



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

Raleigh ES Field Office

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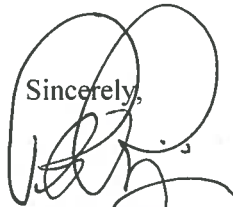
May 3, 2017

Mr. George Norris, Grants Manager
North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
1751 Varsity Drive
Raleigh, NC 27606

Dear Mr. Norris:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service North Carolina Raleigh Ecological Services Field Office reviewed the National Coastal Wetland Conservation Grant Program *Waccamaw Partnership Project Proposal* submitted by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. The project seeks to purchase and protect in perpetuity 3,000 acres of very special and unique wetlands in the coastal plain of Columbus County North Carolina.

The area proposed has been a long term priority for protection in North Carolina as demonstrated by its inclusion in the Regional Wetlands Concept Plan for Emergency Wetlands Resources Act (Southeast Region, US Fish and Wildlife Service, August 1992). This site contains the federally listed as threatened Waccamaw Silversides (*Menidia extensa*) which is only found in Lake Waccamaw and the upper Waccamaw River in Columbus County, NC and provides habitat for the at-risk Carolina Pygmy Sunfish (*Elassoma boehlkei*). This project supports our climate adaptation focus that strives to protect diverse areas slightly upstream of short term sea level rise. Conservation of healthy wetlands, like those proposed to be acquired in the Waccamaw Partnership Tract, prevents future wetland conversion and associated loss of pollutant filtration and sequestration capacity. This is particularly important for mercury currently sequestered in wetland soils that could be re-mobilized and exacerbate the existing mercury impairment in the Lumber River Basin. Because of these reasons and many more that are well stated in the proposal this proposal receives our strongest level of endorsement. Please contact Mike Wicker our NC Coastal Program Coordinator with any questions at mike_wicker@fws.gov or 919-856-4520 ext. 22.

Sincerely,

Pete Benjamin
Field Supervisor