

Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan 2012 - 2022

*Collaborative Actions
for
Protecting and Restoring the Albemarle-Pamlico Ecosystem*



Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program

*Approved by APNEP Policy Board
March 14, 2012
Columbia, NC*

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Mission

To identify, restore, and protect the significant resources in the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system.

Acknowledgments

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|--|--|
| APNEP Policy Board | NC Forest Service |
| APNEP Science and Technical Advisory Committee | NC League of Municipalities |
| APNEP Citizens' Advisory Committee | NC Office of Conservation, Planning, and Community Affairs |
| APNEP Management Advisory Committee | NC Office of Environmental Education & Public Affairs |
| APNEP - EBM Steering Committee | NC Sea Grant |
| Conservation Trust for North Carolina | NC State University |
| East Carolina University | NC Wildlife Resources Commission |
| Environmental Defense Fund | Partnership for the Sounds |
| National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration | The Nature Conservancy |
| National Park Service | UNC Coastal Studies Institute |
| Nicholas Institute for Environmental Policy | UNC-CH Institute for the Environment |
| NC Association of County Commissioners | UNC-CH Institute of Marine Sciences |
| NC Coastal Federation | US Environmental Protection Agency |
| NC Cooperative Extension | US Fish & Wildlife Service |
| NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services | US Forest Service |
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| NC Division of Soil & Water Conservation | VA Department of Environmental Quality |
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| NC Division of Water Quality | And many others... |
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2012-2022 Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) is a significant step forward for the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program (APNEP). While the Albemarle-Pamlico region is rich in natural resources, the ecosystem faces some very unique and large-scale challenges. The CCMP aims to usher in a new era of environmental resource management to ensure these resources are sustained and available to future generations.

The shift from management methods presented in the previous CCMP (1994) is most notably evident in the integration of ecosystem-based management practices. Ecosystem-based management (EBM) includes consideration of both human and natural systems, an adaptive management framework, and meaningful engagement with the region's citizens to find environmental management and policy solutions. Following a directive from APNEP's Policy Board in December 2009 and support from APNEP's Policy Board and Advisory Committees, the CCMP was developed using principles of EBM.

The CCMP is organized by asking and then answering four basic questions: what is a healthy Albemarle-Pamlico system, what is the current condition of the system, what are the most significant challenges facing the system over the next 10 years, and what actions should be implemented to best achieve a healthy system? Goals, outcomes, objectives, and actions were carefully crafted through a systems-based analysis of the regional ecosystem. To achieve the APNEP mission, three overarching goals have been established:

- Goal 1: A region where human communities are sustained by a functioning ecosystem
- Goal 2: A region where aquatic, wetland, and upland habitats support viable populations of native species
- Goal 3: A region where water quantity and quality maintain ecological integrity

Initiatives include protection and restoration efforts to improve water quality and habitats, identification of gaps in knowledge of the system, and engagement of the public to make connections between the natural environment and services provided by the system. APNEP has placed an emphasis on assessment and monitoring to gain further knowledge of the system and facilitate adaptive management.

Finally, as a National Estuary Program, much of APNEP's work is achieved through collaborative partnerships and leveraged resources with others interested in environmental and natural resource management in the region. Many of the objectives and actions in the CCMP rely on involvement from key governmental, non-profit, and other partners. In a time of growing austerity, the continued success of our program is dependent on the success of these partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

The Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine System

The Sounds

The Albemarle-Pamlico estuary includes eight sounds on the coast of North Carolina and Virginia. The Albemarle Sound and the Pamlico Sound are the two largest bodies of water in this interconnected system, but many coastal residents are also acquainted with the region's smaller sounds, including Back, Bogue, Croatan, Currituck, Core, and Roanoke Sounds (Figure 1).

These sounds give a shared sense of place to the counties and municipalities found along their shores. Towns like Bath, Edenton, Manteo, and New Bern each have their own charming character, drawing upon rich histories dating to and beyond colonial America. Separated from the mainland, villages along Hatteras and Ocracoke islands have developed unique waterfront identities. In down-east Carteret County, like many areas in the Albemarle-Pamlico region, a unique way of life persists in communities intimately tied to the ecosystem.

Tourists visit the region from all over the world to experience these special places. Some are content enjoying coastal cuisine and relaxing in the sun, while the more adventurous will explore an extensive array of parks, forests, and wildlife refuges. The barrier islands attract thousands upon thousands of visitors each year, while some continue to visit the estuarine shorelines and communities for their subtle beauty, relaxed pace, and southern hospitality.

Up and down the coast, people participate in water-dependent recreation like fishing, hunting, swimming, and boating. On most weekends, hundreds of recreational anglers can be found sound side. On fishing piers, in tackle shops and behind duck blinds, outdoor tradition and knowledge are shared among generations. Paddle trails beckon to kayak and canoe enthusiasts. Sailboats tack in the stiff winds characteristic of the region, while speedboats tow skiers in their wake.

The sounds also support North Carolina's commercial fishing industry. Fishing boats leave before dawn, staying in the sounds or making their way through coastal inlets to the waters of the Atlantic. Oystermen brave the elements, prying delicacies from reefs and mud bottoms. Crabbers set and pull thousands of pots daily, selling their catch to fish houses that serve as a community pillar. The commercial fishing industry provides income for residents and stocks many markets and restaurants in the region. Perhaps more importantly, it is also the backbone of coastal culture in many smaller communities.

The sounds provide other benefits that are not quite as easy to see. Coastal wetlands filter water supplies and provide a buffer against storms and hurricanes. Submerged aquatic vegetation provides important habitat for most fish and shellfish species in the sounds, while also creating oxygen and removing excess nutrients in the water. Oysters, clams, and other shellfish filter the water column before being served in homes and restaurants throughout the state. The brackish waters that connect the sea and rivers were once legendary runs of shad and herring.

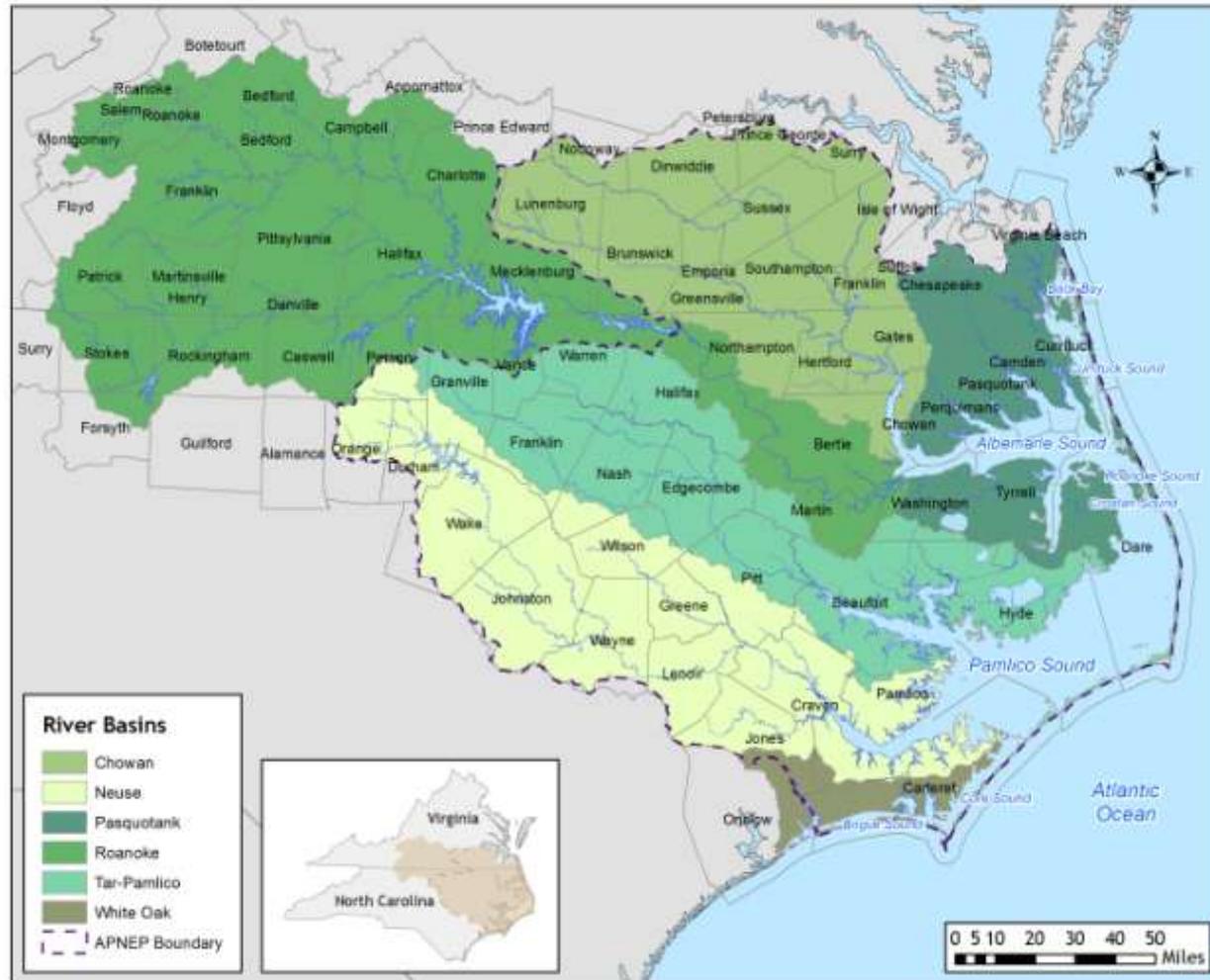
The sounds collectively support billions of dollars in economic activity and natural services for Americans each year. Yet many residents of the region might suggest that no dollar figure can truly capture the rivers' and sounds' value, as the ecosystems and cultures they support are irreplaceable.

The System

Concerted efforts to restore and protect the Albemarle-Pamlico estuary have been ongoing for decades. However, effective management of the sounds requires the study and management of the broader ecosystem that impacts them. The Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem includes the sounds, the streams and the rivers that flow into them, and the land that catches the rainfall and drains into these rivers (collectively known as the watershed).

The Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem spans a land area of over 28,000 square miles. It also includes two million acres of estuarine waters and 10,000 miles of streams and rivers (Figure 1). The headwaters of this ecosystem are found as far as the mountains of Virginia and the North Carolina piedmont. The ecosystem includes wetlands, forests, farms, and cities – all of which affect the downstream estuary in complex ways. Some areas are particularly susceptible to environmental degradation, including urban waterways and areas of low elevation. To effectively safeguard the sounds for future generations, it is necessary to protect and restore the entire ecosystem – its water, air, land, and residents.

Figure 1: River basins and sounds of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system.



For the reader's convenience, a table of acronyms is provided on page 57

The Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program

Overview

The mission of the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program (APNEP) is to identify, protect, and restore the significant resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system. APNEP pursues this mission with guidance and support from its overarching Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan, advisory bodies and regional partners.

APNEP is a cooperative effort jointly sponsored by the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation, with financial support provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Currently, N.C. Governor's Executive Order #122 provides the advisory structure through a Policy Board and three advisory committees (Citizens', Management, and Science and Technical).

APNEP's Policy Board and advisory committees provide invaluable participation and support to APNEP on the implementation of measures to restore and protect the sounds' resources. These bodies are comprised of over 80 members representing a diverse cross-section of governmental, societal, economic, and scientific interests. These members also act as ambassadors for APNEP within their own positions, interest groups, and agencies. With their guidance and support, APNEP collaborates with dozens of agencies and organizations every year to improve the estuarine ecosystem.

History

In recognition of the numerous benefits provided by the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds, the United States Congress designated the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine System an "estuary of national significance." In 1987, The Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine Study (APES) was among the first of 28 National Estuary Programs established by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through amendments to the Clean Water Act.

From 1987 to 1994, APES sponsored nearly one hundred research initiatives in the Albemarle-Pamlico region, each designed to give scientists and managers a better understanding of how this ecosystem functions and to evaluate its health. These research initiatives culminated in the development and implementation of the region's first CCMP. Upon adoption of the CCMP in 1994, the program became known by its current name (Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program) as it broadened its mission to include applied conservation, management, and engagement initiatives.

Since its inception, APNEP has led or contributed to scores of conservation efforts in the region. APNEP's first CCMP (1994) called for the creation of several important environmental management initiatives that came to fruition in the form of Partnership for

the Sounds' Estuarium, the Center for Geographic Analysis, and the N.C. Clean Water Management Trust Fund. Annual restoration and demonstration projects improve habitats and water quality throughout the estuarine system. APNEP continues its proud tradition of facilitating applied scientific research that began during the APES period, which recently led to the completion of a coast-wide map of submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) for the estuary. APNEP has supported citizens monitoring for over two decades. Outdoor classrooms funded by APNEP dot the region, improving water quality while giving students a place to learn about the natural world. These are just a few of the many ways APNEP continues to benefit the sounds and the ecosystems that support them.

Management Approach

Since the release of the 1994 CCMP, APNEP has consistently implemented a management approach anchored by two key tenets. With the 2012-2022 CCMP, APNEP reaffirms its fidelity to these principles while further pursuing its newly adopted ecosystem-based management approach.

