

THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Executive Summary

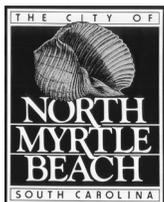
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 Planning and Development Department - City of North Myrtle Beach, SC | May, 2010

“A true conservationist is a person who knows that the world is not given by his fathers, but borrowed from his children”

-John Audobon



Beach at 53 Ave. North, NMB



The term natural environment refers to the sum of living and non-living things that exist independent of human intervention. The City of North Myrtle Beach is blessed with a rich diversity of natural resources. The nine miles of public beach within City limits is one of the most important of these resources, not only as a natural system, but also as the engine that powers our tourism economy. Most communities do not have the luxury of being able to offer a nine mile long public park to its residents and visitors.

Maintaining and enhancing the quality of the beach experience requires a multi-faceted effort, including preserving and enhancing public access, keeping the beach clean, and providing for its safe and convenient use. Coastal communities also face special challenges regarding protection of sensitive coastal plant and wildlife ecosystems. When planning the built environment, it is critical to protect the natural environment to assure community livability and quality of life, as well as economic sustainability.

The natural environment is contrasted with the built environment, which comprises the areas and components that are strongly influenced by humans. A geographical area is regarded as a natural environment, if the human impact on it is minimal.

The South Carolina General Assembly requires the natural resources element to consider coastal resources, slope characteristics, prime agricultural and forest land, plant and animal habitats, parks and recreation areas, scenic views and sites, wetlands, and soil types. The following pages discuss these areas in detail.

The natural environment is directly affected by the built environment. Our community depends on clean water and a healthy ecosystem. The dynamic natural processes that characterize land and water boundaries create beautiful landscapes that are essential to both the local ecology and economy.

Protecting the strength and health of a coastal communities’ natural resources requires balancing the needs of the built environment with those of the natural one. Green infrastructure planning can help North Myrtle Beach achieve this balance. With this tool, a community or region can identify and prioritize natural areas that should be preserved or restored to protect long-term ecological health and build community resilience.

It is anticipated that the process of assessing the City’s most important environmental assets will continue; identifying natural and working lands and water bodies that need to be protected or restored. Humans, animals, and plants all share this ecosystem; and our health is intimately tied to the health of the natural world. Conserving our natural environment not only ensures the protection of attractive surroundings and habitat, it also ensures our survival as well. North Myrtle Beach residents share the responsibility of environmental stewardship.

■ I S S U E S - G O A L S - S T R A T E G I E S

Issue	Goal	Strategy	Comment
<p>*Local development does not maximize or fully embrace natural resource preservation and sustainability opportunities</p>	<p>Protect the City’s sensitive natural areas, wetland habitats, and ecological diversity</p>	<p>Require buffering of wetlands during development</p>	<p>*Ongoing...At the request of City Council, a draft wetland and standing water body (WSWB) preservation ordinance is currently being considered</p>
		<p>*Allow alternative energy generation in the City...continue to enhance energy efficiency in the building code</p>	<p>*Ongoing...At the request of City Council, a draft small wind energy generation ordinance is currently being considered</p>
		<p>Hire a consultant to perform a natural resources and water quality study of Cherry Grove Marsh to determine methods to restore water quality and protect shellfish beds</p>	<p>*A key focus area discussed in the Priority Investment Element</p>
		<p>Explore annexation and public stewardship of Waites Island, and continue current research missions and conservation efforts</p>	<p>*Ongoing...discussions with Coastal Carolina University have taken place</p>
		<p>Reevaluate North and South Sea Mountain Swamps zoning and future land use</p>	<p>*Incomplete...explore land development and zoning policies that would preserve important ecological functions on the properties</p>
		<p>Add an Environmental Stewardship chapter to the Zoning Ordinance and possibly the land development regulations</p>	<p>*Ongoing...to be included before or by the 2015 Comprehensive Plan rewrite</p>
<p>*Future development on Little River Neck needs to be sensitively managed</p>	<p>*Prepare a special area study for the entire length of the Little River Neck</p>	<p>*Identify grant funding opportunities to pay for consulting expertise, partner with all stakeholders</p>	<p>*Proposed...the LRN Road special area study should be completed prior to, and incorporated within, the 2015 Comprehensive Plan rewrite</p>
	<p>*Balance growth and environmental quality</p>	<p>*Develop tools to enable low-impact development to maximize habitat and maintain or enhance water quality</p>	<p>*Ongoing...the Land Development Regulations were revised in 2009 to require “complete streets,” and other initiatives are in the formative stages.</p>
<p>Ensuring adequate public park and open space lands throughout North Myrtle Beach</p>	<p>Have a current Parks and Recreation Master Plan</p>	<p>Update the Parks and Recreation Plan</p>	<p>*Ongoing...the Parks & Recreation Department is currently assessing</p>
		<p>Encourage additional active open space requirements during subdivision and large-scale development</p>	<p>*Ongoing...the planned development review process requires Parks & Recreation analysis...consider same analysis for other types of development</p>
<p>Developing in flood-prone areas is a hazard to the public</p>	<p>Continue to regulate development in flood-prone areas in the interest of public safety.</p>	<p>Continue to implement the Community Rating System</p>	<p>*Ongoing...Building Inspection Division manages this function</p>
		<p>Update the City’s Hazard Mitigation Plan</p>	<p>*Ongoing...Draft will be available in early 2010</p>
		<p>Reduce the amount of impervious surface in flood prone areas</p>	<p>*Ongoing...the Zoning Ordinance was amended in 2008 to allow shared parking... off-site and off-street parking requirements were also reduced in 2009</p>

1. Natural Resources Element

* New Item

■ I S S U E S - G O A L S - S T R A T E G I E S

Issue	Goal	Strategy	Comment
Beach erosion, disappearing marshlands and gaps in dune vegetation	Continue the City's efforts in the maintenance of the City's beaches and protection of marshlands	Continue beach renourishment projects with the State and Federal agencies	*Ongoing...last renourished in 2008
		Update the <i>Beachfront Management Plan</i> every five years	*Ongoing...anticipating an update in summer 2010
		Maintain public access to the beach	*Completed Beach-access relocation policy currently in-place
		Fund and acquire additional parking and public parks on the oceanfront and second row	*Ongoing...City is actively designing new second row parking at 53rd Avenue North, and recently implemented an on-street parking program that netted over 200 new parking spaces within two blocks of the ocean.
Tree canopy should be preserved and increased where appropriate	Update the Tree Planting Master Plan	Dialogue with City departments to determine what sections need to be updated	*Ongoing
	Continue to plant trees in the public domain	Enact a program to fund public tree planting in targeted areas of the City funded through the Tree City Board budget	*Ongoing... "complete streets" policy adopted in 2009 will ensure the planting of street trees along all future public and private streets.
	Adopt greater tree preservation standards	Work to revise the tree preservation and landscape standards within the Zoning Ordinance	*Ongoing
The tree inventory needs updating	Update the public tree inventory	Fund an updated public tree inventory through Tree City Board budget/grants	*Incomplete... will meet with Tree City Board to coordinate
*Overreliance on nonrenewable energy sources	*Renewable energy generation	*Allow alternative energy generation in the City...continue to enhance energy efficiency in the building code	*City is currently proposing a small wind energy systems ordinance

1. Natural Resources Element Cont'd

* New Item