

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA  
SESSION 2015**

**SESSION LAW 2015-70  
HOUSE BILL 346**

**AN ACT TO CLARIFY THAT COUNTIES MAY ENFORCE ORDINANCES WITHIN THE  
STATE'S PUBLIC TRUST AREAS.**

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

**SECTION 1.** Article 6 of Chapter 153A of the General Statutes is amended by adding a new section to read as follows:

**"§ 153A-145.3. Counties enforce ordinances within public trust areas.**

(a) Notwithstanding the provisions of G.S. 113-131 or any other provision of law, a county may, by ordinance, define, prohibit, regulate, or abate acts, omissions, or conditions upon the State's ocean beaches and prevent or abate any unreasonable restriction of the public's rights to use the State's ocean beaches. In addition, a county may, in the interest of promoting the health, safety, and welfare of the public, regulate, restrict, or prohibit the placement, maintenance, location, or use of equipment, personal property, or debris upon the State's ocean beaches. A county may enforce any ordinance adopted pursuant to this section or any other provision of law upon the State's ocean beaches located within the county's jurisdictional boundaries to the same extent that a county may enforce ordinances within the county's jurisdictional boundaries. A county may enforce an ordinance adopted pursuant to this section by any remedy provided for in G.S. 153A-123. For purposes of this section, the term "ocean beaches" has the same meaning as in G.S. 77-20(e).

(b) Nothing in this section shall be construed to (i) limit the authority of the State or any State agency to regulate the State's ocean beaches as authorized by G.S. 113-131, or common law as interpreted and applied by the courts of this State; (ii) limit any other authority granted to counties by the State to regulate the State's ocean beaches; (iii) deny the existence of the authority recognized in this section prior to the date this section becomes effective; (iv) impair the right of the people of this State to the customary free use and enjoyment of the State's ocean beaches, which rights remain reserved to the people of this State as provided in G.S. 77-20(d); (v) change or modify the riparian, littoral, or other ownership rights of owners of property bounded by the Atlantic Ocean; or (vi) apply to the removal of permanent residential or commercial structures and appurtenances thereto from the State's ocean beaches."

**SECTION 2.** G.S. 113-131 reads as rewritten:

**"§ 113-131. Resources belong to public; stewardship of conservation agencies; grant and delegation of powers; injunctive relief.**

(a) The marine and estuarine and wildlife resources of the State belong to the people of the State as a whole. The Department and the Wildlife Resources Commission are charged with stewardship of these resources.

(b) The following powers are hereby granted to the Department and the Wildlife Resources Commission and may be delegated to the Fisheries Director and the Executive Director:

- (1) Comment on and object to permit applications submitted to State agencies which may affect the public trust resources in the land and water areas subject to their respective management duties so as to conserve and protect the public trust rights in such land and water areas;
- (2) Investigate alleged encroachments upon, usurpations of, or other actions in violation of the public trust rights of the people of the State; and
- (3) Initiate contested case proceedings under Chapter 150B for review of permit decisions by State agencies which will adversely affect the public trust rights of the people of the State or initiate civil actions to remove or restrain any



unlawful or unauthorized encroachment upon, usurpation of, or any other violation of the public trust rights of the people of the State or legal rights of access to such public trust areas.

(c) Whenever there exists reasonable cause to believe that any person or other legal entity has unlawfully encroached upon, usurped, or otherwise violated the public trust rights of the people of the State or legal rights of access to such public trust areas, a civil action may be instituted by the responsible agency for injunctive relief to restrain the violation and for a mandatory preliminary injunction to restore the resources to an undisturbed condition. The action shall be brought in the superior court of the county in which the violation occurred. The institution of an action for injunctive relief under this section shall not relieve any party to such proceeding from any civil or criminal penalty otherwise prescribed for the violation.

(d) The Attorney General shall act as the attorney for the agencies and shall initiate actions in the name of and at the request of the Department or the Wildlife Resources Commission.

(e) In this section, the term "public trust resources" means land and water areas, both public and private, subject to public trust rights as that term is defined in G.S. 1-45.1.

(f) Notwithstanding the provisions of this section, a county or city may adopt and enforce ordinances as provided in ~~G.S. 160A-205~~, G.S. 153A-145.3 or G.S. 160A-205, respectively."

**SECTION 3.** This act is effective when it becomes law.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of June, 2015.

s/ Daniel J. Forest  
President of the Senate

s/ Tim Moore  
Speaker of the House of Representatives

s/ Pat McCrory  
Governor

Approved 10:00 a.m. this 11<sup>th</sup> day of June, 2015