

Storm payouts scrutinized

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries has paid \$11,474,472 to 1,171 individual commercial fishermen and commercial fishing companies that lost revenue last fall when Hurricane Florence hit the Crystal Coast, as shown by DMF records.

The data shows that 10 percent of the applicants received 61 percent of the payouts, said Bert Owens, CCA NC president.

Breaking it down further, 14 individuals representing themselves or multiple LLCs received more than \$100,000 each for 26 percent of the funds totaling almost \$3 million.

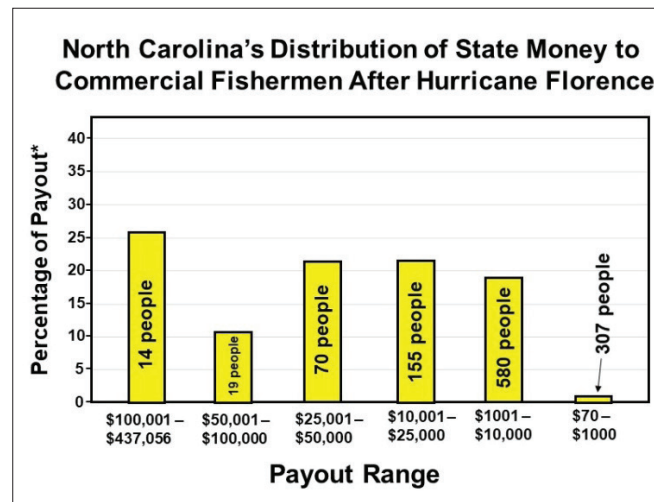
On the other side of the disbursement ledger, of the 1,171 individuals receiving assistance from the state,

887 of them received \$10,000 or less while 307 received \$1,000 or less. This disparity is further illustrated by payments to large companies, Owens said.

A little more than \$1.1 million went to three parent entities. Four LLCs owned by Cooke Seafood in Wanchese received the largest amount of money in 14 payments totaling \$437,056. Sammie Eugene Williams of Swan Quarter received the second most payouts with three companies getting \$366,109 in 12 payments. Lee Bland Williams of Swan Quarter received \$300,078 in eight payments.

After the hurricane, the legislature in its third special session last year gave the Division of Marine Fisheries \$11.6 million to compensate commercial fishermen and shellfish harvesters who could show reduced

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Laughridge reflects on MFC; thinks fisheries future bleak

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

After spending six years on the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission, Chuck Laughridge doesn't feel he accomplished much and is frustrated by the failure of all stakeholders to "do the right thing" for the resource.

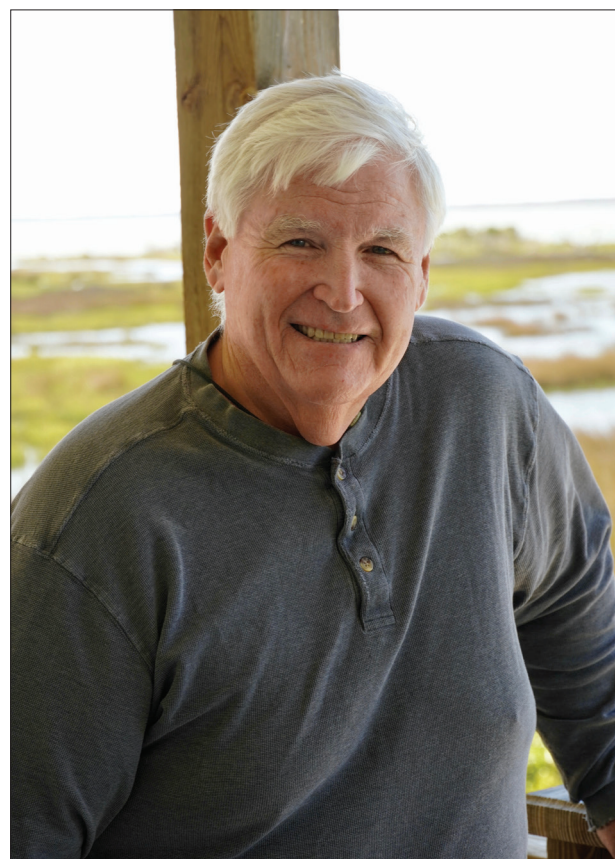
"Without change, the outlook for the state's fisheries is bleak," he predicted.

Laughridge has a long history in fighting for the resource. In the mid 1980s, he was instrumental in starting the Roanoke Valley Striped Bass Coalition that showed legislators, MFC members and writers the value of the fishery by getting them on the water. Rules were put in place that brought the striped bass back. He was active in Ducks Unlimited and the Wild Turkey Federation, but an outdoor writer, George Reiger from Field and Stream mag-

azine, told him the best dollar spent would be with the Coastal Conservation Association. Laughridge went to a fundraising banquet in Nashville and became a Life Member.

After serving on the CCA NC executive board for years, an old Rocky Mount high school buddy, the late Bill Daughtridge, approached Chuck about appointment to the MFC by Gov. Pat McCrory. Daughtridge was McCrory's transition team leader and later became Secretary of Administration. Laughridge was first slated to be named chairman but several friends advised him he could have more input if he were not chairman so he accepted an at-large seat. He was reappointed to a second three-year term, moving to a recreational seat. For four of the six years he was on the MFC, Laughridge served as vice-chairman.

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Chuck Laughridge, shown here at home on Harkers Island, will continue fighting for fisheries in North Carolina after serving six years on the Marine Fisheries Commission.

Photo by Rip Woodin

PAYOUTS

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landings in October and November 2018 verified by trip ticket data from the previous three years.

To be eligible for reimbursement, an applicant had to hold a Standard Commercial Fishing License, a Retired Standard Commercial Fishing License, or a North Carolina Resident Shellfish License anytime from Sept. 1 through Nov. 30, 2018.

The DMF sent packets to eligible fishermen who had lower landings in October and November 2018 as compared to their average landings from the same months in 2015-17.

No hurricane relief money was allocated for any recreational fishing industry of any kind — “for hire” guides, marinas, tackle shops or otherwise, said David Sneed, executive director of CCA NC.

“The response on why there was no hurricane relief money for the recreational industry has always been ‘because they didn’t ask for any,’” he added.

Commercial fishermen went to Raleigh and demanded state assistance for not being able to harvest a public trust resource while the recreational industry relied on what they could get from private insurance and pulled themselves up by their boot straps, Sneed said.

Capt. Tom Roller, owner of Waterdog Guide Service in Atlantic Beach, said he didn’t realize the state would be willing to help guides, both in and off-shore.

Roller said he and other guides lost as much as 20-30 percent of their income since they couldn’t fish the normally busy fall.

“It crushed me,” he said.

Gov. Roy Cooper asked U.S. Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross to declare a disaster for the fishing industry that could help guides, tackle shops, marinas and related businesses. Something similar was done after Hurricane Sandy, but it took two to three years for fishermen to see anything, and it wasn’t much, Roller said.

