

## **MARINE DEBRIS IN “DOWN EAST” NORTH CAROLINA: LOCAL PERCEPTIONS AND MITIGATIVE APPROACHES**

*Chris Ellis, Ph.D., NOAA Coastal Services Center*

*Shay Viehman, NOAA NCCOS-Center for Coastal Fisheries and Habitat Research*

*Jenny Vander Pluym, NOAA NCCOS-Center for Coastal Fisheries and Habitat Research*

*Paula Gillikin, North Carolina Division of Coastal Management, North Carolina*

*National Estuarine Research Reserve*

*Katherine Straus, Vassar College*

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Marine debris presents a number of threats—to marine life, ecosystem diversity, human health, and the economic vitality of coastal communities. Despite numerous associated risks—and the documented need to reduce marine debris on a global scale—there is a paucity of research into how specific user-groups contribute to shoreline littering.

Results from 2007 marine debris surveys in the Core Sound region of North Carolina indicate a need to understand and address the reasons for fishing-gear loss. This study attempts to understand the causes of fishing-gear abandonment and develop ideas for effectively preventing derelict fishing gear in coastal North Carolina. This effort is set into a larger context of public perceptions of marine debris and its impacts on living and natural resources, which are primarily caused by entanglement or ingestion of derelict gear. A primary focus of the study is the investigation of marine-debris accumulation in salt marshes fringing the study area because wetlands are considered habitats vital to fisheries production.

Data collected through a visitor survey at the Rachel Carson National Estuarine Research Reserve will be presented that assesses public knowledge and perceptions of the recreational sources of marine debris, and its impacts on coastal resources. Also presented will be results of a second larger component of the study—currently underway—that focuses on the perceptions of commercial fishermen regarding marine debris, specifically derelict fishing gear. Primary types of derelict fishing gear observed in the marsh relate to clam aquaculture, pound-net fishing, and crab-trap fishing. This information is being collected through a survey of commercial fishermen in the Core Sound region. Additionally, an objective of the study is to understand local contributors to marine debris and to engage the public in developing and implementing mitigative approaches. This is part of a larger study, supported by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) National Ocean Service, Marine Debris Program.

Chris Ellis  
NOAA Coastal Services Center  
2234 South Hobson Avenue  
Charleston, SC 29405

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*Chris.Ellis@noaa.gov  
(843) 740-1195*