First, APNEP implements a watershed approach to protecting and restoring the estuarine system. Consistent with this practice, management efforts have been directed from river headwaters to the sounds throughout the region. This ecological approach helps APNEP ensure that issues are addressed in a holistic way, and that APNEP has standing to address issues throughout the watershed.

Second, APNEP takes a partnership approach to achieve its mission. Protection of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system is an enormous undertaking, and the resources directly allocated to APNEP are limited. APNEP seeks to overcome this hurdle by leveraging partnerships among governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academia, and the public to make significant improvements for the sounds. Most notably, North Carolina and Virginia are parties to a Memorandum of Agreement to manage the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system, and APNEP staff members are hosted by both states. As a result of its broad reach, APNEP is well positioned to fill gaps and identify synergies among its partners.

With the implementation of this plan, APNEP adopts the principles of ecosystem-based management to better support its mission. The ecosystem-based management (EBM) approach includes a systems-based consideration of both human and natural systems, an adaptive management framework, and meaningful engagement with the public to find environmental management and policy solutions.

Overview of the 2012-2022 Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan

Plan authority and overview

As detailed in §320 of the federal Clean Water Act, the guiding document for APNEP, as for all other National Estuary Programs, is its Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP). The CCMP offers objectives and actions designed to protect and restore the Albemarle-Pamlico estuary. Since the adoption of APNEP's original CCMP, many scientific and management developments have occurred. With this new plan, APNEP introduces a new ecosystem-based approach to achieving its mission.

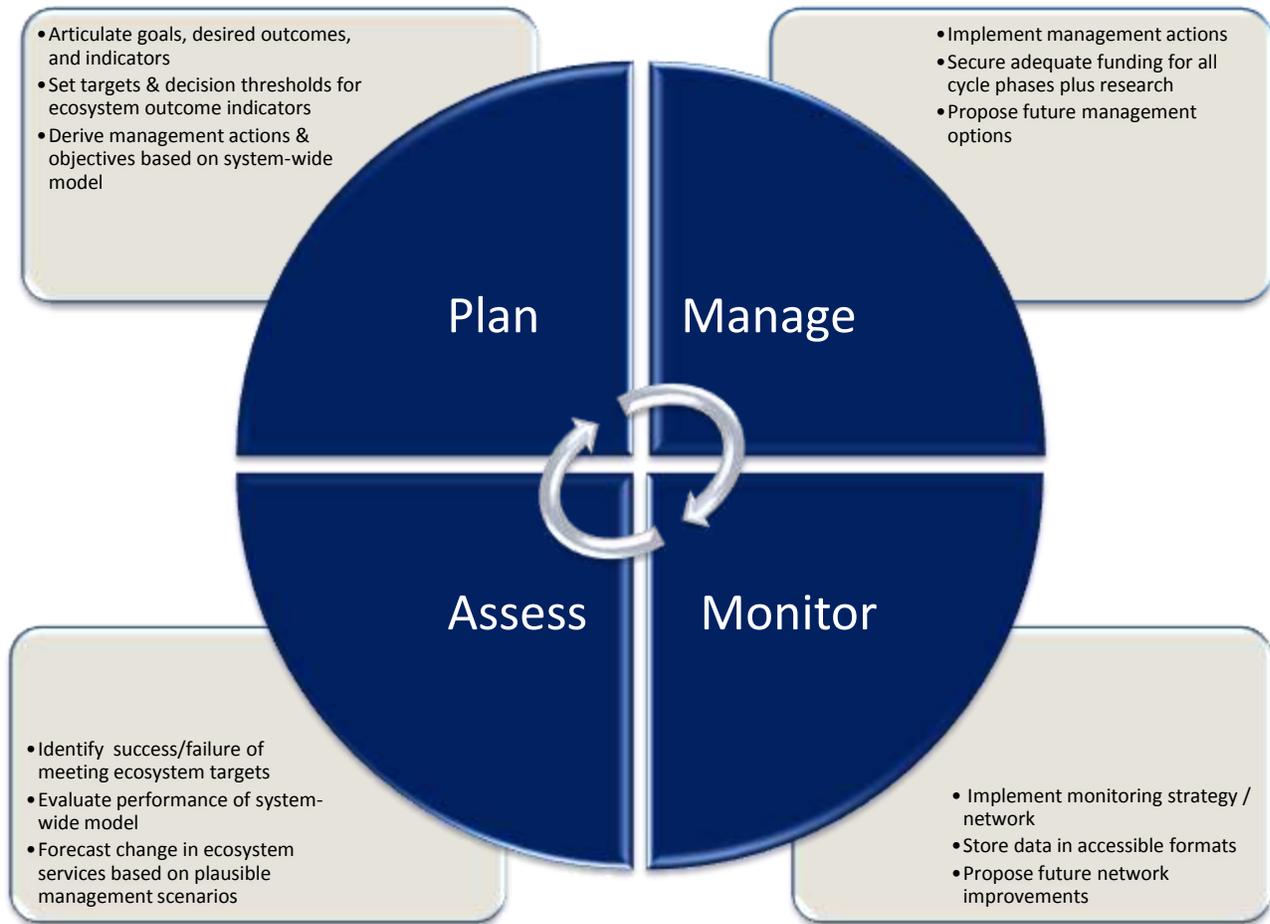
This ecosystem-based plan charts the course for APNEP's activities for the coming decade. It incorporates scientific and planning advances into a plan that serves as a potential model for broad-scale ecosystem-based management efforts. The plan further provides a statement of common purpose across the watershed and forms the basis for cooperation and collaboration among implementing partners. Ultimately, the new CCMP makes it easier to match the Program's annual work plan activities to existing goals and priorities, better couple those priorities with existing and future funding resources, and build on the program's strengths and partnerships.

Ecosystem-based planning

How is this document different from its predecessor? First, this plan has much less technical language, representing APNEP's desire to craft an approachable, readable, and often-referenced document. Close inspection also reveals a careful framework that represents efforts to incorporate ecosystem-based principles into the CCMP. Management objectives and actions were developed through a systems-based analysis of the regional ecosystem. The plan is further structured to support adaptive management, which will allow APNEP to improve its approach as both successes and shortcomings are documented. Ultimately, APNEP is working to introduce more accountability into the environmental management process by monitoring the ecosystem, setting management targets, and critically evaluating progress.

For a more detailed description of APNEP's EBM planning process, see Appendix A.

Figure 2: APNEP's adaptive management cycle.



Organization of this Plan

Ecosystem-based management is a complex undertaking, and this complexity created some challenges for organizing this plan. After much consideration, the plan was organized around four basic questions. By systematically considering each of the first three questions, APNEP developed its management actions and presents them in its treatment of Question 4. Each question is discussed in a separate chapter. The questions:

Question 1: What is a healthy Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine System?

Question 2: What is the status of the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine System?

Question 3: What are the greatest challenges facing the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine System?

Question 4: What actions should be taken to move toward healthier Albemarle-Pamlico Sounds by 2022?

Discussion of Question 1 allows a diverse group of stakeholders to articulate the characteristics of a healthy Albemarle-Pamlico system. These characteristics serve as the environmental goals and outcomes sought by the plan. Question 2 offers insights into the current state of the ecosystem. It further allows for the identification of environmental trends and shows areas where progress is most desirable. In Question 3, major environmental challenges are identified that must be overcome to achieve the goals set forth in Question 1. After formally considering these three questions and working through a systems-based model to address them, management actions were developed and presented in response to Question 4.

In some ways, the heart of this management plan rests in its answer to Question 4. For organizational purposes, the many actions developed for the plan were grouped together as appropriate. Closely related actions were categorized as objectives, and closely related objectives were categorized into five broad components entitled **Identify, Protect, Restore, Engage, and Monitor**.

For each action within the CCMP, APNEP has identified key partners that will be engaged for implementation. Key partners were determined by their mission, statutory mandate, published materials, or by consultation with the partner.

Additionally appropriate outcomes and outputs were developed as metrics for measuring success. Actions generally generate two kinds of products: outputs and outcomes. Outputs are the tangible things the action intends to produce. Examples

include a plan, a training program, a report, acres restored, or a constructed feature. Outcomes are changes in status of condition. Examples include changes in environmental measurements or new management processes.

It is vital that both types have defined metrics and tracking mechanisms to ensure progress toward achieving the deliverables proceeds according to plan. If the progress deviates from the plan, corrective actions need to be taken to ensure positive ecosystem results from management actions.

These questions often have complex answers, which are offered in light of changing demographic trends, different environmental pressures, and advancements in ecosystem science. In this plan, APNEP and its partners propose their best solutions to these questions, with the realization that these answers may change over time. While much remains to be achieved, this plan provides guidance for APNEP and its partners as they respectively strive to most effectively carry out our missions.

Question 1: *What is a healthy Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system?*

“Ecosystem health” is a term that is difficult to define. A healthy system has innumerable variables and relationships that can be difficult to describe and study. The meaning of the term differs depending on context. In general terms, a healthy Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine System might include a thriving natural world, a high quality of life for its people, and a vibrant economy. The air would be safe to breathe and the water would be safe to drink. Farmlands would be fertile and fishing would be bountiful. Outdoor recreation and education opportunities would be readily available. Businesses would be profitable while minimizing negative environmental impacts. While one person might agree that a healthy ecosystem includes all of these factors, others might think this definition is either misguided or woefully incomplete.

Defining the elements of a healthy system is a difficult process. The Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system encompasses more than 31,000 square miles of land and water. The importance of reaching stakeholder agreement on environmental goals and outcomes to benefit ecosystem health is difficult to overstate. It will always be necessary to consider competing uses and interests when planning for such a large region, and management approaches should consider them fairly. In short, APNEP and its many partners in the region must be able to articulate environmental goals before developing a plan to achieve them.

APNEP and its partners have developed a vision for a healthy Albemarle-Pamlico estuary that accounts for the various interests found within the region. This vision of ecosystem health is communicated through three overarching goals, each of which includes measurable ecosystem outcomes. The CCMP management actions outlined in Question 4 are each predicated on effectively pursuing the goals established by stakeholder representatives.

Three goals have been established that, if fully met, would reflect a healthy Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system. To assess progress in reaching each goal, a set of ecosystem outcomes has been developed. These **ecosystem outcomes** are qualitative statements of what a healthy ecosystem should look like. Each outcome will be supported by a set of measurable **indicators** and associated **ecosystem targets** or benchmarks, which are currently under development. Establishing these indicators and targets is the first action in implementing this CCMP. An example, of these types of indicators is displayed in Table 1 (page 14). These candidate indicators are physical, biological, or chemical conditions that can be measured to provide data about the status of the ecosystem.

As time passes, APNEP will periodically consult with its partners to ensure current outcomes remain meaningful and refine management targets to reflect a balance

between competing priorities. Furthermore, as monitoring capabilities improve, APNEP will work with its representative stakeholders to develop, refine, and agree upon new targets and benchmarks, which are the most precise expression of these ecosystem goals. Ultimately, the development of measurable indicators and benchmarks for the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system enables APNEP to determine whether environmental progress has been made, adjust management actions when necessary, and report on the state of the ecosystem to partners, stakeholders, and the general public.

The proposed goals and associated outcomes for the program are:

Goal 1: A region where human communities are sustained by a functioning ecosystem

Ecosystem Outcomes:

- a. Waters are safe for personal contact.*
- b. Designated surface and ground water supplies are safe for human consumption.*
- c. Surface hydrologic regimes sustain regulated human uses.*
- d. Fish and game are safe for human consumption.*
- e. Opportunities for recreation and access to public lands and waters are protected and enhanced.*

Goal 2: A region where aquatic, wetland, and upland habitats support viable populations of native species

Ecosystem Outcomes:

- a. The biodiversity, function, and populations of species in aquatic, wetland, and upland communities are protected, restored, or enhanced.*
- b. The extent and quality of upland, freshwater, estuarine, and near-shore marine habitats fully support biodiversity and ecosystem function.*
- c. Non-native invasive species do not significantly impair native species' viability or function, nor impair habitat quality, quantity, and the processes that form and maintain habitats.*

Goal 3: A region where water quantity and quality maintain ecological integrity

Ecosystem Outcomes:

- a. Appropriate hydrologic regimes support ecological integrity.*
- b. Nutrients and pathogens do not harm species that depend on the waters.*
- c. Toxics in waters and sediments do not harm species that depend on the waters.*
- d. Sediments do not harm species that depend on the waters.*

Table 1. Management goals, ecosystem outcomes, supporting CCMP actions and candidate indicators.