“I’m still feeling the effects of the storm (Florence) because you can’t recover from a loss like this in one year,” he added.

The legislature approved \$1 million for the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to remove derelict vessels on the Outer Banks left from this fall’s Hurricane Dorian. No other money was appropriated to help recreational industry guides who are still suffering from last year’s storms.

What makes little sense about this “compensation” is that the large corporate fish dealers controlling N.C.’s shrimp trawling industry received the largest payouts, Bert Owens continued. Yet 2018 was a banner year for commercial shrimp harvest at 9.7 million pounds

with only four years in the last twenty having higher landings — two of those being 2016 and 2017.

A January *Virginian-Pilot* article summed up this abundance:

Last week, the Capt. Ralph hauled in 30,000 pounds, the most ever for the crew, said Ashley O’Neal, manager of O’Neal’s Sea Harvest. In the past, 12,000 pounds was a good catch no matter where it came from, he said.

“This 30,000-pound stuff is unheard of,” O’Neal said. “We are seeing a lot of shrimp.”

The story went on to say that in 2016, North Carolina shrimpers harvested a record 13.2 million pounds, worth \$28.2 million. It was a 45 percent increase over the previous year, according to state statistics. The record fell again in 2017 with a harvest of 13.9 million pounds worth \$29.6 million. The 10-year average is just short of 8 million pounds. Most of the catch comes from estuaries like the Pamlico Sound.

James Ralph Craddock of Manns Harbor owns the Capt. Ralph. Craddock is president of Roanoke Fish Co., Inc., which received four payments totaling \$102,713 in Florence relief. As part of the 2010 rockfish case, Craddock pleaded guilty on November 28, 2016, in federal court to illegal harvest and sale of Atlantic striped bass from the waters off N.C.’s coast.

It was Sammie William’s trawler the

Lady Samara that was boarded by the U.S. Coast Guard off Oregon Inlet in February 2010 finding 173 Atlantic Striped Bass. The captain later admitted to illegally taking the fish from the Exclusive Economic Zone.

Eleven other fishermen pleaded guilty to similar charges, most of whom received Florence assistance. Bryan Henry Daniels of Belhaven who was sentenced on Aug. 8, 2017, to five years of probation and restitution of \$67,190 in the case, received four Florence payments totaling \$219,833.

Some of the largest payouts are to wealthy business owners. The Garland Christopher Fulcher family in Oriental received 21 payouts with eight companies getting \$287,392. Brent Fulcher, president of the N.C. Fisheries Association, a commercial fishing industry lobbying group, received 17 payouts with six companies getting \$281,477. Stevenson Weeks, a Beaufort attorney who represents the N.C. Fisheries Association, received four payouts for \$9,303 with his son also receiving four payouts for \$5,116.

CCA NC President Owens said he was not “surprised to find that those receiving the biggest payouts were fat cat fish barons, who contributed to political campaigns, rather than the hard working, small time fishermen who were really hurt by the storm. The guides and tackle shops, that were also hurt badly, were ignored as usual.”

Charlotte CCA chapter hosts oyster/beer get together

By Craig Murden
CCA NC Charlotte Chapter

The Charlotte Chapter of CCA NC partnered for a day of seafood enjoyment with Sycamore Brewing in the South End area with proceeds from the sale of three Sycamore beers donated to the state organization.

Oysters Carolina from Harkers Island shucked, grilled and served sustainable, farm-raised oysters from coastal North Carolina. The line was nearly a half-block long most of the day. Local food trucks specializing in seafood also were present.

Ryan Bethea, owner of Oysters Carolina, grows highly acclaimed oysters and harvests them all by hand without machinery via sheer muscle and kayaks.

“It was great to be in Charlotte and have such a positive turnout from people that appreciate what we do. We were non-stop busy all day,” said Bethea.

CCA NC Charlotte chapter members staffed a display booth and a live electronic raffle where attendees could purchase items on their phones to support CCA’s habitat efforts. The booth was a chance to share the news about recent artificial oyster reefs that have been built with great success in North Carolina waters.

One success in particular is the ongoing New River Oyster Highway near Jacksonville. Matt Campbell of Natrx volunteered his day to share how he and his company create the artificial reef structures through their own proprietary 3D printing process. Campbell explained

the effectiveness of their structures.

“Concrete is essentially calcium carbonate that is the same makeup of oyster shells, which means it’s an ideal substrate for new oyster growth,” he said. “Whether in North Carolina or in our coral reef project in Hawaii, the material really works well and has seemingly endless potential.”

Visitors were able to see and feel the reef bases, in various sizes to include versions that had oysters attached. Many questions were about how oysters filter the algae from coastal waters to improve overall water quality.

Current CCA NC Charlotte Chapter president, Charles Knight, was there with Phil Dauksys, Adam Jennings, and Craig Murden. They were joined by Joe

Neely, the Western Regional Director for CCA NC.

“Our goal is to make people aware of things that we can do to improve our coastal habitat,” Neely said. “The oyster population in North Carolina is down to 2 percent of what we had only a few decades ago. A lot of people aren’t aware of the benefits that oyster habitat brings to our coastal fisheries and overall water quality. We really enjoyed sharing the exciting ways in which CCA NC is working to build more of it.

“Cleaner water is so helpful to the health of our estuaries as well as adding back oyster reefs that have been removed over the years. It’s gratifying to see how many people love oysters and had a genuine interest in what we came to share.

Let 'em Spawn generates strong emotions

By Jack Igelman

Reprinted Courtesy of Carolina Public Press

A proposed coastal fishing regulation designed to protect species is drawing sharp differences of opinion from some of those affected.

Some think the measure is necessary to prevent continued loss of important fish species. Others think the measure won't work as intended and could prove catastrophic for coastal fishing industries.

Tom Roller is a professional fishing guide in Beaufort who brings his clients to sounds, bays, inlets and creeks to cast for red drum, speckled sea trout, bluefish and Spanish mackerel. But his bread and butter, he said, is Southern flounder.

"They are extremely important to my business, but we don't catch Southern flounder like we used to because they aren't here anymore," he said. "They are an example of how to overfish something and not do anything."

The recreational Southern flounder fishery is closed for the rest of the year because the catch exceeded its target defined by the Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan.

Commercial landings of Southern flounder, according to the N.C. Wildlife Federation, have declined 88 percent over the past two decades. A landing is the amount of fish harvested at sea and brought to land. In addition, other salt-water species that spawn in estuaries – a partially enclosed coastal body of water with a connection to the ocean – have experienced a similar decline, such as bluefish (78 percent), spot (94 percent) and Atlantic croaker (85 percent).

These declines, said Dr. Louis Daniel a marine scientist with the N.C. Wildlife Federation and former director of the N.C. Marine Fisheries Division, are casualties of commercial shrimp fishing operations in the nursery grounds of many of the species, such as flounder, which are in peril.

