



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

176 Croghan Spur Road, Suite 200
Charleston, South Carolina 29407



March 31, 2017

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

Re: Review and Support of the 2018 National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Proposal
(Waccamaw River Partnership Tract)

Dear Mr. Norris:

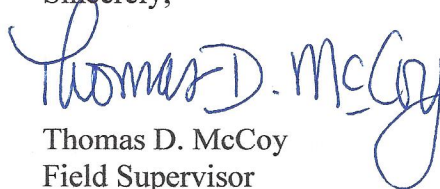
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's South Carolina Ecological Services Field Office (SCFO) and Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge have reviewed the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission proposal for National Coastal Wetlands Conservation Grant Program (NCWCGP) funding. The NCWCGP was established for the long-term conservation of important coastal wetland habitats by offering States a competitive matching funding source. The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, in partnership with the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust, is seeking funding from the NCWCP to purchase the 3,000-acre Waccamaw River Tract in Columbus County, North Carolina.

The SCFO's South Carolina Coastal Program works with public-private partnerships to achieve land conservation throughout coastal South Carolina. Through these partnerships tens of thousands of acres have been protected. In the Waccamaw River watershed in South Carolina, this includes the Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge, the Waccamaw River State Heritage Preserve, and The Nature Conservancy's Sandy Island Preserve. In addition, there are thousands of acres of private land protected with conservation easements. Although these properties provide an important corridor of protected lands, land protection is needed throughout the Waccamaw River watershed. This includes from the origin of the Waccamaw River in North Carolina below Lake Waccamaw all the way to Winyah Bay in South Carolina. In North Carolina portions of the Waccamaw River and its tributaries have been protected by the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. The Waccamaw River Preserve Tract, totaling 3,000 acres with approximately 7.5 miles of frontage on the Waccamaw River, is another key property that will help secure the ecological integrity of this watershed.

The Waccamaw River Preserve Tract includes a diversity of upland and wetland habitats including cypress-gum swamps, bottomland hardwood forests, and Atlantic white cedar stands. These habitats potentially support numerous rare and declining species including several federally threatened, endangered, and at-risk species as well as South Carolina Coastal Program focal species. These include Rafinesque's big-eared bats, American wood storks, Swainson's warblers, and swallow-tailed kites. In addition, the Waccamaw River Preserve Tract provides habitat for numerous species considered high priority by the South Carolina Department of Natural Resources in their Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy such as the black-throated green warbler, Acadian flycatcher, Louisiana waterthrush, American shad, and wood duck. The protection of the Waccamaw River Preserve Tract also complements the Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge which was established, in part, to protect the flora and fauna associated with bottomland hardwoods. While, all of the habitats within the Waccamaw River Preserve Tract provide important habitat for wildlife, they also provide irreplaceable water quality functions that benefit the watershed in both North and South Carolina.

The SCFO's South Carolina Coastal Program and the Waccamaw National Wildlife Refuge actively work with our partners to conserve and manage coastal resources. We fully support the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust in their efforts to protect the Waccamaw River Preserve Tract and believe NCWCGP funding should be provided for this project. If you have any questions please contact Mr. Jason Ayers at (843) 300-0421.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Thomas D. McCoy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Thomas" and last name "McCoy" clearly legible.

Thomas D. McCoy
Field Supervisor

TDM/JTA