

NCDEQ hits seafood company with \$21.5K fine

CUTLINE:

A maintenance crew member in a Hazmat suit was photographed grinding paint on the Gaston Bell in March 2022. The vessel was anchored in open water at the time. (Sound Rivers)

From Sound Rivers

An Oriental fishing company has been hit with more than \$21,000 in fines by the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality.

In February 2022, Oriental police, NCDEQ's Division of Water Resources and the Division of Air Quality responded to a complaint that maintenance crews were grinding paint from the hull of the fishing trawler Chasity Brook while it was docked in Oriental Harbor. Photos and video, submitted with NCDEQ's report showed paint chips covering the surface of the water.

On Feb. 28, 2022, NCDEQ issued a notice of violation to Fulcher's Point Pride Seafood, Christopher Fulcher. Just days later, on March 2, environmental organization Sound Rivers was notified by a boater on the Neuse River that crews were grinding paint from the hull of another Fulcher vessel — the Gaston Bell — this time on the open water of the Neuse. Paint dust and particulates surrounded the vessel where it was anchored, creating a debris field of approximately 75,000 square feet, according to the NCDEQ report.

"Sound Rivers notified DEQ that maintenance crews were out there, once again, creating a debris field of paint chips, which pose a significant threat to the water quality of the Neuse, as well as its aquatic life," said Sound Rivers' Neuse Riverkeeper Samantha Krop.

After a site inspection, NCDEQ issued a second notice of violation to Fulcher on March 21, 2022. "The second violation appears to be willful, given that Fulcher's Seafood Inc. has been notified about the first violation, yet they still conducted another in-water boat maintenance with only the location changed," reads the assessment by the Division of Water Resources.

Fulcher's Point Pride Seafood has been issued two previous notices of violation from the Division of Air Quality for the same infraction: in 2015 and, again, in 2018.

The \$21,588.98 civil penalty, covering both 2022 violations, was issued on Feb. 7 of this year. Fulcher has 30 days from that date to submit the payment, submit a written request for remission or file a petition to have the case reviewed by the Office of Administrative Hearings.

Founded in 1980-81, Sound Rivers is one of the oldest grassroots conservation organizations in North Carolina. Sound Rivers monitors and protects the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico rivers, covering nearly a quarter of the state. With offices in Washington, New Bern and Raleigh, Sound Rivers' mission is to preserve the waterways' health and the health of the people who rely on them

through science-based advocacy and environmental justice. For more information, visit soundrivers.org.