

ALYSON FLYNN, interviewed by Glenn Blackburn on January 11, 2024. Alyson is the Coastal Advocate in the northeast region and an environmental economist for the Federation. She holds a Bachelor's degree in economics from UNC Wilmington and a Masters in Natural Resource Economics from East Carolina University. She is doing a cost-benefit analysis on the benefits of the new rules on stronger docks and piers mandated by the General Assembly, thereby helping the Federation in advocating for more funding from the legislature. She is also doing a cost-benefit analysis on the economic benefits of oyster sanctuaries.

Alyson said that for the last couple of years her work has focused on the Lake Mattamuskeet watershed restoration and on the problem of the oceanfront houses collapsing in Rodanthe. She lives on Hatteras Island, so she knows the area well.

The collapsing houses in Rodanthe are an increasingly big issue because, she said, they are an "extreme example" of oceanfront houses threatened by sea level rise along the East Coast. Recently a working group with representatives from a state agency – the Division of Coastal Management – and a federal agency – the National Park Service – has begun to discuss developing policies for how to deal with the problem of the collapsing houses, and she has been invited to participate as an expert in the public working groups. She has done a lot of research on what other states are doing about the problem. Some of the policy questions being addressed are who should pay for taking down a house about to collapse and who should be responsible for cleaning up the debris that results after a house collapses. Any new policies might eventually be applicable to other parts of the coast, such as Buxton and North Topsail Beach where several houses are also in a precarious situation.

Alyson noted that the Federation is particularly concerned about all the debris resulting from collapsed houses. Several collapsed houses at Rodanthe have left large amounts of debris going into National Park areas, the debris tearing up sand dunes and leaving jagged pieces of wood on public trust beaches where they destroy critical habitat and impact public accessibility and safety.

Alyson said that she is starting to work in another new area – the algal blooms on the Chowan River in northeastern North Carolina. The algal blooms on the Chowan can be toxic and threaten the health of humans and animals and can also lead to fish kills. Warmer water resulting from climate change and nitrogen from farm fertilizer are factors that contribute to an increase in algal blooms. The Federation is getting funding from the

Natural Resources Conservation Service to encourage farmers around the Chowan to adopt “best management practices” that would reduce the nutrient production and thereby improve water quality in rivers and sounds. This project will require numerous trips from the office at Wanchese to the Chowan area, but water quality has always been an important issue for the Federation.

When asked about the Federation’s work in Hyde County, Alyson pointed out that the Lux Farm project is technically outside of the Lake Mattamuskeet watershed project, but the two project areas are connected in both being about wetland and hydrological restoration. She added that the Federation devotes a lot of time to work with Hyde County farmers whose lands are getting wetter and saltier because of sea level rise. The farmers are asking for more wetland restoration so the wetlands can absorb water.

On the Hyde County shoreline the Federation will probably build a number of living shorelines that include a salt marsh planting. The work on marsh migration may come a little later. There is a lot of open land in Hyde County, so there is a lot to be done.