

Area projects funded in state budget

By MARY HELEN
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North Carolina's new two year budget, signed by Governor Mike Easley on July 31, advances several major projects and initiatives.

"I feel really good about this budget," said Rep. Tim Spear as the budget was being considered. Spear represents Dare, Hyde, Chowan and Washington counties.

Under special indebtedness projects which will be financed with Certificates of Participation, the University of North Carolina's Coastal Studies Institute is allocated \$32.5 million for construction of research facilities and housing totaling 90,400 square feet.

The Coastal Studies Institute involves five of the state's universities in collaborative research. To make the campus possible, Dare County formally

transferred 34.4 acres of land adjacent to Dare's regional airport and across from the North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island to the state's university system.

The transfer occurred May 14.

Funds for the institute's building project come in two phases with no more than \$8 million issued or incurred prior to July 1, 2008 and no more than \$23 million prior to July 1, 2009.

In Hatteras, the Graveyard of the Atlantic Museum will formally become a state history museum. The budget contains \$300,000 in recurring funds for the operation of the shipwreck museum.

The result will be, says Couch, "a fully-realized regional museum on Hatteras Island."

The Hatteras museum board has filed an official request, by unanimous action, to become part of the state system, reports

Danny Couch, board chair. The Council of State must accept the property, an action that can happen in mid-August or early September.

The state take-over is contingent upon successful negotiations with the National Park Service. The museum, located on seven acres of Cape Hatteras National Seashore land, operates under a 1995 Memorandum of Understanding with the park service. The agreement has a term of 30 years. A cooperative agreement with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to share artifacts must also be updated.

Waterfront access is a hot topic along the state's coast and this year's General Assembly provided funds for addressing some of those issues.

The state budget creates a \$120 million initiative titled

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THE COASTLAND TIMES. Thursday, August 2, 2007.

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"Land for Tomorrow and Waterfront Access and Marine Industry Fund." The enacted legislation allocates \$50 million for state park land acquisition, \$50 million for Natural Heritage Lands to conserve ecological diversity and \$20 million for waterfronts.

The budget legislation empowers the director to the division of marine fisheries to set up a program to use funds generated by Certificates of Participation. The legislation permits the director to consult with representatives of the commercial fishing industry and other marine industries and with state, local or nonprofit agencies "that have expertise in waterfront access issues and property acquisitions." The director may also set up a committee to review potential property acquisitions and capital and infrastructure improvements.

Before any money is spent, the division must report to the Joint Legislative Committee on Seafood and Aquaculture and then report quarterly on expenditure of funds.

Waterfront legislation (S.646) passed the House on a second reading on Wednesday, Aug. 1. A third reading is required. The Senate has adopted the bill, which creates present use taxation for working waterfronts. A committee, titled advisory committee for the coordination of waterfront access, is authorized to develop a coordinated access plan.

The legislation, if enacted, directs the Department of Transportation to work with the Wildlife Resources Commission to ensure public access to coastal waters along roads and beside bridges. A "boating account" is set up in the Wildlife Resources Fund to receive funds from fees for titling and numbering of vessels. The fund would receive \$3 of a \$15 fee for a one-year certificate and \$9 of a \$40, three-year number certificate.

In the state budget, the North Carolina Aquariums receive \$2.5 million in recurring funds, a portion of which will be allocated to reconstruct Jennette's Pier.