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Submerged Lands Leasing on South Carolina's Coast: Options and Considerations for Commercial and Conservation Strategies

Name: Jessica Berrio

Abstract: Many coastal states have initiated submerged lands leasing programs to regulate activities occurring on submerged lands, including natural resource extraction such as shellfish harvesting and mineral withdrawal, marine structures including marinas, docks, and piers, and conservation projects to restore sensitive habitats. An investigation of Gulf Coast and Southeastern states found that South Carolina is the only state in the region that has not established a leasing program. A policy analysis was conducted using South Carolina as a case study, to generate information and provide comparisons on how coastal states in the region regulate their coast through a submerged lands leasing program. South Carolina's current submerged lands policy was reviewed indicating that the state only allows licenses for shellfish harvesting through the S.C. Department of Natural Resources and permits for structures such as marinas through the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control- Ocean and Coastal Resource Management. Based on these analyses submerged lands leasing options that South Carolina could consider to more effectively manage its coastal waters are presented. Comparisons were made between the types of activities for which states require leases, the fees associated with leases, and the different regulations related to each state's leasing program. Legislative changes will be necessary if the state chooses to adopt a submerged lands leasing program; this policy analysis can service to inform decision makers and others interests about the options available for a submerged lands leasing program in South Carolina for both general and conservation purposes should such policy changes be desirable.

Speaker Information: Jessica Berrio received her Bachelors of Science Degree from Long Island University in Marine Biology in 2003. She recently graduated from the College of Charleston with a Masters Degree in Environmental Studies where she focused on marine and coastal policy. Currently she is working at the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium as a Research Assistant. This winter she will be moving to Washington D.C. to participate in a year long marine policy fellowship sponsored by NOAA.