A large number of juvenile fish that migrate from spawning grounds in estuarine rivers to mature in fishing grounds – such as the Pamlico Sound, the state's largest shrimp fishery – are unintentionally caught in shrimp trawls



Photo by Jack Igelman / Carolina Public Press

Louis Daniel of the N.C. Wildlife Federation at Radio Island Marina in Morehead City.

– funnel-shaped nets that are dragged to capture shrimp – before the fish are mature enough to reproduce. The same thing is happening with gill nets, net walls that hang vertically from fishing vessels.

Daniel estimates that for each pound of shrimp harvested, another four pounds of unwanted fish, called bycatch, perish.

"We are the only state from Maryland to Texas that trawls in nursery grounds," said Daniel. "Once the juvenile fish enter the sound, trawlers go back and forth every day. It's a rare (juvenile fish) that makes it from the inland nursing grounds through the sound during the trawling season and offshore to spawn."

Researchers have raised the prospect that some species could eventually be extirpated from the fishery without action.

"This is the best example I know of the tragedy of the commons," said Daniel. "We are the textbook tragedy."

Daniel's organization has created legislation, with support from the Coastal Conservation Association of North Carolina, to urge action. Last spring, HB

483 – also known as the "Let 'em Spawn Before They are Gone" bill – passed the N.C. House of Representatives in June by a 58-47 vote and was assigned to the Committee on Rules and Operation of the Senate. The Senate will most likely hear the bill in the 2020 short session.

David Sneed, the executive director of the CCA NC, said inshore trawling has been a problem for "decades" and other states have banned or severely restricted the practice. The last meaningful reform to the North Carolina coastal fishing practices was the Fisheries Reform Act of 1997. Sneed said that it's a "pretty good document," but it needs revision.

In 2017, conservationists led an unsuccessful attempt to update the 1997 legislation. This year, said Sneed, their strategy is to pursue a segment of the 2017 reform effort, which became the Let 'em Spawn bill. The bill establishes a minimum size limit for significant marine fisheries species to ensure that juvenile fish at the size limit have a 75 percent probability of reaching maturity and can therefore spawn at least once. This is what marine scientists refer to as L75.

"It's a compromise, but it's a small step in the right direction for fisheries reform," he said.

A core part of their legislative strategy, said Tim Gestwicki, CEO of the N.C. Wildlife Federation, is to present fishery reform as a statewide issue.

"It's not a coastal issue," Gestwicki said. "This is a statewide public trust resource issue. For many years, it has been left alone to the coastal legislators and the pressure they receive. So far, the commercial interests have won the day."

In 2018, 9.7 million pounds of shrimp were harvested at a value of \$20 million, which is 25.7 percent of all commercial finfish and shellfish harvested in North Carolina, according to the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries.

According to the N.C. Fisheries Association, the state has one of the nation's "most rigorous legal and regulatory" management systems. The web of regulations, the association said, "stymies growth and creates unnecessary barriers."

In September, Brent Fulcher, a fourth-generation shrimper spoke to CPP during a break from guiding tours during the N.C. Seafood Festival in Morehead City aboard his fishing vessel, the Micah Bell. Fulcher is the chairman of the board of directors of the N.C. Fisheries Association Inc., and operates a fleet of 10 shrimp boats and two commercial seafood operations in Craven and Carteret counties. His businesses employ 40 and support roughly 200-300 independent commercial fishermen.

"I don't think Let 'em Spawn is the right way to manage (the fishery)," he said. "We're the ones that put in the two-day conservation limit. We are the ones that went to the drawing board and figured out how to limit some areas."

"If you look at a fisherman being a farmer of the sea, he's got to make sure he's doing certain things to promote growth for the next year. We rotate out of certain fisheries to allow that resource to be sustainable. There are so many things that this industry does that people don't realize."

According to a document published by the NCFA, "Shrimp By-Catch: Bridging the Gap" written by Beaufort attorney

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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Unfair fisheries management fails anglers

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

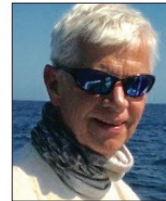
As stated in N.C.'s Fisheries Reform Act of 1997, one of the duties of the Marine Fisheries Commission is to manage our fisheries fairly for recreational and commercial groups. Anyone familiar with the process over the years knows this has not been the case.

A review of the agenda or minutes from any of the MFC meetings for more than 20 years shows little to no mention of items to improve or increase access to our fisheries for anglers.

The exceptions are when it comes time for a cut in creel limits or seasons. At times, the MFC, enabled by Division of Marine Fisheries recommendations, has wrongly exceeded its prescribed duty.

For example, when the Legislature was considering a good bill to make speckled trout, red drum and striped bass gamefish, the MFC voted to oppose the bill and communicated this with Raleigh. This was not managing for both groups, but managing against recreational anglers. Rightfully, they should have taken no position at all.

Passage of the last spotted sea trout management plan cut anglers to four fish at 14 inches from 10 fish at 12 inches. DMF numbers showed that the large majority of commercial trout trips netted less than 50 fish. Therefore, netters were "cut" to 75 fish, and it is documented that their catches have not declined, while anglers have gone from 10 fish in our box to four. Again, this is not fair nor equitable management.



**BERT
OWENS**
President

Fortunately the change to a 14-inch size limit from 12 inches has meant that 80 percent of trout have now spawned before being caught. Consensus is that this has allowed the stock to recover quicker after cold stun events. This model of letting the majority of trout spawn before being kept mirrors the goal of a bill before the Legislature called "Let 'em Spawn."

House Bill 483, which now rests in the state senate, would allow poorly managed and depleted species in our waters, like spot and croaker, to reproduce before being shipped to the fish market or wasted. The result, after only a few years, would be more and bigger fish for both groups and fair management as prescribed by the fisheries act.

The current unfair management allows millions of juvenile spot and croaker to be shoveled overboard dead from trawlers destroying our sounds. Like the gamefish bill, the Division of Marine Fisheries and its parent, the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, have taken a position in Raleigh against "Let 'em Spawn."

How is letting millions of fish be dumped overboard to rot in our waters every year environmental quality? Are they doing this because of big political donations from fat cat fish house and industrial trawl owners? Surely the regulators wouldn't let the people's fish be wasted to enrich a few. You decide.

It's spot season now. As I drive home over the bridge to Beaufort, I see six boats fishing for spot where there used to be 60!

Tens of millions of fish die in shrimp trawls

GUEST OPINION

In the face of staggering data documenting the decline in spot, grey trout and croaker, the Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) in late August voted against considering rule-making proposals submitted by N.C. Wildlife Federation (NCWF) to curb the bycatch of tens of millions of juvenile fish by shrimp trawling in N.C.'s estuarine waters and protect habitat areas essential to valuable fish species.

Without better management practices in place for our sounds and estuarine ecosystems, commercial shrimp trawling results in the catch of unsustainably high levels of non-target (bycatch) species. Trawling surveys have shown for every pound of shrimp caught in North Carolina waters, about four pounds of finfish and other organisms are caught and killed in shrimp trawls and discarded as bycatch.

