

# 'THE WAVES OF THE SEA' EASTERN NORTH CAROLINA

ASCENSION OF THE LORD, YEAR A

**Lectionary Texts: Acts 1:1-11 Psalm 47 Psalm 93 Ephesians 1:15-23 Luke 24:44-53**

**Focus Text: Psalm 93**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is king, [the LORD] is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed, [the LORD] is girded with strength. The LORD has established the world; it shall never be moved; <sup>2</sup> your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting. <sup>3</sup> The floods have lifted up, O LORD, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring. <sup>4</sup> More majestic than the thunders of mighty waters, more majestic than the waves of the sea, majestic on high is the LORD! <sup>5</sup> Your decrees are very sure; holiness befits your house, O LORD, forevermore.

NRSV

## ADDITIONAL TEXTS

### **For the Land of Eastern North Carolina:**

*The LORD reigns; let the earth rejoice; let the many coastlands be glad!*

Psalm 97:1

*O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures. Yonder is the sea, great and wide, creeping things innumerable are there, living things both small and great. There go the ships, and Leviathan that you formed to sport in it. These all look to you to give them their food in due season; when you give to them, they gather it up; when you open your hand, they are filled with good things. When you hide your face, they are dismayed; when you take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. When you send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the ground. May the glory of the LORD endure forever...*

Psalm 104:24-31

*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, until the destroying storms pass by.*

Psalm 57:1

### **For Economic Justice in Eastern North Carolina:**

*Rise up, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed. Why do the wicked renounce God, and say in their hearts, "You will not call us to account"? But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief, that you may take it into your hands; the helpless commit themselves to you; you have been the helper of the orphan. Break the arm of the wicked and evildoers; seek out their wickedness until you find none. The LORD is [God] forever and ever; the nations shall perish from [the LORD's] land. O LORD, you will hear the desire of the meek; you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more.*

Psalm 10:12-18

*When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue is parched with thirst, I the LORD will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers on the bare heights, and fountains in the midst of the valleys; I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.*

Isaiah 41:17-18

*"Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*

Matthew 11:28-30

*Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you... Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you. Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near.*

James 5:1, 4-8

## SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

BY CHRIS LIU BEERS, PROGRAM ASSOCIATE  
NC COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

In Psalm 93 we have an example of a psalm that celebrates the eternal enthronement of Israel's God. It is a song that invokes images from creation to offer up praise to God, in celebration of God's strength, power and majesty. The psalmist begins with the declaration that it is YHWH, Israel's God, who is "robed in majesty," and "girded in strength." It is YHWH who has "established" the world in such a way that "it shall never be moved." The psalmist continues in verse 2 by celebrating God's everlasting presence and reign.

Verse 3 represents a shift; here it is as if the psalmist has fallen silent before God and yet God's creation itself continues to ring out with praise and thanksgiving. The imagery of the waters and the floods is crucial here. Throughout the Hebrew Bible, "the waters" often signal a chaotic and untamed force (see, for example, the beginning of Genesis). In his book *Seeing the Psalms*, William Brown asserts: "Typical of royal temple liturgy, the psalm boldly affirms God's cosmic reign to ensure the stability of creation... As royal warrior, God is poised to subdue any force that would plunge creation into chaos. And, as the second half of the psalm attests, the mighty waters or floods would do just that... God's majesty exceeds the deafening roar of rushing floodwaters. God's 'voice' overpowers all threats of chaos and can be distinctly heard in the divinely wrought decrees..." In verse 5, the psalmist's reference to the Lord's "house" indicates the temple, which serves as a kind of "residence" for Israel's "victorious God" (see the *New Oxford Annotated Bible*).

Those of us living in North Carolina know all too well how the waters bring both harvest and destruction, sustenance and chaos, life and death. While all parts of the state have been deeply affected by flooding at different times, there is a particular connection between this ancient psalm and the eastern part of North Carolina. Indeed, the floods have brought chaos into thousands of lives. In this context, we learn to hear this psalm as a proclamation of faith, that God remains "in charge" despite evidence to the contrary. Today, we might imagine a modern-day psalmist looking out over the destruction of the land, farms, roads, businesses and homes uttering a lament, grieving the many losses that have occurred. And yet, we might also imagine the psalmist raising his or her voice again in praise of the God who is always present in suffering, who is at work in mysterious - and often unseen - ways, bringing forth hope from sorrow and new life even in the midst of death.

