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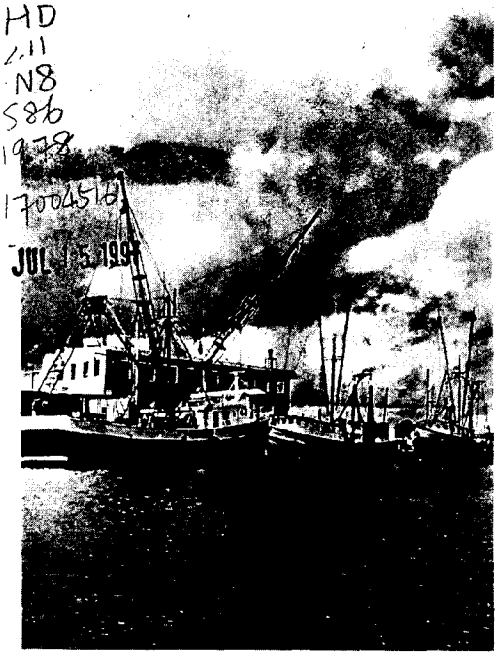

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A SUMMARY OF THE CARTERET COUNTY LAND USE PLAN

prepared by

NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

with assistance from

THE CARTERET COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT

1978

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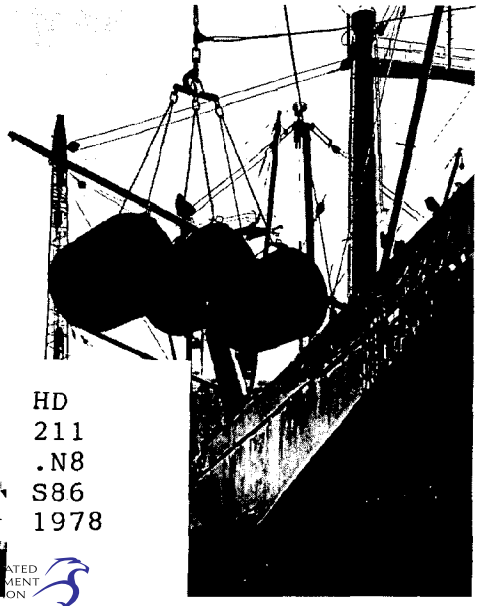

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INTRODUCTION

In April of 1974, The North Carolina General Assembly enacted The North Carolina Coastal Area Management Act. This State law requires that a plan for the future use and management of the lands and resources in North Carolina's Coastal Areas be prepared under the supervision of the North Carolina Coastal Resources Commission.

Responding to the requirements of this Act, Carteret County and its incorporated towns have conducted an extensive investigation into the existing conditions and problems in the County associated with future growth and development. Throughout this process, the citizens of the County were involved in the identification of these conditions and problems.

This Land Use Plan is to serve as a guide for future growth and development in Carteret County. Most importantly, it reflects areas where public services are needed to serve existing and anticipated future development. Also identified are areas that are most productive and should be reserved for agriculture and forestry, as well as lands that should be maintained in their present state for various economic or environmental reasons.

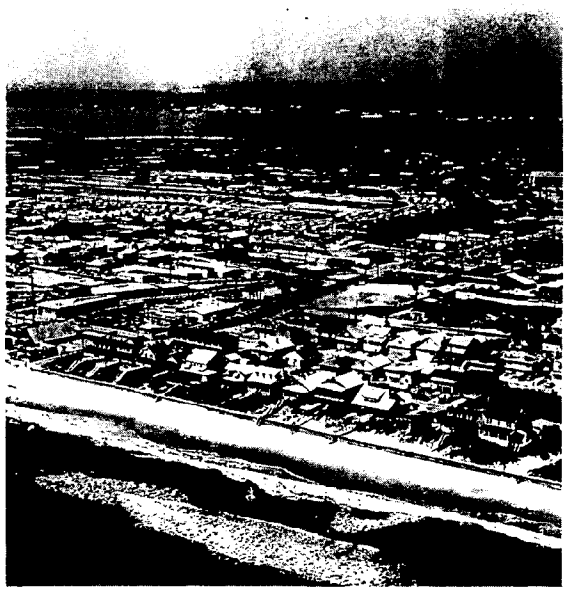
This document is only a summary of the beginning of the planning process. Additional programs must necessarily follow to provide the required facilities and services for existing and future populations, and to insure a balanced and coordinated effort to achieve the goals and policies set down in the Land Use Plan. The narrative and maps included are intended to serve as a guide to citizens and government officials for the future growth and development of Carteret County.

