

Predictably, military attempts take-over of more N.C. natural resources

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When the general public of North Carolina finally got mad enough to say “no” to the proposed Offsite Landing Facility that was proposed for eastern North Carolina, for a while at least, the military backed off. Now it looks like they’re trying to dodge the public opinion on expanding their restricted areas of Pamlico Sound to allow more live ammunition training. If the military has their way this time they’re just going to take it and ignore the fact that the public is saying “enough already.”

Let’s face it; what the military is trying to take in Pamlico Sound is some of the best (world renowned) sport (and commercial) fishing water on the Atlantic Seaboard. Not only will the fishermen be banned from this water, hunters and bird watchers will be banned as well. Reports from the recent public hearings that were held in Pamlico County are that the Marine Corps had more of an attitude of “here’s what we are going to close off to the public” instead of “what, do you think about the possibility of closing off a large part of the Pamlico Sound to the American public?” It’s like the government is using the economic crisis as a smokescreen to cover up its activities in other areas.

This government grab of North Carolina’s air space, land and water is nothing new. Long time readers of this column will remember that some 15 years ago we forecast that the military was systematically going about placing all these resources it could, one step at a time, under their absolute control and off-limits to the American public. In fact the government land grab in North Carolina goes far back into the early 1960s.



Rene Boone of Garner holds a big red drum for a photo before releasing the fish. Husband William fights another one in the background. If the military has its way the area where this fishing is taking place will soon be history as far as commercial and recreational fishing and hunting are concerned. The military wants to increase the restricted area of Pamlico Sound and close the area to all non-military activities. (WDN Photo/Fred Bonner)

In 1961 I was stationed at Myrtle Beach Air Force Base, South Carolina. At that time this was an active base and our fighter-bombers were using a bombing range in Hyde County, North Carolina for their practice strafing and bombing. I hadn’t really thought that much about our base

using land in North Carolina until my commanding officer approached me one day with an unusual request. He wanted me to use any influence I might have had in North Carolina to help the Air Force get more land for their bombing range. Apparently the live ordinance activities had caused some forest fires on the peat and pine forest in Hyde County and it was worried about not having enough land to practice on (sounds familiar doesn't it?).

The OLF issue hit a nerve with not only the waterfowl hunters but the bird watchers and environmentalists as well. Since a very critical election year was close on the horizon some of the politicians finally were forced into taking a stand on the OLF issue and, for now at least, the Navy seems to be backing off the sites they'd chosen in Eastern North Carolina.

It's unfortunate that the election is so close at hand and that the world economic situation is overshadowing the issues involving the proposed loss of access to our publicly owned land. It seems like the developers and military are using the elections and the economy to their advantage to gain what they want to get. Who has time or energy to worry about losing a big part of Pamlico Sound when all these other problems are looming on the horizon?

It's also worth mentioning here that another "hot-spot" for concern about the loss of access to lands that are designated for public use is the potential loss of the waterfowl section of Lake Jordan near Raleigh. These shallow waterfowl areas were a part of the bargain when Lake Jordan was built and, over the years, bird watchers and waterfowl hunters have made good use of these parts of the lake. Now developers want to get permits to build along the shores of this valuable wildlife resource. In order to get the permits the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers would have to go back on its written agreement to protect this area for waterfowl.

I've had questions from readers of this column in recent weeks about what organization they could join and support that would be most effective in fighting off the loss of access to our public lands. Lots of individuals and groups have been voicing concerns about these land grabs but there seemed to be a need for one central group that would (and could) lend some degree of cohesion to the effort. At times it seems like some of these groups were afraid of being politically incorrect or afraid of offending some bureaucrat. They weren't getting really involved in what was going on in the Pamlico Sound.

One really notable exception to not being afraid of standing up for what's right has been fellow outdoor writer Joe Albea. Joe has been very vocal in his opposition to the OLF and to the military take-over of parts of Pamlico Sound. Thanks to Albea's efforts a few individual groups such as the Coastal Conservation Association of North Carolina have also gotten on the bandwagon opposing the BT11 and BT9 live firing ranges.

The one voice that appears to be able to bring all these individuals and organizations together to oppose these governmental intrusions seems to be the relatively new North Carolina Camo Coalition.

The head of this group that has the potential to bring all factions together is the now retired director of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, Dick Hamilton. Hamilton is well

known for not being afraid of “stepping on some toes” and standing up for what’s right. With Hamilton’s retirement from public service, he’s in a great position to do just that. After all the N.C. Camouflage Coalition is, as their name implies, a “coalition” of individuals and conservation organizations. Bringing all concerned factions together for one cause is what they do.

Linked together by the Internet, Camouflage Coalition members receive critical information about legislation and policy changes that could affect wildlife management and outdoor recreation in North Carolina. Using the simple, straightforward, and free tools of the Camouflage Coalition Website, members can voice their concerns to their elected representatives—with a simple click of a computer mouse.

Membership in the North Carolina Camouflage Coalition is free. But the impact of your voice in determining the future of outdoor recreation, hunting and fishing in the state is invaluable. Join the North Carolina Camouflage Coalition today! You’ll receive Action Alerts and other educational materials for the life of your membership. There are NO dues or membership fees for the N.C. Camo Coalition—EVER.

The Camouflage Coalition is a program of the North Carolina Wildlife Federation, North Carolina’s only organization dedicated solely to wildlife and wildlife habitat. To learn more, go to www.ncwf.org.

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