



Coastal Management in South Carolina Fact Sheet Retrospective Group Interviews



In conjunction with the 25th Anniversary of Coastal Management in South Carolina, over forty former and present affiliates of the program were contacted and interviewed about their experiences with the coastal program.

This group included former Coastal Council panel and SCDHEC-OCRM appellate panel members, former agency staff members, and other interested private and public parties:

Retrospective Group Involvement with SC Coastal Management Program

- 20 former or present Coastal Council/Appellate Panel members
- 6 business group members (e.g., chambers of commerce)
- 6 former Coastal Council/OCRM staff members
- 6 interested citizens
- 6 other (e.g., academics)
- 5 Consultants to permit/certification applicants
- 5 Environmental/land conservation group members
- 5 Permit/certification applicants
- 5 South Carolina state environmental agency staff members
- 4 Local elected officials or staff members
- 3 State elected officials or staff members
- 2 Federal environmental agency staff members

(Note: several members of the Retrospective Group have had involvement with the coastal management program in different capacities over the last 25 years, which leads them to be classified in more than one category)

The majority of the Retrospective Group remains involved with the coastal management program on a frequent basis (once or twice every three months). The Group, many of whom contributed to the foundation of the program in its early years, was asked to reflect on the *key issues that led to program development*, their *perception of the program and its policies*, *program successes and failures*, as well as *future directions* for coastal management in South Carolina.

Key Issues that led to program development. Based on the recollections of the Retrospective Group, the two most pressing issues that necessitated a coastal management program in the Palmetto State were 1) increasing coastal development pressures, and 2) providing protection for salt marshes. Other issues

mentioned prominently by Group members included the following:

- Management of coastal waters and estuaries;
- Beach and dune protection;
- Protection for coastal resources in general;
- Wildlife habitat modification;
- Cultural resources.

Level of satisfaction with the program and the management plan. The Retrospective Group was asked about their level of satisfaction with the program and whether the management plan served as a successful guide to agency decision-making. The Group largely expressed satisfaction with the coastal management program and its guiding policies and regulations. The majority believes that the program has met their own expectations (76% strongly or partially agree). The Group shows a similar level of support for the management plan as a guide to agency decision-making (79% strongly or partially agree).

South Carolina Coastal Management Successes and Failures. The Group was asked to name program successes and failures, based on the agency mission of “managing coastal resources and promoting responsible development.”

Beachfront management (e.g., establishing base and setback lines) and preventing salt marsh loss were the two most frequently mentioned successes in managing coastal resources. Other positive effects of the coastal management program include agency permitting and certification, focusing public attention on the need for coastal management, Special Area Management Plans, stormwater management, and public participation. Major accomplishments of the program in promoting responsible development include master planning of development, beachfront management, stormwater management, and outreach programs and materials related to responsible development.

Perceived failures in managing coastal resources include lack of statutory authority to manage coastal growth, consistency of enforcement, not fully accomplishing beachfront management, and dock proliferation in the coastal counties. The effects of politics on the agency and its status as an office in DHEC were the most frequently mentioned failures of South Carolina coastal management in promoting responsible development.

Public involvement in coastal decision-making. Several members of the Retrospective Group believe

that the Coastal Council meeting format (e.g., monthly meetings, in different coastal locales) provided more opportunities for public participation in the management program. Another common response was that the public has ample opportunity to make its voice heard, by attending panel meetings and writing letters.

Critical coastal issues over the next 25 years. The Retrospective Group was also asked to peer into the future and identify critical issues that must be addressed in the upcoming years, then prioritize important coastal issues. Just as in 1977, in South Carolina's coastal management beginnings, growth and development in the coastal counties remains the issue of primary importance:

- 22 Development and growth in the coastal counties
- 6 Stormwater runoff; non-point source pollution
- 5 Urban sprawl; loss of open space
- 5 Water quality
- 5 Isolated freshwater wetland management
- 5 Wetland management, in general
- 4 Habitat protection
- 3 Local (regional, county, municipal) planning
- 3 Climate change; retreat from the beaches and marsh loss
- 3 Science-based decision-making
- 2 Development pressures on environmentally sensitive areas like marsh islands
- 2 Docks
- 2 Public access
- 2 Beach erosion
- 2 State coastal management framework

To meet these challenges, the Retrospective Group believes that agency support from the General Assembly is vital. Other obstacles that must be overcome include local government support, budget cuts, and intergovernmental fragmentation. A more thorough description of the results of the interviews will be included in the upcoming OCRM report, "Coastal Management in South Carolina: Past, Present and Future."