MAJOR LAND USE ISSUES AND PROBLEMS

Through analysis of public comment as well as existing conditions of Carteret County, land use issues which will be faced during the next ten years have been identified. If these issues are not dealt with, land use planning in Carteret County will not be effective.

The following issues have been identified:

I. The impact of population has caused many demands on land development such as:
   - A. Increased demand for housing units which has resulted in the conversion of undeveloped land or rural land to residential use.
   - B. Increased demand for public services such as fire stations, schools, medical facilities, refuse collection and disposal, and the need for water and sewer services.
   - C. Increased access problems around the County, but particularly from the mainland to Bogue Banks.
   - D. Decreased demands for employment opportunities, commercial services, social and cultural services.
   - E. Increased consumption and destruction of natural resources based on the use or misuse of land.
   - F. The loss of cultural and historic resources.



   - A. The impact of the tourist trade affects the use of land, as services must be provided to accommodate the large numbers of persons visiting the County.
   - B. The fishing industry has long been a way of life, as well as economically important to Carteret County. Of prime importance to the fishing industry, and especially to shellfishing, is the quality of the sounds and estuaries. Septic tank leachate, from densely developed areas, may reach the sounds and estuaries, polluting the waters and adversely affecting the state's fishing industry.
   - C. Farming in Carteret County is still an important part of the economy. Farms are presently being converted through subdivision of land for new housing developments. If this trend continues, it could create problems if some means of protecting the productive farm land is not taken.

III. Providing services to people of the County is an issue which affects the use of land. Several major types of services need to be examined:
   - A. Providing adequate housing can have obvious effects on the use of land. The most critical issue concerning housing in Carteret County is the additional development of mobile home parks. Many of the present parks have crowded conditions and have inadequate lot sizes for septic tanks to operate efficiently, creating potential health problems. If additional mobile home parks are to be allowed, steps will need to be taken to better ensure that health problems are not created.
   - B. Perhaps the most critical issue facing the County is the provision of water and sewer services. Questions that need to be answered should include:
     1. Should the County provide water and sewer? If so, in what areas should they be provided?
     2. Who should pay for these services?

IV. Conservation of productive natural resources is another important issue facing citizens of Carteret County. Areas of productive natural resources in the County include coastal wetlands, estuarine waters, and other land necessary for the production of food and to sustain wildlife. Land development in the County is posing a threat to productive resource areas. The County must face up to its responsibility to plan for the preservation or wise use of these areas.

V. The protection of the natural environment goes hand in hand with the protection of productive natural resource areas. Carteret County encompasses a large strand of the Outer Banks, a large amount of estuarine waters, and other natural environmental characteristics of coastal areas such as:
   A. Flood prone areas
   B. Soils with septic tanks limitations
   C. Groundwater aquifers which are sensitive to development
   D. Frontal dunes on the Outer Banks
   E. Estuarine Waters

VI. In addition to the abundant natural resources throughout the County, there are many cultural and historic resources. In general, public input seems to indicate most residents are proud of their way of life and enjoy living in Carteret County. The cultural and historic resources in the county attract many visitors and, in fact, have helped sustain a viable tourist industry. Without proper land use planning, the significance of these areas could be lost forever.

CARTERET COUNTY PAST AND PRESENT

Carteret County's population has changed significantly during the last several decades. From 1950 to 1970, the county's population increased from 23,059 to 31,603, or a 37 percent increase. The approximate population in 1975 was 35,000. In 10 years (1985), the population is expected to increase by another 9,100 people, giving the County about 44,000 people.

But where will most of these people live when they locate in the County? The majority of these people will live in and around the towns, with a large concentration of people locating on Bogue Banks.

Seasonal population is also expected to increase over the next 10 years. Presently, it is estimated that the year-round population on Bogue Banks is 2,000 people. An additional 23,000 people reside there during the summer months. And many additional day visitors come to the beaches during the summer months. To a great extent, the future land needs of Bogue Banks will be dependent upon the needs and desires of the seasonal population.

