

Study: Rec spending slashed

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

A 2016 update of a N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries economic study based on 2009 data shows expenditures by recreational saltwater fishermen has been slashed nearly in half creating losses of \$800 million and 10,434 jobs, said Rick Sasser, a concerned fisherman from Goldsboro.

In an email to DMF Director Steve Murphey, Sasser said, "What has me extremely concerned is the vast difference in Total Economic Effect between the two studies. In 2009, Dr. Scott Crosson found the Total Economic Effect of saltwater angler trips to be \$1,602,722,304. In 2016, Adam Stemle and Maura Condon updated Crosson's analysis and found the total effect to be \$802,458,624. In seven years, N.C. lost \$800 million in annual economic impact that is generated by saltwater

angler trips."

The Division's data seems to support what the recreational sector has been saying for two decades: Management failures are killing the goose that lays the golden eggs driving the economies of our coastal communities and many other businesses throughout the state, he continued.

Crosson's original study surveyed a pool of 625 anglers taken from Coastal Recreational Fishing License data. Of that number, 509 were active anglers while 116 were inactive. From those responses, he calculated all recreational fishermen took 7,247,000 trips with an average expenditure of \$133 per trip. This did not include the purchase of durable goods like boats and tackle.

"The estimated \$1.6 billion economic impact attributed to recreational fishing trip expenditures is a signif-

See STUDY, 2

Crosson 2010 Report

Table 7. Estimated economic impact of saltwater angling.

Impact Type	Output	Employment	Labor Income	Total Value Added
Direct Effect	\$943,929,472	12,424	\$295,284,352	\$548,552,704
Indirect Effect	\$319,250,048	2,434	\$105,912,752	\$176,979,968
Induced Effect	\$339,542,720	2,900	\$106,812,664	\$196,819,456
Total Effect	\$1,602,722,304	17,758	\$508,009,768	\$922,353,664

2016 Report

Table 12. Estimated economic impact of saltwater angling.

Impact Type	Output	Employment	Labor Income	Value Added
Direct Effect	\$454,786,976	4,845	\$172,472,288	\$229,371,800
Indirect Effect	\$161,546,704	1,062	\$53,496,412	\$91,927,090
Induced Effect	\$186,124,928	1,418	\$59,612,572	\$109,778,600
Total Effect	\$802,458,624	7,324	\$285,581,280	\$431,077,500

MFC blocks striped bass harvest; orders nets pulled

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

In what seems like the first pro-resource ruling in decades, the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission halted both recreational and commercial harvest of striped bass in the estuarine waters of primarily the Tar, Pamlico and Neuse rivers at its February 2019 meeting.

The radical action was taken on a 5-4 vote to preserve two unusually large year classes of fish from 2014 and 2015 that appeared in the lower Neuse and Pamlico rivers confounding biologists because there had been little natural reproduction in years. By stopping all harvest, the commission hopes the fish will boost natural spawning in these waters that primarily contain only fish stocked by the U.S. Fish

& Wildlife Service.

Procedurally, the commission ordered Steve Murphey, director of the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, to issue a proclamation closing the waters of the Central Southern Management Area that extend from just south of Oregon Inlet to the South Carolina line. The waters impacted include the Pamlico and Core Sounds and the Tar, Pamlico, Pungo, Bay, Neuse and White Oak rivers along with their tributaries.

Murphey's proclamation effective March 11 closed the area to harvest but did not require all large mesh gill nets be removed from the affected waters as the MFC also requested. Instead, he ordered a year-round 36-inch tie-down and 50-yard distance from shore requirement. In a letter,

See STRIPED BASS, 2



Eric Vick shows off a nice striper he caught last season in the waters of the Tar/Pam/Neuse Rivers system in the Central Southern Management Area of North Carolina.

STUDY

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ificant contribution to the coastal economy,” Crosson wrote, “particularly during a time when other economic engines such as development have declined.” He noted that his calculations follow numbers from similar federal surveys for North Carolina.

In 2009, the industry then created a direct employment of 12,424 jobs worth \$295 million in payroll. There were another 5,334 indirect jobs valued at another \$213 million. By 2016, direct employment had fallen to 4,845 jobs worth \$172.4 million while indirect labor dropped to 2,479 jobs valued at \$113.1 million.

In the updated study, Stemle and Condon figured recreational fishermen made

5,411,329 excursions worth nearly \$191 per trip. Explaining their methodology, they wrote, “The economic sectors most affected by trip expenditures in the recreational fishery are retail sport stores, hotels, charter services, retail food stores and gas stations. These sectors create indirect effects, defined as changes in inter-industry transactions as supplying industries respond to increased demands from the directly affected industries. These sectors also create induced effects that reflect changes in local spending, which result from income changes in the directly and indirectly affected industry sectors.”

It is important to note that neither of these two studies is based on the updated NOAA federal Marine Recreational Information Program data in which new modeling increased recreational effort by at least two-fold, maybe more, Sasser wrote. Once that data is incorporated,

the total economic effect of both studies should increase, but so will the economic loss. Roughly, if new modeling increases effort by two times, then the annual loss will double from \$800 million to \$1.6 billion, he said.

These two studies appear to be “apples to apples,” Sasser concluded.

“If they accurately portray the decline in recreational angler economic impact, it is alarming and supports action in the legislature and within the administration.”

A spokeswoman for the Division could not explain how the updated study was used by either the DMF or Marine Fisheries Commission because the economist position is vacant. Neither could the Division explain why the study was published in July 2017 but did not get posted on the DMF website until April 2019.

There were other interesting comparisons between the two studies that mirror

the decline in fish stocks. In Crosson’s study, 83 percent of the anglers targeted flounder as their top choice followed by spot at 70 percent, speckled trout 69 percent with red drum and bluefish in fourth and fifth places respectively. Flounder remained the top choice of fishermen in the 2016 update but only 47 percent targeted the stock.

