



**North Inlet - Winyah Bay
National Estuarine Research Reserve**

Baruch Marine Field Laboratory
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September 16, 2009

Matt Manashes
Executive Director
National Estuarine Research Reserve Association
444 N. Capiton St. NW, Suite 322
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Mr. Manashes:

The North Inlet – Winyah Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (NI-WB NERR) fully supports the proposal, “A Partnership to Restore Fish Habitats Associated with the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) and Associated Restoration Reference Sites.” There is great capacity in the NERRS to successfully implement restoration science projects as well as serve as reference sites for projects outside reserve boundaries.

The NI-WB NERR is fortunate to have excellent water quality and healthy habitats within most of its boundaries. However, this is not the case in surrounding watersheds. Thus, priority goals for our reserve include detecting and controlling invasive species and also restoring habitat critical to maintaining native biodiversity. In addition to water quality monitoring since 1993 as part of the NERRS System-wide Monitoring Program, our reserve has been monitoring plankton and nekton populations in North Inlet for more than two decades. We also initiated an emergent vegetation monitoring program four years ago aimed at detecting changes in marsh plant communities in relation to sea level rise and other factors. As a result of these long-term investigations and many others conducted by researchers associated with the University of South Carolina’s Belle W. Baruch Institute for Marine and Coastal Sciences, North Inlet is one of the most studied and best understood estuaries anywhere in the world, making it an excellent reference site for potential estuarine habitat restoration projects.

We plan to continue to work with partners in the North Inlet and Winyah Bay watersheds to control invasive species and restore native habitats. *Phragmites* is a particular threat to coastal wetlands and fish habitat in our area. In addition, one of our partners, The Nature Conservancy, has recently expressed interest in working with our reserve to restore oyster habitat in Winyah Bay. The high quality oyster reef habitat in the North Inlet system has been extensively studied and can serve as a reference site for oyster habitat restoration projects.

In summary, the National Estuarine Research Reserve System has many strengths on both local reserve and national levels that can be applied towards the successful implementation of high quality fish habitat restoration initiatives around the country. Please let us know if there is anything else we can do to help ensure the success of this important endeavor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Wendy S. Allen". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Wendy Allen
Manager, North Inlet – Winyah Bay NERR