



**Masonboro Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
March 16, 2017 – 3 pm
Habitat Conference Room, UNCW CMS**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
NC Audubon, Walker Golder	No
Friends of the Reserve (FOR)	No
New Hanover County Sheriff's Office, Sergeant Steve Schmidlin	Yes
New Hanover County Planning Department, Dylan McDonnell	No
NC Coastal Land Trust, Jesica Blake	No
Division of Marine Fisheries	No
Division of Parks and Recreation – CB, Chris Helms	No
Town of Wrightsville Beach	No
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations</u>	
<u>Members</u>	
Neal Andrew	Yes
Richard Cecelski	No
Masonboro.org, Richard Johnson	Yes
Haywood Newkirk	Yes
William Raney	Yes
Pat Rittenmeyer	No
Sam Romano	No
Dr. Anthony Snider	Yes
Surfrider, Cape Fear – Peter Gillman-Bryan	Yes
Ted Wilgis	No
Martin Willard	No
Dr. Amanda Williard	No
<u>Others Present</u>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator & Southern Sites Manager	
Heather Wells, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Research Specialist	

Elizabeth Colhoun, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Specialist
Elise Gilchrist, DCM NCCR & NCNERR Communications Specialist
Rebecca Ellin, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Reserve Program Manager

Welcome – Hope Sutton

The Site Manager welcomed the committee to the Spring 2017 meeting and explained that the focus of this meeting would be the NCNERR management plan update. The Site Manager reminded the committee that a site update was sent out electronically prior to the meeting and explained that there would be time at the end of the meeting for questions/comments regarding the site update.

NCNERR Management Plan Update – Rebecca Ellin

The Reserve Program Manager welcomed the committee and thanked the members for their participation in the management plan update process.

The Program Manager explained that the purpose of the meeting was to review the updated NCNERR management plan and gather feedback from the local advisory committee. She provided a brief overview of the management plan update process including: the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's requirement to have and maintain an updated management plan that adheres to guidelines established for all Reserves within the National Estuarine Research Reserve System; the public input process that the NCNERR conducted to inform the plan update; the history of NCNERR management plans and that the document constitute the fourth plan for the NC Reserve; and reminded the committee of the four themes identified from the public input process - program visibility, visitor use, research awareness, and partnerships. Committee members were reminded to submit written comments on the plan to the Program Manager by March 22.

The Program Manager reviewed the agenda for this portion of the meeting: discuss each section of the plan; discuss general questions regarding the plan; public comments; and next steps.

Section by section review of the management plan

The Program Manager walked the committee through each section of the plan, providing an overview of each section and requesting input on the following questions for each section: What works well in this section? What needs improvement in this section? What suggestions would you make to improve this section? The input is provided by section.

Introduction

- Mr. Andrew shared that the plan is very well organized and a thorough document.

- Dr. Snider commented that the maps are excellent.

Education Program Plan

- Mr. Johnson asked how many teachers are trained per year. Staff shared that the target is 50 annually in the new plan. Mr. Johnson and Rebecca discussed the benefit of discussing teacher education opportunities with New Hanover County School System to provide effective training opportunities in the area and connect the teacher professional development to the Masonboro Island Explorer Program.
- Mr. Johnson also commented that the plan displays how the education program has grown over the years. The committee acknowledged the work of Marie Davis, former southern Sites Education Specialist, in accomplishing this.
- Mr. Newkirk asked how many students the education program reaches. Staff reminded the committee that outreach activities out of the Southern Sites office are focused on the general public rather than students and provided the numbers reached through the Reserve education programs. Mr. Johnson provided the numbers reached through the Masonboro Island Explorer program. Haywood shared that it is crucial to get students to understand the importance of the reserves and thereby protect the island.

Coastal Training Program Plan

- Mr. Gillman-Bryan asked about where this program targets audiences and Mr. Johnson asked how many individuals are served. Staff stated that the reach of the program includes many coastal communities surrounding Reserve sites and 20 coastal counties and numbers served reaches between 300-400 individuals via more than 12 events in 2016.