Another important aspect of the County's development is what the economic situation of the County is and what it is expected to be. The economy of the County has diversified into many different businesses, services, and industries in recent years. In addition to commercial fishing and farming, such areas as tourism, con-

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR LAND USE

Once major land use issues have been identified, a way of handling these issues needs to be established. This has been done in the Carteret County Land Use Plan by the identification of land use objectives, policies and standards. These objectives are designed to give the Planning Board and the County Commissioners a clearer indication of public desires and wishes. It is important to remember that all land use objectives are not equally obtainable. With this in mind, "trade-offs" need to be made to arrive at decisions consistent with the overall desires of the residents and property owners of Carteret County.

The objectives determined by the participants in the planning process were as follows:

I. Cultural and Historical Objectives
   A. Preservation of the historic importance of the County through:
      1. Identification of historic sites.
      2. Subsequent management of these areas that will preserve them.
   B. Preservation of meaningful local traditions and local culture through:
      1. Land use regulations that emphasize the value of the local traditions within each township. In particular, community preservation and redevelopment throughout the County has been indicated as desirable and should be pursued.
      2. Land use regulations and policies that will encourage commercial and industrial development to fit in with existing development. Proper buffer areas should be emphasized.

II. Land Development Objectives
   A. Encourage major residential and commercial growth to occur near municipalities to prevent leap-frog development patterns, and to facilitate the extensions of existing water and sewer facilities. This objective can be accomplished through the establishment of water and sewer extension policies by municipalities, which have these developments close to their existing boundaries, and through location of development near towns in future annexation proceedings.
   B. Preserve the rural nature of the County outside the municipalities. When land is developed in rural areas of the county, it should be developed in a low density residential character. Without the provision of water and sewer services, most of the development will be at lower densities. Also, through large lot zoning, the rural character can be somewhat preserved.
   C. Encourage the preservation of the County's natural resources. All development should consider the potential effect it has on the County's natural resources and insure maximum effective utilization of public facilities and services. Some resources that should be considered include: (1) Wetlands, (2)

Areas. These land development objectives can be achieved through:

1. Emphasizing the importance of county land use regulations (zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations, group housing ordinance, outer banks land protection ordinance, and mobile home park ordinance, and flood plain regulations). These regulations should be developed and adopted in accordance with the stated objectives of this land development plan.
2. Proper use of the land classification system provided in this land development plan.
3. Emphasis on inspection and enforcement procedures.

III. Economic Objectives

To develop an effective program to provide better job opportunities and increase personal income for all citizens of Carteret County, without significantly affecting the "traditional" way of life so important to the citizens of Carteret County. It is hoped this objective can be achieved by:

A. Continued emphasis on tourism as a major source of income for Carteret County. It should be noted that efforts should be closely coordinated with all local governments and organizations within the county involved in tourist related activities. These interests include:
   1. Sport Fishing
   2. Hotel and Motel Service
   3. Restaurants
   4. Retail stores relying basically on tourist business
   5. Other retail interests and services that help support these interests and other tourist related business (for example the construction industry).

B. Development of plans identifying areas to accommodate retail trade and services for the expanding population of Carteret County, and those who visit Carteret County. Land use regulations should be coordinated with the municipalities so as to assure proper development of retail trade and services.

C. Encourage additional import and export tonnage through the Port at Morehead City. This can be done by efforts to monitor the needs of imports and exports within North Carolina, and coordination with the port of Wilmington to assure the most effective use of both facilities.

D. Emphasize and encourage improved transportation facilities. This includes highways and roads, the Beaufort-Morehead Airport, and freight services within the County.

E. Encourage and assist in providing improved navigational channels in the County. This includes the Intracoastal Waterway, the "Deep Water Channel" for the port, and other service channels [illegible] the County including commercial and industrial activities in general, and in particular, the tourist industry.

F. Increase efforts to attract non-offensive industry that will provide better job opportunities and personal income for citizens of the County. The Intracoastal Waterway and the railroad service in the County should be emphasized as potential assets for industry, and land use regulations should be used to protect desirable industrial locations.

G. Continue to emphasize agriculture and livestock production throughout the County. This can be done in some of the following ways:
   1. Continued efforts to assure that the deferred tax incentive is understood.
   2. Emphasize the importance of the Agriculture Extension Service and Soil Conservation Service within the County. They are able to help evaluate the proper use of farm land, and can help with production methods and marketing.
   3. Try to pinpoint productive areas that are not being farmed at the present time through the use of the comprehensive soil survey (now in progress), and the professionals within the Agriculture Extension Service and the Soil Conservation Service.