## PASTORAL REFLECTION

BY REV. WILLIAM L. NEILL, PASTOR,  
MT. ZION AFRICAN METHODIST  
EPISCOPAL ZION CHURCH, FAYETTEVILLE

*Editor's Note: Rev. Neill was pastor of St. John A. M. E. Zion Church in Wilson, NC. In 1999, Hurricane Floyd brought deadly and destructive flooding to most of Eastern NC. This is his first-person account of the flood and its impact.*

As I look from my living room window at the aftermath of Hurricane Floyd, I am compelled to rush to my car radio to listen to the news for further updates, if any are currently on! Tidbits of information from the streets come my way and it is shocking what I hear. Roads are flooded cutting off routes of escape from the city west toward Raleigh, east toward Kenly, and some say you can't get through Rocky Mount. I was scheduled to host a Conference meeting and I needed to know what to do to contact those who would be traveling from all over Eastern North Carolina, as to whether the meeting needed to be canceled. As others did, I got into my car and began traveling different directions to see the destruction myself. Sure enough, many of the main roads were cut off. Later, I received a phone call about a meeting for a few ministers, FEMA, fire personnel, Salvation Army, law enforcement, and others concerning how we would respond to the immediate needs of the community. Feeling somewhat isolated, I realize that I am the only African American Pastor at the meeting, although I do not know whether I am the only one invited or the only one who attended. As I listen to those around the room give their professional opinion as to how we should respond and what should be done, I want to add my input: after all, most of the folk affected (though not the only ones) were African Americans and Latinos. The houses that these folk lived in were condemned because of the diseased water infestation. And yet, people were encouraged and allowed to move back into these same houses after all the political maneuvering and pecking order determined how the funds would be split. I am being encouraged to investigate how one particular relief center is distributing needed clothing, toiletries, and other necessary items. There is widespread discussion that these essential items are being distributed unfairly. There are many stories of certain folk being turned away and told nothing else is available, while witnesses observe folk of other ethnicities going into the same facility and coming out with supplies. As President of the Wilson and Wilson County Ministerial Alliance, many people feel that I have an obligation and duty to look into these allegations. In the midst of this misappropriation and misallocation, there are many churches and other people of goodwill

who have taken upon themselves the task of aiding the community in vital, down-to-earth ways.

Sitting once again at home, looking out my window, I am frustrated. In the aftermath of such a devastating catastrophe, our divisions have hindered an effective collaborative effort to respond to folk who are hurting, distraught, confused, and worried about what life will come to now. Why is it that folk just couldn't equally and equitably distribute goods and services according to the seriousness of the needs of the community, rather than allow greed, politics, and "turfism" invade an opportunity to show forth the love, fellowship, and grace of God in a practical way? I encouraged my congregation to bring what they had available, and to prepare food so we could simply travel along the streets and help folk as their need occurred. As the railroad tracks divide West Wilson from East Wilson, so also the lack of an effective collaborative effort divided us into a cacophony of confused healers.

Now, I have just received word that Bill's Barbeque – a small locally-owned restaurant – is totally underwater and that entire area is not accessible to the public anymore. In fact, the old location for Bill's was also condemned, but by some miracle, it remains standing. Such facts demand that we ask: Why were houses on the East condemned and not restored or repaired, but yet other areas that were clearly affected by the same infested waters, restored, refurbished, refined and operating today?

*How shall we respond?* Well, by the grace of God, we survived. Mothers, fathers, and children lost their lives, livelihood, and homes, but we made it through another tragedy, another tragic display of *untogetherness*. In times such as these, we must learn to live together with caring and sharing hearts. The tragedy of these floods have effectively unveiled the unpreparedness of our community. What once was expected to happen in another 300-500 years has in fact occurred many years before its expected arrival. This reminds us that we should treat everyday as if it is our last day! We should adhere to the Scripture that says to us, "be sober, be vigilant, for your adversary walketh about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Looking back, it is clear that our community was so drunk with elitism that we, in many cases, failed our most valued treasures and resources – our *people*.

