INTRODUCTION

This report is the first of three regional inventories for critical natural areas, wetland ecosystems, and endangered species habitats in the Albemarle-Pamlico region of North Carolina. Contained in this report are natural area descriptions of 10 counties surrounding or adjacent to Albemarle Sound: Bertie, Camden, Chowan, Currituck, Gates, Hertford, Martin, Pasquotank, Perquimans, and Washington. The second regional inventory will be conducted in 1990 for 7 counties adjacent to Pamlico Sound. The third regional inventory will be conducted in 1991 for the remaining 17 North Carolina counties in the Albemarle-Pamlico Estuarine Study area. The N.C. Natural Heritage Program is administering each of these inventories with funds provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the N.C. Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources.

This inventory describes the general physiographic and biological features of the 10-county area, the natural communities and rare plants and animals of the area, and (most importantly) the significant natural areas. The inventory also discusses the current protection status for the natural areas.

The 10-county region in the vicinity of Albemarle Sound lies in the Coastal Plain physiographic province and is relatively young in origin. The flat topography provides for relatively few noteworthy topographic features and relatively few natural communities that are rare on a national scale. Habitat destruction in this area has led to near extirpation of some original natural forest types such as longleaf pine forests, white cedar forests, and oak flats; and habitat for many wildlife species has been reduced nearly to the minimum required for survival. Though urban development is not as severe a problem in this region as in other parts of the state, land clearing for agriculture and silviculture is extreme, especially in non-riverine areas such as pocosins and upland flats. Current protection of significant natural areas in the 10-county region is not adequate. However, great strides appear to have been made in land protection of wetland areas during 1989 in the region. The creation of the Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge in Bertie and Martin counties, and the acquisition of over 100,000 acres of land in Washington and adjacent counties by The Conservation Fund for future additions to National Wildlife Refuges and State Parks in that area have greatly added protection to wetlands. However, a large percentage of the natural areas identified in this inventory are unprotected, especially those in nonriverine areas and those in counties north of Albemarle Sound.

This inventory should be of considerable use to town and county planning agencies, State and Federal agencies, and private conservation groups in the protection of the natural areas described. It is hoped that many of these sites that are currently unprotected will be afforded protection by acquisition or other means within the coming years. Also, it is hoped that future development can be steered away from significant natural areas, even if these areas are not afforded protection.