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# Beaufort lab nears possible end: Massive NOAA cuts signal closure

KATHLEEN HOPEWELL NEWS-TIMES Jul 5, 2025 Updated Jul 8, 2025 💂 1



Island is on the federal chopping block once again.

This following losing 11 members of its approximately 100person staff to federal layoffs enacted by the Department of Government Efficiency. NOAA's fiscal year 2026 budget,

Beaufort lab faces possible

closure amid NOAA's deep

BEAUFORT — A preliminary budget proposal for fiscal year 2025 from the

Office of Management ...

backlog

budget cuts, crippling contract

**BEAUFORT** — After celebrating its 125th anniversary last fall as the nation's second oldest federal

laboratory, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Beaufort Lab on Pivers

released July 1, outlines a 28% cut to NOAA's overall funding and a further 17% reduction in force following earlier layoffs. The cuts include total funding termination of critical functions in the Beaufort lab that, if approved by Congress, would close the lab, could harm Carteret County's economy,

environment and overall livability.

offers, in total.

dedicated office in the Beaufort Lab.

NC) and Mike McIntyre (R-NC) and Rep. David Price (D-NC).

Former NOAA employee, Ruth Kelty, spoke with the *Carteret* News-Times about the Beaufort lab staff cuts. Though Kelty worked in the Silver Spring, Maryland Headquarters for the National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science (NCCOS), a subsidiary of NOAA line office the National

"One took the early retirement and the other 10 were probational employees, split equally between the National Ocean Service and the National Marine Fisheries Service. These new employees had been hired to fill the highest priority staffing needs of the lab." She specified they were working, "to

restore coral reefs, and maintain the lab facilities," Kelty shared of the 11 employees cut.

According to the New York Times' coverage of federal layoffs, about 800 NOAA employees,

Ocean Service, she frequented the Beaufort lab in her 25 years of working with NOAA.

are not discussing internal personnel and management matters, nor do we do speculative interviews. NOAA remains dedicated to its mission, providing timely information, research, and resources that serve the American public and ensure our nation's environmental and economic resilience. We continue to provide weather information, forecasts and warnings pursuant to our public safety mission."

NOAA Public Affairs declined to comment on their staffing, stating, "Per long-standing practice, we

protect communities from storm surge and coastal flooding, site offshore development, [potentially]

NOAA's budget proposal reduces their overall funding to \$4.5 billion, completely eliminating funding for: NCCOS, owner and operator of the Beaufort Lab; the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS), federal partner that oversees the Rachel Carson Reserve; and Sea Grant, research guarantor for North Carolina university studies that often benefit Carteret County.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), also contained in the Beaufort Lab, is slated for a 33%

cut, including total elimination of funding for Habitat Conservation and Restoration, which has a

nationwide, have been fired or laid off and about 500 have accepted deferred resignation or buyout

After surviving countless threats of closure from proposed budgets, congressional approval of this budget would conclude the Beaufort lab's more-than-century-long operation. One such threat to the Beaufort lab was raised when the Obama administration quietly proposed its closure in the FY 2015 president's budget. This particular instance garnered national attention, and was avoided, thanks to bipartisan Congressional support from the late Sen. Kay Hagan (D-NC) former Reps. Walter Jones (R-

The current climate, however, is not as promising for its survival. When asked about threats facing

spokesperson for Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC) offered comments that did not directly respond to

research on coastal resilience, harmful algae blooms, aquaculture, and other ecological issues.

Further, a spokesperson for Sen. Tillis dismissed the funding threats, stating, "The biggest threat

facing the Beaufort lab is damage caused by the ocean. In regards to the 'skinny budget' – it's worth

the Beaufort lab via proposed funding cuts, both Congressman Greg Murphy (R-NC) and a

questions posed, focusing mainly on unrelated funding appropriated to repair a condemned building on Pivers Island's campus Though he was asked about specific efforts taken to support the Beaufort lab, Rep. Murphy said, broadly, "My office is in regular contact with the administration concerning the Beaufort lab and its continued operations. I continue to advocate for the great work the Beaufort lab does, including its

noting that while these documents represent a President's priorities, they are not designed to be voted on or passed into law. In fact, the last President's budget that got a vote was under President Obama, and it failed in the Senate by a 0 to 99 vote!" While their comments were made prior to NOAA's budget proposal this week, both a preliminary

budget proposal leaked in early April and, referenced by Sen. Tillis' spokesperson, the president's