H. Encourage and promote the commercial fishing industry within the County through:
   1. Land management that will help preserve the productivity of the estuarine waters within Carteret County.
   2. Help coordinate the interests of the local commercial fishermen with regional organizations such as the food service extension services of North Carolina State University. This can be done through the County Planning Department and the Carteret County Economic Development Council.

IV. Service Objectives

Provide these services desired by the citizens of Carteret County so as to improve the living conditions of all citizens of the County.

A. Encourage the development of a regional water and sewer plan and its implementation.

B. Encourage and strive for the development and improvement of recreational opportunities and facilities for citizens of all ages. This can be done through close attention to the Carteret County Recreational plan and its proper implementation.

C. To provide for the protection of the County's dunes system on Bogue Banks. This is to be done by providing adequate crossovers for access to

decisions which will affect the future of the County — both ecologically and economically. It is apparent that the decision to do nothing and let nature take its course will eventually be countered at either the State or Federal level, or both. From strictly a health standpoint, the quality of water cannot be allowed to diminish to the point that it is no longer usable.

Until such time as central sewage treatment facilities become available to the most sensitive areas, (Bogue Banks, Bogue Sound and along the rivers), the County needs to implement a series of actions which will aid in protecting water quality. These actions include, but are not limited to the following:

1. Provide lower density requirements through large-lot zoning in the identified sensitive areas.
2. Adopt strict local septic tank regulations.
3. Strict enforcement of septic tank regulations.
4. Adopt and enforce strict sedimentation control to eliminate as much as possible runoff from construction projects. Also, some means of controlling agricultural runoff needs to be put forth.
5. Strict enforcement of subdivision ordinances in the towns and County.
6. Strict enforcement of the Dunes Protection ordinance.
7. Require some form of environmental impact assessment prior to each new project begun in the County or town.

Most of the foregoing actions are already at the County's disposal. Only more strict enforcement is needed to improve the situation. All of the foregoing recommendations are presently available to the County and towns to adopt as ordinances to enforce.

FUTURE GROWTH

Public participation received throughout the early planning process has indicated most residents are pleased with the nature of the County and do not care to see drastic changes in population. In most cases, low to moderate increases in population were indicated as desirable.

The desired growth rate is as follows:

Year	1975	1980	1985	2000	2025
Population	35,000	39,550	44,100	56,600	70,000

In ten years, the County's permanent population is expected to increase by 9,100 people. The seasonal population of Bogue Banks during the next 10 years is expected to go from 25,000 in 1975 to 37,000 people.

It should be pointed out that the expected population 50 years from now is 70,000 people. However, if built-in growth factors such as the number of vacant lots and present zoning densities are examined, it appears that potential growth could actually double the expected population of 70,000. In order to keep the population increases as near to the desired goal as possible, the County and the towns need to take steps to curtail the potential increases. One possible way of doing this would be to change present zoning ordinances to allow for less density, especially in those areas not expected to have sewer services.

In order for the expected growth to occur, it will be necessary to provide a higher level of a majority of the people are expected to locate on Bogue Banks, it will be necessary to provide central water and sewer facilities to keep from creating potential health hazards. In addition to water and sewer services, highway upgrading will be necessary. The main road on Bogue Banks is not designed to handle peak seasonal traffic at the present time, let alone future increases in traffic volume. Also, the idea of additional access to Bogue Banks may be necessary.

Although population growth may mean prosperity for an area, it can be costly to taxpayers. The demand for services will place additional burdens on taxpayers and if development is not well planned, the County will ultimately suffer from loss of natural amenities. It is up to the people of Carteret County to determine if growth is to occur with little or no restraint. This decision will determine what additional costs will be paid by the people of the County.

LAND CLASSIFICATION

The land Classification Map is the heart of the Plan. It is a statement of County policy regarding future growth and therefore, the use of land and water resources. Specifically, the map indicates: where new development should take place; the general kind of development it should be; and, how much development should be encouraged over the next ten years.

The Land Classification Map is intended to improve County government in several ways: (1) the state and federal governments are required to respect the County's development objectives as expressed in the plan; (2) the county will be better able to evaluate the effects of large-scale developments; (3) the County will be in a stronger legal position to enforce its zoning and subdivision regulations, to improve its tax program, and to employ other modern development controls.

