

N. C. Aquariums Receive Learning Center Status

The three North Carolina Aquariums recently received a prestigious feather in their caps. They were collectively designated the United States' 18th Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center (CELC) by Coastal America. This is the first time Coastal America has granted such designation to multi-facilities. Coastal America is a combination of federal agencies working in partnership to preserve our coastal environment.

The Ocean Action Plan, announced by President Bush in Dec., specifically recommends designating the three aquariums as a Coastal Ecosystem Learning Center.

The Coastal Ecosystem Learning Centers were created in 1996 as a network of aquariums and marine educational facilities to work in partnership with federal agencies to educate and involve the public in stewardship of our nation's ecosystems. The aquariums worked closely with Coastal America to receive the designation.

"We're delighted to be included in this forward-thinking network," said North Carolina Aquariums Division Director David Griffin. "It makes it possible for us to deliver our conservation message to far more people, far more effectively. It strengthens our ability

to clarify important coastal issues for the public, which has always been an important part of our mission."

The CELC designation will allow the aquariums to use many federal partnership resources, including research vessel time, expert speakers, educational publications, lesson plans, exhibit materials, films and much more. Federal partners that can be called upon include the departments of Agriculture, Air Force, Army, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Navy, State and Transportation; the Environmental Protection Agency and the Executive Office of the President.

The aquariums are also accredited members of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA), a 212-member group which works together to provide innovation and leadership in education, conservation advocacy and animal care.

The Pine Knoll Shores Aquarium continues its winter programs, with birding trips, seafood cooking classes, programs for youngsters and other activities. To find out what's going on, check our website at www.ncaquariums.com, or call 247-4003.



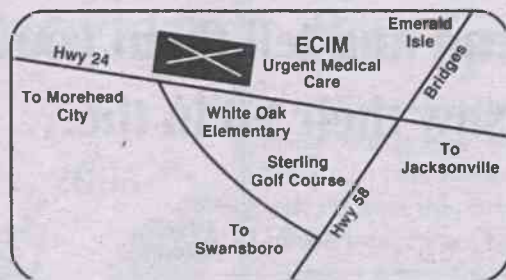
Aquarium directors, federal officials, Coastal America representatives, state and federal congressional representatives and local dignitaries attended the North Carolina Aquariums' recognition ceremony, designating the three state Aquariums as Coastal Ecosystem Learning Centers. The ceremony was held in January at the N.C. Aquarium at Fort Fisher.

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