Tens of millions of fish fall victim to shrimp trawls each year. North Carolina's sounds and estuaries are highly productive

nursery areas that provide vital habitat to juvenile fish before these fish become mature and have an opportunity to spawn and reproduce. Shrimp trawling effort is highest in North Carolina's sensitive sounds; trawling destroys fragile habitat areas and devastates substantial quantities of juvenile fish.

North Carolina is the only state on the east coast that allows trawling in these sensitive, highly productive, in-shore habitat areas. Over the past several decades, the public trust has been wholly violated because the state has consistently failed to enact precautionary, meaningful rules that would lead to recovery of the state's valuable marine fisheries resource.

Conservationists and anglers were hopeful for progress as Gov. Roy Cooper ran on a conservation-focused fisheries manage-

ment platform during his campaign.

The governor had an opportunity to follow through on these campaign commitments when he appointed nine members to the MFC. However, a majority of Cooper's appointees voted against the Federation's proposal outlining new rules, which would have provided protections for valuable species and vital habitat areas.

The annual fishing mortality on these juvenile fish from shrimp trawling bycatch is unsustainable and has led to major declines in the health of these fish populations over the past 20 years. The primary species taken as bycatch in the shrimp trawl fishery - including spot, croaker, grey trout and summer and Southern flounder - have declined precipitously since the Fisheries Reform Act of 1997 was implemented. Landings of the fish subject to this bycatch mortality have decreased over the past

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Fisheries summit sends positive signal

The fishing in coastal North Carolina has been pretty hot lately. Don't believe me? Just check the Facebook or Instagram page of your favorite Down East guide for all the pictures of speckled trout limits being posted or shots of door-mat size flounder and giant drum.

This hot run for recreational anglers has most guide services advertising the need for clients to start booking trips for next year. It has been many years since I have seen this type of excitement around the recreational fishing community so it is a great time to reflect on how we got here and. From my perspective, it is all about taking just a little bit of pressure off the resource.

Some of that reduced pressure comes from regulatory changes, but a lot of it comes from Mother Nature. In September and October of 2018, we experienced back-to-back hurricanes in Michael and Florence that left extensive damage to our coastal communities primarily from Wrightsville Beach through the Neuse River area and across nearly all of eastern North Carolina.

These storms kept both commercial and recreational fishermen off the water for much of the fourth quarter in 2018. The normal pressure on our coastal fishery evaporated so these fish escaped harvest to spawn, grow and return in 2019 bigger and in more abundance. Prior to the hurricanes, we experienced a cold stun event that closed speckled trout harvest in late 2017 and into 2018, which also allowed the surviving fish to escape harvest, grow, spawn and return

bigger and in greater numbers.

Of equal importance in the recruitment of speckled trout was the increase in harvest size to 14 inches that allows these highly fecund fish to spawn twice before they are harvested, making them the poster child for support of the "Let 'em Spawn" legislation. New restrictions on gill nets enacted by the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission to protect striped bass on the Tar-Pamlico and Neuse rivers also have contributed to easing pressure on our fisheries, allowing many species beyond striped bass like speckled trout and flounder to migrate back into the upper reaches of these rivers as they are not caught and killed by the anchored large mesh gill nets anymore. The harvest closure on striped bass and flounder will certainly be another contributing factor to the growth of our coastal fisheries that will lead to more record years like we have seen in 2018.

The reports of good fishing led me during the August MFC meeting to urge MFC Chairman Rob Bizzell and recreational industry Commissioner Cameron Boltes, Chief Deputy DEQ Secretary John Nicholson and DMF Director Steve Murphey that now was the time to be talking about PROACTIVE measures to protect and conserve these fish stocks while they were in good shape. Typically, fisheries managers always have waited for stocks to go into the tank then are forced to take REACTIVE measures like total moratoriums or harvest closures that are last ditch efforts to save a failing stock.



DAVID SNEED
Executive Director



Photo by Rip Woodin

South Carolina angler Henry Fishburne enjoys the bonanza of North Carolina's fall fishing.

High on our list was the speckled trout fishery that has been tremendous of late, yet we all know we can expect it to get hammered by commercial strike netters as the water temperatures drop and many of these fish overwinter in the small creeks off the Neuse, Pamlico, Pungo and particularly, the Bay rivers. Reports of strike netters wiping out large schools of trout in the Bay River already are coming in daily.

We finally were able to get a group together in October that included representatives from the Department of Environmental Quality, the Division of Marine Fisheries, the Marine Fisheries Commission, including Chairman Rob Bizzell and commercial industry Com-

missioner Doug Cross, Glenn Skinner from the N.C. Fisheries Association and CCA NC. There was consensus among the fishing groups that user conflicts in coastal creeks where anglers and commercial fishermen are both targeting speckled trout was definitely a real issue that needed tougher regulations.

The commercial representatives introduced some compromises that included spatial restrictions, seasonal area closures and daytime closures, but the Division deferred any action to the User Conflict Resolution Process, or more preferably, the Fisheries Management Plan review that is scheduled to begin in 2020. There's nothing proactive about waiting.

Another area that received easy support around the table was the agreement that a lack of law enforcement personnel and authority severely limited the N.C. DMF Marine Patrol's ability to protect our coastal resources. Patrol commander Col. Carter Witten commented that not only do they lack the numbers of officers they need to provide adequate protection of speckled trout in these creeks, lower than average salaries and lack of full police powers are also contributing factors to the overall lack of protection for coastal fisheries.

CCA NC committed to making this a legislative priority during the upcoming short session including discussion with DEQ about using the language in Senate Bill 554 that would give broader police powers to Marine Patrol officers. Long-term efforts will be required to lobby for legislative funding for budget increases

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SHRIMP TRAWLS

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two decades from 38.5 million pounds to 4.9 million pounds, a reduction of 87.3 percent.

These species are not only economically valuable, they also serve an important role in ecosystem functioning.

NCWF submitted a broader rule-making proposal two years ago, which the MFC, then under the Mc-

Croy Administration appointments, adopted. DMF prepared a fiscal note greatly exaggerating the cost of implementing the broader conservation measures, which subsequently halted further consideration of the proposal.

Now, this new proposal, which is narrower in scope has been voted down by the current administration's MFC. DEQ and Division of Marine Fisheries administrators opposed considering the revised conservation proposal that was narrowed in scope to reduce the anticipated cost. The entire new Petition for Rule may be read here: [https://ncwf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-](https://ncwf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-05-20-Petition-for-RM-amended-updated.pdf)

[05-20-Petition-for-RM-amended-updated.pdf](https://ncwf.org/wp-content/uploads/2019-05-20-Petition-for-RM-amended-updated.pdf).

DEQ and DMF similarly opposed the "Let 'em Spawn" bill (H483) in the legislature, which passed the House and is now in the Senate. Their opposition to this bill has left conservationists bewildered with regards to the basis for opposition to resource conservation measures.