| Goal | Ecosystem Outcome | CCMP Supporting Actions | Candidate Indicator | |
|---|---|--|---|--|
| 1: Human Communities A region where human communities are sustained by a functioning ecosystem | 1a: Waters are safe for personal contact. | A1.1, 1.2, 2.3, 3.3; B1.2; C1.1,1.2, 1.4; D1.1, 1.2, 2.3,3.1,3.3; E1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 | Beach action days/closings by water body type (sounds, freshwater river, lake, brackish river) | |
| | 1b: Designated surface and ground water supplies are safe for human consumption. | A1.1, 1.2, 2.3, 3.3; B1.2; C1.1,1.2, 1.4; D1.1, 1.2, 2.3,3.1,3.3; E1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 | WQ standard violations (surface waters) | |
| | 1c: Surface hydrologic regimes sustain regulated human uses. | A 1.1, 1.2, 1.2, 2.3, 3.4; D 1.2, 2.2, 3.2; E1.1, 1.2, 2.1 2.2 | Drinking water standard violations (aquifers) | |
| | 1d: Fish and game are safe for human consumption. | A1.1, 1.2, 2.3, 3.3; B1.2; C1.1,1.2; D 1.1, 1.2, 2.3,3.1,3.3; E1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 | Severity and frequency of droughts | |
| | 1e: Opportunities for recreation and access to public lands and waters are protected and enhanced. | A 1.1, 1.2, 2.3; D 1.1, 1.2, 1.5, 2.2, 3.3; E1.1, 1.2, 2.1 2.2 | Fish consumption advisories Shellfish area closures | |
| 2: Native Species A region where aquatic, wetland, and upland habitats support viable populations of native species | 2a: The biodiversity, function, and populations of species in aquatic, wetland, and upland communities are protected, restored, or enhanced. | A1.1, 1.2, 2.2, 3.1, 3.4; B 1.3, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 3.3; C 1.3, 1.4, 2.2, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4; D1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.3; E 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 | Total distance of land and paddle trails Water access points: number & location | |
| | 2b: The extent and quality of upland, freshwater, estuarine and near-shore marine habitats fully support biodiversity and ecosystem function. | A 1.1, 1.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4; B 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3; C 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 5.1, 5.2, 5.3; D 1.2, 1.4, 2.2, 3.1, 3.3; E1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 | Oyster bed extent River herring abundance King rail, Swainson's warbler population /occurrences Box Turtle population /occurrences Longleaf Pine extent, location Firefly population | |
| | 2c: Non-native invasive species do not significantly impair native species' viability or function, nor impair habitat quality, quantity, and the processes that form and maintain habitats. | A 1.2, 2.1, 2.3; B 2.6; C 3.1; D 1.2, 1.3, 2.2, 3.3; E 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 | SAV extent and composition Quality & extent of anadromous fish spawning/nursery areas | |
| | 3: Water Quantity & Quality A region where water quantity and quality maintain ecological integrity | 3a: Appropriate hydrologic regimes support ecological integrity. | A 1.2, 2.1, 2.3; B 2.6; C 3.1; D 1.2, 1.3, 2.2, 3.3; E 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 | Hydrilla population status/occurrences Phragmites australis extent (common reed) Kudzu population status/occurrences |
| | | 3b: Nutrients and pathogens do not harm species that depend on the waters. | A 1.1, 1.2, 2.3; B 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5; C 1.2, 2.1, 2.3, 2.4; D 1.1,1.2, 1.4, 2.1,2.2, 3.3, E1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 | Dissolved oxygen concentration Major river flows |
| | | 3c: Toxics in waters and sediments do not harm species that depend on the waters. | A 1.1, 1.2, 2.3, 2.4; B 1.1; C 1.2; D 1.2, 3.1, 3.3; E 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 | Amount and extent of impaired waters Chlorophyll-a concentration |
| | 3d: Sediments do not harm species that depend on the waters. | A 1.1, 1.2, 2.3; B 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.3, 2.6, 3.1, 3.2; C 1.3, 1.5, 2.1, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2; D 1.2, 3.1, 3.3; E 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 | Amount and extent of impaired waters Dissolved metals concentrations Amount and extent of impaired waters Average secchi disk depth | |

This table illustrates the linkage between the CCMP goals and ecosystem outcomes (page 13), the CCMP management actions (found on pages 19 to 53), and example ecosystem indicators by which success can be measured.

Question 2: *What is the status of the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine System?*

Equally important to setting measurable goals and outcomes (Question 1) is determining the precise condition of the estuarine system. Ultimately, the gap between an ecosystem indicator's current status and the desired state informs the amount of time and resources necessary to achieve that outcome. Thus, an evaluation of ecosystem status and trends must come before the identification and evaluation of challenges and threats (Question 3) and subsequent establishment and refinement of CCMP management actions (Question 4).

The Albemarle-Pamlico Estuary Study Status and Trends Report (1991) preceded the 1994 CCMP and set the stage for adaptive management in the region. Unfortunately, although recurring status updates were anticipated after the 1991 assessment, APNEP was unable to complete further independent assessments in a coordinated manner for over two decades. However, APNEP partners at both the state and federal levels have conducted a number of large-scale assessments since 1991. Each of these assessments provided varying degrees of information on key ecosystem metrics.

The initial effort to reactivate this key adaptive management function was the publication of the *2012 Albemarle-Pamlico Ecosystem Assessment*. Released concurrently with this CCMP, APNEP's latest assessment offers a treatment of 24 important ecosystem indicators. Some indicators are presented in both the 1991 and 2012 assessments, and where possible the status and trends of these indicators are discussed as they relate to the estuarine ecosystem. These 24 indicators are presented as candidates for inclusion in APNEP's integrated monitoring strategy, and a subset will also be incorporated into future versions of this management plan.

Currently in development, APNEP's integrated monitoring strategy aims to provide a coordinated framework for monitoring in the Albemarle-Pamlico region. Substantial monitoring efforts are underway in the region, but they are often limited in scope, geography or interagency coordination. APNEP's strategy will detail the monitoring efforts necessary to sustain adaptive practices and ecosystem-based management in the region, particularly as they relates to APNEP's mission. In addition to informing planning and management actions, the monitoring strategy will help identify gaps or redundancies in the current monitoring structure to help ensure regional monitoring efforts are conducted as efficiently as possible.

High-quality data from an integrated monitoring network will be essential for rigorous evaluation of ecosystem status and trends. As APNEP implements the CCMP actions supporting the "Identify" and "Monitoring" components, it will produce regular status and trends assessments of ecosystem indicators and management actions. These assessments will be integrated into the CCMP by reference and relied upon as APNEP

develops annual budgets and work plans and adaptively reconsiders its management approach at periodic intervals.

Question 3: *What are the greatest challenges facing the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system?*

By developing or refining the specific ecosystem goals (Question 1) and then evaluating the current ecosystem status (Question 2), APNEP and its partners can determine the degree to which ecosystem health must improve to achieve desired outcomes. The next step requires identifying specific challenges to be overcome for the estuarine system to reach its desired state.

In the estuarine system, air, land, and water are connected. Therefore, in order to preserve and protect the sounds, many different challenges must be considered. Stormwater runoff can harm water quality and aquatic species as it carries excess fertilizer, sediments, and other pollutants. Recreational and commercial fishing can be threatened when young fish have limited habitat in which to grow. When harmful chemicals are carried to the sounds, fish and shellfish can become unsafe to eat. Improperly managed development activities can threaten rare species and natural communities. Poor air quality can result in excessive loads of nutrients falling into the sounds. Finally, global climate change and rising sea levels will impact the sounds in ways society is only beginning to understand.

*The Albemarle-Pamlico Estuary Study Status and Trends Report (1991)*¹ listed the following environmental concerns: sores and diseases on fish, anoxia-related fish kills, declines in fisheries productivity, changes in distribution patterns of benthic organisms, impairment of nursery function, eutrophication, habitat loss, shellfish closures, and toxicant effects. While some of these previously identified concerns have diminished, all remain as challenges to the quality and viability of our sounds.

Two decades after the 1991 report, human population in the region has increased on the order of 50% (North Carolina grew from 6.2 million in 1990 to 9.5 million in 2010). This population increase has resulted in an expansion of residential and commercial development. Furthermore, additional concerns such as non-native invasive species and climate change have been identified as significant new management challenges.

To be effective, this plan must address these sources of environmental stress. Such challenges come from human activities in the following areas: agriculture, commercial forestry, residential and commercial development, mining and industrial development, waste disposal, commercial fisheries, recreational fishing and boating, tourism and recreation, and national defense. Recognizing that these industries also provide valuable benefits for the people of the region, APNEP will continue to pursue a balanced and inclusive approach to achieving the goals of this plan.

¹ Available at apnep.org

With the understanding that resources are limited and that the CCMP must prioritize the environmental challenges it seeks to overcome, APNEP developed a qualitative model that explicitly identifies the biological, chemical, physical, and human factors that most influence each CCMP outcome. A subset of these factors collectively represents the most significant challenges facing the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem, and they provide the rationale for CCMP actions supporting the management components **Protect**, **Restore**, and **Engage**.

Addressing the challenges facing this vast estuarine system is no simple task. Successful protection and restoration of the ecosystem will require thoughtfulness, dialogue, ingenuity, resources, and the commitment of those with the will to protect and restore the estuarine ecosystem. Sometimes difficult choices and compromises will be required. However, few would disagree that the beauty, culture, and unique natural history of the Albemarle-Pamlico region are worth maintaining. In that spirit, the following chapter details how APNEP and its partners will address the most significant challenges facing the estuary and the broader region.

Question 4: What actions should be taken to move toward healthier Albemarle-Pamlico Sounds by 2022?

The management actions identified in this plan are presented in five general **components (Identify, Protect, Restore, Engage, Monitor)**, which together address the major challenges to understanding, protecting, and restoring ecosystem health and function while embracing the new systems-based approach to managing the Albemarle-Pamlico region. The five components are based on the APNEP mission statement and the adaptive management cycle (see page 14).

The objectives and actions described here are designed to achieve environmental and ecosystem outcomes at the watershed scale and address the complex connections among both ecological and human aspects of the estuarine ecosystem. These actions also address the major threats to ecosystem health and function.

Each component begins with a **situation assessment** and provides a rationale for action followed by a set of broad **objectives**. Objectives are supported by more focused **actions**, which describe the program activities or initiatives that APNEP and its partners will implement to achieve the objective. Actions will be implemented through various steps that will be presented in APNEP's annual work plans.

The proposed five components are:

A: Identify the gaps in our knowledge. APNEP will implement a focused scientific program with priorities for monitoring and research to improve understanding of the ecosystem and measure the effectiveness of implementation actions.

B: Protect the existing ecosystem processes, structures, and functions that sustain the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system. Avoiding problems before they occur is the best and most cost-effective approach to maintaining ecosystem health.

C: Restore the ecosystem processes, structures, and functions that sustain the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system.

D: Engage the public in sustained and coordinated efforts to increase public awareness and encourage individual stewardship. Greater awareness, citizen engagement and planning are critical for maintaining the ecosystem processes, structures, and functions that sustain the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem, including its human communities.

E: Monitor the ecosystem. Tracking and understanding changes in the ecosystem (outcomes) will require the establishment of a coordinated monitoring strategy to detect, measure, track, and assess changes in the ecosystem.

As part of the planning process, APNEP has coupled its recommended actions with regional partners who will be integral to their implementation. The efforts of many partners are required, which resulted in the unavoidable use of many acronyms in this section. State agencies are noted through the prefixes NC- and VA-, while federal agencies and other organizations are referred to by their most recognizable acronyms. For the reader's convenience, a table of acronyms can be found on page 56.

The reader can also access the document electronically at www.apnep.org, where the full name of any organization can be seen by clicking on its acronym with the cursor.

Component A: Identify

To **Identify** gaps in the knowledge of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system, APNEP will implement a focused scientific program with priorities for monitoring and research to improve understanding of the ecosystem and measure the effectiveness of implementation actions.

To achieve its mission, APNEP and its partners must continually work to identify and assess trends in the regional ecosystem. This component also requires assessment of planning, management, and policy choices related to the ecosystem to ensure environmental progress. Comprehensive monitoring (Component E) provides the information on which these assessments are based.

Current situation

APNEP supported a vast amount of data collection and scientific research during the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine Study (APES) phase from the program's inception in 1987 to publication of the original CCMP in 1994. These research efforts greatly improved knowledge of the region's resources. Much of this applied research gave environmental professionals key insights on the state of the estuarine ecosystem. These various studies supported [The Albemarle-Pamlico Estuary Study Status and Trends Report \(1991\)](#), which provided an environmental baseline for the implementation of the 1994 CCMP. While APNEP's activities have broadened since the early 1990s, promoting science-based management and policy remains a core principle of the program.

Today, APNEP's mission, structure, and ecosystem-based approach allows for broad-scale inquiries and research designed to support management efforts in the region. APNEP staff members work closely with the Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC), partner organizations, and project-specific contractors on diverse research initiatives. This network of professionals allows APNEP to consistently access and apply advanced scientific knowledge in areas of strategic interest to the program. Furthermore, natural resource managers, partner agencies and organizations, and other professionals commonly identify knowledge gaps, which if rectified could result in more robust management of the ecosystem's natural resources.

Rationale for action

Priorities for research, management, and policy cannot be developed effectively without a clear understanding of how the ecosystem is changing. Increasing impact to the region's natural resources from population growth and consequent land-use changes, coupled with technological advancements, require stakeholders to demand periodic integrated resource assessments based on high quality scientific information. Information derived in this component will help answer seven policy-based questions for any particular APNEP outcome:

- Magnitude: what is the resource condition?
- Extent: over what geographic area does the resource extend?
- Trend: how has condition and range of the resource changed over time?
- Cause: what stressors are believed to be responsible for changing trends?
- Source: what agents are responsible for stressor intensity?
- Risk: what is the likelihood of stressors causing a loss in human well-being or ecological integrity over the coming decade?
- Solutions: what combination of approaches and tools are deemed the most effective and efficient to reduce impacts from stressors?

