

**Application for  
Green Initiative**

**Ocean Fest,  
Ocean Fest Inc., NC**

**Judges' score: 8.2**

## Detailed description of the event

Held beachfront in Surf City, NC, Ocean Fest is a two-day, nonprofit eco/surf/arts/live music festival to benefit the ocean. Our motto is: "To Surf and Protect" and our mission is to celebrate Mother Ocean while educating the community about ways they can be better stewards of our precious marine environments. Held annually on the second weekend of every October, Ocean Fest is like a beachfront carnival for a good cause. Our festival includes 9 live bands, a 5K beach race on the sand, a surfing contest on vintage boards from the 1960s-70s, a free adaptive surfing experience for wounded military veterans, a kids zone, arts and crafts, beer gardens and food trucks, and most importantly, our Eco Zone, where attendees get to meet and learn from nearly a dozen nonprofit eco organizations focused on protecting our marine ecosystem. Proceeds for the annual festival are then shared with fellow eco nonprofits in the form of meaningful monetary grants.

## Detailed description of the environmental impact of the event or initiative.

Detailed description of the environmental impact of the event, or of the initiative: Ocean Fest is, at its heart, a way for people who love the ocean to come together to learn about (and share) ways we can all better protect, preserve and restore our fragile coastal environment. To that end, we have focused our efforts on three primary goals: 1) minimizing our environmental impact, 2) educating attendees about challenges facing the marine environment and how they can have a positive impact, and 3) supporting fellow environmental nonprofits (financially and otherwise) to amplify their respective missions. 1. Minimizing Environmental Impacts: Ocean Fest is a zero single-use plastic event. Vendors sign a contract that prohibits them from using single-use serving ware, plastic bags and water bottles. We support them by helping the vendors to source compostable serving ware and aluminum canned water. Our beverage vendors use compostable cups or aluminum canned beverages. We set up numerous waste stations throughout the festival which are monitored by volunteer "waste warriors" who assist/teach festival goers how to sort their waste into compostables, recyclables or landfill trash. We have partnered with Wilmington Compost to provide composting services to ensure food waste and compostable serving ware is actually turned into nutrient rich compost instead of landfill waste. During the 2022 Ocean Fest, we were able to divert 460 lbs of compostable waste and 27 large recycle bins (96 gallon size) from being sent to a landfill. We also recycled a 64 gallon container of oyster shells from our food court that went toward rebuilding local oyster populations by building/rebuilding oyster reefs. Ocean Fest encouraged the use of re-fillable water bottles, sold souvenir refillable water bottles and canned water, and offered water refill stations. We utilized QR codes to link participants to the sign up for our 5K beach race and surf contest instead of wasting paper for printed registration forms. Each year, Ocean Fest utilizes chalkboard signs to advertise and communicate information during the festival thus eliminating the need for single-use signage. Similarly, we have reused our street banners advertising the event each year by simply changing the dates with black vinyl numbers. With regards to those sponsor banners which change annually, we have collected them each year and are working with a manufacturer to repurpose them into beach totes and surfboard covers that will be sold at the 2023 festival—thus closing the loop of what would otherwise just be landfill waste. Ocean Fest has been recognized by NC Green Travel at their highest level for festivals and events and is a certified nonprofit partner for 1 Percent for the Planet. 2. Eco Education: A key component of Ocean Fest is our Eco Zone where festival goers can connect with local, regional and national environmental nonprofit organizations to learn more about their goals, projects and how they can get involved to make an impact themselves. In 2022, we had 11 groups represented in the Eco Zone (e.g. North Carolina Coastal Federation, Oceana, Plastic Ocean Project) with engaging interactive exhibits. The Eco Zone is purposefully located in our highest traffic area to maximize involvement. In addition, our Kids Zone has numerous fun activities for kids and their families to learn more about marine animals, plastic pollution and their connection to the ocean. Kids are also encouraged to participate in a scavenger hunt that requires them to visit each of the exhibits in the Eco Zone. Another component of our education efforts involve placing infographic posters and signage throughout the festival in places where people are often waiting to purchase food, merchandise or to use the restroom. These posters offer easy-to-digest information about issues facing our coastal environment plus easily actionable tips on changes they can make to lessen their own environmental impact. In between live band performances on our main stage, we take advantage of our captive audience by featuring Eco Minute presentations with fun eco games (Trash or Recycle Race) as well as informative eco education in quick bite-sized messages. We also created a unique photo booth opportunity where attendees can #PromisetoProtect our environment by holding placards that have different "promises" of ways they can be better stewards of our earth (e.g. "I promise to skip the straw", "I promise to dispose of fishing line and gear responsibly", etc.). Beyond the annual event, Ocean Fest is the primary sponsor/funder for the Topsail Island chapter of Ocean Friendly Establishments, utilizing our connections to the local merchants in helping them find ways they can be better stewards of the environment, such as no longer offering straws with every drink, better recycling processes, replacing styrofoam with compostable items, etc. 3. Supporting Eco Groups: In addition to providing environmental nonprofits with an outreach opportunity and free booth/tent space in our Eco Expo, Ocean Fest donates a large portion of our proceeds to fellow nonprofit organizations that are doing good work to protect our coastal environment. For example, the success of our 2022 event enabled Ocean Fest to make \$45,000 available to those groups through grant funding.

