JOSH STEIN
Governor

D. REID WILSON
Secretary

JONATHAN HOWELL
Director

SF-3-2026

PROCLAMATION

RE: 2026-2027 OYSTER MECHANICAL HARVEST RESTRICTIONS - PAMLICO SOUND

This proclamation establishes the season for the commercial harvest of oysters from public bottom by mechanical methods, including the bays in Pamlico Sound, in accordance with the N.C. Oyster Fishery Management Plan Amendment 5.

Jonathan Howell, Director, Division of Marine Fisheries, hereby announces that effective at **sunrise, November 16, 2026,** mechanical harvest of oysters shall be allowed, and the following restrictions will apply:

I. **MECHANICAL HARVEST RESTRICTIONS**:

A. Oysters may be taken by mechanical methods (See General Information Section VIII. E., G., I., and K. for other gear restrictions).
B. It shall be unlawful to transfer oysters from the catching vessel to any other vessel during oyster harvesting operations or to transport oysters by any vessel other than the vessel in which they are harvested.
C. It shall be unlawful to possess more than five (5) bushels of unculled catch onboard a vessel. Only material on the culling tray is exempt from culling restrictions.
D. It shall be unlawful to possess accumulated dead shell or accumulated oyster cultch material while underway and not engaged in mechanical harvesting.
E. It shall be unlawful for the catch container (bag, cage) attached to a dredge to extend more than **two** feet in any direction from the tooth bar.
F. It shall be unlawful to tow a dredge unless the point where the tow line or cable exits the vessel and goes directly into the water is on the port or starboard side of the vessel forward of the transom.
G. It shall be unlawful to possess a dredge while engaged in oyster harvesting activities in an area closed to the use of mechanical methods for oyster harvest.

II. **HARVEST DAYS AND TIME PERIOD**

Mechanical oyster harvest will be allowed **Monday through Friday from sunrise until 2:00 P.M. each day**. **Oyster dredges must be out of the water and stowed on deck after 2:00 P.M. each weekday** (See General Information Section VIII. C., F., and M.).

III. **QUANTITY**

It shall be unlawful for persons holding a Standard Commercial Fishing License with a shellfish endorsement to take or possess more than fifteen (15) bushels of oysters per fishing operation per day, regardless of the number of persons, license holders, or vessels involved except as specified in Section V. B. below (See General Information Section VIII. L.). **The harvest vessel is a part of the fishing operation.**

IV. **MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT**

It shall be unlawful to possess oysters less than three (3) inches shell length for oysters taken on public or private bottom (See General Information Section VIII. J.).

V. **AREA RESTRICTIONS (SEE MAPS)**

A. **It shall be unlawful for persons holding a Standard Commercial Fishing License with a shellfish endorsement to take or possess more than fifteen (15) bushels of oysters per fishing operation per day in the areas described below regardless of the number of persons, license holders, or vessels involved (**See General Information Section VIII. E., K., and R.**). The harvest vessel is a part of the fishing operation.**

1. **Northern Dare Area** – all waters north of a line beginning at a point 35° 35.0000' N - 75° 47.2160' W on Long Shoal Point running east to a point 35° 35.0000' N - 75° 27.9860' W on Hatteras Island.
2. **Northern Hyde Area – except for the bays described in V. B. below**, all waters east of a line beginning at a point 35° 20.4741' N - 76° 13.2563' W on Juniper Bay Point; running southwesterly to a point 35° 19.9157' N - 76° 14.1860' W near Juniper Bay Approach Light 2; running southerly to a point 35° 17.5254' N - 76° 13.8147' W near Juniper Bay Approach Light 1; running southerly to a point 35° 14.0088' N - 76° 13.4580' W near Lower Middle Ground Light "LM"; running southwesterly to a point 35° 08.1583' N - 76° 17.5777' W near Marker "BI" on the eastern end of Brant Island Shoal, running southwesterly to a point 35° 01.8982' N - 76° 21.7135' W on Point of Grass; and south of a line beginning at a point 35° 35.0000' N - 75° 47.2160' W on Long Shoal Point running east to a point 35° 35.0000' N - 75° 27.9860' W on Hatteras Island.
3. **Pamlico River Area** – **except for the bays described in V. B. below**, all waters west and north of a line beginning at a point 35° 20.4741' N - 76° 13.2563' W on Juniper Bay Point; running southwesterly to a point 35° 19.9157' N - 76° 14.1860' W near Juniper Bay Approach Light 2; running southerly to a point 35° 17.5254' W - 76° 13.8147' W near Juniper Bay Approach Light 1; running southerly to a point 35° 14.0088' N - 76° 13.4580' W near Lower Middle Ground Light "LM"; running southwesterly to a point 35° 08.1583' N - 76° 17.5777' W near Marker "BI" on the eastern end of Brant Island Shoal; running northwesterly to a point 35° 13.2267' N – 76° 29.5420' W on Sow Island Point.
4. **Neuse River Area** – **except for the bays described in V. B. below**, all waters southwest and west of a line beginning at a point 35° 13.2267' N - 76° 29.5420' W on Sow Island Point, running southeasterly to a point near Marker "BI" 35° 08.0158' N - 76°17.5777' W on the eastern end of Brant Island Shoal, running southwesterly to a point 35° 01.8982' N - 76° 21.7135' W on Point of Grass.