Today, several years removed from the floods, I believe that the community has in most respects rebounded to its "old self." I was moved to another congregation and community in November of 2004, yet I am still in touch with colleagues and constituents, and much is still the same. Although I believe that God is at work restoring and blessing, for better and for worse much is still the same.

## WORSHIP AID - 'THE WAVES OF THE SEA'

### RESPONSIVE READING

God of creation, we give You thanks for the many gifts of Eastern North Carolina.

**We thank You for the stunning beauty of the coast and the vast expanse of the sea, whose pounding waves and changing tides remind us of our limited mortality.**

We praise You for being more majestic than the waves of the sea and God even of the storms of life.

**We thank You for taking us safely through these storms and the flood of troubles that daily seek to swallow us up.**

We thank You for speaking to the raging winds saying, "Peace. Be still."

**God of abundance, we thank You for this fruitful land, which has been yielding crops for countless generations by the goodness of Your sustaining care.**

We thank You also for the hands that labor to bring Your bounty to our tables.

**We pray that You would bless those who work in the fields, give us seasonable weather, and enable all to share in the fruits of the earth as we rejoice in Your goodness.**

We pray for the heart and vision to tend lovingly Your creation and protect it against overdevelopment, pollution and destruction so that those that come after us may also rejoice in Your creation.

**God of the nations, we give You thanks for the diverse peoples of this land and for the histories that have brought each of us to these particular days and times.**

*(continued on next page)*

We can thank You because all our days are in Your hands.

**God of peace, we pray that we might learn to live in love and in community, both near and far, despite the differences that often divide us.**

Help us to love even our enemies and be our strength as we work together for justice here in our communities.

**Guide us in Your sure and holy decrees and raise us up to new and abundant life together in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

*(by Chris Liu Beers and B. J. Morton, with some material adapted from the Book of Common Prayer, Prayer #29, "For Agriculture," p. 824)*

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Gracious God,  
We confess before You and before each other today that we have failed to live as an obedient church here in Eastern North Carolina. We confess that we are divided one from another, by race, by class, by denomination. Give us the courage and perseverance to love one another and to seek unity and prosperity for all. We confess that we are often complicit in the devastation of Your creation. Give us the wisdom to protect our natural resources, and give us hope as we challenge those who attempt to destroy the natural order, whether out of convenience or ignorance. We confess that we are still learning how to share with one another and how to live our lives in harmony with Your creation. We ask for Your grace, that we—Your church—would be a hospitable people who open the doors of our churches, our homes, and our hearts to one another and bless, rather than curse, Your good earth that feeds us. In the name of Christ, **Amen.**

*(by Chris Liu Beers and B. J. Morton)*

**SUGGESTED HYMNS**

- ✠ *My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*      AM/364/BH 406/CH 537/CM 223/  
LW 368/MW 771/NCH 403/PH 379/  
TH 343/UMH 222
- ✠ *Be Still My Soul*      AM 426/CH 566/CM 221/LW 510  
MW 757/NCH 488/UMH 209
- ✠ *We Plough the Fields and Scatter*      AM 579/MW 453/PH 560
- ✠ *O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go*      AM 302/BH 292/CH 540/CM 268/  
NCH 485/PH 384/TH 577/UMH 234
- ✠ *Healer of Our Every Ill*      GC 882

<b>◆ Hymnal Legend ◆</b>	
† AM	— African Methodist Episcopal
† BH	— Baptist Hymnal
† CH	— Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)
† CM	— Christian Methodist Episcopal
† GC	— Gather Comprehensive (Rom Cath)
† LW	— Lutheran Worship
† MW	— Moravian Book of Worship
† NCH	— New Century Hymnal (UCC)
† PH	— Presbyterian Hymnal
† TH	— The Hymnal 1982 (Episcopal)
† UMH	— United Methodist Hymnal

