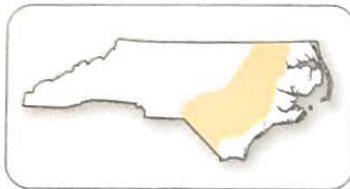
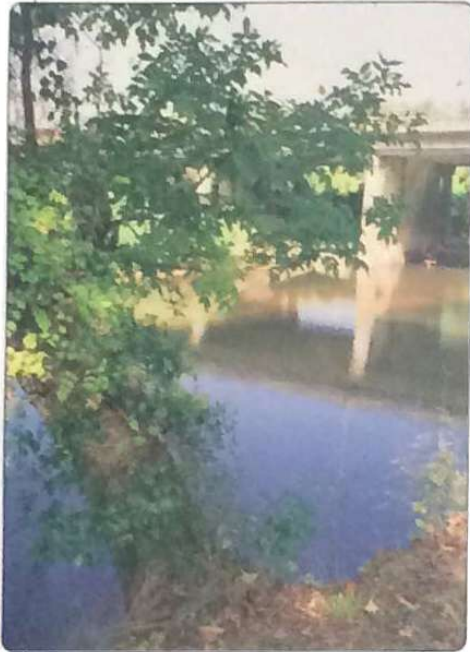


## Section 2

# The Coastal Plain Region

### As you read, look for:

- the features of the Coastal Plain region
- types of traditional communities in the Coastal Plain
- the Carolina bays and the Sandhills
- vocabulary terms **crossroads hamlets, tobacco towns, Carolina bays**



The richest soil in the state is to be found in many areas of the **Coastal Plain**. The region takes up about a third of the area of North Carolina. It slants from the northeast to the southwest, going all the way from the Virginia border to the South Carolina line. The Plain averages about a hundred miles in width. It has two central characteristics: (1) its flat-





ness and (2) its soil, both of which contribute to its role as the chief farming region of the state.

The rivers of the Coastal Plain generally flow southeasterly. Most flow into the sounds of the Tidewater region. The Roanoke, Tar, and Neuse are the major rivers that do so. The Cape Fear River, which rises in the Piedmont, is the longest river entirely in North Carolina. The river flows past Fayetteville and Elizabethtown before it reaches Wilmington and the Atlantic Ocean.

Great stretches of the Coastal Plain seem to go on forever, since in many areas large fields, sometimes several miles across, have been cleared for farming. Through most of the region's history, farms were scattered out across the landscape a half mile or more apart. This has made the area seem the most rural in the state. Traditionally, its residents have lived in two types of communities, the rural crossroads and the small tobacco town.

**Crossroads hamlets** dot the region. Often they have had a store or two, or a school or church, that provide goods and services to the nearby farmers, who have neither the time nor the money to go to town frequently. These community centers are generally named for local residents, like Ballard's Crossroads near Farmville or Hill's Crossroads near Wallace.

**Opposite page, above:** The Neuse River at Smithfield. **Below:** Ballard's Crossroads is a typical gathering place on the Coastal Plain. **Bottom:** Cotton has recently made a rebound as a moneymaker for farmers on the Coastal Plain. This field is near Jackson in Northampton County.







## Tobacco Towns

Tobacco towns have been a part of the Coastal Plain since it was first settled in colonial days. In the twentieth century, the popularity of cigarette smoking caused these towns to grow. People in the towns focused their activities around the raising of tobacco. Rocky Mount, Greenville, Wilson, and Goldsboro provided marketing outlets for the largest tobacco-growing region in the world. Each of these towns had more than a half dozen tobacco warehouses—



**Top:** Railroads still run down the middle of Main Street in Rocky Mount, a famed tobacco town of the twentieth century. **Above:** Bright-leaf tobacco has a distinctive golden hue. **Opposite page, below:** Singletary Lake State Park is located around a Carolina bay.

large cavernous sheds where harvested tobacco was stored until purchased by cigarette companies. Everyone from bankers to farm equipment dealers scheduled their business around the tobacco harvest. On the special market day, an auctioneer sang out the bids as he and the buyers went up and down the rows of tobacco stacks. At the height of tobacco production in the mid-1900s, almost every town in the Coastal Plain, from Fairmont on the South Carolina border to Henderson near Virginia, had at least one warehouse.