Red drum moved into second place at 40 percent with trout at 37 percent followed by black drum and grey trout. Spot tumbled to sixth place targeted by 25 percent of anglers.

Water pollution, regulations and fuel prices were the three top issues facing fishermen in 2009. Overfishing/too few fish was listed as number five. In 2016, keeping up with regulations rose to the most cited issue followed by water quality and weather. Overfishing dropped a spot to number five while fuel prices tumbled to number eight.

STRIPED BASS

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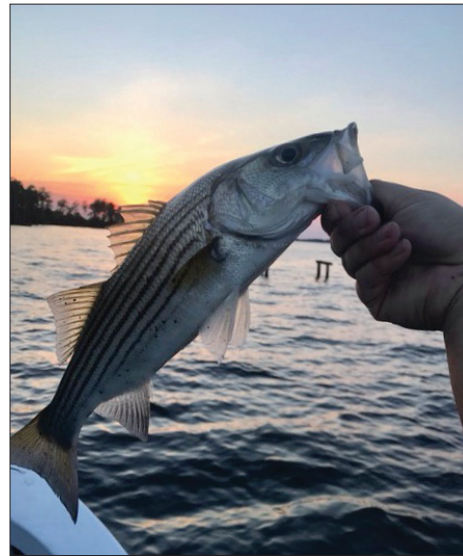
he told the commission that gill nets are not the primary or even the most significant source of discard mortality in the CSMA striped bass fishery.

This prompted the MFC to call a highly unusual emergency meeting March 13, and by another 5-4 vote, order the removal of gill nets since the gear would undoubtedly entrap striped bass as they move up stream to spawn. The order, praised by conservationists, earned the ire of the Governor’s Office voiced in a statement by N.C. Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Michael S. Regan.

“The commission used bad judgment in directing the Division of Marine Fisheries director to take actions that contradict science and the recommendations of the division’s scientists,” Regan said in a press release. Then somewhat ominously, he added, “I certainly hope this is not a precedent we will see again from this commission.”

Gov. Roy Cooper appointed the commission chairman and several of the members who voted for the proclamations.

CCA NC Executive Director David Sneed applauded the pro-resource action taken by the MFC during the spe-



cial meeting in Kinston. “We agree with the five commissioners who submitted letters requesting action on gill net mortality to provide protection for the two surprising year classes of native striped bass on the Pamlico and Neuse rivers.”

In addition to the harvest ban, Sneed said removing gill nets was needed to reduce striped bass by-catch mortality as commercial fisherman sought other species like speckled trout and spot.

“Unlike the high probability for survival in the recreational catch and release effort, any striped bass caught in gill nets will almost certainly be re-

leased dead under the no-possession rules,” Sneed continued.

The proclamation took effect March 18, and the closure is expected to continue for about two years until Amendment 2 to the N. C. Estuarine Striped Bass Fishery Management Plan is adopted, said a DMF news release. Amendment 2 could continue the provision or recommend other management actions.

Besides coastal waters managed by DMF, the closure includes water jointly managed with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. These include upstream of the Bayview/Aurora Ferry in the Pamlico River system and upstream of the Minnesott Beach/Cherry Branch Ferry in the Neuse River system. At the March 13 meeting, the Marine Fisheries Commission also passed a motion asking to adopt a year-round closed season for striped bass for recreational harvest in joint fishing waters.

The Division of Marine Fisheries briefly had delayed implementation of the no-possession measure for the recreational fishery in joint fishing waters because it was inconsistent with Wildlife Resources Commission management measures for those waters that set different size and creel limits.

That changed March 29 when Murphy and Wildlife Resources Commission Executive Director Gordon Myers issued consistent proclamations for

joint waters of the CSMA. In addition, the WRC proclamation also closed the striped bass season in all remaining inland waters it manages.

“CCA NC is not opposed to commercial fishing, but we are firmly opposed to the use of destructive gear that is contributing to the decline of our state’s fisheries,” Sneed said. “We are at the point with fisheries management in North Carolina where the Division of Marine Fisheries scientists are recommending that we close fisheries in order to save them. That’s a testament to the sad state of affairs,” Sneed said. “Further disheartening is the division’s refusal to address the problems caused by the large mesh gill net fishery.”

The no-possession limit on CSMA striped bass was the first case, he continued. “Next comes Southern flounder where DMF scientists have stated that a 72 percent reduction in total harvest is needed this year to stop the 30-year decline in Southern flounder stocks.”

The harvest bans will not impact striped bass fishing in the Atlantic Ocean, Albemarle Sound Management Area, Roanoke River Management Area and inland waters under the jurisdiction of the N.C. Wildlife Resource Commission, a DMF release clarified.

The change also will not impact the Cape Fear River and its tributaries, where a no-possession rule already exists.

Action to restore Southern flounder likely

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

A 20-year wait for a fisheries management solution to rescue collapsing Southern flounder stocks may come to an end this August when the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission hopes to adopt significant harvest reductions before the fall season when most flounder are caught, said David Sneed, executive director of CCA NC.

The reductions were dictated after a 2018 coast-wide stock assessment confirmed that flounder are overfished and overfishing is still occurring, said Dr. Chris Elkins, a retired UNC-CH microbiologist and chairman of CCA NC's fisheries committee. In simple terms, overfished means the population size is too small while overfishing means the removal rate is too high. The two-step recovery strategy proposed is to implement Amendment 2 to stop overfishing this year and later in Amendment 3 to adopt regulations that would restore the overfished stock within 10 years as mandated by law.

The Southern Flounder Fisheries Management Advisory Committee voted in March to recommend a 31 percent cut, the minimum amount that would end overfishing, in an across the board harvest reduction this fall for all gears used by both recreational and commercial fishermen. This would be followed in 2020 by a 52 percent reduction including a complicated formula to reward commercial fishing gears that are least destructive, a step in the right direction. With four recreational and four commercial representatives on the Advisory Committee, together they crafted a compromise that garnered two commercial votes enabling it to pass 6-2.

