great day of fishing."

This was the fourth year the Onslow Bay Chapter has taken vets fishing. At its regular banquet, the chapter has special fundraising projects that help generate the \$4,000-\$5,000 needed to finance the fishing events, he said.

"It's become self-perpetuating where we use our own energies and resources while raising money for CCA," Howell said.

The vets arrived on a warm Friday in time for a cookout of chicken and tuna steaks provided by the Ruddy Duck restaurant in Morehead City, Howell said. For those who needed to stay overnight, "Waterway Dave" put them up in his Waterway Inn right on the inlet in Swansboro as well as hosting the two dinners. And Chick Fil-A provided sandwiches for the boats.

"We've had very generous support from the community," Howell explained. In return, the chapter hosted a gigantic pig picking for the veterans, captains and all the volunteers who help put on the event.

This year's jamboree was called the "Billy Burch Wide Open," named for a current Marine who once got the party started by releasing a live opossum in the



The Onslow Bay chapter of CCA NC took 110 veterans fishing and then treated them to a cookout during the fourth annual fishing jamboree for members of Marine Corps Special Operations Command and Project Healing Waters. They chased all types of fish from stripers to sharks and enjoyed a great dinner after a day on the water.

large garage where dinner was being cooked, Howell recalled. "He's just wide open," hence the name, Howell added.

Former CCA NC Chairman Bud Abbott praised the

Onslow Bay Chapter saying, "This shows the community we're not just a fishing organization, not one dimensional. Our members care about their communities and make the effort to show it."

Former teacher takes over Western Region

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

With two history degrees from East Carolina University, Joe Neely always thought he was going to be a teacher. Now he finds himself teaching anglers about protecting the state's estuarine and marine resources as CCA NC's Western Regional Director.

Neely, 26, of Raleigh, is charged with developing CCA chapters and fundraising activities west of I-95 while Clark Hutchinson in Pine Knoll shores plays a similar role in Eastern North Carolina.

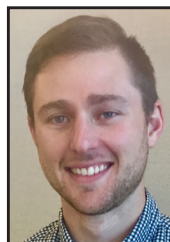
"As the Western Regional Director, it is a priority of mine to expand our reach into the western half of our state," Neely said. "It is important that we make people aware that the waters and fisheries of our coast belong not just to those who

live there, but to all residents of North Carolina."

He said CCA is interested in establishing chapters in Asheville and Winston-Salem, among other places. "It is only with the support of our entire state that the goals of CCA NC can be achieved."

During his tenure at ECU, Neely worked part-time in the Coca-Cola warehouse in Greenville. After graduating in 2015, he took a sales job with Coke in Nashville, TN, after not finding the right fit in teaching.

"Leaving the classroom was a tough decision because it was something that I genuinely enjoyed doing, but I thought that taking the job with Coke would



NEELY

be a wise move for my future," Neely explained. In his two years there, he learned valuable skills but in the end, selling sugar water didn't give him much purpose. "So, when the CCA job presented itself, it seemed like a terrific opportunity to get involved with such a great organization that had a purpose."

The CCANC job immediately appealed to Neely because he is "very passionate about our public resources, and more importantly, our access to those resources. We are very fortunate to live in a country that is rich in public lands and waters that belong to all its citizens."

Public ownership of these resources is unmatched anywhere else in the world, he continued, "and it is so important that we protect and conserve them for the enjoyment of present and future generations. I consider myself very fortunate

to have been presented with this opportunity, and I hope to represent the CCA and all of its members well in my efforts."

For CCANC to succeed, Neely said the non-profit organization relies mostly on the funds raised through banquets. "To grow our revenue from these banquets, we will be striving to boost our outreach and engagement with both members and potential new members through our website and social media, great tools for us to spread our message and to share our successes.

"I encourage everyone to share your pictures and stories from your time spent in the outdoors so that we can feature our members and strengthen our community. Follow us on Instagram @cca_nc and check out our CCA North Carolina Facebook page. Feel free to send me your pictures and stories at joe@ccanc.org.

Gov. Cooper makes new appointments to fisheries commission

Gov. Roy Cooper reappointed a longtime member to the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission to represent commercial fishermen, and also named two new members of the commission who took their seats in January.

Sammy Corbett of Hampstead, the current chairman, holds a fish dealer license and works as a full-time commercial fisherman, primarily for blue crab, oysters and clams. He started his career in 1976 as a first mate on a charter boat before moving over to commercial fishing in 1980. He was first appointed to the commission in August 2014.

Cameron Boltes of Washington is a recreational industry representative, taking Joe Shute's seat when he declined to seek reappointment. Boltes is a captain, product development manager, and properties manager for Grady-White Boats. He previously served as the program director for Reality Ministries in Durham. Boltes graduated from N.C. State University.