These integrated assessments will support APNEP’s planning and program processes and other policy and program planning activities, including the North Carolina’s Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (CHPP) and North Carolina and Virginia basin-wide planning. To evaluate the success of program efforts guided by this plan, APNEP will provide a reliable environmental baseline of ecosystem condition in its *2012 Albemarle-Pamlico Ecosystem Assessment*.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

Objective A1: Develop and refine a conservation atlas

To effectively protect and restore the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system, the significant resources of the system must be identifiable. With recent advances in mapping and technology, this information is often most effectively conveyed, studied, and applied through the use of functional interactive maps. To achieve its mission, APNEP will work with partners to maintain, develop, and distribute current data and maps related to the significant landscape features, habitats, conditions, changes, and stressors in the region.

Action A1.1: Facilitate the mapping of significant ecological, bathymetric, geologic, demographic, and cultural features. In a dynamic natural and social environment, regional mapping efforts develop and maintain the timely information necessary to support environmental decision-making. It further provides one method by which management activities can be evaluated.

Key Partners: NC-OCPCA, NC-DMF, SALCC, USFWS, NOAA, NC-DCM, NC-WRC, NC-NHP, VA-NHP

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d

Outputs: Maps and GIS data

Results: Improved resource management decisions

Action A1.2: Facilitate the refinement and use of online conservation planning tools. Providing accessible tools for informed decisions is critical for addressing human and ecosystem needs. Tools such as the North Carolina Conservation Planning Tool, the Green Growth Toolbox, and Strategic Habitat Areas support resource management decisions. Additionally, such tools can assist in addressing the potential impacts associated with a changing climate.

Key Partners: NC-OCPCA, NC-WRC, TNC, USFWS, SALCC, NC-DEM, VA-DCR

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d

Outputs: Access to mapping, GIS data, conservation planning tools

Results: Improved resource management decisions

Objective A2: Assess the impacts of targeted threats on the ecosystem

The estuarine ecosystem and its various components are sensitive to both localized and systemic changes. Population growth and associated development, climate change, sea level rise, increasing demand for freshwater, invasive species, and introduced pollutants are among the most significant stressors to the ecosystem. Scientific knowledge of the individual and cumulative impacts of these stressors can be developed further, and research is needed to identify thresholds for ecosystem resilience.

Action A2.1: Facilitate the development of protocols and conduct rapid assessments to determine presence and potential threat of invasive species. Aquatic and terrestrial invasive species can cause significant ecological damage. The timely identification and assessment of invasive species threats can ultimately result in cost-effective management if addressed before threshold levels are reached.

Key Partners: NC-WRC, NC-DENR, VA-DEQ, VA-DCR, EPA, NOAA, USFWS, NC-DWR, NC-DACS, USDA, NC-EPPC, USGS

CCMP Outcome Supported: 2c

Outputs: Protocols and assessments

Results: Better information on presence and potential threat of invasive species

Action A2.2: Create and improve projections of land use and climate change related impacts on the regional ecosystem. Forecasting future

potential impacts allows managers to undertake proactive measures and consider environmental management initiatives.

Key Partners: EPA, SALCC, NOAA, USFWS, USFS, NC-OCPCA, NC-DEM

CCMP Outcome Supported: 2a

Outputs: Climate change impact models; land use projections

Results: Information to support better resource management decisions

Action A2.3: Support research on adapting to impacts associated with climate change and sea level rise. Current research suggests that climate change and associated sea level rise will be a significant stressor in the region for the near future. Science that helps predict impacts at the regional level will help support informed decision-making by those in a position to use it.

Key Partners: SALCC, NOAA, EPA, USFWS, USFS, NC-DCM, NC-OCPCA, NC-DEM

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d

Outputs: Research activities and reports

Results: Information to support better resource management decisions in the face of a changing climate

Action A2.4: Facilitate risk assessments of targeted personal care and pharmaceutical products in the aquatic system. Numerous chemical compounds reach our waterways and sounds, including medications and other products with unknown effects on the estuarine ecosystem. APNEP will work with its partners to better understand and address the risks associated with these chemicals. Understanding these risks helps prioritize future research and management efforts.

Key Partners: EPA, NOAA, NC-DWQ, NC-DPH, VA-VDH, VA-DEQ

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1b, 3c

Outputs: Risk assessments

Results: Information to support better resource management decisions regarding risks associated with personal care and pharmaceutical products in the ecosystem.

Action A2.5: Facilitate risk assessments of heavy metals and other toxic contaminants in sediments. Toxic materials come from smokestacks, roads, and other sources. While risks of some toxic

sources have been well documented (e.g., mercury), the risks of other sources are unknown. Understanding these risks helps prioritize future research and management efforts.

Key Partners: EPA, NC-DWQ, NC-DPH, NC-DMF, VA-DEQ

CCMP Outcome Supported: 3c

Outputs: Risk assessments

Results: Information to support better resource management decisions regarding risks associated with heavy metals and other toxic contaminants in sediments.

Objective A3: Assess current natural resource policy, laws, and regulations according to ecosystem-based management principles

To ensure wise stewardship of the public's natural and fiscal resources, the rigorous review of various environmental laws, policy choices, and management efforts is necessary. These issues are typically complex and require expertise in many areas, and often-subtle changes in management approaches can result in significant environmental improvements. Considering their complex nature and effects on water quality in the sounds, wetland protection and riparian buffer implementation policies have been identified as two priority areas for study.

Action A3.1: Assess the effectiveness of policies and regulations to minimize wetland loss. Wetlands are extremely valuable habitats, providing flood protection and filtering runoff. Policies should support the preservation, maintenance, restoration, and creation of ecologically functional wetlands.

Key Partners: Sea Grant, NC-DENR, VA-DEQ, USACE, USFWS, SALCC, EPA, NOAA

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b

Outputs: Recommendations for improved wetland protection

Results: Information to support better resource management decisions

Action A3.2: Assess the effectiveness of policies and regulations regarding riparian buffers. Riparian buffers reduce runoff into the estuarine system and provide other ecosystem services; however, buffer requirements differ throughout the region. Further study of the issue can help demonstrate the costs and benefits of buffer rules, allowing for optimal investment in this conservation strategy.

Key Partners: NC-DWQ, Sea Grant, VA-DEQ, USACE, USFWS, SALCC, EPA, NOAA, VA-VWVP, NC-DACS

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2b, 3d

Outputs: Recommendations for improved riparian protection

Results: Information to support better resource management decisions

Action A3.3: Develop and refine ecological flow requirements for each major river. Many of the fish, aquatic plants, and other species that live within the estuarine system depend on flowing water to survive. Identifying these ecological flows will help ensure that these species and ecosystems are protected.

Key Partners: NC-DWR, USFWS, USGS, NC-WRC, VA-DCR, VA-DEQ, USACE, SALCC

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1c, 2a, 2b, 3a

Outputs: Hydrologic models of each river basin within the APNEP region and associated ecological flow requirements to support better resource management decisions

Results: Management of river flows that support ecological integrity

Component B: Protect

Protect the intact ecosystem processes, structures, and functions that sustain the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system. Preventing problems before they occur is the most cost-effective approach to maintaining environmental health.

Current situation

The Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system has been altered significantly during the past 400 years as nearly undisturbed large ecosystems have made way for human development. While not as urbanized as many other watersheds, land uses like forestry, farming, industry, mining, and development characterize much of the land use in the region. These land use activities have important direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts on aquatic ecosystems. Further, more direct aquatic impacts can be seen through the existence of dams and water-dependent structures found through the region. If not properly managed, these activities and structures can cumulatively damage and destroy the underlying processes that allow for healthy and productive ecosystems. Human population growth and a changing climate will likely magnify these challenges in the future. To maintain the structure and function of the ecosystem, it is imperative to identify and retain the ecosystem's important features.

Current environmental protection measures are often insufficient to sustain ecosystem processes and structure because they were intended to protect individual pieces of the system. Further, these measures are often considered only at the site scale with limited information regarding the larger scale of the ecosystem. Since the 1970s, federal, state, and local governments have employed numerous protective measures, including regulations, land use planning tools, acquisition of property, incentive programs, and education/stewardship programs. These measures are designed to protect the environment and to manage for and minimize the adverse consequences of human population growth and associated land cover change. Despite these efforts, many activities continue to alter and impact habitat across the lands and waters of the watershed, placing our ecosystem at increased risk of degradation.

In contrast to many areas of the country, the region has made significant progress integrating environmental information into its protection efforts. Efforts to address this task include the N.C. Coastal Habitat Protection Plan and associated Strategic Habitat Areas, information and tools produced by the N.C. and Virginia Natural Heritage Programs, Virginia's Healthy Waters Initiative, and watershed planning efforts by the N.C. Division of Water Quality and the N.C. Ecosystem Enhancement Program. These data and tools provide target areas whose protection will provide important ecological or water quality benefits.

Despite these promising inroads, work remains to be done. Current efforts to preserve and restore inland aquatic habitats can be bolstered significantly and addressed more comprehensively. The packaging and delivery of information to resource managers and local governments is of critical importance and can be substantially improved by incorporating advances in mapping technology. Finally, because the estuarine region crosses state boundaries, work must be done to integrate information generated on both sides of the North Carolina-Virginia border.

Rationale for action

Protecting high quality ecological areas is less expensive and more effective than attempting to repair or recreate damaged areas. Protection of existing land cover is critical for making improvements in water quality, and the survival of important species will depend on our ability to preserve critical and connected habitats along estuarine, riverine, and upland systems. It is important to look at remaining habitat on a larger scale, determining what areas are most valuable, and make these our highest priority for protection. An array of tools such as purchasing property and conservation easements, incentive programs, and regulations are already available. Adaptive strategies are needed to best match these conservation approaches with the areas that are the most important and most vulnerable.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

Objective B1: Minimize the introduction of additional water pollution sources

Once the water quality in a system is degraded or impaired, it often becomes difficult to improve or restore. Protection efforts will help prevent further degradation to the many impaired stream segments within the Albemarle-Pamlico watershed. The system also benefits from an array of streams and water bodies that fulfill use requirements or even meet high quality water standards. It is important to protect these streams from being degraded to help maintain the valuable services they provide.

Increased potential for water pollution will occur in the Albemarle-Pamlico region as populations grow and land use practices change. Protection of critical buffer areas, sound planning, the adoption of low impact development, and other best practices will ensure that new impacts to water quality are minimized.

Action B1.1: Minimize the introduction of toxics from targeted sources. APNEP will support the development and implementation of best management practices (BMPs) that curb introduction of toxic materials into the estuarine system. Targeted sources of toxic pollution may include new marinas, boatyards, stormwater discharges, and wastewater treatment facilities.

Key Partners: NC-DWQ, VA-DEQ, VA-DCR, EPA, NC-CWMTF, VA-WQIF

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1b, 1d, 2b, 3c

Outputs: Pollution control measures, BMPs

Results: Reduction in toxics within targeted water bodies

Action B1.2: Minimize the introduction of pathogens from targeted sources. The reduction of pathogens entering the estuarine system helps improve ecosystem integrity and resiliency. Aging infrastructure and rising sea levels are two challenges that must be addressed to reduce bacteria, viruses, and other microorganisms from entering public waters through identified sources. To address this action APNEP will work with its partners to support upgrades to wastewater treatment facilities and associated infrastructure that account for future risks.

Key Partners: NC-DWQ, VA-DEQ, VA-DCR, NC-DMF, NC-DCM, EPA, NC-CWMTF, VA-WQIF, SRF

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1d, 2b, 3b

Outputs: Pollution control measures, upgraded infrastructure, BMPs

Results: Reduction in pathogens within targeted water bodies

Action B1.3: Facilitate the protection of natural riparian buffers to reduce runoff. Riparian buffers trap and filter polluted runoff, preventing sediments, nitrogen, phosphorus, pesticides, and other substances from entering the sounds. APNEP will support the purchase of land or conservation easements to protect buffers. APNEP will promote and endorse policies that encourage leaving riparian zones in a natural state.

Key Partners: NC-DWQ, NC-DCM, VA-DCR, NC-WRC, NC-CWMTF, VA-WQIF, VA-VOF, CTNC, NC-EEP, NC-SWC, VA-DSM

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b, 3b, 3d

Outputs: Protect or restore riparian buffers

Results: Improved water quality and habitat availability

Action B1.4: Facilitate the development of state and local policies that support the use of low impact development (LID) practices to reduce runoff. Use of LID practices will be encouraged through the development of model codes and governmental incentives for implementation.

Key Partners: Sea Grant, VA-DCR, NC-DCM, NC-DWQ, EPA, NOAA, Cooperative Extension, NCCF, NC-WRC, COGs, PDCs, IOG

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2b, 3b, 3d

Outputs: Model LID codes, LID projects

Results: Improved water quality; sustain manageable rates of stormwater runoff

Action B1.5: Facilitate the use of best management practices on agricultural and silvicultural lands. Best management practices include a variety of methods and techniques to reduce pollutant runoff from lands modified by human use. BMPs will be promoted in the APNEP region through educational resources, workshops, and demonstration projects.