The MFC will consider the recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Amendment 2 at its May meeting along with other recommendations from biologists on the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries staff.

After a stock assessment is done, DMF biologists calculate the minimum cuts that would recover the stocks in 10 years, in theory. This is called the threshold and the percentage cut calculated was 52 percent. Another calculation, called a target, is provided to create a buffer due to uncertainty, such as untoward environmental events, poor spawning year classes and most important, changes in fishermen's behavior. The threshold would require a 72 percent cut, a figure that division scientists touted during the Advisory Committee meetings until the last hearing March 6.

N.C. Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Michael Regan reportedly thinks this is too high for commercial fishermen to endure.



Davis Boyd of Wilson loves catches flounder.

Regan has asked the division to delay drastic action on measures to rebuild the stock in 10 years to allow North Carolina time to coordinate Southern flounder management with the other southeastern states, according to a DEQ press release. Without this coordination, management measures may not work, he said.

With a convoluted series of reviews required before adoption, MFC Chairman Rob Bizzell has indicated he will call special meetings to move through the regulatory process in time to enact new rules for the fall flounder season, David Sneed said. Steps include a 30-day public comment period if a draft reduction is adopted at the May meeting, followed by review of the comments by the Advisory Committee. The MFC has to vote a second time then send it to the legislature for a rules review. After that the reductions could be adopted at the MFC's August meeting and be implemented by proclamation before the fall.

Southern flounder over the years

- 2002-2013, Various DMF staff reports labeled Southern flounder as "overfished" then "depleted."
- 2005, Southern flounder management plan adopted.
- February 2013, Southern flounder management plan amended.
- 2014, DMF stock assessment concluded the stock was "overfished" and "overfishing" was ongoing but it didn't pass peer review because it didn't reflect coast-wide data.
- November 2015, The MFC adopts a supplemental flounder plan.
- October 2016, a lawsuit by the N.C. Fisheries Association wins an injunction to stop the DMF from shutting down the fall flounder season.
- December 2017, a revised stock assessment including 2015 data from neighboring states passes peer review with the proviso that DMF add in 2016-17 landing data from the four participating states.
- November 2018, the updated assessment continues to show flounder is "overfished" and "overfishing" is continuing.
- December 2018, the Southern Flounder Fishery Management Plan Advisory Committee begins work on Amendment 2 to the flounder management plan.
- May 15-17, 2019 Marine Fisheries Commission meeting in Jacksonville. The commission is expected to vote on approval to take draft Amendment 2 to the Southern Flounder FMP out for public and advisory committee review.
- Monday, June 3, 2019 Finfish Advisory Committee/Northern Regional Advisory Committee/Southern Regional Advisory Committee combined meeting in Morehead City. This combined meeting of the commission's committees would include staff presentations on the stock assessment and public comment.
- Monday, June 3, 2019 Southern Flounder Advisory Committee meeting, in Morehead City. Staff would provide an overview of the public and committee input.
- Thursday, June 6, 2019 Marine Fisheries Commission special meeting, in Beaufort. The commission is expected to vote on its preferred management strategy for draft Amendment 2 to the Southern Flounder FMP.
- Wednesday, June 19, 2019 Southern Flounder Advisory Committee meeting.
- Aug. 21-23, 2019 Marine Fisheries Commission meeting, Raleigh. The commission is expected to vote on final approval of Amendment 2 to the Southern Flounder FMP. Management measures would be implemented by proclamation.

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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Fisheries management: Looking behind the curtain

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

North Carolinians can rightfully be puzzled about the state of our inshore fisheries management. Since our Fisheries Reform Act was passed in 1997, most of our state managed stocks have steadily declined. Despite calls for change, this decline continues.

Recent events in our management of striped bass, rock to those of us who grew up here, highlights this bewildering state of affairs. Our stock of stripers from the Pamlico River to the South Carolina line has been kept on life support for years by yearly stocking of hatchery raised fingerlings. In the meantime we have wisely been removing dams on these rivers that had hindered the natural spawning runs.

Sampling by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission found evidence of two naturally spawned year classes of stripers swimming in our waters. CCA NC and others were out front and consistent in urging the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission and the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries to take action to preserve these fish while the opportunity presented itself to kick-start a naturally occurring fishery, as it once was. But what could be done?

N.C. Wildlife had in hand well regarded studies showing that the primary roadblock to rebuilding the striped stock for years has been dead discards from gill nets. Other data was available showing the majority of these discards were in the Neuse and Pamlico rivers,

up stream of the ferries from Minnesott to Cherry Branch and from Bayview to Aurora.

While the allowed commercial catch of these fish is met early each spring, the nets stayed in the water killing fish all year. The only real chance to take advantage of this opportunity to get our fish back was to get the nets out. Even before these two natural year classes were known, CCA NC had spotlighted the need to stop the waste of these fish in public comment before the commission, on social media and face to face with regulators and politicians.



BERT
OWENS
President

The money, about \$600,000 a year for stocking these fish, came from an excise tax on recreational fishing gear through the U.S. Fish & Wildlife recreational angling program. This money was being spent as intended, but the effectiveness of the program was blocked by a commercial net fishery that is worth about \$60,000 a year spread among many.

Fast forward to this past February's Marine Fisheries Commission meeting in Williamston. I was able to attend Wednesday night's session along with our Executive Director David Sneed and several other CCA members who regularly attend giving the resource a voice.

What was really heartening was the large number of anglers,

See CURTAIN, 6

More legislators open to fisheries issues

Legislation affecting coastal marine resources is always a hot topic at the General Assembly, and this long session is no different. CCA NC will make some headway in its fight to preserve estuarine and marine resources if House Bill 483 survives.