## Estimated number of attendees?

10000

## Testimonials or community feedback

"I just wanted to chime in and let you know that Ocean Fest was one of the best, most engaging festivals that I have done in my 7 years with the aquarium." - Kristin Holloman-Noe, Education Outreach Coordinator at NC Aquarium Ft. Fisher



## Sustainability Practices

Ocean Fest is an environmentally-friendly event. We have been recognized by NC Green Travel at their highest level for our sustainable practices. It is important that we walk the talk, lead by example and be good stewards of our environment. Below is a list of practices we have committed to for the event. In addition to the weekend of Ocean Fest, we all, as leaders of the event, should strive to carry these practices into our daily lives, at home and in the community.

### WASTE REDUCTION EFFORTS:

- Reduce paper waste - communicate electronically when possible, reuse paper for scrap/note taking, recycle used paper
- Plastic bottle water & other single-use plastics are very strongly discouraged - not allowed.
- Encourage refillable/reusable bottles, cups & containers
- Water refill stations are being provided and will be staffed. We will be selling high-quality reusable water bottles.
- Food vendors using compostable serving ware; No styrofoam allowed
- Reusable signage, avoid using specific dates, chalkboard signage
- Wilmington Compost is providing industrial composting service for the event
- Plastic films will be recycled (plastic bags, overwrap, shrink wrap, shipping bags) - these can all be recycled at most grocery stores in the "plastic bag" bin. If you have any plastic films to recycle during the

event, please bring them to the TILA or Ocean Fest booth by the Eco Expo.

- Durability & reusability of items will be considered when purchasing items for Ocean Fest.

#### ENERGY MANAGEMENT:

- Energy Star/energy efficient equipment is used in planning & operation of Ocean Fest wherever possible. LED lighting is encouraged.
- Solar power is used wherever possible - we will have small solar charging stations this year and are looking into larger solar power sources for future years.

#### GREEN TRANSPORTATION:

- Bike racks will be available and biking to the event is encouraged, ie: bike-in concert
- Shuttle service used to reduce cars on the island
- No-idling policy in place - vendors & shuttle should be encouraged to cut off engines while unloading & loading. This conserves fuel and reduces emissions. Education & Promotion
- Waste stations (trash/recycle/compost) will be staffed to avoid contamination of compost & recycle & to educate about proper recycling and composting. Informational signage will be attached
- Messaging during intermissions to help attendees know how & where to dispose of waste and where to find the water refill stations. Also, messaging from our Eco Expo partners engage about various issues.
- We need to inform attendees about what to expect at the event; in particular, encourage them to bring reusable water bottles/cups. This can be done through advertising and social media.
- 11 nonprofit environmental organizations are participating in the Eco Zone. In addition to Wilmington Compost & GFL will be engaging attendees about proper waste management practices.

- We will be tracing/estimating the amount of compost & recyclables that are diverted from landfills and advertising that after Ocean Fest.
- There will be a clean up after Ocean Fest to ensure that we leave no trace.

I appreciate everyone's support in making Ocean Fest the "Greenest" festival possible, or maybe I should say the "Bluest". If you have any ideas for additional things we can do to be even better, please let me know. This is a team effort and I appreciate all of your support.

Jan Farmer  
Ocean Fest Sustainability & Eco Zone Coordinator  
[eco@theoceanfest.org](mailto:eco@theoceanfest.org)  
919-753-7440



---

















Ocean Fest - To Surf & Prote

OCEAN FEST

Fat Tire

POP  
PLASTIC  
OCEAN

SHOP FOR POP

Hello Fall

Current Projects



Plastic Literacy Project

Our First Community Clean-Up



POP PLASTIC OCEAN