

THE NEWS & OBSERVER

Trouble in the deep

A federal commission's report on oceans ought to be required reading for policy-makers dealing with coastal issues in North Carolina. Cox News Service notes an alarming quote from the chairman of the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy, retired Navy Adm. James Watkins: "Our oceans and coasts are in trouble, and we as a nation have an historic opportunity to make a positive and lasting change in the way we manage them before it is too late."

As foreseen by the commission, a federal Ocean Policy Trust Fund of \$5 billion would provide funding to monitor environmental health on coastlines, pay for historic preservation efforts and boost conservation. It's a good idea, but does it have a chance with the Bush administration's priorities of tax cuts and a swelling federal deficit that will limit the

nation's ability to deal with these kinds of issues? There's a possibility, if the White House and Congress would follow the commission's idea that the fund would be paid for by fees on offshore oil and gas leases.

The commission notes that since the last really intense study of ocean policy 35 years ago, millions of homes and businesses (and people) have put a lot of pressure on coastal areas. That's certainly true in North Carolina.

Natural resources, if abused, can be restored, but it's much easier and safer to protect those resources with preventative care - land-use controls, wetlands protections, limits on pollution sources. State regulation can do a large part of the job, but an overall policy from the federal government, along with a trust fund to help coastal states with preservation and conservation, would be an important step.