

2026 CHPP Amendment

Draft Review

Coastal Resources Commission
October 29, 2026



Coastal Habitat Protection Plan Requirements

- MFC, CRC, and EMC must review and revise CHPPs every five years (NCGS 143B-279.8)
  - Developed by DEQ staff with expertise in marine fisheries, coastal area management, and water quality
  - CHPPs evaluate function, value, status and trends of habitats; identify threats; and recommend actions to protect and restore
- CHPP Steering Committee provides review before adoption

Active Plans:
2016 Base Plan
2021 Amendment
*2026 Amendment**



2026 CHPP Development Timeline

CHPP Development

✓ Scoping: May-July 2025
✓ CHPP Team review: Aug 2025 – July 2026

Steering Committee Meetings

✓ Sep 2025
✓ May 2026
✓ July 2026
early 2027

Commission Updates

✓ MFC: Nov 2025
✓ HWQAC: March & June 2026
✓ EMC: July 2026

Commission feedback on draft CHPP

2026
MFC: Aug & Nov
EMC WQC: Sep
CRC: Aug & Nov

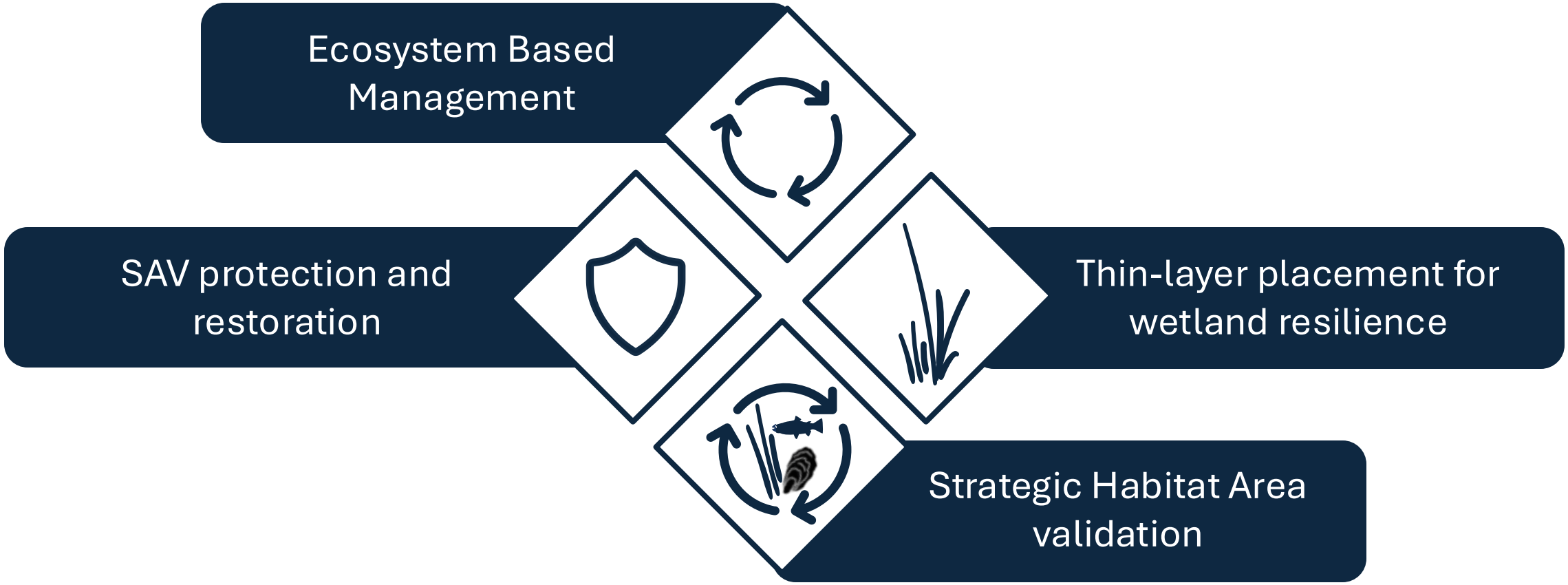
Where we are today

Public comment
(*including MFC AC meetings*)