**ADDITIONAL PRAYERS**

**A Prayer of Confession Concerning Unjust Treatment of Workers in Eastern North Carolina**

Gracious God,  
We confess to You this day that we have placed unfair burdens on our sisters and brothers living and working in Eastern North Carolina. We have asked them to work at lower wages than we would accept. We have asked them to bear the burden of the hog lagoons, with their harsh impact on the environment and on people’s health and well-being. We have asked them to live in poverty, that we might live in wealth. And we have asked that they not complain too loudly, that they accept the demands of the “New South,” while reaping none of its benefits. Forgive us, Lord, for our complicity in their poverty and hunger. Forgive us, Lord, for we are quick to respond to “disaster relief” but slow to recognize the everyday disasters of homes still without plumbing or heat, of children receiving inadequate education, of environmental destruction without regard for those who will come after us. Together we confess this truth: when one part of the body suffers, we all suffer. Remind us of our suffering today, and give us hearts of compassion and justice. In Christ’s name, **Amen.**

*(by Chris Liu Beers)*

## God of All Consolation

God of the fields and the seas, God of the sun and the mighty waters -- the awesome powers of nature that can be both a wonder, as well as a source of tragedy -- we cry out to you saying, Lord, have mercy.

For those who seek shelter from the hot sun, water for their thirst, food for their hunger, and medicine for their ills:

**Lord, have mercy.**

For those who live in worry and anxiety and on whom the light of deliverance may not appear to shine:

**Lord, have mercy.**

For all people in urgent need or daily suffering:

**Lord, have mercy.**

For those who provide rest to the weary and relief to those in need:

**Lord, have mercy.**

For government leaders at all levels that they might act for the common good of all people:

**Lord, have mercy.**

God of all consolation, we welcome Your Word of hope and pray that all Your creation may experience Your abundance and peace. **Amen.**

*(Adapted from a prayer vigil at St.. Paul's Lutheran Church, Waverly, Iowa on 9/1/2005, and from a prayer by Rev. Charles Cox, Forest City, Iowa)*

## ADDITIONAL HELPS

### ▫ QUOTES ▫

*Jobs of any kind, but especially if they hold much long-range promise, still don't grow on trees; wages still are among the lowest in the nation, and the gap between these eastern [North Carolina] counties and the Piedmont cities, as between rich and poor, gets wider and wider. Manufacturing is not what it used to be, and yet, most people looking for work aren't prepared for anything else.*

Linda Flowers

*Farming looks mighty easy when your plow is a pencil, and you're a thousand miles from the corn field.* Dwight D. Eisenhower

*One of the happiest days of my life is when I made five or six hundred pesos from a crop of watermelons I raised all on my own.*

Emiliano Zapata

*There is no drop of water in the ocean, not even in the deepest parts of the abyss, that does not know and respond to the mysterious forces that create the tide.*

Rachel Carson

*There are two big forces at work, external and internal. We have very little control over external forces such as tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, disasters, illness and pain. What really matters is the internal force. How do I respond to those disasters? Over that I have complete control.*

Leo Buscaglia

*I realized that if I had to choose, I would rather have birds than airplanes.*

Charles Lindbergh

### Eastern NC and the Navy's Proposed Outlying Landing Field -- A Grassroots Victory

North Carolinians Opposing the Outlying Landing Field (NO-OLF) staved off the US Navy's proposal to establish an outlying landing field for pilot training in Washington and Beaufort counties in North Carolina. This grassroots organization launched a campaign to oppose the Navy's plan expressing concern about the potential loss of family farms, the dramatic negative impact it would have on tax bases of these economically depressed counties, the negative impacts on wetlands and local wildlife preserves, as well as the danger to migrating birds and to military pilots. In May 2007, The US House passed the FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act, by a 397 to 27 vote, repealing the authorization to construct the outlying landing field at the site identified by the Navy in Washington and Beaufort counties.