The failure of MFC to act on these conservation proposals is extremely disappointing and unfortunate for the resource but NCWF will not halt its efforts for serious reform on this conservation priority. Let 'em Spawn...Before they're Gone!

LET 'EM SPAWN

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Steven L. Weeks Sr., nearly 1 million acres of internal coastal waters are closed to trawling, just under half of the total coastal waters. In addition, it is estimated that only 10-15 percent of coastal waters are trawled. In all, the document claims that survival rates of fish captured in shrimp trawls is 22-48 percent.

During a tour, Fulcher demonstrated the operation of a "fish excluder device," one of several bycatch reduction devices aboard the Micah Bell. The FED allows bycatch to escape through an opening in the net. The N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries requires use of the devices. Testing in 2015 showed reductions of bycatch up to 38 percent, according to the NCFA.

Daniel, of the N.C. Wildlife Federation, is skeptical. He explained to CPP that in the 1970s, '80s, and '90s, the capacity of the commercial fishing fleet increased due to better engines, navigational tools and stronger, cheaper netting.

"The impression is that once a juvenile fish gets shot from the net, it grows up and spawns, but what happens is that 20 minutes later another trawler comes along," he said. "What they refuse to acknowledge is that the number of fish that survive an individual tow is meaningless. What is meaningful is what leaves the inlet and goes offshore and contributes to the population."

The agency that manages North Carolina's coastal fisheries said that the efforts of commercial fishermen to reduce bycatch have been meaningful.

In North Carolina, coastal fisheries are managed by the Division of Marine Fisheries of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality.

Kathy Rawls, chief of the Fisheries Management Section of the DMF, doesn't dispute that North Carolina allows more fishing techniques than other states but said the composition of the state's estuaries and fisheries are not comparable to other states. The Pamlico Sound, for example, is the largest estuarine system along the Eastern Seaboard.

She also said that gill netting, while banned in other states, is "highly regulated" in North Carolina. Gill



Photo by Jack Igelman / Carolina Public Press

Brent Fulcher aboard the Micah Bell at the N.C. Seafood Festival in Morehead City.

nets aren't "necessarily as harmful as they are made out to be" if used appropriately, Rawls said. "Shrimp trawl bycatch is something the division works on and has made huge improvements over the last several years and will be a huge part of future management plans," she said.

Rawls also does not dispute that shrimp trawling has an impact on populations of fish caught; however, "the state looks at things other than just landings to determine the population status" of various fish.

"It's difficult to put a number on what level of bycatch is out there and what effect it has on some of these populations," Rawls said.

For example, she said, croaker have "such a high mortality rate as juveniles that it's hard to put a num-

ber on it."

Her primary concern with the Let 'em Spawn bill is the "across the board" application of the bill's proposed size limit, L75.

"There are so many things that go into selecting the most appropriate size limit, but it is not just a sweeping broad brush that is L75. I don't know of any other fishery management entity that manages fish in that way," she said. "Right tool, just the wrong method."

Daniel of the N.C. Wildlife Federation disagrees.

"Many (states) use size limits at or near the size at maturity," he said. "That's the point. Many use L100, which means all fish have reached the size they

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Official sunglasses
of the CCA NC



Carter named Sportsman of the Year

The North Carolina Wildlife Federation announced the winners of the 56th Annual Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards and CCA NC Legacy Life Member, and Executive Board Vice President Rocky Carter has been honored as the 2018 Sportsman of the Year.

The press release said, "This year's winners are exceedingly notable conservation devotees who work for wildlife, habitat and those who cherish natural resources. They are land stewardship champions, water advocates and leaders in the preservation of unique ecosystems. The award winners include agency professionals, elected officials, dedicated volunteers and organizations rising to the challenge."

As the Sportsman of the Year, the release said Rocky is "passionate about hunting and fishing; Carter epitomizes paying it forward by working for better management and enforcement of rules for fish and wildlife. Carter works to engage youth in fishing, spearheads Wounded Warrior events and champions habitat restoration projects. He relishes and practices the responsibility as a sportsman to make sure our public trust resources are there for future generations to enjoy."

CCA NC was proud to support Carter's nomination as Sportsman of the Year, writing in part that, "Rocky Carter is that rare individual who never enters into anything half-heartedly or without careful consideration of the consequences and the expected outcome. Such was Rocky's decision to get involved with conservation of our coastal marine resources and their habitat.

"Rocky Carter grew from a humble beginning in western North Carolina to become a successful businessman. All along this journey, Rocky developed a love for fishing whether it be fashioning homemade tackle so he could fish the lakes and ponds of his childhood to where he was always ready and willing to take a friend fishing in his adopted home of Swansboro. It was this journey that led Rocky to the understanding that to those who are given so much, so much is expected. The same spirit that drives true conservationists who understand that it is our responsibility as sportsmen to make sure our public trust resources are there for our future generations to enjoy."

This spirit of conservation led Carter first to the Coastal Conservation Association where he wasted no time becoming a Life Member. He later attained both the Heritage and Legacy Life Member levels, and helped start the Onslow Bay CCA NC Chapter in Swansboro. This chapter quickly became one of the largest N.C. chapters in both members and money raised through their annual banquet.

But the greatest legacy of the Onslow Bay Chapter is the fellowship and service of the local membership that fishes together on a regular basis and is the leader among CCA NC chapters in community service. The chapter hosts two weekends each year, in the spring and fall, to take active duty and retired military personnel fishing. The events provide a social outing in thanks



Photo by Rip Woodin

Rocky Carter, far right, works on the New River Oyster Highway project with scientist, filmmaker and CCA volunteer.

for their service and as a means for many to escape the memories of their sacrifice.

The chapter also hosts a free kids fishing tournament in August called the Fishing for the Future Tournament that gets more than 100 kids out on the water each summer bringing a whole new generation to the joy of outdoor activities and conservation. And Carter is the glue that holds all of this together.

The nomination also read, "When the City of Jacksonville came up with the idea for the New River Oyster Highway as a way to introduce new oyster reefs in the New River, Rocky was quick to jump in with his support and leadership. The project brought together support from the City of Jacksonville, Camp Lejeune, the UNC

Institute for Marine Sciences, the N.C. Wildlife Habitat Foundation and CCA NC.

"The project involved raising \$1.4 million, the use of cutting-edge science and hands-on volunteer labor to build six new oyster reefs and put more than 4 million new oysters into the water to help improve water quality; restart new oyster populations in the New River; and provide new fish habitat."

Carter was part of the small band of volunteers from the City of Jacksonville, the UNC IMS and CCA NC who worked for two weeks on the placement of the new structure and oysters that ultimately will form the New River

LAUGHRIDGE

From Page 1

The politics of fisheries management is putting our marine resources in danger, he inferred.

"The Fisheries Reform Act of 1997 is one of the most powerful pieces of legislation ever enacted, but it's been bastardized," Laughridge explained.