Final Adoption
Plan revised with commission and public input

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2026 CHPP issue papers



Ecosystem Based Management

Ecosystem assessment & state report card

1997 FRA Evaluate the status and trends of coastal habitats

2016 CHPP Apply principles of Ecosystem Based Management (EBM)

2021 CHPP Enhance mapping of indicators of six coastal habitats

2026 CHPP Statewide approach to ecosystem evaluation

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CHPP Actions

Ecosystem assessment & state report card

Conceptualize

Establish internal working group to define and establish EBM goals of an ecosystem assessment

1

Choose Indicators & Define Thresholds

Conduct workshop(s) with experts and partners to select ecosystem indicators and establish appropriate thresholds.

2 3

Calculate Scores

Calculate grades and create state report card

4

Communicate Results

Communicate status and trends of coastal ecosystems to stakeholders and the public.

5

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Ecosystem Based Management

Strategic Habitat Area (SHA) validation and implementation

Locations with high-quality, connected habitats that were identified to protect the biodiversity and ecological function of coastal habitats through non-regulatory approaches.

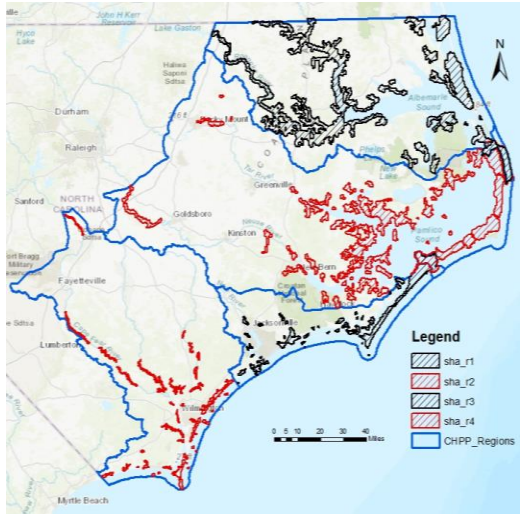
2006
Identification process established

2009-18
Nominations completed

2018-21
Validation study conducted

NORTH CAROLINA COASTAL HABITAT PROTECTION PLAN 2026

- ✓ High ecological function
- ✓ Relatively unaltered
- ✓ Habitat landscape connections
- ✓ Need protection, enhancement, or restoration





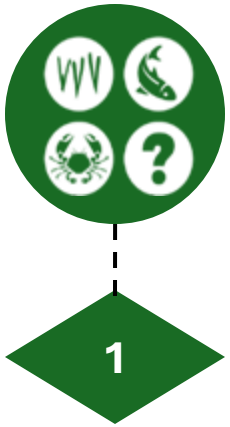
White Oak & Cape Fear CHPP Regions
Stratified random design

- Fish & mobile invertebrate abundance
- Habitat metrics
- Alteration

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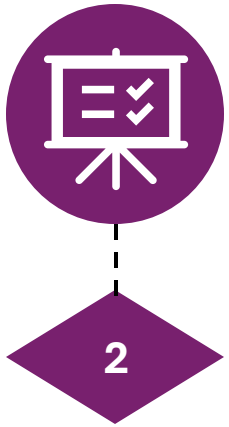
CHPP Actions

Strategic Habitat Area (SHA) validation and implementation



Complete Validation

Explore the feasibility of using DMF independent sampling data to validate SHAs for Albemarle Sound and Pamlico Sound regions



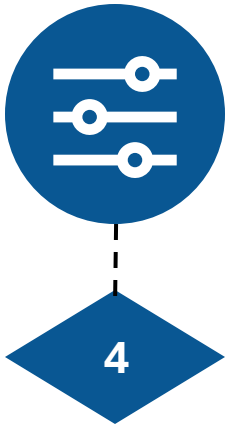
Present Designation Options

Complete issue paper that presents validation of Strategic Habitat Areas statewide and propose designation options to the Marine Fisheries Commission



Develop Management Options

Conduct a workshop with state partners to further develop options for protection or restoration/enhancement



Present Management Options

Complete issue paper and present management options to the commission(s).

