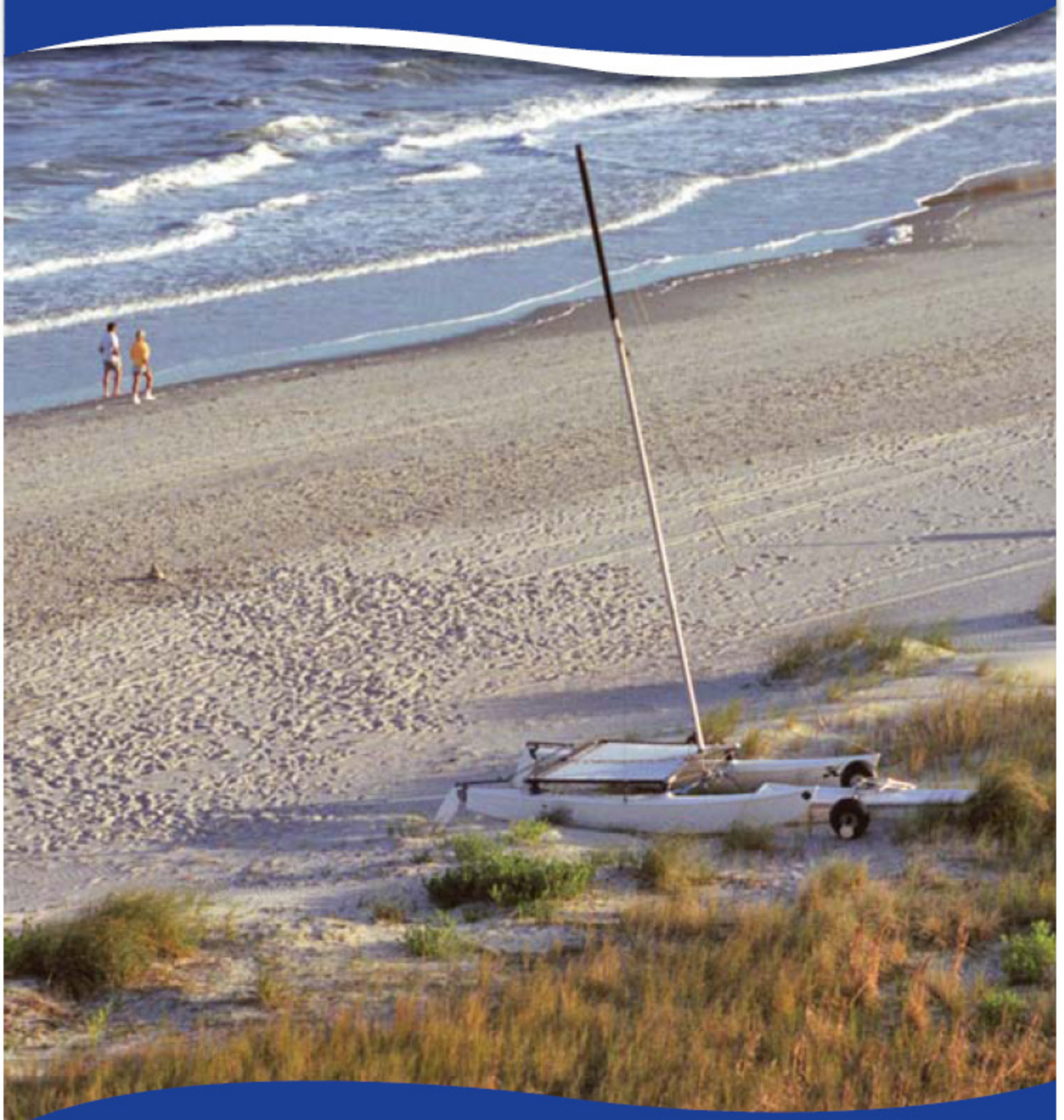


SETTING A NEW COURSE FOR THE COAST



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE
FINAL REPORT OF THE COUNCIL ON COASTAL FUTURES



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The eight counties that comprise the coastal zone of South Carolina are home to 1 million residents, are visited by 14 million tourists annually, contain 65 percent of the state's 456,000 acres of isolated wetlands and all of the state's salt marsh and shellfish grounds.