Briefly, the Land Classification system works like this: All land in the County is placed into one of five classes according to its ability to handle growth, and according to the County's ability to provide the public services needed by that development (water and sewer, police and fire protection, etc.).

The five classes are defined as follows:

DEVELOPED — Lands where existing population density is moderate to high; and where there are a variety of land uses which have the necessary public services, including water and sewer.

TRANSITION — Lands where local government plans to accommodate moderate to high density development during the following ten-year period. Water and sewer and other public services will be provided to accommodate that growth.

COMMUNITY — Lands where low denisty development is grouped in existing settlements, or will occur in such settlements during the next ten years, and will not require extensive public services now or in the future.

RURAL — Lands whose highest use for agriculture, forestry, mining, water supply, etc., based on their natural resource potential.

CONSERVATION — Fragile, hazardous and

towns, will attempt to provide parking facilities at selected areas along Bogue Banks with crossovers provided nearby. Crossovers are an inexpensive method of preserving the valuable dunes system which protects the mainland during storm surges.

D. Encourage and emphasize fire, police and rescue services for all citizens of Carteret County. All of these services should be analyzed and expanded as the population increases.

E. Encourage and emphasize the solid waste disposal program through:
   1. Proper landfill management.
   2. Proper collection procedures.
   3. Proper equipment and landfill site planning so as to cut unnecessary costs.

V. Government Objectives

Strive for the development of an effective long-range County planning process through:

A. Improvement of channels for citizen participation by the continued use of public participation techniques used in the development of this plan.
   1. Public meetings conducted by elected and appointed officials.
   2. Questionnaires
   3. Advisory committees

B. The development of methods of coordinating planning efforts with all local governments within Carteret County.

C. The development of better methods of coordinating planning efforts on a regional basis.

D. The updating of all County land use regulations in accordance with this land development plan.

E. Striving for proper enforcement of land use regulations. This should include proper emphasis on assuring land use regulations which reflect the desires of the citizens, as well as emphasis on proper training for all enforcement officers.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION EFFORTS

Once these objectives, policies, and standards are determined, they should serve as a guide with which to classify land areas to indicate potential levels of development, as well as to clearly establish priorities for action during the planning period.

Due to the importance of this basic portion of the planning process, a great deal of effort has been exerted toward obtaining public comment. It seems appropriate at this point to describe the public participation process and summarize the comments received. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate the basis for establishing major issues, objectives, policies, and standards contained within the plan. The alternatives that were considered are also discussed.

The Carteret County Planning Department used several methods of obtaining public participation in the planning process for this land development plan.

A. There were a total of 21 public meetings attempt to involve individuals from all 16 townships.

B. Questionnaires were distributed at each public meeting in order to stimulate discussion and to firm up some basic levels of public participation.

C. Ideas were also solicited from a 13 member advisory commission made up of a cross section of Carteret County residents.

D. The Carteret County Planning Department also reviewed the results of the public participation process for all of the municipalities within the County.

WILL THE LAND SUPPORT THE PEOPLE?

Future planning must recognize that physical limits exist at which certain levels of human activity will lead to undesirable and unacceptable degradations of the environment. This concept is called "carrying capacity."

In the coastal areas, the detrimental effects of sewage disposal on ground and surface water resources represent an important example of physical limitations on development. Up to a certain density, the land is capable of absorbing human waste from onsite sewage disposal systems without adverse effects on the quality of ground and surface waters within the area. After that density is reached, any increased development results in lowering the quality of ground and surface waters.

At this point, a choice of alternatives for handling the situation are apparent. These alternatives include limiting further increases in density, putting money and energy into providing alternative methods of waste disposal, or tolerating the lower water quality as an acceptable "cost" of further development. Unfortunately, many people prefer the last of these alternatives, with little regard to degradation of environmental aspects necessary for the quality of life.

It is clear that at some point density must be regulated or the quality of water will be lowered. This is especially true under present conditions in most of Carteret County, and particularly Bogue Banks, where individual wells and septic tank systems predominate.

The choice of alternatives is further complicated by the fact that the financial costs of alternative systems, even public sewerage facilities, are high and there exists a general lack of money to finance the projects. The amount of growth related sewerage facilities which will be funded by EPA is strictly limited under existing regulations; and State Clean Water Bond Act monies have effectively already been allocated or expended. Therefore, Carteret County must recognize the very real possibility and at a time when outside financing is decreasing.