## Fear and Flooding in North Carolina

Scientists warn that flood-prone U.S. communities... like Princeville, [North Carolina, a poor and largely minority community]\* face an increased risk of disaster due to a dangerous combination of global warming and ongoing human alteration of land for profit. And they say future flooding has the potential to be just as or even more devastating than what happened [in 1999] following Hurricane Floyd, which killed 35 people, destroyed 8,000 homes and caused some \$1.9 billion in damage in North Carolina alone. The storm hit eastern North Carolina, the state's most impoverished region, especially hard...

**A man-made catastrophe:** [Dr. Stanley Riggs, an East Carolina University geology professor and Floyd expert, urges] people to stop blaming God and Mother Nature for disastrous floods and face their own role in creating them... Though the floods followed storms that were beyond earthly control, human tampering with the land has exacerbated the damage storms cause. Soon after the white settlers drove the Tuscarora people from eastern North Carolina in the early 1700s, they began ditching and draining the region's extensive swamps and upland coastal dismals known as "pocosins," an Indian word for "swamp on a hill." By the 1980s, North Carolina had lost half of its original wetlands, which act like sponges to absorb rain into the earth. Also in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the U.S. Soil Conservation Service and Army Corps of Engineers began artificially channeling streams with the intention of improving marginal agricultural land and controlling upland flooding. But as a result, stormwater now pours off the

earth and jeopardizes downstream communities like Princeville.

Road building... and [land development also contribute] to flooding by removing trees and increasing hard surfaces. During the 1990s alone, North Carolina's forests and other open spaces were developed at a rate of more than 156,000 acres a year — a 67 percent increase over the previous decade. The state lost more than a million acres of forests over the last 12 years, largely due to urban sprawl.\*

**The solution becomes the problem:** [Flood] control efforts have complicated the very problem they set out to fix. "The traditional approach to reducing flooding largely relies on straight-jacketing rivers with levees and floodwalls, and quickly funneling floodwaters to downstream areas" ...That's precisely what happened at Princeville, where the levee altered the Tar River's flow to disastrous effect.

**Rising Flood Risks:** While Princeville has been largely resurrected since Hurricane Floyd, little has been done to protect the town from future floods. Meanwhile, the likelihood of flooding is increasing due to manmade climate change that's expected to heat up annual temperatures in the Southeast by 4 to 10 degrees over the next century and raise sea levels by as much as a foot by 2030, according to a recent report from Environmental Defense\*...

*Excerpt from an article written by Sue Sturgis for Southern Exposure 32 (Winter 2005) - [www.southernstudies.org/reports/Princeville-WEB.htm](http://www.southernstudies.org/reports/Princeville-WEB.htm). \*See the full text for footnoted sources.*

### A Hurricane-Harried African-American Town Lives with the Specter of Future Disaster

Storms and floods have long haunted [Princeville, North Carolina], a former capital of the state's cotton economy where today the majority of residents are African-American and almost one in five live in poverty. A peal of thunder here has power to strike fear in people's hearts... Though fortunately none of Princeville's 2,000 residents lost their lives in the [1999 flooding following Hurricane Floyd], they lost almost everything else — homes, churches, cars, pets, family treasures. The deluge submerged the town for weeks under water and mud stinking of human waste, rotting animal carcasses, oil, gas, and pesticides. It even disturbed Princeville's dead, uprooting hundreds of caskets from local cemeteries and sending them floating through town... Floyd's specter still casts a shadow over the town. Abandoned businesses and boarded-up homes stand empty, warped by water damage...

[The] people of Princeville have not forgotten what happened [in 1999], and they live in dread of the next big storm. Inside her new white trailer on Tyson Street, Louise Latham — a senior citizen like almost half of the town's residents — recalls what happened...when she woke to find the river pouring into the trailer she had bought just a month earlier. Struggling through fetid, waist-deep water, she made her way to a nearby rooftop where she was rescued by boat, only to face living in temporary housing for months on end, until she was able to purchase a new home with insurance money.

As Latham tells her story, thunder rumbles in the distance. She leans back on her sofa, pushes aside the curtain and nervously peers out the window. "It was devastating," she says in a quiet voice. "Now every time it rains, you start thinking."