Pete Kornegay of Camden was named to the commission's science seat, previously held by Mike Wicker. Kornegay spent more than 30 years with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission serving in roles including fisheries biologist, Anadromous

Fisheries Coordinator and Coastal Region Supervisor. He holds master's and bachelor's degrees in biology.

All three appointments run through June 2020.

They join Mark Gorges, Chuck Laughridge, Janet Rose, Brad Koury, Rick Smith and Allison Wills on the commission. Gorges, Rose and Smith will be up for reappointment or replacement this June.

CCA NC Executive Director David Sneed said he was pleased with the governor's choices. He noted Corbett understands the need to manage our fisheries with future generations of professional

fishermen in mind.

"Boltes and Kornegay both support science-based management of the state's estuarine and marine resources, a change that the Division of Marine Fisheries must make if the agency wants to revive the 18 of 22 managed species currently classified as not viable," Sneed added.

"Gov. Cooper will have three more appointments to make in June, and has a terrific opportunity to reshape the commission so that our fisheries will be protected for future generations of both recreational anglers and commercial fishermen," he said.

Official sunglasses
of the CCA NC



60/40 winner gets \$17,600

Santa came early to CCA member Brett Murphy of Raleigh, when his name was drawn Dec. 15 by a Greenville CPA firm to win \$17,600 in CCA NC's first 60/40 raffle.

Executive Director David Sneed said the raffle benefitted last year's legislative effort by NC Sound Economy to rewrite the 1997 regulations that govern management of the state's estuarine and marine fisheries resources. The present regulations have led to only four out of 22 finfish and shellfish species managed by the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries listed as "viable." The remaining 18 are classified as either "depleted," "concerned" or "unknown" in the division's own words.

CCA NC General Counsel Dr. Tim Nifong played a major role in drafting HB 867 that would have required science-based management rather than a system based on political pressure. The bill, however, was never reported out of committee. Part of CCA NC's support for the NC Sound Economy was to pay Dr. Nifong's bill by devising the 60/40 raffle.

Sneed said CCA NC and its chapters

sold 440 tickets at \$100 each in less than six months. As the winner, Murphy got 40 percent of the total while CCA NC used the balance to pay Nifong for his work that still may be the basis of future legislation.

The raffle was so well received that CCA NC has begun selling its 2018 raffle at banquets and events with the goal of reaching a full \$100,000 in sales.

"This will give us \$60,000 to use for future projects from legislation to oyster reefs," said CCA NC Chairman Billy Byrd.

To spur ticket sales throughout the year, Sneed said early buyers will be entered into monthly drawings for CCA merchandise.

"Each \$100 raffle ticket bought gets you an entry for the year-end cash drawing and entered for monthly merchandise drawings."

Jim Yeames of Newport won the March 60/40 raffle drawing and picked up a new TFO spinning rod. In addition to banquet and office sales, tickets can be purchased on CCA NC's website at www.ccanc.org/donate/ or call the CCA office at (919) 781-3474.



Brett Murphy, left, receives an early Christmas present from David Sneed.

Resource Warrior campaign targets new members for CCA NC

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

Calling all coastal anglers: Are you tired of spending a great weekend on the water that could cost several hundred dollars but you catch only small or no fish? Then take some action and become a Resource Warrior.

That's the message from CCA NC Membership Committee Co-chairman Ron McCoy of Hampstead. Alarmed after studying the steadily declining trends of fish landings, McCoy wanted to try reaching the public through a different, more aggressive approach. His wife, Paula, sketched the state fish with a set of fangs ready to take a bite out of general apathy toward declining fisheries, so the Resource Warrior entered the fray, McCoy said.

The CCA NC Membership Committee ran an ad in the Fisherman's Post newspaper in early May calling for fishermen to join CCA and become a Resource Warrior. Some people might be asking what did we mean by "Resource Warrior."

"Well, for us, a Resource Warrior is a fisherman who is also a conservationist, one who is willing to put the health of the resource first," explained McCoy. A Resource Warrior is a change agent, willing to be engaged, and someone who cares about the future of fishing and our coastal environment, he added.

Furthermore, a Resource Warrior is willing to fight to modernize North Carolina's fisheries legislation and believes this modern approach includes conservation of our coastal resources as opposed to maximum

yield, McCoy continued.

"There is a huge difference between a Resource Warrior and resource fisherman," he said. "They both fish, but the resource fisherman just goes to the bar after fishing and complains while the Warrior calls his or her state legislators, writes the governor, recruits more Warriors and never gives up on supporting the resource."

McCoy recalled someone a lot smarter than he is once said, "Never, never be afraid to do what is right, especially if the well-being of a person or animal is at stake. Society's punishments are small compared to the wounds we inflict on our soul when we look the other way."

Don't look the other way. Join the Coastal Conservation Association. Become a Resource Warrior, he concluded. "Remember, no fish, no fishermen."

