

Renowned coastal geologist launches first of 10-part book series

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Dr. Stanley "Stan" Riggs speaks about his newest book *Cape Lookout National Seashore: Paradigm for a Coastal System Ethic* at The Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center

HARKERS ISLAND — After more than six decades of studying the dynamics and ever-shifting nature of the North Carolina coast, renowned coastal geologist Stanley "Stan" R. Riggs has launched his newest endeavor: a three-part, 10-volume series on the southern Outer Banks.

The Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Center hosted Riggs on Sunday for a book signing and discussion to recognize the release of the first book in the series, "*Cape Lookout National Seashore: Paradigm for a Coastal System Ethic*."

At the crux of Riggs' work is the complex interrelation of human activity, natural resources and the volatile nature of North Carolina's northern and southern Outer Banks. In a video presented at the event, Riggs said the new book "represents a holistic approach, the integration of all the different disciplines that we've worked with in these big multidisciplinary teams," drawing on cultural, historical, ecosystemic and geological knowledge to "tie this system together."

"The North Carolina coast matters because it's an incredibly unique coastal system in the world. And it not only is our home, but it's the backbone of our coastal economy, and we have to take care of it," Riggs said in the video.

Riggs is a professor emeritus at East Carolina University, co-director of a United Nations program focused on natural resources in developing nations, a founding member of the state's Coastal Resources Commission's science panel and co-founder of the sustainable development nonprofit

North Carolina Land of Water, or NLOW.

Despite his strong academic background, he intends to reach beyond scientific audiences.

"Here, he's crafting books that are fun to read and beautifully designed, with dozens of maps, figures and illustrations that enliven and annotate his lucid prose," wrote R.A. Fountain, the book's publisher.

Karen Amspacher, executive director of the Core Sound Museum, thanked Riggs for "letting us be home base for the kickoff." She acknowledged that while she loves "staying for his science," she also appreciates "the fact that he cares about the people who live with these moving beaches."

In introducing Riggs, Amspacher underlined the significance of his work, particularly at this point in the development of the Outer Banks.

"We expect land to stay where we leave it," she said.

Retired Cape Lookout Superintendent Jeff West acknowledged Riggs as being among the few "pioneers in coastal geology; not in general, but in really understanding what was going on here."

Riggs used his moment at the microphone to recognize those who encouraged his work, highlighting two of his heroes: Aldo Leopold and Rachel Carson. Riggs identified Leopold as "a great conservationist" who developed an understanding of how to deal with land and growing populations. He described Carson, the well-known biologist, as someone who "knew far beyond that; she knew policy, she knew the philosophy behind all of this."

He also acknowledged the importance of teamwork, recalling his work with colleagues across five universities as well as federal and state agencies, from whom he "learned more ... than I did out there just working alone."

Riggs highlighted the "hundreds of students that ... come and go," adding that while some write their theses and dissertations and go unrecognized, "they're not forgotten."

One of Riggs' former students, former Carteret County Shore Protection Officer Greg "Rudi" Rudolph, attended the signing. He noted that his own photo was used for the cover of Riggs' newest book. Rudolph said that following his studies, he and Riggs became friends and have remained so, "constantly bouncing ideas and thoughts off one another."

Rudolph said the new work "is going to be an amazing book series."

"Riggs helped start the ECU Geology Department in 1967 and has dedicated his entire career — or, really, life — to understand the surfaces we live on and resources we depend on," Rudolph said. "He knows every little tributary, swamp forest, trunk river estuary, paleo sand dune field, barrier island and inlet on the North Carolina Coastal Plain and how they formed over the past 180 million years like we know every nook and cranny on our body since birth."

Rudolph further pointed to Riggs' findings on why North Carolina has one of the richest deposits of phosphates in North America, despite being positioned on a passive continental margin with no upwelling of nutrients. That work made the cover of Science magazine in 1984.

"He brings all of this to the book series — unparalleled experience and knowledge of the coast coupled with engaging, razor-sharp communication skills," Rudolph added.

When asked by an audience member how to support Riggs' mission, Stanton Blakeslee, a member of the NLOW board of directors, suggested purchasing the books through "foundations" like the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum and Heritage Site. He also encouraged donations to NLOW and

volunteering. The book can also be purchased through publisher R.A. Fountain. All proceeds from book sales will go to various nonprofits to support coastal conservation and education efforts.