Key Partners: NC-SWC, VA-DSM, NC-NCFS, VA-VDOF, NC-DWQ, Cooperative Extension, NC-DACS, NRCS

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2b, 3b, 3d

Outputs: Increased use of BMPs for agricultural and silvicultural activities

Results: Improved water quality and aquatic biodiversity

Objective B2: Protect and manage areas containing significant natural communities and habitats

The natural communities and habitats of the Albemarle-Pamlico region support a diverse and vibrant collection of species. The services provided by these systems include shelter, food sources, spawning areas, passage or travel, protection, and habitat for threatened and endangered species. Loss or fragmentation of these habitats can have severe and possibly irreversible impacts to the species that rely on them.

Action B2.1: Facilitate the development and implementation of an integrated freshwater habitat protection strategy. This protection strategy will complement the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (CHPP), serving as a guide for inland waters. The plan will be a combined effort between North Carolina and Virginia, and it will include actions that address anadromous fish passage to and from spawning areas.

Key Partners: TNC, NC-WRC, VA-DGIF, NC-NHP, VA-NHP, USFWS, SALCC, NC-SWC, VA-DSM, NC-DMF

CCMP Outcome Supported: 2a

Outputs: Integrated freshwater habitat protection strategy/
partnership

Results: Improved management of water quality and ecosystem biodiversity to sustain ecosystem health

Action B2.2: Develop and implement a submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) protection strategy. APNEP will work with its partners in protecting SAV habitats through mapping efforts, examination of permitting requirements, water quality and habitat issues, and education for boaters.

Key Partners: NOAA, USFWS, NC-DCM, NC-DMF, NC-WRC, VA-VMRC, VIMS, USACE, SALCC

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b

Outputs: Submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) protection strategy

Results: Improved management of water quality and ecosystem biodiversity

Action B2.3: Facilitate the development of incentives for protection and management of targeted natural communities and habitats. APNEP will facilitate the development and use of incentives to implement conservation easements and other conservation tools. An emphasis for protection will be placed on inland and coastal wetlands, primary nurseries, floodplain riparian areas, wetland buffers, and Significant Natural Heritage Areas.

Key Partners: NC-OCPCA, NC-WRC, NC-DMF, SALCC, CTNC, TNC, NC-SWC, VA-DSM, USFWS, USDA

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b, 3d

Outputs: New incentives for land protection

Results: Increase in acres of protected lands

Action B2.4: Facilitate the development of policies to minimize dredge and fill activities in naturalized areas and sensitive habitats. Policies will address direct as well as indirect dredge activities. Over time, the extensive drainage network in several coastal counties has become naturalized and provides important habitats for fish and wildlife. APNEP will work with its partners to ensure that these habitats are considered in maintenance of the network.

Key Partners: NC-DMF, NC-DCM, NC-DWQ, USACE, VA-DEQ, NC-WRC, USFWS, EPA, VIMS

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b

Outputs: Coordinated policies and regulations regarding dredge and fill activities

Results: Improved water quality and ecological integrity

Action B2.5: Facilitate protection of designated anadromous fish spawning areas and inland primary nursery areas from marina impacts. Consistent with regulations and best practices, new projects should be directed away from or minimize impacts to specially designated areas vital to fishery resources. Marina development in inland waters, if not carefully considered and implemented, can damage valuable estuarine habitats. This action also supports retrofitting at existing facilities to improve aquatic habitat, as well as support for programs that safely dispose of onboard waste that might be discharged in open waters.

Key Partners: NC-DCM, NC-WRC, NC-DMF, NC-DWQ, VA-DEQ, EPA, NOAA, USFWS, VA-DGIF, USACE

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b

Outputs: Policies and regulations to protect designated anadromous fish spawning areas and inland primary nursery areas from adverse impacts of new marinas

Results: Increase in ecological integrity

Action B2.6: Minimize and rapidly respond to the introduction of invasive species through the development and implementation of integrated prevention and control strategies. Management strategies include education of the public and actions to prevent introduction of invasive species. Existing populations of invasive species will be managed to prevent further encroachment into natural habitats.

Key Partners: NC-WRC, NC-DMF, NC-DWR, VA-DGIF, USFWS, NOAA, USDA, NC-OCPCA, VA-NHP, NC-DACS

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2b, 2c, 3d

Outputs: Coordinated invasive species prevention and control strategies

Results: Prevention of adverse impacts associated with invasive species

Objective B3: Utilize natural and constructed “living” shorelines to maintain estuarine and riverine ecosystem processes

The marine and estuarine shorelines of the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem are vulnerable to multiple threats, including erosion due to normal wave action and currents, storm surge associated with hurricanes and other strong storms, and sea level rise. As humans have settled in increasing numbers along the coast, they have also played a role in the modification of natural shorelines. While the protection of shorelines is necessary in some cases to protect important resources, there are techniques beyond traditional hardening, including the use of natural and living shorelines, which provide benefits to humans and allow for healthy marine and near-shore communities.

Action B3.1: Assist local governments in the development of incentives for protecting natural shorelines. Incentives and techniques will be developed and promoted that encourage the protection of natural shorelines as an alternative to hardened structures such as bulkheads and sea walls.

Key Partners: Sea Grant, NC-DCM, NC-DWQ, NC-DMF, VIMS, NC-SWC, NCCF

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2b, 3d

Outputs: Incentives for protecting natural shorelines

Results: Improved water quality and ecological integrity while reducing shoreline erosion.

Action B3.2: Develop and distribute educational materials encouraging landowners to protect natural shorelines. APNEP will work with its partners to continue to develop materials will describe how living shorelines are a viable alternative to hardened structures and explain the benefits natural shorelines provide.

Key Partners: NC-NERR, Sea Grant, NCCF, VIMS, NC-DWQ, NC-DMF, NC-SWC

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2b, 3d

Outputs: Educational materials

Results: Improved water quality and ecological integrity while reducing shoreline erosion.

Action B3.3: Facilitate the development of requirements for living shoreline stabilization projects that optimally protect estuarine aquatic and shoreline habitats while minimizing regulatory requirements. Homes, businesses, and towns along the estuarine waterfront often take shoreline stabilization measures to protect their property from erosion. Currently, the permitting process for living shorelines often takes more time and is more expensive than the process for most hardened structures. These regulatory requirements can be a disincentive for those who might utilize living shoreline stabilization techniques, which can have significant long-term benefits for aquatic habitats. Because all shoreline stabilization techniques can impact water quality and aquatic habitat, APNEP will work with collaborating regulatory partners to develop standards that balance competing environmental considerations in the permitting process.

Key Partners: Sea Grant, NC-DCM, USACE, USFWS, NC-DWQ, NC-DMF, VIMS, NC-SWC, NCCF

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b

Outputs: Collaborative recommendations for estuarine shoreline stabilization policies

Results: Structures that control erosion with the least impact to natural shoreline function, Improved water quality and ecological integrity.

Component C: Restore

Restore the ecosystem processes, structures, and functions that sustain the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system. The restoration component recognizes that some ecosystem function has been lost, and that it must be strategically repaired to meet the demands of human and natural environments. The implementation and maintenance of integrative ecosystem restoration projects will be guided by comprehensive regional ecosystem assessments.

Current situation

The protection and restoration components are closely linked, as they both address common ecosystem functions and sources of decline. As mentioned in the preceding section, the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system has been modified by the actions of its human inhabitants. Changes to the landscape that accommodate homes, businesses, and infrastructure have increased runoff, which results in more polluted water reaching our rivers and sounds. Permanent vegetation removal, ditching, and the loss of riparian areas have increased erosion and degraded habitat for aquatic and upland species. Dams have blocked the passage of diadromous fish species. These actions have caused flooding, algal blooms, species declines, closed shellfish beds, and other serious impacts to the estuarine environment.

Despite these impacts, the Albemarle-Pamlico region is well positioned to benefit from coordinated and integrated restoration approaches. Urban centers like Raleigh and Durham continue to implement state-of-the-art development and infrastructure projects that advance LID approaches. Farmers and foresters are adopting best management practices that ensure the viability of working lands while improving water quality. Coastal hydrology, oyster reefs, degraded shorelines, and other critical ecosystem components are being restored through innovative projects. These restoration efforts will ultimately result in cleaner water, healthier ecosystems, and associated benefits for the people of the region.

Rationale for action

In addition to protecting important parts of the ecosystem from future human impacts, strategic restoration efforts are also needed to reach our ecosystem goals. While protection initiatives are important to preserve key ecosystem functions, environmental improvement in the face of increasing population pressures can only be achieved through targeted restoration efforts.

As in other sections, these restoration actions have been linked to CCMP outcomes through an ecosystem-based management decision-making process. APNEP aims to ensure that projects are selected considering the broader ecosystem, including habitat connectivity and potential effects of climate change. Furthermore, restoration work

should address identified challenges like wetland loss or nutrient pollution. The most desirable restoration efforts will address many of these factors in unison, improving both the quality of the ecosystem and the quality of life for the region's people.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

Objective C1: Restore water quality by eliminating targeted sources of water pollution

The Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system contains many streams and bodies of water that are polluted. Where these waters do not meet water quality standards, they are considered to be impaired. Contaminant management strategies will be developed and implemented for all waters not meeting water quality standards. Restoration activities will also improve damaged riparian and estuarine shorelines and reduce unregulated discharges from wastewater treatment facilities. Developments and infrastructure that create large amounts of polluted runoff will be targeted for retrofitting with low impact development practices.

Action C1.1: Establish contaminant management strategies for waters not meeting water quality standards. Management strategies for pathogens, toxics, and nutrients will have a more extensive focus than traditional total maximum daily load (TMDL) plans, which primarily manage industrial point sources and municipal stormwater. These strategies will also incorporate agricultural runoff and atmospheric deposition.

Key Partners: NC-DWQ, VA-DEQ, NC-CWMTF, EPA, NC-DACS, NC-SWC, VA-DSM

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1d

Outputs: Coordinated contaminant management strategies

Results: Improved water quality and ecological integrity; reduction in impaired waters.

Action C1.2: Facilitate the implementation of existing contaminant management strategies. APNEP will work with partners to support full implementation of existing management strategies for pathogens, toxics, and nutrients.

Key Partners: NC-DWQ, VA-DEQ, VA-DCR, NC-CWMTF, NC-SWC, EPA

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1d, 3b, 3c

Outputs: Coordinated implementation of management strategies

Results: Improved water quality and ecological integrity

Action C1.3: Facilitate the restoration of riparian and estuarine shorelines. Impacted shorelines will be replanted with native vegetation. Where feasible, bulkheads, and riprap structures will be replaced with living shorelines or structures that control erosion with the least impact to natural shoreline function.

Key Partners: NC-DCM, NC-WRC, USACE, NC-EEP, NCCF, USFWS, NOAA, TNC, NFWF, NC-CWMTF, CTNC, NRCS, VA-DCR, NC-SWC, VA-DSM, DU, UNC, CSI, Sea Grant

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b, 3d

Outputs: Voluntary shoreline restoration projects to support natural shoreline ecosystem functions

Results: Improved water quality and ecological integrity

Action C1.4: Reduce unregulated discharge from wastewater treatment systems. APNEP will work with municipalities in the region whose wastewater infrastructure is in need of repair or upgrade. APNEP will work with its partners to secure funding either directly or through federal and state grants or loans, to work with these communities.

Key Partners: NC-DWQ, VA-DEQ, NC-CWMTF, VA-WQIF, SRF, EPA

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3b

Outputs: Wastewater treatment systems upgrade projects

Results: Improved water quality and ecological integrity

Action C1.5: Facilitate voluntary retrofitting of existing development and infrastructure to reduce runoff. This action targets existing stormwater systems that are to be improved to reduce runoff. Where development or infrastructure has a high percentage of impervious surfaces, implementation of low impact development practices will be encouraged.

Key Partners: EPA, NC-DWQ, VA-DCR, NOAA, NC-CWMTF, VA-WQIF, NCCF, Sea Grant, CSI, Cooperative Extension

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2b, 3d

Outputs: Stormwater retrofitting projects

Results: Improved water quality and ecological integrity

Objective C2: Restore hydrological processes in rivers and estuaries to support significant natural communities and ecosystem functions

As human beings developed the Albemarle-Pamlico region, the hydrology of the system was highly altered. An increase in impervious surfaces resulted in increased runoff and higher rates of erosion. Streams were physically altered and diverted, sometimes eliminating habitats or leaving poor conditions for natural growth. Along the shores of the sounds and estuaries, hardening methods, such as bulkheads, have become the standard to prevent loss of coastal acreage.

To improve the hydrology of the Albemarle-Pamlico system, large-scale, coordinated efforts must be initiated. Alternative methods to shoreline armoring, including living shorelines, will be promoted to restore tidal shorelines while providing shallow water habitat and shoreline access to wildlife. Incentives will help increase the implementation of living shorelines. Restoration of streams to provide natural function and flow conditions provides a direct benefit to the ecosystem.

Action C2.1: Facilitate the development and implementation of coordinated landscape-scale hydrological restoration strategies.

