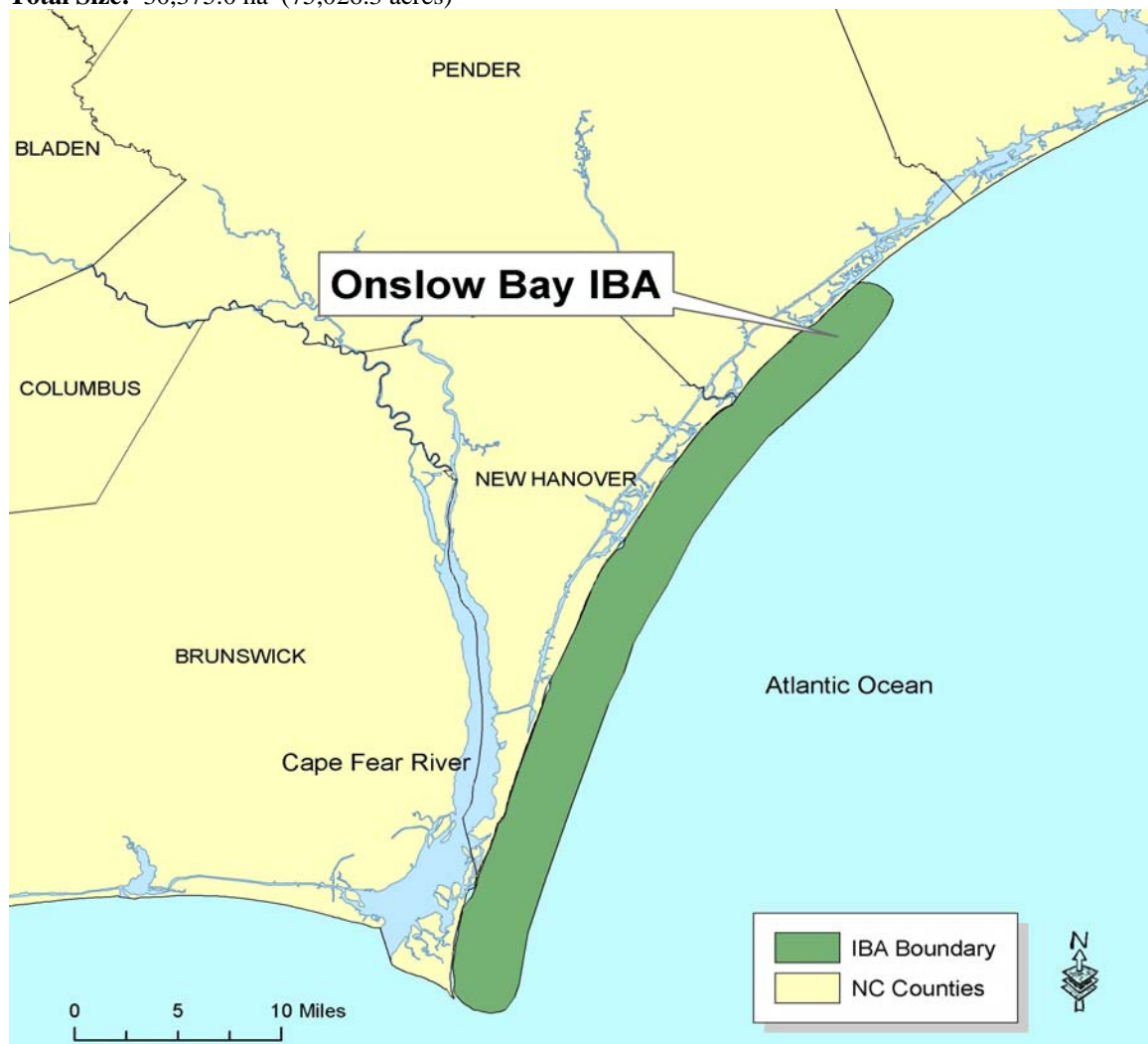


Onslow Bay

Location: inshore Atlantic Ocean waters between Topsail Inlet and Cape Fear

Total Size: 30,375.0 ha (75,026.3 acres)



Site Description: This site includes the inshore waters along the southern coast of North Carolina between Topsail Inlet and Cape Fear, the southernmost portion of an area known as Onslow Bay. The eastern and western boundaries of the site include an area of ocean from the surf zone to approximately 5 km offshore. This area of ocean supports a diverse assemblage of birds and other marine life throughout the year.

Habitats: inshore open ocean

Land Use: commercial and recreational fishing

Primary Threats: bycatch of birds in commercial fishing gear and entanglement of birds in discarded monofilament fishing line are concerns.

Protection Status: The site is currently afforded no formal protection. North Carolina Marine Fisheries and the National Marine Fisheries Service govern fishing activities.

Conservation Issues: Commercial fishing activity (primarily gill nets) peaks during fall months, typically from September to late December. Studies in other areas of the mid-Atlantic coast have indicated that commercial fishing activities are responsible for the death of thousands of diving birds annually. The primary species impacted include Northern Gannet and Common Loon. Observations of commercial fishing activities and the timing of dead birds washing ashore on local beaches suggest that bycatch of birds

in commercial fishing gear should be examined. Studies of the impact of commercial fishing activities on diving and fish-eating birds in the area are needed. Surveys of waterbirds using the site during breeding and migration seasons are needed.

Birds: This site is important for coastal birds throughout the year. During spring and summer months, the site is a key foraging area for terns nesting on nearby beaches and islands. During migration, the site is a foraging area for many species of gulls and terns, as well as a key migration corridor for loons and sea ducks. During winter months, the site supports North Carolina’s largest population of Common Loons and a significant number of wintering Red-throated Loons. These birds move throughout the site depending on the location of forage fish.

Key Bird Species

Criteria		Season	Number	Year	% NC
3a	Common Loon	W	843	2002	52.0 %
3a	Red-throated Loon	W	404	2002	21.0 %
3a	Brown Pelican	W	876	2002	8.0 %

B=Breeding FM=Fall Migration SM=Spring Migration W=Winter