

FROM RIVERS TO SOUNDS: A NATURAL RESOURCE-BASED MODEL FOR SUSTAINABLE ECO-TOURISM IN THE BERTIE PENINSULA AND WATERSCAPE

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North Carolina Land of Water (NLOW) www.nclandofwater.org

Bertie Peninsula (BP) extends SE from the VA-NC border to Albemarle Sound. The BP is bounded by the Bertie Water Crescent (BWC) with the Roanoke River system along the SW and S boundaries and Chowan River system along the E boundary. The lower portions of both river systems transition into the Albemarle Sound and Chowan River estuaries by ongoing sea-level rise. The BP contains a series of smaller, black-water tributary drainages that include the Cashie River and Salmon Creek, mid-scale Black Walnut and Cashoke swamps, and ephemeral streams that form steep ravines riming the highland Wicomoco and Talbot terraces.

The natural and human history within North Carolina's Land of Water (NC LOW) is a product of the continual interplay of the geological, ecological, and human processes operating in this dynamic coastal system. Northeastern NC's coastal system is a complex network of interdependent ecosystems dominated by changes resulting from ongoing processes of sea-level rise and recurrent, high-energy storms. These energetic processes of change have molded North Carolina's human history, continue to significantly impact the present culture, and will have a heavy imprint on our future coastal culture and economy. Thus, the "From Rivers to Sounds" program reflects a water-based, environmental history of a small coastal region through millennia of coastal system change and evolution with a substantial cultural over-print on the landscapes, their ecosystems, and natural dynamics.

NLOW focused on the natural resources for developing eco-tourism and environmental education as a means of diversifying the rural economy while minimizing the stifling impact of flooding and drought. NLOW defined five water hubs utilizing the world-class system of land- and water-scape resources within BP and BWC, along with over 125,000 acres (195 mi²) of public lands to form the basis of a sustainable eco-tourism network. The NLOW 2018 report provides a framework for the water hubs and forms the basis for requesting a US National Park Service designation as a "Rivers to Sound National Water Trail" for the BWC. The water hubs include the following.

1. Windsor: An urban waterfront park on the Upper Cashie River that includes four boat ramps, fishing piers, boardwalks, campground, four tree houses, two museums, kayak rental facility, and a National Wildlife Refuge Visitors Center and meeting facility.
2. Sans Souci: A two car cable ferry and public boat ramp that opens up the black-water wilderness of the Lower Cashie and vast Roanoke River floodplains with their abundant camping platforms.
3. Salmon Creek State Natural Area (995 acres) and County Recreational Area (147 acres) occurs at the confluence of three different water bodies with over 5 miles of waterfront and provides the framework for the "Rivers to Sounds" environmental education program. The possible acquisition of an additional 300 acre parcel, that connects the two existing parcels, is in progress.

4. Weeping Mary on the Roanoke River, with its vast wilderness and important climate history, is situated within the historic Moratico Floodplain that already has developed a public fishing platform and boat ramp.
5. Colerain's Wicomoco Bluffs and Cow Island Swamp Forest Natural Areas on the west bank of the Chowan River Estuary are in the early discussion phase.