Much of the lowland agricultural areas are characterized by modified drainage networks that incorporate ditches and pumps. A coordinated strategy is the best way to ensure restoration is accomplished at the system scale.

Key Partners: SALCC, TNC, NCCF, USFWS, EPA, NOAA, USACE, NC-CWMTF, NC-DWQ, NC-DCM, NC-WRC, NC-EEP, Cooperative Extension, NC-DWR, NC-DSWC

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b, 3a, 3b, 3d

Outputs: Coordinated landscape-scale hydrological restoration strategies

Results: Improved water quality and ecological integrity

Action C2.2: Facilitate the development of incentives to replace hardened estuarine shorelines with living shorelines. Regulatory and financial incentives will make it easier to construct living shorelines and help motivate landowners to restore shoreline property. Technical assistance can demonstrate that living shorelines are a viable option for shoreline stabilization.

Key Partners: NC-DCM, NC-DMF, USFWS, EPA, NOAA, USACE

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b

Outputs: Incentives for removing hardened estuarine shorelines

Results: Improved water quality and ecological integrity

Action C2.3: Facilitate the hydrologic restoration of floodplains and streams. Floodplain restoration will include restoring wetland function and planting riparian vegetation. Removing channelization and improving stream banks will restore streams that have been altered.

Key Partners: TNC, NCCF, USFWS, EPA, USACE, NC-WRC, VA-DCR, NOAA, NC-CWMTF, NC-DWQ, NC-DCM, NC-EEP, NC-DSWC, VA-DSWC

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 3a, 3b, 3d

Outputs: Floodplain restoration projects

Results: Improved water quality, hydrology, and ecological integrity

Objective C3: Facilitate collaborative and integrative restoration programs and projects

The ecosystem-based management approach taken by APNEP recognizes that species and habitats are linked through complex natural processes. The ecological integrity of the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem is dependent on a myriad of ecological, social, and economic factors. Three elements of the ecosystem would especially benefit from the development and implementation of a comprehensive restoration strategy: invasive species, wetlands, and submerged aquatic vegetation. Collaborative restoration strategies should be developed for each of these environmental components to ensure all factors are considered as a management plan is created.

Action C3.1: Develop and refine integrated invasive species eradication and control strategies. Invasive species that adversely impact native populations must be systematically removed. A restoration strategy for habitats populated by invasive species will be comprehensive and consider the natural processes of all species within the ecosystem.

Key Partners: NC-DWR, NC-DACS, NC-WRC, USFWS, NOAA, VA-DGIF, NC-NHP, VA-NHP, USDA, NC-DCM, NC-DMF

CCMP Outcome Supported: 2b, 2c, 3d

Outputs: Invasive species eradication and control strategies

Results: Improved ecological integrity

Action C3.2: Develop and implement a coordinated wetland restoration strategy. APNEP will work with its partners to re-establish wetland hydrology and vegetation at sites where wetlands previously existed. Restoration will aim to improve wetlands in urban as well as rural/agricultural areas, and work will be coordinated with ongoing efforts to maximize output.

Key Partners: NC-DWQ, NC-DCM, NC-WRC, NC-EEP, NOAA, USFWS, USACE, EPA, TNC, NCCF, SALCC

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b, 3d

Outputs: Wetland restoration strategy/ partnership

Results: Improved water quality and ecological integrity

Action C3.3: Develop and implement a submerged aquatic vegetation restoration strategy. In conjunction with strategies to protect SAV (see B2.2), APNEP will work to restore areas capable of supporting SAV. This work will require study of effective restoration techniques, bathymetric mapping, water quality monitoring, and other efforts. APNEP will continue its contributions to the SAV Partnership to develop and promote a SAV restoration strategy.

Key Partners: NOAA, USFWS, NC-DCM, NC-DMF, NC-WRC, VA-VMRC, VIMS, USACE

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b

Outputs: SAV restoration strategy

Results: Improved water quality and ecological integrity

Objective C4: Remove in-stream barriers and restore spawning areas for diadromous fish

Humans have modified the rivers and streams of the Albemarle-Pamlico region for centuries to meet needs for water supply, irrigation, flood control, and other infrastructure. These changes come to the detriment of diadromous species, which depend on both rivers and the ocean for their survival. A single impassable barrier between these two environments can prevent miles of otherwise acceptable habitat from being utilized by these species. Barriers will be removed where feasible to facilitate the movement of these species around obstructions and restore degraded habitats.

Action C4.1: Install fish ladders and eel-ways on existing dams and other permanent barriers. Fish ladders and eel-ways can preserve passage across dams that are otherwise providing societal benefits like drinking water supplies or electricity. APNEP will support the construction and maintenance of mechanisms for fish and eel passage around in-stream barriers.

Key Partners: NC-WRC, VA-DGIF, USACE, NOAA, USFWS, NFWF, SALCC, American Rivers, NC-DMF, NCCF, TNC, NC-DWR

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b

Outputs: New fish ladders and eel-ways

Results: Improved fish populations and ecological integrity

Action C4.2: Facilitate the removal of dams, culverts, and other in-stream barriers. Structures that have surpassed their designed lifespan or intended use will be targeted for removal. In-stream barriers scheduled for replacement also present opportunities to implement technologies that improve fish passage.

Key Partners: NC-WRC, VA-DGIF, NC-DMF, USACE, NOAA, USFWS, SALCC, NC-SWC, VA-DSM, NFWF, NC-EEP, American Rivers, NC-NCDOT, VA-VDOT, FHA, SEPA, NC-DCM

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b

Outputs: In-stream barrier removal projects

Results: Improved fish populations and ecological integrity

Action C4.3: Restore degraded anadromous fish spawning habitats. Anadromous fish spawning habitat is dependent on suitable current velocities, adequate dissolved oxygen levels, and low turbidity. APNEP will work to support suitable hydrologic flows and restore submerged aquatic vegetation in streams and rivers that contain anadromous species.

Key Partners: NC-DMF, NC-WRC, VA-DGIF, USACE, NOAA, USFWS, NFWF, NC-DCM, CTNC, NCCF

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b

Outputs: Habitat restoration projects

Results: Improved fish populations and ecological integrity

Action C4.4: Facilitate research to improve fish passage. APNEP will provide funding and support for research to improve fish passage. In-stream barriers will be studied to identify structures that may potentially be removed. Mechanisms for conveying anadromous species, such as fish ladders, will be considered and targeted for strategic locations.

Key Partners: Sea Grant, NOAA, USFWS, USACE, NC-DMF, NC-WRC, VA-DGIF, VA-VMRC, SALCC

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b

Outputs: Recommendations for improved fish and eel passage

Results: Improved fish populations and ecological integrity

Objective C5: Restore oyster habitats to improve water quality and other ecosystem functions

Oysters are an important resource for the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system that provide a livelihood to coastal residents and serve an important function by filtering pollutants out of the water. Harvests from the sounds of North Carolina have declined dramatically over the last 100 years, and efforts are under way to restore the extent of oyster habitat in the region.

Action C5.1: Construct new oyster habitats. Where conditions are optimal for oyster habitat, APNEP will fund the replanting of cultch material and seed oysters. APNEP will support the development of oyster sanctuaries and shellfish management areas to provide continued propagation of oysters.

Key Partners: NC-DMF, NCCF, TNC, NOAA, USACE, NC-DCM, EPA, CSI, IMS, VIMS

CCMP Outcome Supported: 2b

Outputs: Oyster habitat restoration projects

Results: Increased oyster habitats, improved water quality, and ecological integrity

Action C5.2: Reduce the adverse impacts of harvests to existing oyster habitat. APNEP will support management efforts to prevent adverse oyster harvest practices. Existing reefs should be carefully managed to prevent further decline of oyster populations, and research should refine technologies and methods to support improved management of oysters in the future.

Key Partners: NC-DMF, NOAA, Sea Grant, CSI, VIMS, IMS

CCMP Outcome Supported: 2b

Outputs: Recommendations for oyster harvest methods

Results: Continued oyster harvests and viable habitats

Action C5.3: Facilitate research to improve oyster restoration technologies and methods. APNEP will support the completion and update of shellfish habitat mapping efforts along the North Carolina coast. Research supported by APNEP will study conditions that support reef productivity, change analysis in oyster habitat shifts, and site selection and benefits of oyster sanctuaries.

Lead Organizations: APNEP, NC-DMF, Sea Grant

Key Partners: NC-DMF, Sea Grant, NCCF, TNC, NOAA, SALCC, IMS, CSI, VIMS

CCMP Outcome Supported: 2b

Outputs: Recommendations for oyster restoration

Results: Increased oyster habitats, improved water quality, and ecological integrity

Component D: Engage

Engaging partners and collaboration are the overarching principles necessary for the achievement of suitable environmental outcomes. To accomplish program goals, APNEP will work closely with its partners to ensure that activities and resources are focused on the most urgent and important problems. Many of the programs and laws now used to regulate or support activities in our watershed were established on a piecemeal basis to address significant individual problems. Improved coordination of planning for land use, water supply, ecosystem protection, transportation, and restoration will enable us to more effectively address problems at an ecosystem scale.

APNEP will engage its partnering organizations and the public to improve awareness and understanding of environmental issues facing the Albemarle-Pamlico region. Furthermore, APNEP will encourage individual and collective stewardship of the region's resources, including support for the planning, policies, and actions required to sustain the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem and its human communities.

Current situation

Most management efforts in the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system were not designed to protect the entire ecosystem. Instead, most programs focus on smaller pieces of the ecosystem (fisheries, soil, water, and others), which can result in a fragmented approach to restoration and protection. For example, many land use and permit decisions are made without full consideration of broad-scale impacts to land, water, species, and human well-being. Furthermore, many decisions do not fully consider land use, climate change, or sea level rise forecasts.

Our review of environmental efforts in the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system indicates that many people, organizations, and agencies are working to improve the region. However, regional capacity to work at an ecosystem scale remains low despite decades of work and progress. Fully integrated approaches to restoring and sustaining the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system have not yet been realized. The transfer of knowledge and resources to implement strategic actions remains uneven, and coordination of management initiatives can be improved substantially.

Rationale for action

APNEP is well positioned to coordinate stewardship, environmental education, and management efforts across state lines, between all levels of government, and with a broad array of stakeholder groups in the region. APNEP's advisory committee structure ensures strong community ties throughout the region, and APNEP's partners consistently undertake engagement activities throughout the region. With its mission to protect the entire estuarine ecosystem, APNEP can identify opportunities to integrate and improve engagement efforts on a regional scale.

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIONS

Objective D1: Foster environmental stewardship

The Albemarle-Pamlico region's inhabitants and visitors recognize the beauty and rich natural resources of the region. Through targeted education and communications efforts, APNEP and its partners will encourage citizens to reduce their environmental impacts and provide meaningful opportunities to restore the ecosystem. APNEP will further work to find areas of mutual benefit between citizens, businesses, and governments related to the protection and restoration of the region's resources.

Action D1.1: Communicate the importance of stewardship and offer opportunities for volunteerism to further APNEP's mission.

Advocating environmental stewardship and providing citizens with meaningful volunteer options improves the environment while educating the public about the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system.

Key Partners: NC-DENR, NC-OEEPA, VA-OEE, VA-DCR, VA-DEQ, NCCF, TNC, EPA, NOAA, Pfs, IMS, CSI, VIMS, NC-NERR, NC-AQ, VA-AQ

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1d, 1e, 2a

Output: Workshops and engagement materials on stewardship and volunteer opportunities

Results: Increase in voluntary citizen action to protect and restore the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system

Action D1.2: Facilitate efforts to improve collaborations to protect and restore ecosystem processes. Homeowners, farmers, foresters, and businesses control most land in the Albemarle-Pamlico region. The interest and action of private individuals, supported by government expertise and resources, is critical to protect and restore the estuarine ecosystem.

Key Partners: NC-OCPCA, CTNC, NC-DENR, VA-DCR, VA-DEQ, NCCF, TNC

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d

Outputs: Workshops and engagement materials on land conservation

Results: Increase in protected lands through easements, better management, or other methods

Action D1.3: Coordinate outreach and engagement efforts regarding the impacts of invasive species. Effective outreach and engagement is an important part of any integrated invasive species management effort. There are many ways citizens can help limit the spread of invasive species and informed volunteers can report on the presence and spread of these organisms.

Key Partners: Sea Grant, Cooperative Extension, NC-DWR, NC-WRC, NC-DACS, VA-VDACS, NC-NHP, VA-NHP, TNC, VA-DGIF, NC-NERR

CCMP Outcome Supported: 2c

Outputs: Coordinated outreach and engagement programs

Results: Reduced introductions of and impacts from invasive species

Action D1.4: Coordinate outreach efforts regarding the proper application of fertilizers to reduce nutrient runoff. Perhaps no everyday action affects the estuarine system as does the application of fertilizer, which contributes to eutrophication if improperly applied. The choice of product, as well as the timing, volume, and area of application are important considerations for consumers. A coordinated outreach and engagement program will be an important part of nutrient management efforts. Best practices can help save money while preserving the region's waters.