B. **It shall be unlawful for persons holding a Standard Commercial Fishing License with a shellfish endorsement to take or possess more than ten (10) bushels of oysters per fishing operation per day in the areas described below regardless of the number of persons, license holders, or vessels involved** (See General Information Section VIII. E., K., and R.). **The harvest vessel is a part of the fishing operation.**

1. **Wysocking Bay** – northwest of a line beginning at a point 35° 22.9684' N - 76° 03.7129' W on Benson Point, running northeasterly to a point 35° 24.6895' N - 76° 01.3155' W on Long Point;
2. **East Bluff Bay** – northwest of a line beginning at a point 35° 19.5333' N - 76° 09.3333' W on Bluff Point; running northeasterly to a point 35° 21. 2784' N - 76° 06.7572' W on North Bluff Point;

3. **West Bluff Bay** – north of a line beginning at a point 35° 20.3413' N - 76° 12.3378' W on the east shore of Cunning Harbor; running easterly to a point 35° 19.5333' N - 76° 09.3333' W on Bluff Point;
4. **Juniper Bay-Cunning Harbor** – north of a line beginning at a point 35° 20.6217' N - 76° 15.5447' W on the west shore of Juniper Bay, running easterly to a point 35° 20.4372' N - 76° 13.2697' W; running easterly to a point 35° 20.3413' N - 76° 12.3378' W on the east shore of Cunning Harbor;
5. **Swanquarter Bay** – north of a line beginning at a point 35° 20.9500' N – 76° 20.6409' W at The Narrows, running easterly to a point 35° 21.5959' N - 76° 18.3580' W on the east shore and south of a line beginning on the west shore at a point 35° 23.5651' N - 76° 20.6715' W; running easterly to the east shore to a point 35° 23.6988' N - 76° 20.0025' W;
6. **Deep Cove-The Narrows** – north and east of a line beginning at a point 35° 20.9790' N - 76° 23.8577' W on the west shore; running southeasterly to a point 35° 20.5321' N - 76° 22.7869' W on Swanquarter Island, and west of a line at The Narrows beginning at a point 35° 20.9500' N - 76° 20.6409' W on the north shore, running southerly to a point 35° 20.7025' N - 76° 20.5620' W on Swanquarter Island;
7. **Rose Bay** – north of a line beginning at a point 35° 23.3404' N - 76° 26.2491' W on Long Point, running southeasterly to a point 35° 22.4891' N - 76° 25.2012' W on Drum Point;
8. **Spencer Bay** – northwest of a line beginning at a point 35° 22.3866' N - 76° 27.9225' W on Roos Point, running northeasterly to a point 35° 23.3404' N - 76° 26.2491' W on Long Point and southeast of a line beginning on the north shore at a point 35° 24.3129' N - 76° 28.5300' W; running southwesterly to the south shore to a point 35° 23.9681' N - 76° 28.7671' W;
9. **Slade Creek** – east of a line beginning at a point 35° 27.8879' N - 76° 32.9906' W on the west shore; running southeasterly to a point 35° 27.6510' N - 76° 32.7361' W on the east shore and north of a line beginning on the north shore at a point 35° 27.9168' N - 76° 30.5189' W; running westerly to the south shore to a point 35° 27.9532' N - 76° 30.7140' W;
10. **Goose Creek** – south of a line beginning at a point 35° 19.7932' N - 76° 37.5347' W on the north shore of Lower Spring Creek; running easterly to a point 35° 19.8667' N - 76°35.9333' W on Fulford Point;
11. **Jones Bay** – west of a line beginning at a point 35° 13.4968' N - 76° 31.1040' W on Mink Trap Point; running southerly to a point 35° 12.3253' N - 76° 31.2767' W on Boar Point;
12. **Bay River** – west of a line beginning at a point 35° 11.0333' N - 76° 31.5666' W on Bay Point; running southerly to a point 35° 09.0333' N - 76° 32.1500' W on Maw Point;
13. **Adams Creek** – south of a line beginning at a point 34° 57.3104' N - 76° 41.1292' W on the north shore of Godfrey Creek; running westerly to a point 34° 57.5226' N - 76° 40.5630' W on the east shore;
14. **South River** – southeast of a line beginning at a point 34° 58.6524' N - 76° 35.4240' W; running northeasterly to a point 34° 59.1936' N - 76° 34.7657' W on the west shore of Horton Bay;
15. **West Bay** – south of a line beginning at a point 35° 01.5700' N - 76° 25.2850' W on New Stump Point; running easterly to a point 35° 01.8982' N - 76° 21.7135' W on Point of Grass.