They also produced \$40 billion in economic output in 2000, house nationally and internationally important cultural resources, and are bound by 180 miles of beautiful beaches. The Coastal Zone's people and its ecology are diverse. The area's contributions to South Carolina's economy and quality of life are considerable.

The purpose of the Council on Coastal Futures Report is to recommend ways to preserve what is valued on the coast through recommending improvements to the state agency charged:

"to protect the quality of the coastal environment and to promote the economic and social improvement of the coastal zone and of all the people of the State."

—SC Code of Laws Section 48-39-30(A)

The South Carolina Council on Coastal Futures has submitted a comprehensive report as the result of eighteen months of in-depth discussion and dialogue among the 19 members of the council and many coastal citizens and leaders. The council is greatly pleased to present its recommendations to all who view South Carolina's coast as a treasured place worthy of special attention and management. The report contains a balanced vision for our coastal environment, economy and communities. This vision is underscored by the following statement of values that guided the council throughout this challenging process:

"To have an inviting coast that ensures a high quality of life, environmental stewardship, and sustainable economic growth."

BACKGROUND

2004 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the South Carolina coastal management program and served as an opportunity to evaluate the progress made and lessons learned in managing South Carolina's coastal resources since enactment of the 1977 Coastal Tidelands and Wetlands Act. This act established the South Carolina coastal management program, originally the South Carolina Coastal Council, and now the DHEC Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management (DHEC-OCRM).

In November 2002, the Board of the Department of Health and Environmental Control appointed the 19 members of the Council on Coastal Futures as an ad hoc advisory committee. The board charged the council with documenting priority issues and concerns

and recommending actions, programs and measures to improve the effectiveness of the South Carolina Coastal Zone Management Program.

In keeping with its mission, the council employed a very public process, conducting all its business in well-attended meetings that were open to the public. A summary of the council's recommendations for assuring the continued effectiveness of coastal management in South Carolina's rapidly changing coastal counties are listed on the next page. The final report also contains suggested timelines for implementation of these recommendations, all of which are dependent on DHEC board endorsement.

GATHERING INPUT AND INFORMATION

The council convened fifteen times between December 2002 and April 2004. The full report includes appendices with agendas and minutes of these meetings, the results of public and stakeholder surveys, as well as a listing of all the individuals and their comments, both oral and written, who addressed the council at these meetings.

Three separate assessments were conducted between July 2002 and January 2003 to provide a starting point for council deliberations. These efforts surveyed (a) stakeholders representing a broad range of interests, (b) those who have a particular knowledge of the coastal program and (c) the general public. This input provided welcome and needed direction and perspective. With a strong voice, those contacted indicated a consensus for three important priority issues:

- the need for development and growth management, particularly in assisting local governments and coastal communities
- the need for habitat and wetlands protection and management
- the need for water quality and stormwater management.

Beginning with the second meeting of the council in January 2003, the council involved the public and stakeholders to the maximum extent possible in their work. The agenda of the council was largely established by addressing those issues and concerns that the public, coastal residents, community leaders and stakeholders believed to be most important for the future of the coast. Utilizing this input as direction, the council established a schedule and agenda for its work that focused on three broad areas of consideration, in the following order: regulatory processes, assistance to local governments, and coastal resource management issues.

COASTAL ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS

As additional input for the council, DHEC-OCRM partnered with the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium to commission a study on the contribution of the coast to the South Carolina economy. Dr. Mark S. Henry and Dr. David L. Barkley with the Clemson University Regional Economic Development Research Laboratory completed their study on September 30, 2002. This work provided the following key findings for the eight coastal counties from 1990 to 2000:

- 28 percent population growth
- \$40 billion in total economic output in 2000, 22 percent of the SC total
- 25 percent of all state employment growth
- 33 percent of all new private sector jobs in the state
- 25 percent of new jobs in fast growth industries (services, trade & finance, insurance & real estate)

The rapid growth in the coastal economy occurred at a time of very significant federal and military employment declines since 1990 due to base closures in Charleston and Myrtle Beach. Total government employment had a net loss of nearly 19,000 jobs in the eight coastal counties while the 38 non-coastal counties saw a net increase of over 41,000 jobs. Federal, civilian and military job losses due to the two base closures amounted to nearly 36,000 jobs lost from 1990 to 2000. Despite these losses, coastal employment growth still rose nearly 25% from 1990 to 2000 compared to 19% for the non-coastal counties.