It's interesting that more legislators are talking about fisheries issues this year and want the two sides (recreational and commercial) to come together and compromise. Jerry Schill, the lobbyist for the commercial N.C. Fisheries Association is also talking about working together and CCA NC is always willing to listen.

House Bill 483, "Let Them Spawn," seeks to establish a minimum size limit for each historically significant marine fishery species to ensure that 75 percent of the juvenile fish at that size have reached maturity and had the opportunity to spawn at least once.

"Let them spawn before they are gone" offers a straightforward solution to the cur-

rent paralysis over North Carolina fisheries through simple fishing rules establishing minimum size limits for recreational and commercial fishing. It would give the N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission a statutory requirement how to manage fish stocks; it would take the politics out of the process. The pushback is such a requirement doesn't work on every species, like red drum, but there are ways around that such as slot limits.



DAVID
SNEED
Executive Director

The bill's primary sponsor, Rep. Larry Yarborough (Person, Granville), presented it in the Wildlife Resources Committee in late April. Although it passed a committee vote with opposition only from Rep. George Cleveland, (Onslow) and Rep. Larry Pittman (Cabarrus, Rowan), the bill fell a few votes shy of earning endorsement from the

Republican caucus on May 2. That's a requirement for any legislation to reach the floor.

Some members of the caucus were not present to vote so Yarborough is trying to round up a few more votes to reach the majority of 33 favorable in the 65-member Republican caucus. The bill is on life support but there's still a chance.

House Bill 486, "Commercial Fishing License Reform," did not get enough favorable votes in the caucus and is not going anywhere. It would have amended the Coastal Fishing License statutes to ease the regulatory burdens and enhance access to fisheries for bona fide commercial fishermen. Rep. Yarborough also presented the bill to the Wildlife Resources Committee, which approved it.

The N.C. Fisheries Association's opposition to the legislation appears to center around the increase in the commercial li-

See LEGISLATORS, 9

Guides predict good fishing this spring

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

With the chilly, wet spring chased off by warming temperatures, coastal fishing will pick up quickly from mid April, through May and into June, two veteran guides predict as anticipation of that first hard pull grows.

Capt. Tom Roller of Waterdog Guide Service in Morehead City started the outlook with striped bass, explaining that the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries has closed some rivers to harvest while others remain open leading to some angler confusion. The Tar/Pamlico and Neuse rivers are closed to harvesting any fish but they can still be fished, Roller said, just all striped bass have to be released to protect two large and unexpected year classes that could help the population in those rivers recover.

The Roanoke River is in a different management area where fishermen can keep two fish daily between 18-22 inches until May 1 when the season closes. The Roanoke has a bigger population of striped bass because of much better spawning success. Roller loves to fish the Roanoke in May because it's less crowded and the fish are feisty before and after spawning. He drifts the river throwing a top water lure or fly at the banks. Soft plastics also work as the sun comes up, he added.

In coastal waters, Roller said there is an abundance of small speckled trout around since there were no major cold stuns, which will lead to an outstanding fall season. "Last year, the fish were 10-12 inches, now the 2-year-old trout are 13-15 inches and will grow to 16-20 inches by the fall," Roller said.

In the ocean, anyone can be a fisherman in May. "The nice thing about May is you don't know what's on the end of your line," he continued. It could be a very edible one- or two-pound bonito as they push through migrating northward, a Spanish mackerel or bluefish. They can show up anywhere from early April through mid May.

The main event is in late May into June when the cobia start showing up. "It's anyone's guess what the cobia season will be like this year," Roller said. "Last year was disappointing." The 2019 recreation-



Photo by Doug Mumford

Savannah Mumford holding a striped bass proves spring fishing is warming up with the weather.

al regulations are similar to last year. The 36-inch minimum fork length remains in place May 1-Dec. 31. In May, anglers can keep one fish per person per day through May with a maximum of two fish in a boat. That number drops to one fish per boat from June through December.

Roller said he believes king mackerel fishing will be good this summer because of a big year class. Large red drum schools from the winter will break up in late May as the fish move into their summer patterns during June. There was a decent

year class — not the worst and not the best — Roller said, but he hasn't heard reports yet of fish numbers.

The big, "chopper," bluefish can show up any time from April through May. "They could be anywhere or nowhere because it doesn't happen every year," he said. The best place to look for them is at the Cape Lookout rock jetty or in Back Sound behind Shackleford Banks. Top water lures can draw vicious strikes. "Throw rusty stuff from the bottom of your tackle box," he joked, because it will be mauled. They

may be 8-12 pounds here, skinny and spawned out but the big blues will be up to 15 pounds by September further north, he added.

By July and August, water temperatures dictate bottom fishing. There will be a short snapper season in July. Spanish and smaller bluefish will be around all summer, Roller concluded, "while amberjack will be offshore and the red drum will move on to the grass flats on a flood tide."

The season begins about a month earlier in the Wilmington area, said Capt. Seth Vernon of Doublehaul Guide Service. The bonito started in mid April and respond to Clouser flies or Kastmaster lures, Vernon said. The big bluefish arrive about the same time and can be found in Rich's Inlet near Figure Eight Island or western creeks around Topsail Island. He throws a popper fly or a Top Dog Junior from MirrOlure. The blues will jump like a snook when hooked in shallow water so hang on.

After the bonito and blues, come the larger Spanish followed next by cobia, he said. There usually aren't as many cobia in the Wilmington area as off Atlantic Beach. "But the big message is the hotels, marinas and restaurants have been rebuilt from the damage caused by Hurricane Florence. A lot of infrastructure has been refurbished and is better than ever," he added. "Wrightsville Beach and Wilmington are open for business."

Red drum tailing in the spartina grass started in mid April and the speckled trout spawn is about over. They can be found all summer and fall along the brackish water lines in the Cape Fear River around Wilmington and the New River from Jacksonville up to Swansboro, Vernon said.

