

Past Accomplishments Reviewed, Future Challenges Anticipated at PenderWatch & Conservancy Annual Meeting

By LuEllen Huntley

Two leaders in environmental work reviewed the past and looked toward the future at the annual meeting of PenderWatch & Conservancy of January 8, 2008.

Don Ellson, president of the organization for the past four years, provided an overview of the group's accomplishments before passing the torch to new president Jim Milne. He reported activities in watershed management, oyster shell recycling, recycling beyond oyster shells, county development, low impact development, and Environmental Impact Statement research as it relates to dredging, specifically Rich Inlet. Ellson recognized Pender County as a rapidly growing area becoming increasingly urbanized, and called for more environmentally responsible development and awareness, both locally and globally.

Currie resident Joan Weld, the meeting's featured speaker, shared Ellson's emphasis on the need to continue advancing environmental efforts in the coastal region.

Her address "Our Coast and the Challenges Ahead" reviewed the last 34 years and focused upon coastal area change, beginning with the North Carolina General Assembly's creation of the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) in 1974.

Currently a member of the North Carolina Coastal Resources Commission, Weld was Assistant Secretary for Natural Resources in the North Carolina Department of Environment, Health and Natural Resources (now DENR), and Chief of Staff for Governor Jim Hunt.

Weld's presentation enumerated coastal issues and challenges such as land use planning, atmospheric climate change, rising sea level, and coastal habitat protection.

While both Weld and Ellson noted success regarding the protection of life and property, the two also demonstrated a need for more forums to address complex issues surrounding environmental messages. Weld noted that many groups work on difficult issues, but that the future challenge is to bring groups together, prioritize efforts, determine what North Carolina values relative to its coast, and mobilize efforts.

For further information on PenderWatch or to become a member, call 270-3839, or sign up for PenderWatch e-notification by e-mailing vufinder@charter.net.