

# **RESOLUTION ON EMERGENCY WATERSHED PROTECTION PROGRAM IN NORTH CAROLINA**

## **North Carolina Chapter of the American Fisheries Society**

Adopted ×, 2006 by a membership vote of × yes, × no

WHEREAS, diverse and stable fish communities and productive fisheries depend on pools, runs, riffles, large woody debris, stable undercut banks, riparian vegetation, accessible floodplains, and other naturally occurring stream and riparian habitat features; and,

WHEREAS, fish communities are resilient to and sometimes dependent upon periodic flood-induced habitat changes that are not unnaturally excessive; and,

WHEREAS, accelerated stream bank erosion from major floods largely occurs where stream banks and riparian areas have insufficient coverage, an absence of deep rooted trees, or other soil-securing vegetation; and,

WHEREAS, many flood management activities such as construction of levees, armored stream banks, and straightened, widened, and deepened stream channels degrade aquatic habitat by reducing habitat diversity and complexity, isolating the floodplain, disrupting normal sediment transport, and increasing stream velocity, erosion, and the magnitude of flooding in downstream areas; and

WHEREAS, the U. S. Department of Agriculture has implemented the Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP) program in North Carolina to "...undertake emergency measures, including the purchase of floodplain easements, for runoff retardation and soil erosion prevention, in cooperation with landowners and land users, as the Secretary deems necessary to safeguard lives and property from floods, drought, and the products of erosion on any watershed whenever fire, flood, or any other natural occurrence is causing or has caused a sudden impairment of that watershed."<sup>1</sup>; and,

WHEREAS, implementation of the EWP program often includes stream channel, bank, and riparian modifications that must be conducted in an environmentally defensible manner<sup>2</sup> and that must have a minimal adverse effect on the environment where waters are filled<sup>3</sup>; and,

WHEREAS, the EWP program has the potential to improve watershed functions, diminish recurring erosion and flooding problems, and improve aquatic habitat if its actions restore natural stream and riparian features and processes; and,

WHEREAS, the EWP program can demonstrate to the public the use and effectiveness of natural stream design techniques that will improve long-term stream channel stability and aquatic habitat; and,

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<sup>1</sup> Section 382 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (16 U.S.C. 2203)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Agriculture, Natural Resource Conservation Service, 7 CFR 624, Emergency Watershed Protection Program (Federal Register, Vol. 70, No. 63, Monday April 4, 2005)

<sup>3</sup> Section 404 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. 1344)

WHEREAS, the EWP program was implemented in 2004 in North Carolina following major floods from tropical storms; and

WHEREAS, some EWP projects following the 2004 floods in North Carolina (herein referred to as flood projects) involved locations on streams with recurring erosion problems that had been addressed previously by the EWP program; and,

WHEREAS, natural stream design techniques were used with many flood projects, but full restoration of natural stream and riparian features and processes was not pursued; and,

WHEREAS, many flood projects involved extensive stream channel modifications and bank armoring to return streams to pre-flood conditions that are not stable; and,

WHEREAS, vegetation planting on repaired stream banks was optional and agreements to maintain reestablished vegetation were short-term; and

WHEREAS, livestock were not excluded from stream banks and channels where flood projects were undertaken; and,

WHEREAS, many flood projects involve protection of properties that were damaged because they are in an active floodplain, but no floodplain easements were obtained; therefore, be it

**RESOLVED, that based on the best scientific information available on the importance of habitat quality to fish community diversity and fisheries productivity, it is the position of the North Carolina Chapter of the American Fisheries Society (NCAFS), which includes fisheries professionals from throughout North Carolina's academic institutions, state and federal management agencies, and private institutions, that any future implementation of the EWP program in North Carolina:**

1. should include restoration of natural floodplain functions by purchasing riparian easements from willing property owners and by giving priority to properties where stream improvement projects have already been completed or are planned under other programs,
2. should continue to expand the use of accepted and appropriately designed and constructed natural stream design methodologies for stream bank repairs instead of stream channelizing and bank armoring that degrade aquatic habitat and perpetuate excessively unstable stream channel conditions,
3. should require riparian vegetation planting and perpetual maintenance of replanted vegetation on repaired stream banks, and
4. should use best management practices and adequate project construction oversight to ensure compliance with all applicable sedimentation and erosion control and other environmental laws in the State of North Carolina.