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October 14, 2026

MEMORANDUM **CRC-26-84**

TO: Coastal Resources Commission
FROM: Charlie Deaton, DMF Habitat Protection Supervisor
SUBJECT: Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (CHPP) Update

The Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (CHPP) is mandated by the Fisheries Reform Act of 1997 (GS 143B-279.8) to be adopted every five years by the Environmental Management Commission, Coastal Resources Commission, and Marine Fisheries Commission. The Fisheries Reform Act also requires the Division of Coastal Management, the Division of Marine Fisheries, and the Division of Water Resources to work together to address threats to coastal habitats across their areas of expertise, and the first CHPP was adopted in 2005.

The 2016 CHPP serves as the base plan CHPP, providing in-depth documentation of the status and trends of coastal habitats, their importance to fisheries, the threats to those habitats from fishing gear, coastal development, and water quality, and recommended actions to address those threats. Like the 2021 CHPP, the 2026 CHPP takes the form of an amendment to the base plan, presenting four new issue papers focused on strategic habitat area validation, a coastwide ecosystem assessment and report card, SAV protection and restoration, and thin-layer placement as a wetland restoration technique. Drafts of the 2026 CHPP are available at www.deq.nc.gov/chpp.

At your August meeting, staff from DMF's habitat protection team gave a presentation reviewing the issue papers in the 2026 CHPP and requested your feedback and suggestions. DMF staff gave similar presentations to the Marine Fisheries Commission (August) and Environmental Management Commission's Water Quality Committee (September), requesting their feedback too.

Feedback from the three commissions has included: adding discussion of the Bonner Bridge mitigation project in the SAV restoration section, clearly addressing the nuances of the results of the Strategic Habitat Area validation study, exploring coordination with partners working on large restoration projects, and various recommended points of clarification. Additional written feedback from the EMC's Water Quality Committee is expected this month.

At your October meeting, DMF staff will present a short presentation summarizing the 2026 CHPP issue papers, and staff will request a CRC vote to signal preliminary support for the plan and begin a public comment period.

Looking ahead, DMF habitat protection staff will present to the CRC in February, focusing on any changes made to the CHPP in response to both public comments and any additional commission

feedback, and staff will ask for a vote for final approval of the 2026 CHPP. An updated draft of the 2026 CHPP will be provided ahead of time for the meeting materials.

DMF staff are presenting the 2026 CHPP to the MFC and EMC on similar timelines, and after all three commissions vote for final approval, the 2026 CHPP will go to the Department of Environmental Quality and be submitted for legislative review for finalization.

Questions or comments welcome: please email Charlie.Deaton@deq.nc.gov or call 252-725-2484.