The significance of this discussion of carrying capacity is how it relates to Carteret County. Based on prior discussion of potential population increases in the County, it can readily be seen that current conditions will not allow doubling or quadrupling the population of Carteret County without adversely affecting the quality of the water. This is especially true on Bogue Banks and areas immediately adjacent to the

ural environment and necessary to provide for the public health, safety or welfare. These lands should be maintained in essentially their natural state.

The Classification Map indicates that most of the Development Land will occur in and around the existing towns. Additional growth, Transition classification, occurs on the outskirts of the municipalities and in the County areas on Bogue Banks. Most of the growth is expected to occur around the towns, with more Community and Rural land uses expected to occur in the County areas.

AREAS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN (AECs)

Carteret County contains land and water areas which are especially sensitive to development. They are physically or biologically fragile and could easily be damaged or destroyed by poorly-planned or inappropriate development.

Listed below are the kinds of fragile areas found in Carteret and the types of uses which may be made of them. "The intent of AECs is not to stop development, but rather to ensure the compatibility of development with the continued productivity and value of certain critical land and water areas."

COASTAL WETLANDS

Highest priority of use shall be allocated to the conservation of existing coastal wetlands. Second priority shall be given to those types of development activities that require water access and cannot function elsewhere. Lowest priority will include restaurants and businesses; residences, apartments, motels, hotels and trailer parks; parking lots and offices, spoil and dump sites; wastewater lagoons; public and private roads and highways; and factories.

ESTUARINE WATERS

Highest priority of use shall be allocated to the conservation of estuarine waters and their vital components. Uses of second priority in estuarine waters shall include those types of development activities that require water access such as simple access channels; structures to prevent erosion; navigation channels; and boat docks, piers, wharfs, and mooring pilings. Lowest priority is allocated to those uses that would adversely impact important marine grass beds; spawning and nursery areas of valuable estuarine dependent species; important nesting, feeding, and wintering sites of waterfowl and wildlife.

PUBLIC TRUST AREAS

Highest priority will be allocated to uses that enhance the rights of the public within public trust areas. Second priority will be given to navigational channels, drainage ditches, the use of bulkheads to prevent erosion and the building of piers, wharfs, or marinas. Lowest priority is given to projects which would directly or indirectly block or impair existing navigation channels, increase shoreline erosion, deposit spoils below mean high tide, cause adverse water circulation patterns, violate water quality standards, or cause degradation of shellfish waters.

ESTUARINE SHORELINES

Highest priority of use shall be allocated to recreational, rural and conservation activities in those shoreline areas exhibiting a significant erosion rate. High priority shall also be given to water access and shoreline protection, provided that public resources will not be detrimentally affected. Second priority of land use shall be given to proposals which illustrate a sound understanding of the management principles of this dynamic and susceptible zone. Lowest priority shall be allocated to major public facilities that would promote growth in areas where a substantial possibility of excessive public expenditures for maintaining the use of the facility may result or the facility would result in a loss of significant private resources. Proposed development that may harm estuarine resources or cause damage to riparian properties will also receive lowest priority.

OCEAN BEACHES

Highest priority shall be allocated to recreational uses that maintain the high quality of the beach while providing access to public beaches. Lowest priority is given to land uses involving the construction of permanent or substantial structures.

FRONTAL DUNES

Highest priority shall be allocated to the preservation of frontal dunes. Lowest priority will be given to development that would involve the removal or relocation of frontal dune sand or vegetation.

INLET LANDS

Highest priority shall be given to uses that do not involve the construction of substantial structures. Lowest priority will be allocated to major public facilities that promote development.

OCEAN ERODIBLE AREAS

Highest priority shall be allocated to recreational and other nonstructural uses. Lowest priority shall be given to structures for commercial or institutional purposes that encourage growth in these hazardous areas.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation is the means by which the plan is carried out, or made to work. Carteret County has already adopted several of the most important implementation tools including a zoning ordinance, subdivision regulations and a dunes protection ordinance.

The permit system for development in Areas of Environmental Concern and the public investment philosophy fostered by the Land Classification System will be major new tools exercised jointly by the County and the State.

PLAN REVISIONS

The Coastal Area Management Act requires local governments to update their plans every five years. This is to account for changing conditions, new technology and your opinions on any subsequent issues. Your constant participation in the planning process is needed; not just every five years, but as a continuous voice in a

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