

## Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge Grows

Scott Lanier remembers the first time he visited the Albemarle Sound. As a child, visiting the beach for the Lincolnton native, meant going to Myrtle Beach. “But, one year my uncle and my dad took us to the Outer Banks,” he says. “We hit Pea Island and I saw those blue goose signs (the logo for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is a blue goose). My uncle explained that this was a special place set aside for wildlife. Man alive, I thought this is something else. I always wanted to get back here.” Today, he is back in the area serving as deputy manager of the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge.

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**Bear at Alligator National Wildlife Refuge** © JEFF LEWIS

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## director's note

### mission statement

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to preserve the plants, animals and natural communities that represent the diversity of life on Earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

To date, the Conservancy and its members have been responsible for the protection of more than 117 million acres of land and 5,000 miles of river around the world. The Nature Conservancy works in all 50 states and more than 30 countries. While some Conservancy acquired areas are transferred to other conservation groups, both public and private, the Conservancy owns more than 1,400 preserves—the largest private system of nature sanctuaries in the world.

The North Carolina Chapter, established in 1977, is a state program of The Nature Conservancy. *Afield* is published by the North Carolina Chapter.

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Indigo bunting at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge © JEFF LEWIS

Of all the near 700,000 acres of property that the North Carolina Chapter of The Nature Conservancy has protected, my involvement goes back the furthest with the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. That wonderful, wild place has a special spot in my heart. As a congressional staffer, I was involved in the creation of the refuge in the early 1980s. Since that time, the Conservancy has worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to create a 154,000-acre swath of protected land that comprises the refuge.

The refuge is surrounded on three sides by water, which was a big plus back in the day when wildlife experts were looking for the perfect site to reintroduce red wolves into the wild. The water formed a natural barrier to keep the wolves inside the refuge. Today, with climate change and sea level rise, that water threatens to inundate much of the refuge.

Two years ago, the Conservancy moved into a new conservation arena. Up until then, our work had been focused on traditional land conservation – buying property and moving it into some form of permanent protection. But, we realized in the face of climate change that

much of that protected property was now imperiled and we needed to take a new approach. Thus, our Climate Change Adaptation project was created at the refuge. Today, that pilot is already showing promise. So much promise, in fact, that we have agreed to work with the Fish and Wildlife Service to do similar work at other nearby refuges. This newsletter gives you an update on our progress.

This newsletter also gives you the story of our latest purchase at the refuge. We are taking a strategic approach to our purchases. The idea is to create protected lands that will allow the wolves, bears and other animals a way to move further inland to other wildlife refuges as some of the existing refuge is lost to rising sea level.

We are changing our conservation model as the world around us changes. The ability to alter our course as science gives us more data is why The Nature Conservancy is so successful. You are a large part of that success. Thank you for your continued support.

*Kenneth D. Skinner*