May 2 preliminary budget proposal or, "skinny budget," revealed these threats in advance of their

statements. Neither N.C. Governor Josh Stein nor Senator Ted Budd (R-NC) responded to requests

Though the potential loss of the Beaufort lab hasn't incited urgency among representatives, its importance to the Crystal Coast should not be overlooked. A 2018 study on the economic impact of marine science in Carteret County found NOAA directly contributed over \$11 million to the county and \$9.3 million through its payroll and those initial

in 2017, alone. A new marine science economic impact study with updated figures is currently in the works by Carteret County Economic Development. NCCOS, owner and operator of the Beaufort lab, plays a significant local role in flood mitigation and

expenditures, which nourished local businesses and citizens' incomes, leveraged an additional \$5.9

million for the county. In total, NOAA brought Carteret County \$12.7 million and employed 97 people

shoreline preservation, evidenced by the living shorelines they installed that protected Pivers Island from storm surges during Hurricane Florence in 2018, and their salt marsh restoration efforts on nearby U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) Base Camp Lejeune that reinforced national security amid a rising sea level. NCCOS staff on Pivers Island also equal roughly half of the scientists that forecast harmful algal blooms nationally, like the red tide in Florida, according to Kelty. Though NCCOS is slated for total funding termination, NOAA's budget proposes continued funding of \$4.3 million to support harmful algal bloom forecasts that will be carried out by other programs in the National

NERRS, also facing potential total funding termination, is a partnership program between NOAA's Office for Coastal Management and coastal states; North Carolina's partnership is named NCNERRS, which protects 4 sites, including the nearby Rachel Carson Reserve. NCCR, however, is the State's own reserve network, inspired by the successful protection of coastal and estuarine habitats by NCNERRS, that protects 10 sites in the state, also including the Rachel Carson Reserve Losing this funding would harm the Rachel Carson Reserve's presence and, by extension, threaten the preservation of downtown Beaufort's waterfront and Front Street, given the reserve's role as both an estuary and barrier island.

research across 34 universities in coastal states and territories. The North Carolina Sea Grant, funds

the Beaufort lab on projects. Research funded by Sea Grant, like Dr. Katherine Anarde's recent study

from North Carolina State University that improved flooding measurement tools using data collected

projects across the state, largely conducted by nearby university labs that collaborate closely with

in Beaufort and Sea Level, often benefits Carteret County in multiple ways

the South Atlantic, will go unscathed.

domino effect of increasing losses across sectors.

Losing this funding would lead to reduced research and intervention capacities of the Duke University Marine Lab, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill Institute of Marine Sciences, the North Carolina State University Center for Marine Science and Technology, Carteret Community College's Aquaculture & Marine Trades and even the Pine Knoll Shores Aquarium. NMFS holds a fairly significant presence in Beaufort as well, with the Southeast Fisheries Science

Center, Southeast Regional Office and, set to be eliminated per the proposed budget, the Habitat

Conservation Division Field Office, all contained on Pivers Island. Fortunately, the key functions of

NMFS at the Beaufort Lab, like the Southeast Fishery Independent Survey and life history research in

Kelty noted there is a possibility for NMFS to takeover the Beaufort Lab if NCCOS funding is terminated but, "NMFS doesn't have the money to own the lab. There's no power struggle between NMFS and NCCOS staffs. NMFS is happy not having the costs of running the lab."

NOAA's support in the Carteret County is not exclusive to the Beaufort lab's operations. Two more

NOAA programs that benefit the state are under threat of complete funding cuts: Coastal Zone

Management Grants, which awarded \$44.6 million to the North Carolina Division of Coastal

Management for projects in 2024, and National Coastal Resilience funds, which made over \$3 million available to finalize living shoreline plans in Morehead City, in partnership with UNC's Institute of Marine Science. The loss of these grants would further hinder financial support for crucial projects even outside of the Beaufort lab's efforts The Beaufort lab's contributions to the area has made it, in the words of Former Beaufort, North