Key Partners: Sea Grant, Cooperative Extension, NC-DWQ, VA-DCR, NC-DACS, VA-DEQ, NC-SWC, VA-DSM

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 2a, 2b, 3b

Outputs: Coordinated outreach and engagement programs

Results: Nutrient reductions in the waters of the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine system

Action D1.5: Increase opportunities for public access to waterways, public lands, and trails. Greenways, parks, piers, and other projects can help protect water quality and provide opportunities for experiencing and learning about the environment. As people seek out these areas for relaxation and recreation, they also support an increasingly valuable ecotourism industry.

Key Partners: NC-WRC, USACE, NC-DCM, VA-DCR, NC-PRTF, VA-VOF, CTNC, NC-DPR, NPS, USFWS, USFS, NC-CWMTF, VA-DGIF, Pfs, NC-AQ, VA-AQ

CCMP Outcome Supported: 1e

Outputs: New opportunities for the public to become engaged in experiencing the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem

Results: Increased awareness and engagement in implementation of the CCMP

Objective D2: Conduct targeted environmental education efforts regarding sustainable use, habitats, and ecosystem services

Environmental education is a learning process that increases people's knowledge and awareness about the environment and associated challenges while developing the necessary skills and expertise to address these challenges. Environmental education also fosters attitudes, motivations, and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action with respect to the environment. APNEP is committed to educating children and adults about the rich natural resources found throughout the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem, with the purpose of increasing knowledge of the ecosystem and equipping the region's citizens with the skills to effectively approach environmental issues.

Action D2.1: Provide and promote opportunities for outdoor experiences that connect individuals with the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem. A meaningful and educational outdoor experience can change the lens through which a person views the natural world. A person who is connected to the estuarine system is more likely to take the steps necessary to ensure that it thrives. APNEP will continue to work with its partners to provide and promote opportunities for meaningful outdoor experiences.

Key Partners: APNEP, NC-DPR, VA-DCR, NC-NERR, NC-WRC, PFS, VA-OEE, NC-OEEPA, USFWS, NPS, NCCF, NC-DOC, VA-DOC, NC-MNS, NC-DACS, NC-AQ, VA-AQ

CCMP Outcome Supported: 2a

Outputs: Activities for the public to become engaged in experiencing the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem

Results: Increased awareness and engagement in implementation of the CCMP

Action D2.2: Provide environmental education training opportunities for educators in the region. By teaching educators about the Albemarle-Pamlico region and its associated environmental issues and providing them with science-based resources, APNEP and its partners enrich the education of thousands of students annually.

Key Partners: NC-NERR, PFS, NCCF, NC-DPR, Sea Grant, NC-MNS, NC-OEEPA, VA-OEE, VIMS, CSI, UNC, NC-AQ, VA-AQ

CCMP Outcome Supported: 1c, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3b

Outputs: Workshops and materials for educators

Results: Increased awareness and engagement in implementation of the CCMP

Action D2.3: Increase public understanding of the relationship between ecosystem health and human health advisories relating to water, fish, and game. Few citizens fully understand the relationships between human activity and health advisories. APNEP will work to help people make these connections, allowing citizens to take concrete steps to address pollution sources.

Key Partners: Sea Grant, USFWS, NC-WRC, EPA, NC-DWQ, NC-DMF, VA-VDH, NC-DPH

CCMP Outcome Supported: 1a, 1b, 1d

Outputs: Outreach and educational materials

Results: Improved water quality.

Objective D3: Provide tools and training to support ecosystem-based management.

Many decisions that affect the integrity of the estuarine ecosystem are made at the local level with little incentive to consider their broader impacts. Local leaders are tasked with making decisions based on a wide range of political, economic, and social factors. Often environmental considerations represent only part of any given issue. Because local leaders come from all disciplines and face many issues, APNEP recognizes the need to provide local government officials with tailored information necessary for efficient and informed environmental decision-making. APNEP will work with its partners to ensure that local governments have access to quality educational opportunities, mapping resources, and other pertinent information necessary to make informed decisions.

Action D3.1: Develop and implement a strategy to improve decision-makers' understanding of the costs and benefits of environmental protection, restoration, planning, and monitoring. While the costs of environmental protection are easy to see on a balance sheet, the benefits can be harder to quantify. APNEP will work with its partners to provide science-based information to government officials regarding the value of ecosystem services and help them incorporate this information into the decision-making process.

Key Partners: NC-DCM, NC-DWR, NC-DWQ, IOG, COGs, PDCs, APA, Sea Grant, IOG, NC-NHP

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1d, 2a, 2b, 3a, 3c, 3d

Outputs: Communication strategy and materials on ecosystem services

Results: Informed decisions for environmental management

Action D3.2: Facilitate the development and implementation of basinwide water management plans to ensure no less than minimum in-stream flows are maintained. APNEP will work to provide scientific information and engage regional stakeholders to develop and implement water management plans that fully account for both human and ecological demands.

Key Partners: NC-DWR, NC-WRC, USFWS, USGS, VA-DEQ, USACE, SALCC, NOAA, EPA

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1c, 3a

Outputs: Management plans establishing minimum in-stream flows

Results: Science-based management of in-stream flows to support both human and ecological demands

Action D3.3: Provide assistance to state, regional, and local governments to incorporate climate change and sea level rise considerations into their planning processes. APNEP and its partners have made significant strides predicting and mapping future climate risks, but much work remains to be done. APNEP will support government partners that choose to integrate climate information into their planning process. Additionally, APNEP will work across sectors to identify and leverage mutually beneficial climate adaptation opportunities.

Key Partners: Sea Grant, NC-DCM, NC-OCPCA, NC-DMF, NC-DEM, EPA, SALCC, VA-CZM, USFWS, NC-WRC, NOAA, NC-NCDOT, NC-DHHS, IOG

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d

Outputs: State, regional, and local plans that address climate change and sea level rise

Results: Improved climate resiliency for human and natural communities in the region.

Component E: Monitor

Monitoring the environment and implementation of management actions undertaken by APNEP and its partners are critical components of adaptive, ecosystem-based management.

First, APNEP and its partners will focus monitoring efforts on various indicators of ecosystem condition. Tracking progress towards the ecosystem outcomes will require the establishment of a coordinated monitoring strategy to detect, measure, track, and assess changes in the ecosystem. Without consistent monitoring, financial and human resources could be wasted on ineffective initiatives. Alternatively, the benefits of highly successful management approaches may not be recognized.

Second, APNEP will work with its partners to monitor the implementation of management actions. If actions are not fully implemented, APNEP will take steps to identify and overcome the barriers to implementation. Alternatively, if barriers to an action's implementation prove difficult to overcome, APNEP will revisit the ecosystem-based management process to determine whether more effective actions exist to achieve environmental outcomes.

This monitoring and reassessment is an essential part of adaptive, ecosystem-based management, as it promotes accountability by evaluating whether or not management actions have resulted in progress toward stated environmental goals. The information obtained from monitoring efforts will be provided in an easily accessible format designed to promote transparency and foster cooperative adaptive management efforts.

Current situation

Currently, monitoring infrastructure in the region remains sparse, and an integrated ecological monitoring network does not exist. Until recently, little coordination existed among monitoring efforts by local, state, and federal organizations within the region. Most monitoring and reporting efforts conducted in the region are tied to objectives from specific grant programs or legal mandates.

Recent efforts at the federal and state level to organize monitoring are helpful, but these initiatives do not necessarily provide information at a consistency and scale that is needed to address the problems in the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem. Actions in this component will begin to more effectively discern who is monitoring the environment, what is being monitored, whether programs are working, and what might be done differently to support ecosystem-based approaches in the region.

Rationale for action

The incorporation of a rigorous and relevant monitoring program is critical to the success of APNEP and its partner organizations. Yet the complexity of ecological systems makes the design, construction, and maintenance of monitoring efforts a challenging task. Despite this fact, the residents of the region deserve accountability and information regarding the state of their environment. A comprehensive and integrated environmental monitoring strategy and its full implementation are necessary to fulfill this obligation.

OBJECTIVES & ACTIONS

Objective E1: Develop and maintain an integrated monitoring network to collect information for assessment of ecosystem outcomes and management actions associated with the implementation of the CCMP

Implementation of CCMP actions should produce positive changes in the ecosystem, and monitoring should be designed to measure these changes. Where possible, monitoring should also detect other environmental trends, helping the program identify and adjust priorities. Measuring progress toward desired outcomes will require the establishment of a coordinated and integrated monitoring strategy. If fully implemented, these monitoring actions will support a systems-level understanding of the region's environment.

Action E1.1: Facilitate the development and implementation of an integrated monitoring network through the guidance of regional monitoring and assessment teams. APNEP resource-themed teams (living aquatic, water, wetlands, terrestrial, air, human dimensions) will help assure that the results of environmental management efforts can be measured, and that management initiatives can be tailored based on the results of environmental assessments.

Key Partners: NC-DENR, VA-DEQ, VA-DCR, SALCC, EPA, NOAA

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d

Outputs: Regional integrated monitoring network

Results: Management decisions based on the results of environmental monitoring and assessments

Action E1.2: Assess the value of information for measuring ecosystem and CCMP implementation outcomes. APNEP will work with its partners to assess monitoring information to gauge its ability to assist managers in determining environmental progress of the

implementation of CCMP actions. Specifically, the costs and resolution of monitoring data will be assessed, as well as that data's value for supporting adaptive management and other environmental decisions. When needed, APNEP will work to identify new monitoring technologies and revisit established monitoring strategies.

Key Partners: EPA, NC-DENR, VA-DEQ, VA-DCR, SALCC, NOAA

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1 a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d

Outputs: Assessments of monitoring and CCMP progress

Results: Revised monitoring network to support management decisions

Action E1.3: Facilitate the expansion of volunteer monitoring into a core element of the integrated monitoring network. The traditional focus of APNEP's Citizen Monitoring Network has been the monitoring of select ecosystem indicators of water quality and citizen engagement. Where feasible, the expansion will incorporate a volunteer monitoring contribution for active ecosystem and management indicators. A rigorous quality assurance protocol will help maximize the utility of volunteer-produced data in APNEP assessments.

Key Partners: NC-MNS, NCCF, NOAA, USFWS, NC-DENR, VA-DEQ, VA-DCR

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d

Outputs: High-quality volunteer monitoring data for select ecosystem and management indicators

Results: More comprehensive and effective monitoring network to support management decisions

Objective E2: Develop and maintain a comprehensive spatial database for pertinent environmental data and modeling information

Even the most well planned monitoring and modeling efforts will fall short if the information isn't readily available to those who need it. Currently, data from many monitoring or modeling programs remain difficult to access. Other efforts fall short because they are of limited scope or duration, or the results simply don't reach environmental decision-makers. APNEP will work to develop a clearinghouse of all relevant monitoring and modeling efforts from the regional to community scale. The database will be publicly available, easy to navigate, and will contain historical information to assess changes in the regional ecosystem. This database will make environmental information available to all whom are interested, and it can maximize monitoring resources by avoiding duplication and focusing efforts where needed.

Action E2.1: Facilitate the design and content acquisition of a regional database based on partners' data and information needs. A regional database will help ensure that environmental information will be integrated to support regional assessments and environmental decision-making.

Key Partners: SALCC, EPA, NC-DENR, VA-DEQ, VA-DCR, NC-WRC, NC-DEM, NOAA

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d

Outputs: Regional database that is comprehensive, current, and easily accessible

Results: More informed decisions based on current shared data

Action E2.2: Develop and maintain an online resource that clearly conveys regional information in support of ecosystem-based management. In addition to creating a regional database, APNEP will work to make its contents easily and readily available for all who wish to use it.

Key Partners: SALCC, NC-WRC, NC-OCPCA, NOAA

CCMP Outcomes Supported: 1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 1e, 2a, 2b, 2c, 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d

Outputs: Data portal

Results: More informed decisions based on current shared data

Terms and Definitions

The working terms and definitions below are meant to introduce various concepts and to convey the meaning of technical terms in a straightforward, plain language manner. More precise definitions are available by consulting other references or literature sources.