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Planning for wetland change

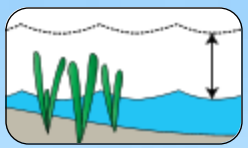
Thin Layer Placement (TLP) for enhanced marsh resilience

Included in this chapter:

History and Methods

Low and High Marsh

Tidal Frames



Faunal Response

Adjacent Habitats

Physical and Chemical Sediment Characteristics

Target Elevation and Thickness

Plant Growth and Recovery

Carbon and Nutrient Dynamics

Marsh image modified from S.C. Sea Grant. Symbols adapted from ian.umces.edu

Planning for wetland change

Thin Layer Placement (TLP) for enhanced marsh resilience

<u>This section does:</u>

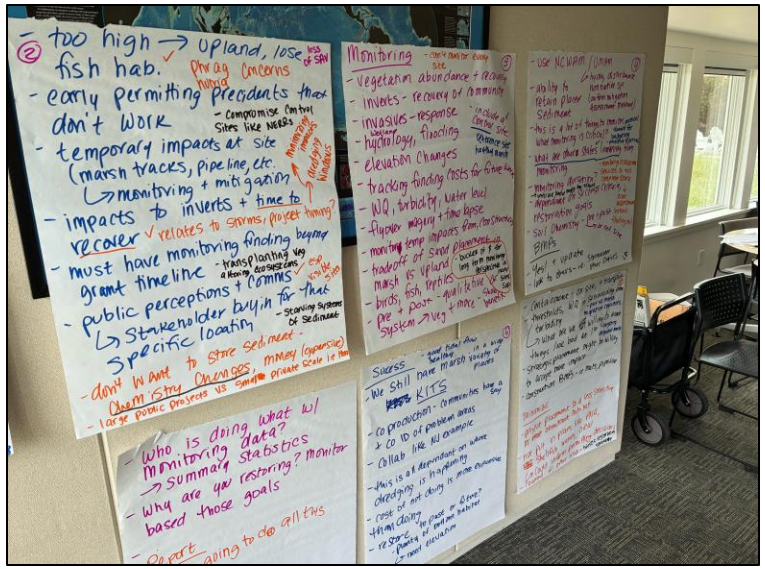
- Respond to stakeholder interest in learning more about TLP
- Provide an informational resource for:
  - Regulatory and resource agency staff
  - Commission members
  - Restoration practitioners
  - Researchers
- Synthesize peer-reviewed literature, existing guidance documents, policies, and regulations
- Summarize case studies
- Incorporate results from a 2026 multi-agency TLP workshop
- Explore one possible tool for coastal wetland restoration and enhancement

<u>This section does not:</u>

- Propose management actions related to TLP implementation in NC
- Provide an endorsement to pursue widespread TLP in NC

TLP Coordination Workshop (March 30, 2026)





CHPP Actions

Thin Layer Placement (TLP) for enhanced marsh resilience

1 → 2 → 3

Create TLP Workgroup

Create a state-wide multi-agency workgroup to stay current on TLP science and applications, and if necessary, facilitate the establishment of best practices specific to NC.

Evaluate Wetland Status

Evaluate the status and trends of wetlands across coastal NC, incorporating high-resolution land cover data obtained through the 2021 CHPP.

