

UNC Chancellor gets first hand look at IMS

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MOREHEAD CITY — UNC Chancellor James Moeser visited the school's Institute of Marine Sciences Wednesday to see first-hand what students experience by joining in a class field trip in the Newport River.

"They're learning at a level they'd never get just from books," the UNC chancellor said about the students. "It (the hands-on projects at IMS) is an incredible learning opportunity."

Chancellor Moeser said UNC is proud of the institute.

"IMS is an incredible institution," he said. "Carteret County, with the three university labs, IMS, the Center for Marine Sciences and Technology (CMAST) and the Duke University Marine Lab (DUML), is a focal point of marine science on the East Coast."

Chancellor Moeser indicated there could be opportunities to expand the role of IMS with additional classes in the future. These classes would be in more than mathematics and science, potentially including subjects like law. The institute is also in competition for an \$18 million grant from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security as a center of excellence.

Dr. Rick Luettich, director of IMS, accompanied Chancellor Moeser out to the field trip site. Professor Pete Peterson had students dredging for marine life samples to study the changing ecosystem in the Intracoastal Waterway (ICW) in the Newport River. The field trip was part of the IMS Institute for the Environment field site program.

"The ICW connects to the Neuse River," said Dr. Luettich. "The students get to see the differences in the marine species."

He said an interesting aspect of the Newport River area was the changes it went through with

climate, water temperature and salinity.

"There are so many organisms that can adapt," he said. "Often interpreting data from fish catches requires going back a few years to look at the climate and the circumstances that led to the fish growing to that size."

Dr. Luettich said salinity has a big impact on marine life. Saltwater is heavier than fresh water, so in areas like the Newport River, where they mix, saltwater will stay near the bottom and lose oxygen.

"When the wind blows, it mixes the water," said Dr. Luettich. This mixing is a cause of fish kills.

Students caught a variety of different marine creatures on the field trip, including pompano, hog choker, lizardfish, squid and a butterfly ray.

"The only predators of these butterfly rays are sharks, which have been greatly depleted," said Dr. Peterson as a student picked up the ray for the rest of the class to see. "These rays eat mollusks, including commercially important ones."

Dr. Peterson said the warming of the ocean has caused a change in 25 marine life species during the last 20 years. Human activity has also affected them, including marine birds, like seagulls.

"The ones around here are herring gulls," said Dr. Peterson, indicating the flock of birds swarming around the boat, picking up the remains of fish dissected by the students. "They go north to Maine and eat puffin chicks. The human activity is supporting these gulls; it's a conservation issue."

Chancellor Moeser said he believes there are a lot of students who would love to be in the field site program.