The bias toward maximum harvest for the commercial industry led to threats several years ago by legislators like Bob Steinburg, Jerry Tillman, Norman Sanderson and Bill Cooke when the MFC talked about cutting back on the Southern flounder harvest. They threatened to sponsor legislation that would emasculate the MFC.

"They were very difficult to talk to," he said. "Their idea of a fisheries discussion was a prayer breakfast with Jerry Schill (lobbyist and former director for the commercial N.C. Fisheries Association)."

Laughridge faults the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries for its inertia in dealing with crises like the crashing Southern flounder population, striped bass, gray trout and other species popular with recreational fishermen. A Fisheries Management Plan that governs allowable catches on a species shouldn't take five years to update and be peer reviewed, he said.

"It should only take two years max; they could do it in 14 months, but that would mean DMF employees would have to change and they don't like change," he added. "Their excuse is they're overworked and underpaid."



Photo by Rip Woodin

Chuck Laughridge, at home with his hunting dogs on Harkers Island, feels an upcoming economic study funded by the commercial industry could open some eyes and be a catalyst for a change in management philosophy that would grow a robust fishery for all stakeholders.

North Carolina's DMF has long been recognized as having good scientific data.

"It's the gold standard compared to other states," Laughridge said. "It's supposed to be used to make decisions, rules and policies, but they don't use it. It's like having Hank Aaron as a high school third base coach."

If the DMF had used its data to recommend reductions in the Southern flounder harvest in 2015 when early numbers showed a 42-percent reduction in catch was needed, "we wouldn't be where we

are now facing a 72-percent reduction" to stop overfishing, Laughridge said. Instead a suit by the NCFCA blocked a supplemental flounder plan. "The suits are all gone now, and the commercial industry is in worse shape than they were."

He didn't leave recreational anglers unscathed either.

"There are too many people on the commercial and recreational sides that want to manage fisheries without data, especially flounder," he said. "You can't have anything without limits."

There's never been a check written

from a bank account to a politician that says anything about the economic benefit of the fisheries, he said.

If the legislature changes anything on fisheries management, it makes one side the apparent winner whether it's Brent Fulcher, a big commercial operator, or Allen Gant, a recreational proponent.

"These guys (politicians) get money from both sides, so they're tickled to death to have a problem. Likewise at DMF, if there were no problems, they'd be out of a job," he continued.

Laughridge even took the Marine Fisheries Commission to task for its inefficient operation. Fishing was a "\$2.2 billion industry, now it's close to \$4 billion but the MFC only works 36 hours a year to manage the industry. Look how often the UNC Board of Governors meet or the Department of Transportation board. We should gather monthly, and the same for the advisory committees."

The MFC has one of the largest rule-books in the world, he added. "That's very frustrating." It was also frustrating when Michael Regan, secretary of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality that oversees the DMF, suggested North Carolina should look at other states to see how they manage Southern flounder. Then Regan sharply criticized the MFC for overriding DMF Director Steven Murphey and ordering him to take all gill nets out of the Neuse River when the striped bass season was closed earlier this year to save a large year class of fish.

Laughridge said he can't point to any big accomplishments while on the commission. Yes, they saved two unusu-

See LAUGHRIDGE, 12



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Fall albies: Bruised egos, broken rods

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

Chasing false albacore at Cape Lookout is a bucket list trip many hundreds of anglers make every fall, but it takes a reliable boat and knowledge of the fishery to hook into this speedy relative of the tuna family. If the bait doesn't come close to shore, then neither do the albies, leaving the beach fisherman with lots of casting practice.

Finding Fat Albert feeding on a bait ball of bay anchovies or silversides can be as easy as heading out Beaufort Inlet at Morehead City. Other days, guides might cover several hundred miles looking for the elusive fish that must move constantly, even while resting at night, to force oxygen over their gills since they have no swim bladder. This rapacious appetite and constant movement creates a very muscular fish that never gives up.

In the fall as the water temperature begins to drop, the tides flush millions of baitfish out of the sounds. That's the dinner bell for the albies, which will chase bait right up on the beach in rare moments. Since false albacore are a schooling fish, they hunt in packs. When they find baitfish, they circle pushing the bait to the surface, then like green torpedoes slash through the bait ball sending the anchovies or silversides flying into the air. This is the blitz that makes the heart pound and hands shake in anticipation.

It also draws the birds that dive on the water, picking up leftover shreds. Their raucous shrieks attract more birds that suddenly appear from all directions. Diving birds is a blinking billboard to boats anywhere within range. In no time, there are a gaggle of anglers surrounding the melee, throwing flies, jigs or lures into the ball.

Cast and make three or four long, fast strips. If nothing happens, quickly cast again, making sure that the fly is moving, especially if the momentum of the boat is still pushing it forward. Suddenly, the line will come tight and half a second later the fish will take off for the next county. The reel buzzes. Don't dare touch it. In less time than it takes to wipe an amazed grin off your face, the fly line and a hundred yards of backing will have disappeared.

Start working when the reel stops but be prepared for at least one, sometimes two more runs of decreasing distances. The trickiest part of the fight is when the albie see the boat, dives straight down then swims in circles around the boat hoping to shake the hook. This is when rods and egos are broken.

For fly anglers, a 2- to 3-inch Clouser minnow tied sparsely on a number one to four strong hook in chartreuse and pink bucktail with barbell eyes is a Cape Lookout standard. For variety, match olive, brown, gray and chartreuse with white. Some small, silver baitfish patterns down to 1.5 inches long, a gummy or two and a white mushie round out the simple patterns needed for most conditions.



Photo by Rip Woodin

Paul Lombardi, a veteran false albacore chaser from California, loves the excitement of hooking into an 18- to 20-pound fish that tests the angler's equipment and mental stamina.

Spin fishermen can choose from a wide variety of jigs tipped with white or green Albie Snax soft bait. Stick lures like a Deadly Dick, Stingsilver or Shore Lure and a shiny Kastmaster or something similar also work. For top water, Capt. Tom Roller of Water Dog Guide Service advocates trying a Rebel Jumpin' Minnow ripped across the surface. It may not catch as many fish as a three-fourth- to 1-ounce spoon, but the takes are something to see. If a fast retrieve doesn't produce a strike, let the lure or fly sink a bit then start the retrieve, he said. There are usually fish below the blitz picking off stragglers. Rig a medium to medium-heavy rod with 4000 series reels that hold 300 yards of braided line with a diameter of six- to eight-pound mono.

In September and early October, big Spanish mackerel and bluefish will join the buffet. And through it all, the seven-foot fish in the brown suit lazily swims through the action with its jaws open gorging on them all. In mid-October, when temperatures begin to drop, the Spanish and blues migrate south while the big albies, nicknamed "buffaloes," move in from offshore through November.

Wherever they come from is irrelevant to landing one of these big fish, the pinnacle of fall false albacore fishing. They make multiple runs, peeling off a hundred yards of backing in seconds. Anecdotally, false albacore are 30 percent faster than bonefish and a whole lot stronger. They test your tackle, physical strength and mental stamina. Unlike their tasty cousins, they are terrible table fare, oily and dark, so shoot them head first back into the ocean to get a shot of oxygen and recover before a shark finds lunch.

