

**APNEP FACILITATES MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN NORTH CAROLINA AND VIRGINIA
STATE AGENCIES TO FOSTER INTERSTATE COLLABORATION ON ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES WITHIN SHARED
ALBEMARLE-PAMLICO RIVER BASINS**

FACT SHEET

Summary

- On November 1, 2017, N.C. Department of Environmental Quality (NCDEQ) Secretary Michael S. Regan, N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (NCDNCR) Secretary Susi H. Hamilton, and the Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources* Molly J. Ward officially signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that will foster interstate collaboration to manage for healthy ecosystems and communities within the Albemarle-Pamlico region of North Carolina and Virginia.
 - **Note: The Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources oversees both the VA Department of Conservation and Recreation and the VA Department of Environmental Quality.*
- Development of the MOU was facilitated by the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership (APNEP), a federal-state program hosted by the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality that works to identify, protect, and restore the region’s natural resources, from its upstream rivers to the barrier islands where the estuary meets the ocean.

**What is it
and why is it
important?**

- From Dr. Bill Crowell, APNEP Director: “This MOU creates a formal mechanism for the governments of North Carolina and Virginia to communicate with one another. Because it shows that collaboration between the two states is a priority to the Secretaries of both states, it gives authority to requests from North Carolina to Virginia or vice versa.”
- The Albemarle-Pamlico is the second largest estuary in the nation behind Chesapeake Bay, with equally important natural resources that drive the local economy. However, the region has not received the same attention and monetary resources that stakeholders have been able to successfully garner in the shared waterways of multiple states in the Chesapeake region. APNEP partners hope the MOU provides a platform to achieve the same success in our sounds.
- The MOU will assist these agencies in working together alongside APNEP to tackle regional issues such as nonpoint source pollution, restoring fish passage and spawning habitat, and controlling invasive species. There is also the opportunity for agencies to explore opportunities to assist state, regional, and local governments in incorporating climate change and sea level rise considerations into their planning processes.
- From Dr. Kirk Havens, Assistant Director of the Center for Coastal Resources Management, Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS), and APNEP Policy Board Chair, “The Virginia Secretary of Natural Resources office was interested in turning their attention toward what we call the southern watersheds – the shared river basins of the Albemarle-Pamlico region. With NCDEQ’s new Secretary, Secretary Regan, it seemed like a good time to reinvigorate this collaboration.”
- From Dr. Bill Crowell, APNEP Director: “In the end the MOU is a piece of paper, and it’s up to all of us to make it more than that. It gives us the potential to, through collaboration, accomplish a lot of good in both North Carolina and Virginia.”

How was APNEP involved?

- In 2001, APNEP facilitated a previous MOU between North Carolina and Virginia, but much has changed since then, and APNEP leadership saw an opportunity to update and reinvigorate that agreement.
- APNEP is the coordinating organization for this MOU, but encourages independent collaboration and communication between agencies and organizations in both states.

How/when was the MOU signed?

- NCDEQ Secretary Michael Regan provided the final signature for the MOU during APNEP's *2017 Albemarle-Pamlico Ecosystem Symposium: Eyes on the Horizon* on November 1, 2017.
- He was joined by NCDNCR Chief Deputy Secretary D. Reid Wilson and VA Deputy Secretary of Natural Resources for the Chesapeake Bay Russell Baxter in giving remarks about the importance of working together to improve the water quality and ecological health of the shared river basins that flow into Albemarle Sound.
- Secretary Regan stated that his hope was that this MOU could also serve as a model for future interstate collaborations.
- NC DNCR Chief Deputy Secretary Wilson concluded that because air and water quality issues do not respect political boundaries, the collaboration represented by the MOU is extremely important.
- Deputy Secretary Baxter summarized, "this MOU is about the future."
- From Dr. Kirk Havens, "I think attendees at the Albemarle-Pamlico Ecosystem Symposium saw the enthusiasm between Virginia and North Carolina to make this a meaningful MOU that will accomplish things within our shared river basins."

How will this MOU be utilized in 2018 and beyond?

- In 2018, APNEP plans to capitalize on the signed MOU by increasing NC-VA partnerships, working both upstream and downstream within the shared Roanoke, Chowan, and Pasquotank river basins of the Albemarle-Pamlico region.
- From Dr. Kirk Havens, "Virginia went through an administration change at the beginning of this year, but before the new governor and Secretary of Natural Resources took office, [outgoing] Governor McAuliffe and Secretary Ward put together a workgroup to identify people within Virginia's state agencies who would work to carry out the MOU. That first workgroup meeting took place under the previous administration, and I'm hopeful that it will continue under the incoming administration."
- Right now, APNEP is working with the Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS) to organize a systematic wetlands inventory of the region's shared watersheds. VIMS will take the lead on this effort; gathering data from both states and going into more detail than the information in the National Wetlands Inventory. This effort will help both states to work together to identify the best ways to protect these natural resources.
- In addition, APNEP hopes to coordinate agency representatives from both states to identify opportunities for collaboration on fish passage issues affecting North Carolina and Virginia.
- APNEP has already coordinated with agency representatives from NCDEQ and VADEQ to foster data sharing in the Chowan and Pasquotank River Basins and facilitate updates to watershed and basin plans.
- The North Carolina portion of the Chowan River Basin has experienced unexplained algal blooms the past few summers for the first time in almost twenty years; APNEP hopes that this MOU will provide a formal mechanism to work with Virginia to identify and address the causes of these blooms.

- Another benefit of the MOU will be to foster improved communication and coordination with the Roanoke Bi-State Commission, a legislative commission from North Carolina and Virginia.
- Long term, APNEP hopes that this MOU will establish avenues of communication between people working on the shared resources of the Albemarle-Pamlico region.
- From APNEP Director Bill Crowell: “We have this North Carolina-Virginia border, which is an imaginary line, but which has in the past impeded the states’ abilities to collaborate and share information. APNEP tries to ignore that imaginary boundary, and in the long term, with the help of this MOU, we’d like to see the state agencies do the same in order to tackle shared issues.”

A copy of the 2017 MOU is available at <http://bit.ly/apnepMOU>