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Land Use Land Cover Change and County Land Use Planning; Are Land Use Plans, or Lack Thereof, One of the Agents of Observed Changes in Coastal North Carolina?

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North Carolina coastal counties are required by the Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA), a state legislation derived from the 1972 Clean Water Act, to maintain land use plans so that fragile ecosystems can be protected from unplanned development. We have been investigating land use and land cover change in coastal watersheds and how they relate to fish recruitment in North Carolina estuaries and coastal waters. In the past twenty years, Carteret and Onslow counties have had a great increase in human population (>20%) and a rapid land use change, with approximately 30 thousand hectares of forest and wetland area being transformed to agriculture or urban uses. This study is an attempt to explore the possible links between human population increase, land use planning history in the targeted counties and the observed changes.

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