The brackish water line varies depending on rain but will be somewhere between Snow's Cut and downtown Wilmington on the Cape Fear while it will be around Duck Creek and Stone's Bay on the New River. In the fall, bigger trout from Chesapeake Bay and Pamlico Sound show up as they migrate south.

As the temperature warms, the phone starts ringing as anglers start thinking about fishing. So Vernon urged fishermen who need a spring "tug" to call their favorite guide now.

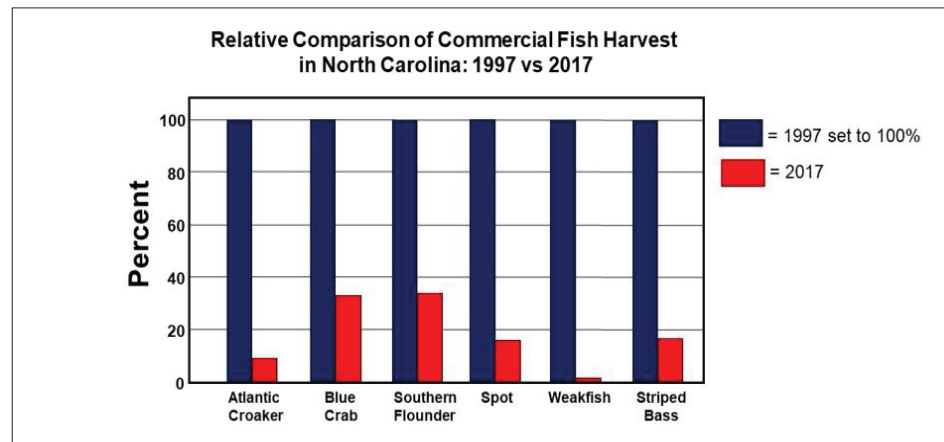
CURTAIN

From Page 4

old and young, who made this trip to a remote location then took their turn at the microphone in a room half full of an unfriendly crowd to say get the nets off these fish before it's too late.

A motion was made and passed "asking" DMF Director Stephen Murphey to issue a proclamation closing the waters above the ferry lines to netting and recreational harvest for two years until an amendment to the striped bass management plan is completed.

Sounds good, right? In fact it was ground breaking for N.C. Yet the consensus among those who have followed "the process" for years was that Director Murphey would not comply. This was confirmed several days later in his letter to the commission. They then had the option of accepting no for an answer or calling another meeting to instruct the director to issue the proclamation. Kudos go to MFC Chairman Rob Bizzell for promptly calling another meeting and to all the pro resource commissioners for again voting



for the proclamation removing the nets and giving the fish a chance. The proclamation was grudgingly issued several days later.

Then an odd occurrence happened. Murphey's boss, N.C. Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Michael Regan, issued a written statement publicly criticizing Gov. Roy Cooper's appointed commission for calling the second meeting and for "using bad judgment" directing these actions. Regan further

stated he "certainly hopes this was not a precedent we will see again."

Such actions are why I say the people have a need to see behind the curtain of fisheries management in North Carolina. When provided a well regarded study showing gill nets as the major killer of stocked striped bass in our rivers, why did the DMF director feel compelled to pay for their own study to counter it? Obviously to maintain status quo, but why don't they want to give the fish a chance

and a break to anglers for a change? Why does a DEQ secretary make a pointed statement against a pro resource move by the governor's commission? Why does a governor, who issued a very pro resources statement prior to his 2016 election, have his DEQ secretary criticize his commission?

Fast forward again to mid April and ponder newly introduced Senate Bill 554 that would transfer much of the MFC's power to the DMF, effectively preventing such resource friendly action from happening again. Obviously DEQ and DMF see saving these fish for two years as a loss so they want to change the rules.

We can't fully pull back the curtain on the Oz of fishery management, but by their consistent actions trying to stop progress and conservation we get a glimpse of who is behind the curtain, and they are not for managing our fishery for all the people. We will be exasperated and bewildered at times, but we will not give up. We need even more voices to stop the bureaucrats from continuing to spend the people's fish while not saving any for the future.

Get on board.

FLOUNDER

From Page 3

Sneed said Southern flounder is a defining moment for CCA NC. "We've got the striped bass and Southern flounder issues both at the same time and both are entangled with gill nets.

"We know as an organization that the best and fastest way to restore our coastal resources would be through removing

gill nets and shrimp trawlers from our inshore waters," he continued. "Everyone who follows the decline in Southern flounder knows there is a direct connection. The MFC cannot ignore the problem any longer."

When he was working the membership table at the George Povoromo fishing seminar in January, Sneed said nine out of 10 people who stopped by to talk asked if CCA was ever going to do anything about the nets. This is the opportunity a lot of people have been looking

for to at least get some relief from the gill nets, he added.

DMF biologist Mike Loeffler said after Amendment 2, the Advisory Committee could continue working on the longer term management measures for Amendment 3.

"The mandate from Murphey is to act now to save the fishery. This is the action we want to force," Sneed explained, saying he was impressed that Loeffler and the Division are pushing back against inaction. Years ago the MFC "kicked the

can down the road so now it's time to pay the piper."

Regardless of the reduction percentage adopted, some commercial fishermen may not fish and just drop out. This would help flounder but it may help other depleted stocks as well.

"The turnout by recreational fishermen during recent striped bass meetings resulted in conservation-based decisions by the MFC and continued engagement by anglers will undoubtedly impact future decisions," Elkins said.

Official sunglasses
of the CCA NC



New River oyster habitat nearly complete

By David Sneed
CCA NC Executive Director

The weather cooperated enough over the last two weeks for work to really start cranking up on the final phase of the New River Oyster Highway project near Jacksonville.

CCA NC members joined forces with the City of Jacksonville staff, students from the UNC Institute of Marine Sciences and commercial fishermen to build oyster castles, harvest the oyster catchers and move it all out onto the six new oyster reef sites in the New River.