Labor force growth rates in the eight coastal counties were 25 percent higher than the rest of the state. The number of households in the coastal counties increased at a rate of 33 percent higher than the rest of the state. Retirees and their service needs contributed much to these differences. The coast has a significant competitive advantage in the in-migration of retirees and in service sectors such as trade, insurance, banking, communications, finance and real estate. The report concludes: *"the growth in the coastal economy dominated the State through the 1990s and will continue to do so through the current decade. Even though the coast dominated the State in most leading economic measures, these shares of aggregate economic activity may actually understate the importance of the eight coastal counties to the state."*

KEY PRIORITIES

Contained within the final report is a full discussion of 18 recommendations, including steps required for implementation and a suggested schedule. The council views as important every recommendation contained within the final report and summarized below. The following recommendations are the council's highest priorities:

- Implement a mandatory mediation process for appeals
- Improve coordination within DHEC for coastal regulatory processes
- Build capacity within DHEC-OCRM to serve as a center of expertise and to provide technical assistance on coastal resource and environmental planning issues

- Provide guidance for managing and protecting freshwater wetlands
- Improve local and state stormwater management
- Maintain and enhance the quality of coastal beaches, waters and habitats and public access to them
- Improve decision-making by accessing and applying the best available scientific information

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Regulatory Processes

1. Improve internal DHEC coordination to ensure concurrent and expedited project review
2. Improve cooperation between DHEC-OCRM and other agencies
3. Implement a mandatory mediation program for all DHEC-OCRM permit appeals
4. Improve the DHEC-OCRM public notices
5. Clarify that conditions on DHEC-OCRM critical area permits continue for the life of the permit

Assistance to Local Government

6. Build capacity at DHEC-OCRM to be a 'center of technical expertise' for local governments
7. Continue DHEC implementation of the state stormwater permitting program
8. Improve water quality by managing stormwater on a watershed basis

Coastal Resource Management Issues

9. Encourage construction of community docks in lieu of multiple private docks
10. Encourage voluntary dock planning by cooperating landowners
11. Develop statewide legislation for managing freshwater wetlands
12. Identify marina dredging issues and problems, evaluate technologies and recommend preferred alternatives for spoil disposal
13. Review DHEC's septic tank policy
14. Determine strategies and alternative funding sources for public beach access
15. Fund the State Beach Renourishment Trust Fund
16. Allow and encourage innovative stormwater best management practices (BMPs) and standards
17. Develop a strategy for maintaining and inspecting stormwater BMPs
18. Establish formal partnerships between DHEC-OCRM and state research institutions

IMPLEMENTING CHANGE

The Council on Coastal Futures recognizes that implementing the recommendations contained in the final report will require a significant commitment of resources, time and energy on the part of all concerned to achieve the vision of *“an inviting coast that ensures a high quality of life, environmental stewardship, and sustainable economic growth.”* The leadership of the DHEC board, Governor, and General Assembly will significantly enhance the quality of outcomes from these recommendations.

This commitment must also be shared, supported and understood by every citizen and resident who appreciates the quality of life and clean environment of our coast. Success cannot be realized without a similar commitment to educate our citizens on the importance of coastal stewardship to our state’s future. The council believes that the coast cannot sustain

economic growth and progress without a strong commitment to environmental protection and improvement, preservation of the coastal landscape, and careful planning for continued public and private investment on the coast. Research has convincingly documented the lead role that the coast had in sustaining the state’s economy in the 1990s. This same research predicts an even stronger leading role for the decades ahead. The decisions that we make today for the management of our coast will determine if the coast’s future is one of sustained economic and environmental health and well-being or one of diminished quality of life and unrealized potential.

To download the full South Carolina Council on Coastal Futures Final Report, please visit our website:
<http://www.scdhec.gov/ocrm/html/ccf.html>

This publication is funded by a grant/cooperative agreement from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of NOAA or any of its sub-agencies.

A publication of the SC Department of Health and Environmental Control pursuant to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Award Number EA133C03SE0085 and NA770Z0124 for financial assistance as provided by the Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972, as amended, administered by the Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

Printed January 2005

Total Printing Cost - \$600.00
Number of Documents Printed - 1,000
Cost Per Unit - \$.60



www.scdhec.gov

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