

Bonner Bridge Replacement

Long Bridge Restores the Refuge



Refuge is a Haven for Wildlife

Pea Island was established as a national wildlife refuge in 1937 to provide nesting, resting, and wintering habitat for migratory birds. With 13 miles of ocean beach and wetlands, Pea Island National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) is a haven for more than 365 different birds and other wildlife, such as loggerhead turtles. Barrier islands, like Pea Island, protect the coast from storms as well as serve as unique wildlife habitat. Barrier islands are dynamic and are constantly changing shape and being washed over by the ocean, which revitalizes the island and creates new habitat for wildlife. On Pea Island the ecosystem depends on occasional overwash of sand to build up marshes in Pamlico Sound, creating new habitat for birds and other wildlife. However, humans have been constantly fighting this natural barrier island process. NC-12 is dangerously close to the ever-changing shoreline. Frequently, it is shut down or backed up by traffic to clear sand off the road.



Greater yellowlegs can be found on Pea Island NWR

NC-12 Maintenance Destroys Wildlife Habitat

To make NC-12 a viable transportation route, the state has taken some drastic measures to keep the ocean at bay. Sections of the highway have been moved west, away from the ocean. Some of these sections now abut important refuge wetlands—moving them any further would greatly impact migratory birds. Artificial dunes and other infrastructure, designed to prevent overwash of NC-12 and erosion of portions of Pea Island, have had profound negative impacts on the refuge's diverse habitat types and associated wildlife species. Hardening of the northern end of Pea Island has exacerbated erosion farther south by affecting the flow and deposition of sand. The interaction between these two forces has led to the loss of wildlife habitat and the shrinking of Pea Island by a fifth of its area since it was established as a refuge.



Bulldozer clearing NC-12 after a storm.

Long Bridge Revitalizes Wildlife Habitat

The short bridge alternative would require extensive maintenance of NC-12 over the years as storms and other weather events continually wash sand over the road making it impassable. This continual fight with nature is damaging to wildlife that depend on this natural process for survival. The long bridge alternative would build a bridge in Pamlico Sound and completely bypass the refuge. The long bridge allows for the restoration of these natural forces and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will be able to restore habitat for migratory birds, sea turtles and other species for the benefit of refuge visitors for years to come.

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