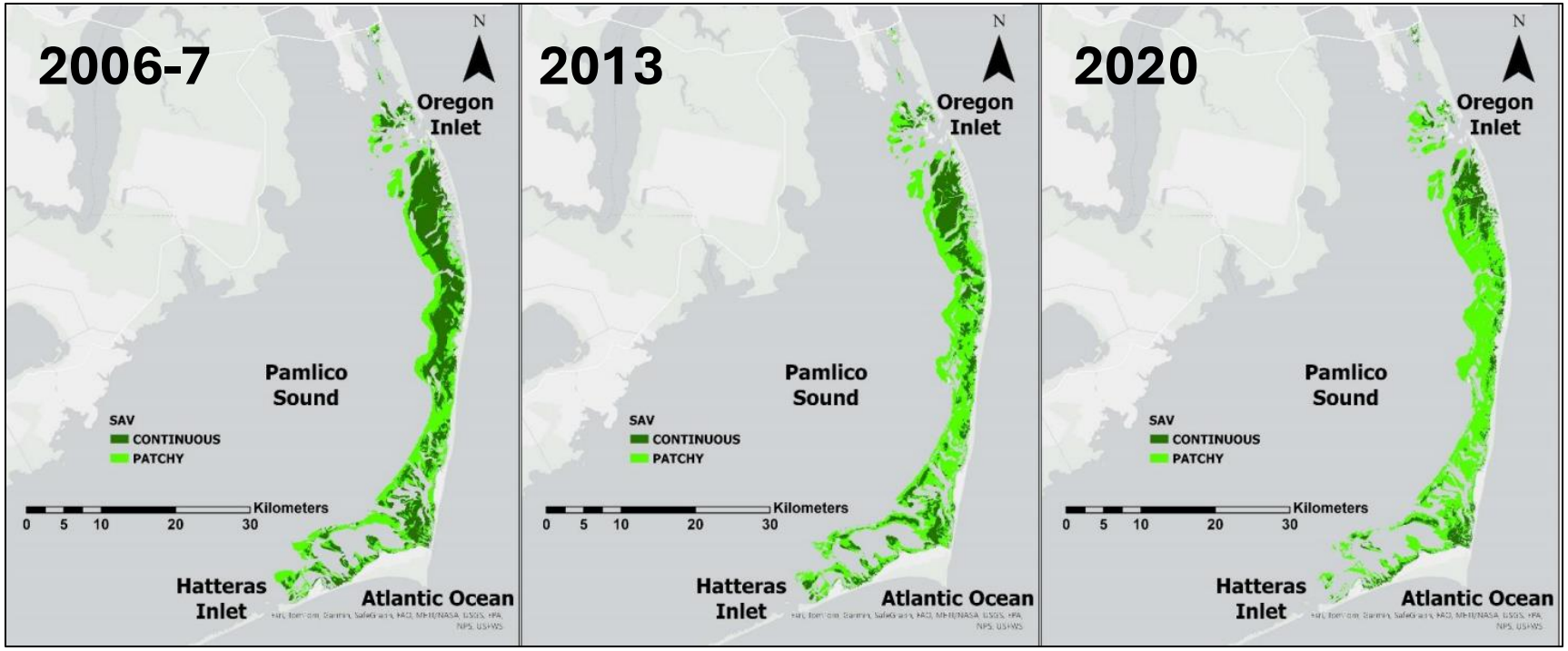
Assess Need

Leverage existing tools and data sources to identify candidate areas that may benefit most from TLP.

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SAV protection and restoration

2026 APNEP Submerged Aquatic Vegetation extent & distribution report



Seagrass beds are disappearing and becoming patchier

~16% coastwide (>1% annually)

50% loss of continuous seagrass meadows

DEQ committed to protect and restore 191,000 acres of SAV coastwide
(2021 CHPP action 4.2)

Field et al. 2026

CHPP Actions

SAV protection and restoration

Water Clarity Standard	DEQ will collaboratively facilitate progress on the proposed water clarity standard to protect SAV
MFC Habitat Protections	Complete rulemaking issue paper and present management options to the MFC
Restoration Roadblocks	Work group to explore barriers to on-the-ground SAV restoration and identify research needs

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2026 CHPP Amendment

CRC Action

Vote to send the 2026 Coastal Habitat Protection Plan Amendment out for public and advisory committee review.

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2026 CHPP Recommended Actions

Ecosystem Based Management

- Stakeholder driven ecosystem assessment
- State ecosystem report card

Strategic Habitat Area validation and implementation

- SHA validation and designation options
- SHA management strategies

SAV protection and restoration

- Collaboratively facilitate progress on the proposed water clarity standard
- Initiate MFC rulemaking process to develop a habitat-based rule framework
- Workgroup for SAV restoration concerns and roadblocks

Planning for multi-decadal wetland change

- Develop a TLP resource document
- Create work group to stay current on TLP science and applications
- Evaluate status and trends of NC coastal wetlands
- Identify candidate areas that could benefit from TLP