Carolina Mayor Rett Newton, "part of the fabric of the community," providing increasing support of,

and importance to Carteret County's economy, environment, infrastructure and quality of life. Given

its deep enmeshment in a variety of institutions, habitats and commercial activities, the lab's closure

would not only severely injure the already vulnerable local environment and economy but lead to a

Critical, cross-cutting efforts by scientists at the Beaufort lab include developing living shorelines to mitigate hurricane-related erosion and damages on the Crystal Coast, conducting fishery stock assessments to maintain the health and consistent harvest of fish in the area and advising coastal managers on evidence-based approaches for preserving the coastlines and wetlands that attract tourists and, by extension, draw in hundreds of millions of dollars in visitor spending each year. The Beaufort Lab's longevity and increasing contributions to the area have made its success

Tags National Marine Fisheries Service National Oceanic And Atmospheric Administration National Ocean Service Beaufort, North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve Physical Geography Hydrography Hydrology Natural Environment Oceanography Earth Sciences Environmental Science Harmful Algal Bloom

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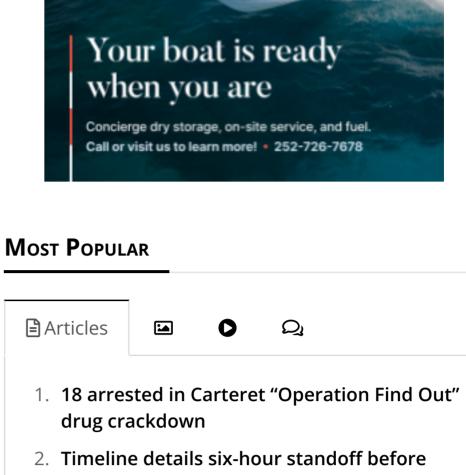
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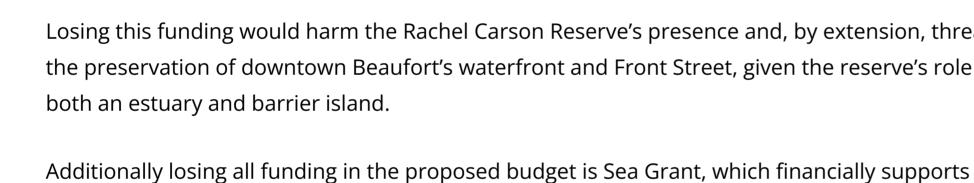
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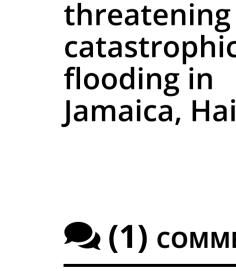


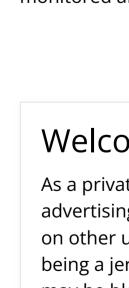


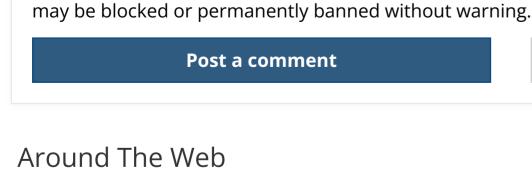




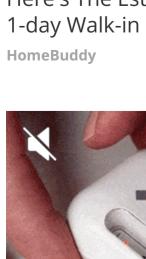






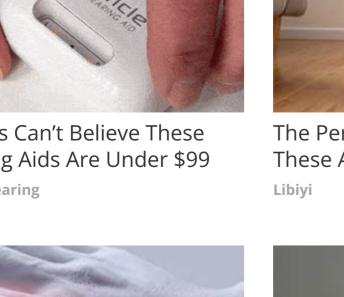






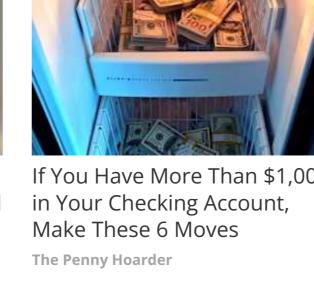


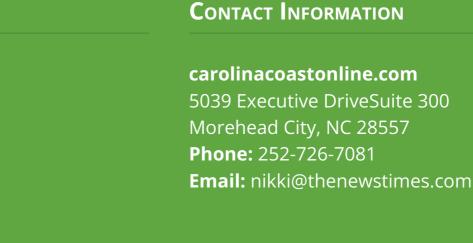




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