VI. **MECHANICAL HARVEST SEASON**

The season for harvesting oysters by mechanical methods shall be monitored and changes in harvest areas may be implemented by proclamation at a later date. Rotational Harvest Cultch Sites described in Shellfish Proclamation **SF-2-2026** as open to mechanical harvest from November 16, 2026 through March 31, 2027 shall be exempt from the season lengths listed below (See General Information Section VIII. S.). **It shall be unlawful to harvest oysters by mechanical methods except from:**

A. **November 16 through December 18** in the open waters of the **Northern Dare Area** described in Section V. A. above.
B. **November 16 through December 18** in the open waters of the **Northern Hyde Area** described in Section V. A. above **except for the bays described in V. B.**
C. **November 16 through December 4** in the open waters of the **Pamlico River Area** described in Section V. A. above **except for the bays described in V. B.**
D. **November 16 through December 4** in the open waters of the **Neuse River Area** described in Section V. A. above **except for the bays described in V. B**.
E. **November 16 through November 27 and December 14 through December 25** in the bays of the Northern Hyde Area described in Section V. B. above**,** which includes: **Wystocking Bay, East Bluff Bay and West Bluff Bay.**
F. **November 16 through November 27** in the bays of the Pamlico River Area described in Section V. B. above**,** which includes: **Juniper Bay-Cunning Harbor, Swanquarter Bay, Deep Cove-The Narrows, Rose Bay, Spencer Bay, Slade Creek, Goose Creek.**
G. **November 16 through November 27 and December 14 through December 18** in the bays of the Neuse River Area described in Section V. B. above**,** which includes: **Jones Bay, Bay River, Adams Creek, South River and West Bay.**

VII. TRANSPORTATION EXEMPTION

Commercial fishing operations shall be exempt from the transportation requirement set out in 15A NCAC 03I .0120 when transporting oysters in waterbodies that are closed to harvest. Commercial fishing operations are not exempt when in possession of oysters and harvesting oysters in a closed area.

VIII. GENERAL INFORMATION:

A. This proclamation is issued under the authority N.C. General Statutes 113-134; 113-170.4; 113-170.5; 113-182; 113-182.1; 113-221.1; 143B-289.52; and N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rules 15A NCAC 03H .0103 and 03K .0201.
B. In accordance with N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03H .0103 it shall be unlawful to violate the provisions of any proclamation issued by the Fisheries Director under their delegated authority.
C. N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03K .0111 requires a permit for the use of mechanical gear on private bottoms. Permits are available, at no cost, from all Division of Marine Fisheries License Offices.
D. It shall be unlawful to possess or sell oysters without a harvest tag affixed to each container in accordance with N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03K .0109.
E. N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03K .0204 lists areas closed to the use of mechanical methods to take oysters; N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03N .0104 prohibits the use of mechanical methods to take oysters or clams in primary nursery areas; N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03K .0108 prohibits the use of mechanical methods to take oysters or clams within any established bed of submerged aquatic vegetation.
F. N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03K .0106 prohibits the taking and unloading of oysters between the hours of sunset and sunrise on any day.