Anglers who tow their boats from New England down Interstate 95 must wonder what the guides are talking about when they say there is a big school in 50 feet of water off the "dead tree hole." There used to be a dead tree on Shackleford Banks running eastward from Morehead City perpendicular to Cape Lookout. A nor'easter knocked it down years ago so it refers to an area probably a half-mile long.

Another unrecognizable reference point is the "gun

See ALBIES, 12

New rule requires snapper descender device

The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) made a landmark decision in September by passing a rule requiring commercial and recreational fishermen who are fishing for snapper-grouper species to have a descending device readily available to release unwanted fish.

The descending device would return the fish back to the depth from which it came, decreasing the harsh effects of barotrauma and increasing chances for survival.

“This is a big win for the fish,” said Richen Brame, South Atlantic Fisheries director for Coastal Conservation Association (CCA). “Discard mortality is a having a negative effect on a number of snapper-grouper populations, and this requirement will help decrease the mortality on these important species. Every angler fishing in areas that might hold snapper, grouper and other similar species has a role to play to ensure a healthy future for these fish.”

The new rule, if approved by NOAA Fisheries, defines what a descending device is and provides enough flexibility to allow for homemade versions to decrease barotrauma, allowing anglers to be creative and innovative. There was universal support for the new rule with major commercial, recreational and en-

vironmental organizations all publicly supporting the proposed requirement.

Brenden Runde was awarded a CCA NC scholarship in 2016 for his master’s studies at N.C. State University on the reduction of barotrauma on triggerfish. Runde designed a better descender device to save more grouper that are caught then released. There is an 80 percent survival rate if caught and returned to deep water by using a descender device called a “seaqualizer” that looks like a hand scale with jaws, a three-way swivel and a four-pound weight. The jaws can be set to release the fish at a specific depth. This would replace venting tools that may not save fish from barotrauma.

“I am excited that the SAFMC voted to support the new requirement for descender devices,” Runde said. “I believe widespread use of descender devices in our region is only a few years away, and spreading awareness of their use and utility is critical to achieving this goal.”

“While regulations cannot require the use of these tools, requiring the presence of the devices on vessels fishing for snapper/grouper species is a great starting point. Our research at N.C. State has shown these tools to be effective in promoting survival of deep-water groupers.”

He said colleagues at other institutions have found similar results for species such

as red snapper. Hopefully, stakeholders from all sectors will incorporate descender devices into their fishing routine.

“This is a win-win for the fisherman and the fish,” said Chester Brewer, a recreational angler and council representative from Florida. “I’m proud of how the entire council came together to address one of the major fishery management challenges we face and enact a common-sense regulation that will have a significant, positive impact on the health of these stocks.”

Research by NOAA Fisheries found that almost 30 percent of all red snapper caught by the recreational sector and almost 40 percent of snapper caught by the commercial sector died after release in 2017, causing a huge hidden drain on the species. The hope is that the descending device requirement will decrease the discard mortality so more fish will survive to grow and add to the spawning stock. The SAFMC is committed to monitoring the use and efficacy of descending devices so any conservation gains would be used in future stock assessments, perhaps leading to larger populations and more robust abundance. Mortality of unwanted fish improperly released back into the ocean is one of the biggest problems facing fishermen and managers today.

“Anglers everywhere are increasing-

ly aware of barotrauma and many have taken it upon themselves to find ways to properly release fish to increase survival. No one likes to throw back a fish and see it float off and know that it’s a wasted fish,” said Ted Venker, conservation director for CCA. “Given the availability and effectiveness of descending devices to address one of the main factors causing short seasons for many species, particularly red snapper, this requirement only makes sense.”

For the purposes of this requirement, the South Atlantic Council defined descending devices as “an instrument to which is attached a minimum of a 16-ounce weight and a length of line that will release the fish at the depth from which the fish was caught or a minimum of 50 feet. The descending device attaches to the fish’s mouth or is a container that will hold the fish. The device must be capable of releasing the fish automatically, by the actions of the operator of the device, or by allowing the fish to escape on its own. Since minimizing surface time is critical to increasing survival, descending devices shall be readily available for use while engaged in fishing.”

NOAA Fisheries and the U.S. Department of Commerce must approve the regulation before it goes into effect.

SUMMIT

From Page 5

to support higher salaries for Marine Patrol officers and more funded positions.

We also remain positioned and committed to support legislative reforms of our outdated fisheries management laws including House Bill 483, “Let ‘em Spawn” and House Bill 486, Commercial Fishing License Reform, during the 2020 short session. As of this writing, we also are working with legislative leaders to include financial assistance for rebuilding any damage to the recreational fishing community on the Outer Banks because of Hurricane Dorian. In late October, the House passed House Bill 1023 entitled Storm Recovery Act of 2019.

Currently, the bill does not contain any

specific language to provide assistance to either the recreational or commercial industries, but it does contain a provision providing \$1 million to the N.C. Wildlife Resource Commission (WRC) to inspect, investigate, remove and dispose of abandoned and derelict vessels. There has been some outreach from the pier owners on the Outer Banks for assistance with rebuilding to help get that important recreational and tourism access point operating, but no clear means of support has been defined yet. Our discussions with legislators and DEQ officials indicate they are looking at all avenues, including making small business grants available through the Golden Leaf Foundation.

Reacting to the devastation of natural disasters to help our neighbors in their time of need is the right thing to do, but it also brings us back to the idea of being

proactive when it comes to our fisheries management in North Carolina. Included in House Bill 1023 is \$40 million for the North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency to help coastal communities recover from the storms in 2018 and 2019. It also contains significant money to assist local governments with the development of resilience implementation frameworks.

Support for preparing our coastal communities to be better positioned to weather future storms. We need this type of forward thinking on fisheries management from both our legislative leaders and DEQ now. The fishing has been good in North Carolina this year, yet it is no time to be satisfied with the status quo. Legislators and fisheries managers need to seize the day and not be satisfied with “sustainable” fisheries.

It has been a long time since many of us have experienced the type of fishing we have seen this summer and fall. It’s all because the pressure on our fish was eased by Mother Nature and some progressive fisheries management decisions. Now is the time to build on this momentum with more progressive changes in our fisheries laws.

This week, we celebrate the 161st birthday of our first great conservationist Theodore Roosevelt. It is a great time in North Carolina to remember his words with a slight paraphrase to the Old North State, “We have fallen heirs to the most glorious heritage a people ever received, and each one must do his part if we wish to show that North Carolina is worthy of its good fortune.” Now is the time to show we are worthy of a great fishery.

Crystal Coast chapter helps Ocracoke



Photo by Norman Miller

The CCA NC Crystal Coast chapter raised \$2,500 to help rebuild fishing docks in Ocracoke harbor for the recreational fishing community get back to work after Hurricane Dorian swept through the state in September.