*(Excerpt from "Fear and Flooding in North Carolina" written by Sue Sturgis - [www.southernstudies.org/reports/Princeville-WEB.htm](http://www.southernstudies.org/reports/Princeville-WEB.htm))*

## ▪CONTACTS AND OTHER RESOURCES ▪

- ✦ [www.nccouncilofchurches.org](http://www.nccouncilofchurches.org) -- The *North Carolina Council of Churches* has three committees/programs that work on Eastern North Carolina issues. The Rural Life Committee brings together a variety of groups concerned with issues affecting rural North Carolina, including agricultural policy, health care, disaster recovery, contract farming, housing, urbanization, and the survival of family farms. The Farmworker Ministry Committee works to improve conditions of farmworkers through public awareness, advocacy, service, support for organizing, and resolutions of endorsement. NC Interfaith Power and Light works with faith communities to address the causes and consequences of global climate change through education and public policy advocacy.
- ✦ [www.ncruralcenter.org](http://www.ncruralcenter.org) – The mission of the *North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center* is to develop, promote, and implement sound economic strategies to improve the quality of life of rural North Carolinians. The center serves the state's 85 rural counties, with a special focus on individuals with low to moderate incomes and communities with limited resources.
- ✦ [www.rafiusa.org](http://www.rafiusa.org) – *RAFI-USA* is dedicated to community, equity and diversity in agriculture. RAFI-USA is creating a movement among farm, environmental and consumer groups to: promote sustainable agriculture; strengthen family farms and rural communities; protect the diversity of plants, animals and people; and ensure responsible use of new technologies.
- ✦ [www.noolf.com](http://www.noolf.com) – *North Carolinians Opposing the Outlying Landing Field*, concerned citizens formed a coalition to halt the Navy plans to build an outlying landing field (OLF) in Washington and Beaufort counties, North Carolina's Albemarle Peninsula -- the heart of the Atlantic Flyway. The Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge hosts tens of thousands of swans, geese, and ducks, and construction of the OLF would destroy these wildlife habitats. The Albemarle Peninsula is also some of the most fertile farmland in the country, and construction of the OLF would devastate North Carolina's generational farmers in the region.
- ✦ [www.nccppr.org](http://www.nccppr.org) -- The *North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research* is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to the goals of a better-informed public and more effective, accountable, and responsive government. The majority of the key facts below are from the Center's February 2006 study – *North Carolina Insight, Eastern North Carolina Revisited: What Drives the Region's Economy*.
- ✦ [www.smithfieldjustice.com](http://www.smithfieldjustice.com) – *Justice at Smithfield* campaigns for employee justice at Smithfield Foods in Tarheel, NC. Smithfield operates the largest hog slaughterhouse in the world. Concerned that workers are forced to work under harsh and dangerous circumstances, with fast line speeds, inadequate training, and improper safety procedures, Smithfield Justice seeks to promote better working conditions at Smithfield.
- ✦ [www.cleanenergy.org](http://www.cleanenergy.org) – *Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE)* is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that promotes responsible energy choices that solve global warming problems and ensure clean, safe and healthy communities throughout the Southeast. SACE is collaborating with other organizations in North Carolina on the issue of global warming, including efforts to address its adverse impact on Eastern North Carolina. SACE has produced a short film entitled, "Treasured Places: The Outer Banks in Peril," which details the risks from global warming to our coast.
- ✦ [www.environmentaldefense.org](http://www.environmentaldefense.org) – the *North Carolina Office of Environmental Defense* has developed innovative solutions to environmental problems affecting the state and the Southeast region, working to protect and restore marine, coastal and mountain ecosystems, advocate sustainable forest management, reduce air pollution, improve water quality and preserve habitat for wildlife.