G. N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03J .0303 prohibits the use of dredges weighing more than 100 pounds except in the Atlantic Ocean; prohibits the use of more than one dredge per vessel to take oysters or crabs; and prohibits possession of oysters aboard a vessel with a dredge weighing more than 100 pounds.

H. **N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03L .0203 allows for the incidental take of blue crabs in oyster dredges at 10% of the total weight of the combined oyster and crab catch or 100 pounds, whichever is less.**

I. N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03I .0101 defines mechanical methods for oyster harvest.

J. N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03K .0207 exempts permitted aquaculture operations from bag and size limit restrictions.

K. N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03K .0209 prohibits the taking of oysters and clams and the use of mechanical methods for oyster or clam harvest in oyster sanctuaries designated in N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03R .0117.

L. **It shall be unlawful for mechanical oyster harvesters to possess more than 10 bushels of oysters while working in the restricted areas identified in Section V. B. It shall be unlawful for mechanical oyster harvesters to possess more than 15 bushels of oysters while working outside of the restricted areas identified in Section V. B. and may transport their catch through the restricted area to the point of landing.**

M. **N.C. General Statutes 113-168.2 and 113-169.2 require mechanical harvesters to hold a Standard Commercial Fishing License with a shellfish endorsement. Crew members working under the direction of a person who holds a valid Standard Commercial Fishing License with a shellfish endorsement are not required to hold a shellfish license.**

N. **Maps are provided to aid in the identification of the specified harvest areas described in Section V. A. and B. Maps do NOT supersede existing rules or supersede proclamations closing areas to harvest by reason of pollution. The military restricted areas and danger zones shown on the proclamation maps are closed to civilian access pursuant to federal rules 33 CFR 334.410 and 334.420. These closures render these areas unavailable for oyster harvest. Visit the online Shellfish Sanitation Temporary Closure Public Viewer at: https://ncdenr.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=5759aa19d7484a3b82a8e440fba643aa**

O. In accordance with N.C. General Statute 113-221.1(c) all persons who may be affected by proclamations issued by the Fisheries Director are under a duty to keep themselves informed of current proclamations.

P. **In accordance with Shellfish Temperature and Sanitation Controls Proclamation SS-1-2026:**

1. It shall be unlawful to possess oysters or clams in a commercial fishing operation without a harvest tag recording the time of the start of harvest, and information as described in N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03K .0109, affixed to each container of oysters or clams. The time of the start of harvest shall be the time when the first oyster or clam is initially removed from the water.
2. It shall be unlawful for harvesters to fail to deliver oysters and clams harvested from Coastal Fishing Waters to a licensed shellfish dealer **within 12 hours of the time of the start of harvest**.

Q. In accordance with N.C. Marine Fisheries Commission Rule 15A NCAC 03K .0202 it shall be unlawful to possess oysters with accumulated dead shell, accumulated oyster cultch material, a shell length less than three (3) inches, or any combination thereof that exceeds a five (5) percent tolerance limit by volume.

R. In accordance with Shellfish Proclamation SF-2-2025 it shall be unlawful to harvest oysters by mechanical methods in the Deep-Water Oyster Recovery Areas (DORAs) at the mouth of the Pamlico and Neuse rivers.

S. Rotational Harvest Cultch Sites open to harvest by mechanical methods as described in Shellfish Proclamation **SF-2-2026** shall be open to harvest for the entire duration of the mechanical harvest season, from **November 16, 2026 through March 31, 2027,** unless closed due to pollution, in accordance the N.C. Oyster Fishery Management Plan Amendment 5.

T. The intent of this proclamation is to open the season to the commercial harvest of oyster by mechanical methods from public bottom in accordance with the N.C. Oyster Fishery Management Plan Amendment 5.

U. Contact N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, P.O. Box 769, Morehead City, NC 28557; 252-515-5500 or 800-682-2632 for more information or visit the division website at https://deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/marine-fisheries .

V. **This proclamation opens the season to the commercial harvest of oysters from public bottom by mechanical methods, including the bays in Pamlico Sound, in accordance with the N.C. Oyster Fishery Management Plan Amendment 5.**

By: Jonathan Howell
Jonathan Howell, Director
DIVISION OF MARINE FISHERIES

November 10, 2026
11:30 A.M.