CARTER

From Page 7

Oyster Highway.

“It was sometimes back-breaking labor in the chilly spring waters of the New River, but it was fitting that Rocky was a part of the final implementation of what started as an ambitious idea to create new marine habitat. Throughout the process, he never wavered in his support or doubted that it could be done.

“Rocky Carter embodies the spirit of what it is to be a true conservationist. He has given generously of his time, money and leadership to make a difference. He recognizes that without people who are willing to stand up for our coastal resources their future abundance is not guaranteed. In fact, without people like Rocky we should expect the opposite.”

Carter follows another CCA NC Legacy Life Member, Eddie Smith, who was recognized last year by the NC Wildlife Federation as its 2017 Sportsman of the Year.

All of the award winners were recognized at the NCWF Governor’s Conservation Achievement Awards banquet on Sept. 7.

LET 'EM SPAWN

From Page 6

spawn. Others use L50, which is the size in which half of them spawn. The L75 is a compromise between the two. HB483 is very specific to species where an L75 or a slot limit is appropriate.”

Proponents of Let ‘em Spawn have attempted to work with commercial fishermen, Sneed said. However, members of the commercial fishing industry “want the status quo,” he said.

“They feel that if they give up one thing, they will take it all, but the science is there to show the stocks are declining and their industry will kill itself if they don’t start to realize that things need to change,” he added.

Chris Horton, the fisheries program director of the Congressional Sportsmen’s Foundation, said that de-

spite the drop in the population of Southern flounder and other species, “they can recover over time, but the science says we need to reduce the harvest because how we’ve been managing appears to not be working.”

The Washington, D.C.-based organization works with state legislatures to advance the interests of hunters and anglers and supports HB483. Horton concedes, however, that regulating fisheries is an emotional issue.

“For recreational commercial fishermen and commercial fishermen, this is their livelihood,” he said.

Nevertheless, he said he’s worried that North Carolina’s method of managing fish leaves it ripe for its politics to supersede the science.

“As a legislator representing a coastal community, you want to represent your constituents, but at the same time, we’ve got to look at the bigger picture to maintain the fisheries over the long term,” Horton said.

Indeed, advocates may have a tough time capturing

support from coastal legislators when the Senate hears the bill next year.

The Let ‘em Spawn bill was co-sponsored by Reps. Larry Yarborough, R-Granville, Jason Saine, R-Lincoln, Michael Wray, D-Halifax, and Brian Turner, D-Buncombe, all representing inland districts, but was supported by just one coastal lawmaker, Rep. Holly Grange, R-New Hanover.

The state is managing fisheries “as well or better than any other state in the U.S.,” Fulcher said.

“You need to let the state manage the fishery the way it’s intended to be managed and not by the General Assembly,” Fulcher added. “Let ‘em Spawn is a way to circumvent the state. You manage it by the science, and that is what we’re all following.”

“For commercial and recreational fisherman, Let ‘em Spawn will be devastating,” he said. “My business directly and indirectly supports 250-300 people. Let ‘em spawn would cause most of that to be gone.”



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ALBIES

From Page 9

mounts.” Visiting fishermen won’t see any guns along Cape Lookout but they were there during World War II when more than one U-boat met its end on the 17 miles of shoals once called the “horrible headland,” the southern part of the Graveyard of the Atlantic. The 163-foot stark Cape Lookout lighthouse with her black and white diamond decoration stands way above the Cape and is an incredible scene when the sun rises over Barden’s Inlet. Albacore also show up “inside the hook,” the curved bay between the east and west sides of the Atlantic, which produces a jolting chance to catch a fish in relatively shallow water.

Another often-heard phrase is, “There are some fish half a mile west of where you saw me yesterday.” Try to figure that one out. Cell phone coverage is reasonably good from the Cape Lookout shoals all the way down the western beaches for as far as a desperate angler wants to travel. The for-hire guides will be on the water before the sun rises and will sometimes cover 200 miles in a day looking for fish. Once fish are found, an alerting call is made.

This way they avoid the hated “run-and-gun” of two dozen boats jumping from one brief showing of fish to the next one 300 yards away. Aggressive boats cut in front of fishermen already

casting into splashing fish. “Albie rage” generally ensues. Seasoned anglers try to avoid these fruitless competitions and either leave or anticipate there the next school will pop up.

Fishing behind shrimping boats is a way to find fish around Cape Lookout on days when the fish do not feed on top, said Capt. Gordon Churchill, author of *Flyfishing the Southeast Coast* and a contributor to *Orvisnews.com*. “Boats pull up behind the trawlers, get in line, wait for the guys in front to hook up then take their turn. It’s traditionally done with a sinking line, either an intermediate or a fast sinker. The thought is that the fish won’t see the fly unless it gets down through the white water in the wake of the shrimper.”

Using a popper in this situation gets some exciting strikes to rival anything in flyfishing, he added. “The fish slash at it from below one after another. Many times you can see them as they come up in the clear water just off the wake.”

One more bit of advice to heed — check the weather. Winds around the Cape come up fast and the sea can get “sporty” as the guides call it. Know the tides, especially if someone is going across the shoals to the “east side.” What was a safe depth two hours earlier may be nothing but breaking waves as the tide drops. Every winter, winds and tides change the sandbars over the shoals. This is where “good enough” is not good enough. If unsure of a route, follow someone who knows where they’re going.

LAUGHRIDGE

From Page 8

ally large year classes of striped bass that mysteriously appeared in the Neuse this year and anglers are enjoying a banner year for speckled trout.

That’s attributable to quick action by the DMF director in closing the season when a cold stun is imminent. Hurricane Florence, which disrupted fishing last fall, allowed females to spawn several times. And the DMF is now managing to the Southern flounder target.

“We just did what was right,” he said.

Without a poundage quota on commercials, there’s no way landings will reach a 62-percent reduction, he said.

It should be taken off next year based on trip ticket data from 2019, but DMF doesn’t manage Southern flounder in arrears the way it does red drum.

“You cannot have any fishery even with size and seasonal limits that allows you to extract unlimited numbers of fish,” he said.

Laughridge said he plans to be active with the N.C. Legislative Sportsman’s Caucus and hopefully influence opinion there. He also helps out the pro-resource NC Sound Economy that has become the N.C. Marine Estuary Foundation. It will take a major initiative for the commercial industry to see the economic benefit of a robust fishery. If that doesn’t happen, then recreational anglers should stop giving money to politicians and use it to file lawsuits.









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CCA NC event schedule

Nov. 3: Asheville Chapter get together at Sweeten Creek Brewing, Asheville
(For more information, call Joe Neely at 704-249-8196)

Nov. 7: Triad Chapter banquet at the High Point Country Club, High Point
(To buy tickets online, go to www.ccanc.org)

Nov. 9: Cape Fear Chapter will join Cape Fear Riverwatch for a river cleanup
(Sponsored by Costa Del Mar Sunglasses, Sweetwater Brewing)
For more information, call Matthew Wallin at 757-508-3980)