The oyster catchers were removed from Bogue Sound and the Newport River where they have been growing the new oysters that will be the start of the new Oyster Highway. The oyster catchers were placed on each of the six new reef sites in preparation for building the oyster reefs next week. These oyster catchers allowed volunteers to put 4.6 million oysters onto the New River Oyster Highway.

These past two weeks have seen a lot of hard work by dedicated individuals, but it has also been a very rewarding experience for those who have had a chance to be a part of actually building this project. "It is a very cool experience and I encourage anyone who has some time and energy they could donate to get involved," said Matthew Wallin, CCA NC's eastern regional director.

Perhaps Rocky Carter and John Rouse said it best when they termed it a "legacy project." It will be a proud moment to be out fishing on the New River with your children, grandchildren and friends in the future and be able to point out the reefs that make up the Oyster Highway and say, "I helped build that."

We need volunteers to help finish this work. We need volunteers who can get in the water, so waders and wet-suits are needed, and help move the oyster catchers and oyster castles into place to finish the structure of the six new reefs.

If you are interested in volunteering your time, boat and effort, please contact us. Work one day, or all week. For more information or call:

Rocky Carter, CCA NC Habitat Committee Chairman, (336) 423-9100; or

Matthew Wallin, CCA NC Eastern Regional Director, (757) 508-3980.



At top, volunteers handle oyster catchers recently, which will be the foundation of reefs that continue to clean water in the New River near Jacksonville. At left, after a long day in the water, volunteers pose for a photo.

Photos by Matthew Wallin



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This is a statewide raffle that will be drawn after the final CCA NC banquet in 2019.






CFMOTO CForce 500S ATV Yamaha 1600 Watt Engel 35 Cooler with Costa Sunglasses

Membership drive offers ATV, other outdoor prizes

Instead of a 60/40 cash drawing, CCA NC is holding a prize raffle worth \$8,000, David Sneed, executive director of CCA, recently announced.

A CFMoto 500S all terrain vehicle is at the top of the prize list, he said. To further equip the outdoorsman, CCA NC is including a Yamaha 1600 watt generator, an Engel 35 quart cooler, a pair of Costa sunglasses and a CCA spe-

cial edition rod and reel as part of the prize package, Sneed continued.

In years past, tickets have been \$100, but entries for this raffle will only be \$25, and if someone buys a \$50 Coastal Caretaker membership, a free raffle ticket comes with it. CCA NC hopes to sell all 1,000 tickets before the drawing is held in November after the final banquet of 2019, Sneed said.

Volunteers repair docks



The Onslow Bay chapter of CCA NC helped rebuild docks at the Salt Water Grill in downtown Swansboro in early April. Sixteen members volunteered a day of their time to rebuild almost 2,000 square feet of docks destroyed by Hurricane Florence in September 2018.



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LEGISLATORS

From Page 4

cense fee and the loss of part time fishermen. That was enough to kill it in the caucus.

The Senate agricultural, natural and economic resources committee approved SB 554, "Marine Fisheries Reform," an act to change the management of marine fisheries in North Carolina.

There is very little in DEQ's Senate Bill 554 that would serve to protect or enhance state public trust fisheries resources. Rather, in essence, it is a thinly veiled attempt to shift policymaking authority for coastal fisheries resources management from the Commission to the Division and DEQ. This is diametrically inconsistent with the way that wild-life resources have historically been managed in the state. In contrast, House Bill 810 offers revisions to FRA 97 that would change the state's current management standard from "maximum exploitation" to one of "responsible exploitation" given the public trust nature of coastal fisheries resources and the fiduciary responsibility of state fisheries managers to ensuring sustainable marine and estuarine fisheries and habitats for the benefit and health of the people of North Carolina.



YARBOROUGH

Instead of rewriting the statutes to give control of the fisheries management plan process to the Division of Marine Fisheries, why not just update FRA 97 to give the Division and the Commission statutory direction on how our fisheries should be managed? We proposed simple revisions to FRA 97 that would change the state's current management standard from "maximum exploitation" to one of "responsible exploitation" given the public trust nature of coastal fisheries resources.

DEQ, didn't respond to an email raising these concerns. It's very frustrating that DEQ is not willing to engage with us on our concerns. The "reform bill" appears to be in response to the MFC vote on striped bass and the subsequent directive to the DMF director to order all gill nets out of the water during the closure period. (See related story on page 1.)

Reps. Pat McElraft (Carteret, Jones), George Cleveland (Onslow) and Deb Butler (Brunswick, New Hanover) filed HB 860 in mid April as a companion bill to SB 554. It will probably be dropped since the senate bill appears headed for passage.

Rep. Larry Yarborough filed House Bill 810, "Marine Fisheries Reform," the same day after the DEQ refused to accept any recommendations for improving SB 554. CCA NC believes HB 810 provides the most critical response to DEQ's proposed "fisheries reform" bill by proposing the adoption of the three primary legislative reforms for 2019 previously put forward by CCA NC.



It's interesting that more legislators are talking about fisheries issues this year and want the two sides to come together and compromise.

The most desirable change would be to expressly declare that North Carolina's marine and estuarine resources are a public trust resource belonging to all citizens of the state and therefore it is state policy to conserve and protect public coastal fisheries resources for current and future generations.

The second most important piece of legislation would be the revision of the current definition of "sustainable harvest" to reflect the nature of the resource and its ownership, and the resultant need to better conserve and protect coastal fish stocks.

Third would be a legal enforcement mechanism to ensure the current statutory prohibition against overfishing is met.

Where the Commission determines that management measures under a plan have been insufficient to end overfishing within two years, the Commission shall have the authority to implement as temporary rules those measures recommended by the Division

necessary to end overfishing immediately.

House Bill 169 would name the loggerhead sea turtle as the official saltwater reptile of North Carolina. CCA NC has used this opportunity to educate legislators on the fact that North Carolina is the only state in the country that has a federal Incidental Take Permit that allows killing hundreds of sea turtles annually by the large-mesh gill net fishery.