303(d) list – A list of the most seriously impaired waters in the region developed to comply with the federal Clean Water Act.

anadromous – Aquatic species that must reproduce in rivers but live much of their life in the ocean.

aquatic system – The interconnected surface streams, rivers, lakes, sounds, and ocean in the Albemarle-Pamlico watershed.

bathymetry – The study of the depth and contours of underwater surface features.

best management practices (BMP) – Practices applied in a number of different industries (including agriculture, stormwater management, and energy development, among others) that minimize negative environmental impacts.

catadromous – Aquatic species that breed in the ocean and live a majority of their life in fresh and brackish waters.

conservation atlas – An integrated collection of maps and geographic information, presented online, that can be used in support of environmental decision-making.

contaminant management strategy – The full array of management measures which may be employed to reduce the amount of contaminants that enter the estuarine system.

designated use – A categorization of water bodies based on their most appropriate use. Associated with each designated use are various water quality standards which should be met to support that use.

diadromous - Migratory aquatic species that depend on both the river and the ocean for parts of their life cycle. This term includes both anadromous and catadromous species.

ecological flow – The amount of stream flow necessary to maintain ecological integrity in aquatic river systems. See N.C.G.S. § 143-355(o)(1)(a).

ecological health – A synonym for ecological integrity that compares the function of an ecosystem to that of the human body.

ecological integrity – The ability of an ecosystem to support and maintain a balanced, integrated, adaptive community of organisms having a species composition, diversity, and functional organization comparable to prevailing ecological conditions and, when subject to disruption, to recover and continue to provide the natural goods and services that normally accrue from the system.

ecosystem – All living organisms in an area and the nonliving physical environment with which they interact.

ecosystem-based management – An environmental management approach that recognizes the full array of interactions within an ecosystem, including humans.

geographical information system – Mapping software that allows geographically referenced information to be displayed, managed, and analyzed.

hardened shorelines – Areas along a waterfront that are stabilized by structures that prevent erosion, including bulkheads and riprap.

hydrologic processes – The ways in which water moves through the ecosystem.

hydrologic regime – The movement, distribution, and quality of water in the ecosystem.

impaired waters – Bodies of water or stream segments in which at least one surface water quality standard is not met for its designated use.

indicator – A numerical value derived from actual measurements of a pressure, state or ambient condition, exposure, ecological condition, or measure of human health or well-being over a specified geographic domain, whose trends over time represent or draw attention to underlying trends in the condition of the environment in the Albemarle-Pamlico region.

living shorelines – Stabilization techniques to minimize erosion that use natural habitat Reelements to protect shorelines from erosion while also providing critical habitat for estuarine species.

low-impact Development (LID) – An approach to land development (or re-development) that works with nature to manage stormwater as close to its source as possible. This practice employs principles such as preserving and recreating natural landscape features, minimizing or eliminating pollutants in storm water through natural processes, and maintaining pre-development hydrologic characteristics, such as flow patterns, surface retention, and recharge rates.

National Estuary Program – Established by section 320 of the Clean Water Act, the National Estuary Program is administered by EPA and protects 28 “estuaries of national

significance” throughout the United States. The Albemarle-Pamlico estuary was among the first in the nation to become a part of this program.

pathogens – Viruses, bacteria, or other microorganisms that cause disease in humans or other plant or animal species.

personal care and pharmaceutical products – Products used for personal health or cosmetic reasons, or used to enhance the growth or health of livestock. Many of these substances are present in small amounts in regional waterbodies and have unique chemical structures. The ecological effects of these substances remain largely unstudied.

submerged aquatic vegetation – Rooted vascular plants that live below the water surface in large meadows or small patches in coastal and estuarine waters. Also known as SAV, aquatic grasses, or grass beds, they can be further classified by the range of salinity of the waters in which they are found.

toxics – Chemicals that have adverse health or ecological effects when released into the environment.

watershed – The area of land where all water that is under it or drains from it goes to the same place. The Albemarle-Pamlico watershed describes the land and rivers that drain into the Albemarle and Pamlico Sounds.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

| | |
|--|---|
| APA- American Planning Association | NC-OEEPA- North Carolina Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs (NC-DENR) |
| APES- Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine Study | NC-PRTF- North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund |
| APNEP- Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Program | NC-SWC- North Carolina Division of Soil and Water Conservation (NC-DACS) |
| BMP- best management practices | NC-WRC- North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission |
| CAC- APNEP Citizens Advisory Committee | NCSUWQG- North Carolina State University Water Quality Group |
| CAMA- Coastal Area Management Act | NEMO- Non-point Education for Municipal Officials |
| CCMP- Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan | NFWF- National Fish and Wildlife Foundation |
| CHPP- Coastal Habitat Protection Plan (NC) | NGO- Non-governmental organization |
| COG- Council(s) of Governments | NMFS- National Marine Fisheries Service |
| CSI- University of North Carolina Coastal Studies Institute | NOAA- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration |
| CTNC- Conservation Trust for North Carolina | NRCS- Natural Resources Conservation Service |
| DU- Ducks Unlimited | PCPP- personal care and pharmaceutical products |
| EBM- ecosystem-based management | PDC- Planning District Commission |
| EPA- United States Environmental Protection Agency | PFS- Partnership for the Sounds |
| FHA- Federal Highway Administration | SAFMC- South Atlantic Fishery Management Council |
| GIS- geographic information system | SALCC- South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative |
| IMS- University of North Carolina Institute of Marine Sciences | SAV- submerged aquatic vegetation |
| IOG- University of North Carolina Institute of Government | SEPA- Southeast Power Administration |
| LID- low-impact development | SHA- Strategic Habitat Area |
| MAC- APNEP Management Advisory Committee | SRF- North Carolina and Virginia State Revolving Funds |
| NC- North Carolina | STAC- APNEP Science and Technical Advisory Committee |
| NCCF- North Carolina Coastal Federation | TNC- The Nature Conservancy |
| NC-AQ- North Carolina Aquariums | UNC- The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill |
| NC-CWMTF- Clean Water Management Trust Fund (NC) | USACE- United States Army Corp of Engineers |
| NC-DACS- North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services | USDA- United States Department of Agriculture |
| NC-DCM- North Carolina Division of Coastal Management (NC-DENR) | USFS- United States Forest Service |
| NC-DEM- North Carolina Division of Emergency Management | USFWS- United States Fish and Wildlife Service |
| NC-DENR- North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources | USGS- United States Geological Survey |
| NC-DHHS- North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services | VA – Virginia |
| NC-DMF- North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (NC-DENR) | VA-AQ- Virginia Aquarium and Marine Science Center |
| NC-DOC- North Carolina Department of Commerce | VA-CZM- Virginia Coastal Zone Management Program (VA-DEQ) |
| NC-DPH- North Carolina Division of Public Health | VA-DCR- Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation |
| NC-DPR- North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation (NC-DENR) | VA-DEQ- Virginia Department of Environmental Quality |
| NC-DWQ- North Carolina Division of Water Quality (NC-DENR) | VA-DGIF- Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries |
| NC-DWR- North Carolina Division of Water Resources (NC-DENR) | VA-DSM- Virginia Division of Stormwater Management (VA-DCR) |
| NC-EEP- North Carolina Ecosystem Enhancement Program (NC-DENR) | VA-NHP- Virginia Natural Heritage Program (VA-DCR) |
| NC-EPPC- North Carolina Exotic Pest Plant Council | VA-OEE- Virginia Office of Environmental Education (VA-DEQ) |
| NC-MNS- North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences | VA-VDACS- Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services |
| NC-NCDOT- North Carolina Department of Transportation | VA-VDH- Virginia Department of Health |
| NC-NCFS- North Carolina Forest Service | VA-DOC- Virginia Department of Commerce |
| NC-NHP- North Carolina Natural Heritage Program (NC-DENR) | VA-VDOF- Virginia Department of Forestry |
| NC-NERR- North Carolina Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve | VA-VDOT- Virginia Department of Transportation |
| NC-OCPCA- North Carolina Office of Conservation, Planning, and Community Affairs (NC-DENR) | VA-VMRC- Virginia Marine Resources Commission |
| | VA-VOF- Virginia Outdoors Fund |
| | VA-VWWP- Virginia Office of Wetlands and Water Protection (VA-DEQ) |
| | VA-WQIF- Virginia Water Quality Improvement Fund |
| | VIMS- Virginia Institute of Marine Science |

Appendix I

APNEP's Ecosystem-Based Planning Process 2008-2012

Development of an ecosystem-based CCMP

Based on seven years of intensive scientific study and the efforts of numerous stakeholders, APNEP's first Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) was developed in 1994. Most of the 49 management actions in the plan were implemented. Since then many new issues have arisen that were not addressed in the CCMP. Additionally, as developments in natural resource conservation and ecosystem science progressed, the 1994 plan became increasingly dated. APNEP staff began the process of updating the CCMP in 2008 with assistance from its advisory committees and the EPA.

APNEP began the planning process by seeking initial counsel from a broad array of stakeholders. A CCMP steering committee was created to define issues of importance for the region, which began to inform the development of the new plan. After several meetings a core set of issues emerged and draft objectives were developed. However, the objectives appeared disjointed for lack of a comprehensive watershed management approach necessary for protecting and restoring the Albemarle-Pamlico estuarine ecosystem. An overview of national estuary programs (NEPs) and ecosystem-based management (EBM) was presented to the Policy Board in June 2009.

After much consideration program staff, with the assistance of the Science & Technical Advisory Committee (STAC), investigated current practices among our partners pertaining to their use of EBM principles. Following the summer 2009 STAC meeting, staff began to draft a proposal for Policy Board consideration of using EBM as the foundation for the new CCMP. To provide guidance in development of the EBM proposal the staff assembled an EBM Proposal Team. The team included representatives from the Policy Board, STAC, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Working together, the Team developed a proposal that was approved by the Policy Board in December 2009.

To provide guidance in plan development, APNEP recruited an EBM Transition Team in early 2010, which included representatives from the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and APNEP's Policy Board and each of the advisory committees. The team was later expanded to include select faculty from the Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences Center for Coastal Resources Management (CCRM) whose expertise includes EBM theory. The Team implemented the steps necessary for effective ecosystem-based planning and management. During

regular intervals, they sought further advice and input from each of APNEP's advisory committees. Early in the process, staff suggested a CCMP format similar to the *2008 Puget Sound Action Agenda*.

As a first step in developing the new CCMP, the Team crafted desirable ecosystem *goals* and more explicit *outcomes* for each goal. In essence, these goals and outcomes are qualitative statements that define a "healthy" Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem (CCMP Question 1). The Team selected three ecosystem goals relating to the support of 1) human communities, 2) native species, and 3) clean and available water. These goals were more specifically articulated through the 12 outcomes found in the plan. Efforts to achieve these outcomes may sometimes conflict, particularly when balancing human interests with ecosystem needs. Therefore, the EBM approach will require engagement with various regional interests to develop new ideas and find areas for compromise.

Next, in the absence of a tested quantitative ecosystem model of the Albemarle - Pamlico ecosystem, the Team developed a conceptual (qualitative) ecosystem model. To do this, explicit *factors* were identified. These factors are the various pieces or elements that influence particular ecosystem outcomes. The factors were assigned into biological, chemical, physical, and human categories, and when considered together these factors represent the Team's conceptual understanding of the primary influences on the Albemarle-Pamlico ecosystem. The factors selected vary in scale, and reflect APNEP's traditional focus on a watershed approach to a healthy estuary and clean water. The regular refinement of this model is necessary to ensure an explicit linkage between human activities, management actions, and environmental outcomes are possible.

Third, factors, which had the greatest impact on a particular outcome, were deemed "high-impact" and addressed in the CCMP. Systems approaches dictate that the thorough management of many factors is often required to achieve the desired environmental outcomes presented in the plan. Therefore, for each desired outcome, the Team selected several of the most influential factors for management actions. These factors were considered in terms of both their importance and manageability.

Fourth, management *actions* were drafted for each high-impact factor (CCMP Question 4). Key organizations were identified and consulted regarding implementation of the actions. Over 50 partner plans were investigated to assess potential collaborations in implementing the CCMP. Additional input was requested from many of the partners. In many cases, representatives from these organizations were able to clarify or improve upon APNEP's original suggested actions.

Once management actions were drafted based on the above approach, APNEP staff reconsidered their ongoing management actions that were not elicited as part of the ecosystem-based planning process. In some cases, current management actions had a moderate effect on many ecosystem factors. These cumulatively significant actions

were mapped back to the ecosystem factors and incorporated into the plan. Other actions were deemed low-priority and phased out as the new CCMP was adopted.

Finally, actions generated through the aforementioned process were organized into *objectives* and then objectives were aggregated into *components*. Common actions were grouped under thematic objectives. These objectives were further grouped into five components that build upon APNEP's mission: identify, protect, restore, engage, and monitor. This classification of management actions provides clarity for environmental managers and illuminates opportunities for complimentary management initiatives in the region.

As is apparent in the plan, a single action can address many ecosystem outcomes (see Table 1). Furthermore, in this complex ecosystem, each ecosystem outcome is necessarily dependent on many successful management approaches. By tracking management actions and ecosystem outcomes, APNEP hopes to both refine its ecosystem model and determine the relative importance of the many actions in the plan. Unsuccessful or relatively unimportant approaches will be discontinued, and program resources will be rededicated to proven or promising actions.

Remaining Steps

The transition to an ecosystem-based management process is difficult, and the road thus far has included a few detours. Nevertheless, this summary provides a condensed version of the steps APNEP took to incorporate ecosystem-based management into its CCMP for the Albemarle-Pamlico region. APNEP will continue to draw upon lessons learned from the planning process in both the development of annual work plans (implementation) and in future iterations of the CCMP.

To fully implement an ecosystem-based management framework, APNEP will need to associate indicators, targets, and benchmarks with both its ecosystem outcomes and its management actions. This work is ongoing. APNEP will continue to update and assess the impacts of CCMP implementation, to incorporate new actions and metrics directly into the plan.

Each of these metrics will need to be monitored, and APNEP is currently developing a monitoring strategy necessary to support its ecosystem-based management approach. Both the implementation of management actions and the resulting ecosystem changes will be tracked by the Albemarle - Pamlico integrated monitoring network. Where actions are not fully implemented, future assessments will note barriers to implementation. Where actions are implemented but environmental improvement is lacking and thus benchmarks are not achieved, APNEP and its partners must reevaluate the ecosystem model underpinning the plan.