### KEY FACTS

The North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research has taken a detailed look at Eastern North Carolina's economy and this is what their research reveals about the region:<sup>1</sup>

- Say "Eastern North Carolina" and most people think instantly of farming, but only 2.2 percent of the region's workers are employed full-time on farms. Manufacturing represents 12.9 percent of the work force, compared to 15.6 percent

for the state as a whole. The public sector – including local, state, and federal governments – employs 23.7 percent of the work force in the East compared to 17.7 percent statewide... The U.S. Department of Defense is the leading employer in three counties with large military bases: Craven, home of Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point; Cumberland, with the Army’s Fort Bragg and Pope Air Force Base; and Onslow, home of Marine Corps Camp Lejeune. Services and retail trade provide the bulk of the jobs, with three out of four workers in the East employed in the service or retail sectors.<sup>2</sup>

- ❑ North Carolina is the nation’s second largest pork producer. The state now has more hogs than people.<sup>3</sup>
- ❑ The farm economy faces challenges on a number of fronts. The federal buyout of the tobacco support program changes the business arrangement for raising the region’s most valuable crop. Livestock production faces issues around environmental regulation, waste management, and odor control. And, the debate rages about whether consolidation of ownership into larger and more valuable farms is a good thing or a bad thing for the farmer.<sup>4</sup>
- ❑ Most farmworkers are employed on a seasonal basis at little more than minimum wage, working in conditions that threaten their long-term health and safety. Many employers fail to comply with rules about pesticide applications, fail to provide water for workers or sufficient time to drink it. Many North Carolinian farmworkers, therefore, suffer from heat-related illness.<sup>5</sup>
- ❑ Hog farming initially was attractive to farmers because of the system that stored hog waste in lagoons, then sprayed the lagoon substance as manure onto crops. With environmental concerns brought on by odor and flooding, hog waste lagoons since have fallen from favor.<sup>6</sup>
- ❑ The 41-county region lags the rest of the state on almost every indicator. Eastern NC has fewer college graduates, more high school dropouts, lower per capita income, higher unemployment, and higher poverty rates than the rest of the state.<sup>7</sup>
- ❑ Another indicator that the region is not thriving is its declining population. The U.S. Bureau of the Census found 16 Eastern North Carolina counties lost population from 2000-2004, and all eight North Carolina counties that lost population from 1990-2000 were located in the East.<sup>8</sup>
- ❑ According to the NC Department of Commerce’s Division of Tourism, in 2004 more than 49 million visitors traveled to North Carolina, and tourists ranked visiting North Carolina’s beaches their second most popular activity. With an increasing number of visitors to the state, there is a growing need for workers in the tourism industry. However, not everyone is enamored with tourism as an economic development engine. Most of the jobs supported by it are low-wage and seasonal.<sup>9</sup>

#### Other Key Facts

- ❑ Recent findings indicate that global warming is likely to cause sea levels to rise worldwide by 7 to 23 inches by 2100. Rising sea levels along North Carolina’s coast will erode the 72-mile Cape Hatteras National Seashore and threaten the area’s natural and historic treasures. The Cape Hatteras lighthouse was moved ½ mile inland in 1999.<sup>10</sup>
- ❑ According the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources, North Carolina’s estuarine and coastal waters are showing signs of habitat degradation and loss (lack of recovery of certain fishery species despite reduced harvest, increasing shellfish harvest closures in Outstanding Resource Waters, large number of impaired waters, frequent fish kills, and negative changes in ecosystem structure). Not only are coastal fisheries threatened, but also coastal economies built around a high quality natural environment.<sup>11</sup>

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1. Excerpts from North Carolina Center for Public Policy Research, *North Carolina Insight, Eastern North Carolina Revisited: What Drives the Region’s Economy?* February 2006, Volume 22 No. 1.

2. John Quinterno, “Eastern North Carolina at Work: What Are the Region’s Economic Engines?” in *North Carolina Insight*, pp. 3-4, 10.

3. Mike McLaughlin and Katherine Dunn, “Agriculture: Still King of the Eastern North Carolina Economy?” in *North Carolina Insight*, pp. 39-40.

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

7. Quinterno, pp. 3-5

8. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

9. Katherine Dunn, “Tourism in Eastern North Carolina” in *North Carolina Insight*, pp. 33-34.

10. [http://www.cleanenergy.org/resources/factsheets/NC\\_GW\\_factsheet.pdf](http://www.cleanenergy.org/resources/factsheets/NC_GW_factsheet.pdf).

11. <http://www.ncfisheries.net/habitat/chpphabitats.html>.