If legislators had a sincere interest in protecting and celebrating loggerhead sea turtles they would do more to protect them from being killed by large-mesh gill nets. Similarly, House Bill 598 would recognize the bottlenose dolphin as the state marine mammal. It was filed by Reps. Bobby Hanig (Currituck, Dare, Hyde, Pamlico) and Holly Grange (New Hanover) and passed by the Wildlife Resources Committee without dissent.

Ironically, DMF Director Steve Murphey recently issued a proclamation placing additional restrictions on using gill nets in the Atlantic Ocean within 100 yards of the beach "to minimize interactions with bottlenose dolphin in accordance with the Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Plan".

All legislators seem to join hands in their affection for sea turtles and dolphin but turn a blind eye to the damage to these beloved creatures caused by the continued use of gill nets in our state coastal waters.

Both bills are benign in content and will likely pass if they made the May 7 house cross over date.

Professional outdoorsman joins CCA NC

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

Matthew Wallin, a professional outdoorsman with forestry, guiding and conservation experience, has joined the CCA NC staff as Eastern Regional Director, announced David Sneed, executive director of the conservation organization.

"I grew up in Virginia on the Chesapeake Bay where at a young age I began to explore and learn what this watershed had to offer," Wallin said. "Fishing and hunting the Bay's tributaries gave me a hands-on experience which in turn allowed me to gain knowledge about our coastal resources and the impacts we have on them."

After attending high school in a rural area on the Rappahannock River an hour east of Richmond, Wallin earned a BS degree in natural resource conservation and forestry from Virginia Tech in late 2016.

"After graduation, I left Blacksburg and took a job in New Bern where I was a procurement forester with a timber company. I bought and sold timber all across Eastern N.C. and was able to explore its fisheries and coastal resources," Wallin continued.

This job required him to manage logging contractors, negotiate sales to mills and follow land management plans.

In 2018, he ventured to Alaska where he was a fly fishing guide at the TikChik Narrows Lodge, an Orvis endorsed camp on Bristol Bay. During his college summers, Wallin worked for an oyster farm, state park, tree care company and yacht club. During this time he gained a great appreciation for what N.C. fisheries had



Matthew Wallin, right, hoists a giant silver salmon for a client he was guiding on an Alaskan river.

to offer.

"I also learned about the problems and issues with the state's management of our fisheries."

It is easy for anyone to see the potential that North Carolina has when it comes to its fisheries, Wallin continued.

"Our coastline is unlike any other and with a focus on pro resource management,

we should be able to improve the resource for all stakeholders into the future."

He wanted the job with CCA NC because "I want our future generations to have the opportunity to enjoy the resource the way we have and hopefully in an improved state."

Sneed said CCA NC is lucky to have Matthew Wallin take over the eastern

region of the organization.

"He is a true outdoorsman with the right education and work history to join CCA NC. He walks the talk," Sneed concluded.

Wallin will live in New Bern where he will have access to coastal CCA chapters yet still have easy access to other parts of Eastern North Carolina.

DMF director orders 'no gill net' corridor to protect dolphins

North Carolina created a "no gill net" corridor along the ocean surf zone in late April to reduce bottlenose dolphin interactions, a news release from the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries announced.

DMF Director Steve Murphey issued a proclamation effective April 22 expanding the current restriction on small mesh

gill net use within 100 yards of the ocean surf zone to include large mesh gill nets.

The intent of prohibiting all gill net use within 100 yards from shore in the Atlantic Ocean is to provide a safe corridor along which bottlenose dolphins are known to travel.

This no gill net corridor is in accord

with recommendations provided by a federal Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Team, the agency said. These recommendations were addressed in a November 2018 letter from National Marine Fisheries Service Southeast Regional Administrator Roy Crabtree.

Crabtree wrote that by-catch from

commercial gill nets continues to exceed allowable levels for two North Carolina stocks of dolphins under the Bottlenose Dolphin Take Reduction Plan. North Carolina estuarine stock dolphins are known to spend significant time in the surf zone foraging and traversing the area, Crabtree wrote.

Angler raises irony of turtle legislation

By Rip Woodin
CCA NC Editor

Three coastal North Carolina House representatives have introduced legislation that would glorify the loggerhead sea turtle as the state's saltwater reptile but doesn't mention the federal Incidental Take Permit that allows commercial gill net fishermen to kill some turtles trapped in their nets.

The one-page bill sponsored by Reps. Frank Iler (R-Brunswick), Carson Smith (R-Columbus) and Pat McElraft (R-Carteret) notes that a loggerhead can grow to four feet weighing 250 pound while living for 50 years. Each year the loggerhead will lay 100 eggs on southern N.C. beaches.

Capt. Seth Vernon, a fly fishing and light tackle guide in Wilmington, noted the irony of the legislation in a letter to a number of representatives.

"The irony that you want to classify this creature with state symbolism while being the only state on the Atlantic coast to actively pay for a permit to knowingly harm, harass and kill endangered sea turtles at the hands



Photo by John Mauser

of the Southern flounder commercial gill net fishery, a failed fisheries management plan, is bewildering," he wrote.

While Vernon appreciates the sentiment of making the loggerhead sea turtle the state saltwater reptile, it only gives off the appearance of doing some good for an animal widely admired. "Wouldn't you each like to enact some real legislation to protect these amazing reptiles, their history with our coast and the joy they bring to all who are fortunate to get a glimpse of them in our waters?" he asked.

He pointed out that North Carolina is the only state on the East Coast that still allows gill nets inshore. In 2013, the state began paying over \$1 million for Incidental Take Permit No. 16230 that allows gill net fishermen to not only interact with but kill these endangered turtle species while fishing with destructive commercial gear.