The traditional tobacco barn, a tall, thin square of logs or planks, was to be seen everywhere on the Coastal Plain. This tobacco was flue-cured, dried for the market with low levels of heat that made it mild enough for



cigarette smoking. Recently, however, computer-controlled “barns” made of insulated metal and plastic are used for drying. The old tobacco barn is becoming as much a thing of the past as the log cabin. Recent hurricanes have damaged thousands of them; only a few have been repaired. In addition, every year fewer and fewer Coastal Plain residents grow tobacco. Two factors are the cause of that decline: (1) health risks associated with smoking and (2) the cutoff of government payments that guaranteed farmers they would eventually be able to sell their leaf at a profit.

Before there were tobacco fields, the longleaf pine was the most common sight on the Coastal Plain. Geographers think that more than ten million acres of pine forest covered the region. The tree gradually disappeared from the landscape. At first it was cut down for lumber and for making tar; later the land was cleared for growing tobacco and other crops. In the twenty-first century, better management of resources has stabilized the tree. Today it is mostly found in the southern part of the Coastal Plain, particularly in the Bladen Lakes State Forest near the Cape Fear River. Because of its historical importance to North Carolina, the longleaf pine is the state tree. The tree that often grows in the midst of pine forests, the dogwood, provides the blossom that is the state flower.

### Carolina Bays

The longleaf pine grows around some of the biggest curiosities in the state. In the southern part of the Coastal Plain are hundreds of elongated depressions in the ground called **Carolina bays**. They range in size from a half mile to two miles long and about a mile wide. No one can figure out exactly why they are there or how they were created. Some, like White Lake or Singletary Lake, are filled with water. Others resemble the surface

### Did You Know?

The longleaf pine was so named because its needle can be as long as fifteen inches.





**Below:** The sandy soil of the Sandhills lies between the sandy loam of the Coastal Plain and the clay of the Piedmont. **Bottom:** Vast longleaf pine forests once covered the Coastal Plain. These woods are at Weymouth Woods-Sandhills Nature Preserve near Southern Pines.



of pocosins—mucky part of the year, dry the other. Quite a few have been drained and plowed up to make rich farmland.

Scientists still argue about their origin. For a long time, it was argued that an ancient shower of meteors fell from outer space and made the holes. This idea came from the fact that the bays are all lined up, as if some giant flung water into the sand of a huge beach. The problem with that idea is that no one has found evidence of meteorites—what's left after the meteor explodes. The other idea is that the bays are sink holes. That is, they are areas of ground that are above bodies of water and thus sink down when the water table changes. But no one has proven that idea, so it is still an open question. What is unquestionable is that they provide some of the richest soil and best animal habitats in the state.

## The Sandhills

To the northwest of the Carolina bays are the **Sandhills**. These concentrations of rolling sand ridges are left over from an ancient change in the shoreline of the Atlantic Ocean. They have, by far, the poorest soils in the state, since the sand allows all the topsoil nutrients to drain away. Where they are the most concentrated, the Sandhills shine whiter than the whitest beach on a summer day. They were put to two good uses during the twentieth century: (1) golf courses in places like Pinehurst, where the World Golf Hall of Fame is located;







and (2) Fort Bragg, the huge military installation near Fayetteville, originally designed to be a training ground for artillery. It was thought during the world wars that the missiles would land without much damage in the deep sand. Today, Fort Bragg is home to one of the most important units in the United States Army, the 82nd Airborne Division.

The Coastal Plain has long attracted people of different ethnic backgrounds who came to take advantage of its dark soil and other resources. Many white residents are descendants of colonial settlers from Virginia or South Carolina. The first concentration of African American slaves was in the area along the Cape Fear River. When tobacco became important, African Americans from other parts of the state moved into the region. Many recent migrants from Mexico and other parts of Latin America have moved to the Coastal Plain to work the land. The most distinctive people of the Coastal Plain are the Lumbee of Robeson County. They form the largest population of Native Americans in the state.

**Above:** Golfers from around the world come to Pinehurst. The Golf Hall of Fame was originally located in the village.

## It's Your Turn

1. What are the two types of traditional communities in the Coastal Plain?
2. What are the Carolina bays?
3. Where are the poorest soils in the state?