Passing the torch: UNC's Fodrie to head Duke Marine Lab

KATHLEEN HOPEWELL NEWS-TIMES
Jun 19, 2026



UNC Chancellor Lee H. Roberts visits the UNC Institute of Marine Sciences (IMS) and takes part in an environment, ecology and energy program boat tour. The stops include marsh areas, living shorelines and UNC projects. June 2, 2026. In this photo, Joel Fodrie (right) gives an overview of the coastal ecosystems in the area. (Jon Gardiner/UNC-Chapel Hill)

Jon Gardiner

MOREHEAD CITY — Tides are turning in Carteret County's storied marine science community with a change of hands between university lab directors. UNC Institute of Marine Science Director Joel Fodrie will be making the move from Arendell Street onto Pivers Island to head the Duke University Marine Lab in short order for a five-year appointment, Duke announced earlier this week.

Current Duke Marine Lab Director Andrew Read, who has headed the university's historic Beaufort satellite campus for the last decade after starting as an assistant professor in 1995, welcomes the change.

In fact, Read shares with the News-Times that, "It's time for somebody else. Time for new energy, new ideas, new leadership."

Read, who is originally from Ottawa, Canada, said of Fodrie, who grew up in Beaufort, that, "It's really exciting to us to have somebody who's really grounded in this place leading us."

"He's really kind of deeply seated here in the community and in North Carolina. So I think that's great," Read said.

Fodrie, who has headed IMS since 2024 after being a researcher at the institute for the 15 years prior, pointed out the large shoes he will be tasked to fill.

"I feel like I'm walking into a good situation. If I have any sort of self-doubt, it's just that I hope I can live up to doing the same sort of good job that he's been doing," Fodrie said. "Definitely because he has set a high bar and Duke frankly, has, I think, a rich history of leadership."

Far from the rivalry on the courts and fields in Durham and Chapel Hill, the Duke and UNC marine science labs — as well as their N.C. State, Carteret Community College and NOAA colleagues in the area — have worked complementary to one another, functioning as a larger powerhouse for coastal research, for decades. Despite sharing a marine science label, each lab takes on its own niche, largely avoiding disciplinary overlap and making each institution uniquely valuable.

Fodrie speaks to this, saying, “I wouldn't want people to think that because we have one marine lab, we don't need others.”

And in that grander scheme of labs, UNC-IMS takes a focus on, “the way estuaries work,” Fodrie says, covering water quality, coastal systems, estuarine organisms and, as Fodrie puts it, “that intersection of humans and nature, largely fisheries.”

Duke Marine Lab, on the other hand, is a little different, Read says.

“We have a really strong social science component,” he points out, with three faculty members covering the intersections between marine and social sciences, including geography, economics, political science and public policy.

It’s that multidisciplinary approach, however, that partly excites Fodrie.

“If you look at my current title at Carolina, I happen to have a position in public policy,” Fodrie said.

“It just speaks to the fact that I'm engaged in resource management, which is not just about the natural sciences, it's about the people.”

“I'd like to believe that I can sort of be a bridge,” Fodrie says, “who sees real value in both and the connections that are required of those to do good work, whether it's at our state level, which tends to be where I specialize, or at national or international levels.”

In fact, Fodrie actually served as a lead researcher on a 2025 study by the N.C. Collaboratory, the General Assembly’s state-funded research organ that supports decision-making, on the governance of state fisheries.

Read expressed excitement over Fodrie’s being embedded in, “that interface between science and policy at the state level,” seeing as Read, himself, does, “a lot of work at the federal level.”

“He is really grounded here: He knows the ecosystems really well here. He knows the animals and he knows the people,” Read said of Fodrie.

But the focus on the federal level has taken on significance for Duke, given the changes to the federal funding landscape under the current administration that have resulted in cuts to higher education, particularly research grants.

“We’re lucky compared to some of the other postsecondary education institutions that are worried about the kind of generational cliff, like there are going to be fewer students,” Read said. “We're not worried about numbers of students. We're worried about funding.”

In his departure from his alma mater, Fodrie hopes to see IMS continue pushing forth in what he identified as the institute’s “core areas of strength”: research on marine resources; water quality and the effects of water quality on human and ecosystem health; coastal hazards and resilience; and, “underpinning all of those,” he says, understanding how the ecosystem works.

“IMS has been a resource that people in the state and country and world can reach out to, to gain expertise and to do the research that moves the ball forward.”

“I don't think the issues that coastlines are facing are going to go away,” Fodrie says.

While Read is not retiring entirely from research — in fact, he shares he will be taking a yearlong sabbatical locally to write a book and will resume teaching and research afterward — he implores Fodrie and the area’s marine science community to speak up about, “the importance of science to the well-being of the communities in which we live.”

“Since the Second World War, there's been an informal contract between universities and government to promote science,” Read points out. “And a lot of the things that we kind of take for granted, like your cellphone and GPS, have come out of that, that informal contract, and have increased our standard of living.”

“And I think that's under fire right now. So we just need to speak up about the importance of science.”

Likewise, Fodrie explains that, “What I hope I can achieve is that people understand that we’re here to serve everybody — maybe not agree with everybody all the time, but even as we may sometimes disagree — to serve everybody to hopefully create a more sustainable coast for us and the people that come after us.”

Fodrie says Carolina will name an interim director of IMS “to make sure that we continue to make progress on our areas of growth. And then I think you'll see probably, sometime in this academic year of 2026-2027, they'll probably do a search.”

A 2018 economic impact study on the area’s marine science sector by Edward Brent Lane and Deborah Theresa Watts revealed the sector contributed roughly $83 million to the county gross domestic product and employed more than 1,000 in high-paying roles.

Within that scope, IMS was credited with over $9 million in impacts and 155 employees. Duke Marine Lab brought in over $21 million and 184 employees.