Vernon said Rep. Deb Butler (D-New Hanover) was the only representative to answer his letter. "I sense your frustration

and I have suffered similarly in many ways since taking office," she wrote. "I care deeply about our environment and have tried to champion a whole host of environmentally forward thinking pieces of legislation all of which have landed in the ash can of this body. And so, I pledge not to give up, to keep trying against the odds and I encourage you to continue the effort as well."

Vernon wrote back to Butler that he has been advocating for science based, resource first management practices for the last 15 years. "When the Democrats held the power in our legislature, Sen. Marc Basnight (D-Dare) wouldn't give small business owners with my conservation mindset the time of day much less an opportunity to create a fair governing N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission."

Fast-forward a decade to a Republican majority without any leadership to restore the public trust resources on our coast. "The fisheries are in peril and we are giving away our coastal tourism to neighboring states at an alarming rate. I want to know what you're going to do to promote a sustainable resource for our coastal business and the county you represent?"

Rep. Butler promised to stay in contact with him in the hope that the legislative climate will change soon.

In a related fisheries effort, Vernon said a cross section of charter captains are seeking support from major businesses like the Blockade Runner hotel, Redix Store, Tex's Tackle and others to "take the fight to the legislature. Coastal communities exist on tourism but the management of our fisheries is suffocating the recreational angler."

From N.C. 58 to the South Carolina line, Vernon said the Southern flounder gill net fishery only generates \$140,000 in profit, a number that can be proven through DMF data. "We're being held hostage by destructive fishing gear for a profit of only \$140,000. We're going to make a concerted push to get the gill nets removed. It's just ludicrous that it will take the collapse of the Southern flounder fishery before we get gill nets out of the water. And we're there," he said.



Photo by Rip Woodin

Seth Vernon, a guide in the New Hanover County area, poles through flooded spartina grass, looking for tailing redfish. Vernon urges legislators to do more than honor sea turtles. He wants more protection for all marine resources.

Dove hunts and fishing tournament scheduled

A week-long fishing tournament, opening day dove hunt and a fall oyster roast are among the new summer events CCA NC is planning for members to have fun and learn about on-going conservation efforts, said Joe Neely, Eastern Regional Director.

An Inside/Out Fishing Tournament will be held July 13-20 in the Wilmington area and coastal waters from Swansboro to the South Carolina state line.

The tournament will be a week long, Saturday to Saturday, all catch and release tournament and will feature the iAngler app that will allow all entered fishermen to photograph and submit their catch in real time, Neely explained.

Anglers can chase red drum, flounder and striped bass in the Inside division or go after Spanish mackerel in the Outside division, he said.

"The money pots for the winners keep growing as we get more sponsors and participants already itching to be a part of this awesome event."

Mark your calendar and don't miss your chance to take it home. Entry will be \$50 for CCA members, \$75 for new members, and free for kids. More information will come shortly as details are finalized.

If you would like to be a part of the tournament call us at 919-781-3474 or email joe@ccanc.org.

CCA's 1st Annual Dove Hunt will be held on Saturday of the opening weekend at fields in Shelby and Dunn, Neely said.

"As our membership continues to grow across the state, we are happy to hold these dove hunts that will be convenient for all of our members across North Carolina.

Dunn will be host for the eastern half

of the state and Shelby will be for all of our folks in Charlotte, the Triad or anywhere else in Western North Carolina."

Don't worry about opening day being on a Monday this year, Neely continued.

"Enjoy your Labor Day weekend plans because we will hold these hunts on Opening Saturday so that everyone can make it."

Both locations will feature first-rate morning dove hunts on fields that have been reserved for CCA. Food, drinks and raffles are included.

Neely said the hunts are welcome for all ages so bring children and make some lasting memories. More information will be forthcoming on each location.

Although the Charlotte banquet has been moved from October to March 2020, the

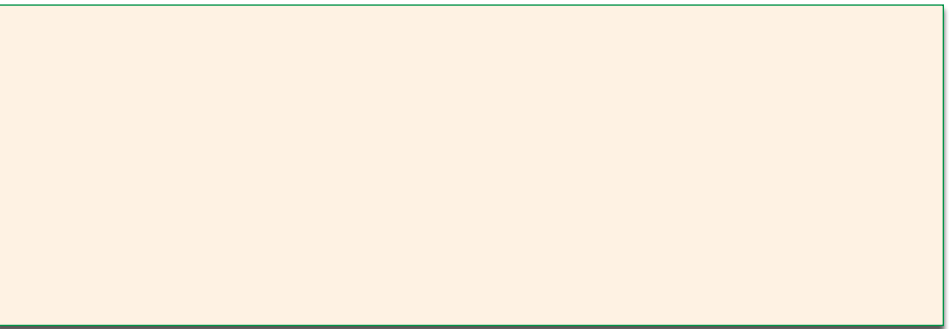
Queen City chapter will be having an oyster roast at Sycamore Brewing in its place for everyone in the area to enjoy a good time in Charlotte.

"Our oyster roasts across the state are a lot of fun and a great way for people to show their support for CCA" Neely said. "The best part about them is all of the leftover oyster shells are delivered back to the coast where they are recycled to create new oyster beds and valuable habitat."

Oyster roasts are a great way for people to have fun and enjoy the best our coast has to offer, he added.

Final details and an exact date for the roast will appear in CCA Tidelines e-newsletters and on our social media accounts.

If you are interested in being a part of our Charlotte chapter committee and helping out with great events like this, call Charles Knight at 704-236-9101 or Joe Neely at 704-249-8196.



CCA NC event schedule

May 16: Triangle Chapter banquet in Market Hall at City Market, Raleigh

July 13-20: Inside/Out Fishing Tournament, two divisions, Morehead City to S.C. line

Sept. 7: 1st annual CCA NC dove hunts, Shelby and Dunn

Sept. 14: Crystal Coast chapter banquet at The Boat House, Beaufort

Fall 2019: Charlotte chapter oyster roast at Sycamore Brewing, Charlotte

Nov. 7: Triad chapter banquet at the High Point Country Club, High Point