Research and Monitoring Plan

- Mr. Johnson asked for clarification on what was meant by coastal decision makers and how they receive information. Rebecca stated that information is shared with researchers and those who make decisions regarding coastal resources as part of their jobs through workshops and presentations. The Reserve tracks this and data are available through a variety of means depending on the type of data. Dr. Snider inquired about the proposed federal budget for FY18 and how that may jeopardize the NC Coastal Research Fellowship, jointly funded with NC Sea Grant, and how members may be able to help support the Reserve through the budget negotiation. Rebecca discussed what information is available and how the Reserve is working with partners to gather support and promote the Reserve.

Stewardship Plan

- Mr. Johnson asked about the dredge material policy and inquired if it is new. Staff shared that the policy remains the same and that there is now better communication between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Reserve regarding projects.
- Mr. Andrew recommended communicating with the county sand manager to make ensure that Wrightsville Beach and Masonboro Island are coordinating regarding sand availability for placement on the Reserve.
- Committee members asked several informational questions regarding the allowable use table. Staff clarified that it is allowable to remove shells and dead sand dollars and that the signage posted regarding camping satisfies the posted permission in 15A NCAC 70

and more detail regarding camping is available on the Reserve's website. Committee members reiterated the desire to maintain compatible recreational use. Staff clarified the origins of references to the compatible recreational use language in the Coastal Area Management Act and 15A NCAC 7O and shared that the stewardship program is responsible for protecting the sites for research, education, and compatible traditional uses including recreation. Mr. Johnson inquired about the local dog leash rule and why that is applicable on the Reserve. Staff shared that the Attorney General's office has provided guidance that county ordinances can be enforced on Reserve sites.

- Dr. Snider acknowledged that the chapter does a nice job of recognizing partnerships.

Topical Areas

- Mr. Gillman-Bryan inquired about the outcome of the shellfish lease meeting. Staff responded that the activity is not mentioned in the current version of the plan as the department is coordinating with the Natural Heritage Program on next steps. It is anticipated that the outcome will be included in the final version of the plan.
- Dr. Snider suggested working more closely with the stormwater staff person at the City of Wilmington.
- Mr. Raney inquired whether looking at the entire watershed is a new focus and expressed caution in taking on more than can be handled.
- Dr. Snider commented that this chapter is a nice addition.

Administration Plan

- Mr. Johnson asked about the Reserve's capacity to fundraise. Staff and the committee discussed the opportunities for the program to supplement operational funds, including external grants and donations.

Facility Development and Improvement Plan

- Mr. Johnson acknowledged that the signage at the site has been very helpful and that the kayak trail is a great idea. Anthony offered that the Environmental Science Department could help with the development of a kayak trail using students.

General questions

The committee discussed the following general questions regarding the plan.

- Is the format and presentation of the plan effective? Is the plan user friendly and easy to read/navigate? Are the maps, keys, and images easy to read and understand?
 - Yes to all questions.
 - The plan is a positive step forward from the previous plan.
- Four themes emerged from the public input process: program visibility, visitor use, research awareness, and partnerships. Does the plan adequately acknowledge and address these themes through its goals, objectives and actions?
 - Mr. Johnson suggested that the plan could strengthen its explanation of the benefits of the Reserve to the public and promote its partnerships more.

- Dr. Snider mentioned that there is still a need to increase public knowledge about the Reserve but feels the plan does a great job of outlining how the Reserve plans to do that.
- Mr. Johnson recommended improvements to the website and improving how research is communicated overall.
- Mr. Gillman-Bryan stated that having more members of the public aware of what the Reserve does will help with support for the program.
- Dr. Snider recommended considering additional ways to utilize the amount of reporting that is conducted by the Reserve and researchers conducting projects at the sites to share activities and impacts.

Public comments

- Three members of the public were present; no comments were made.

Next steps

The Program Manager provided an overview of the next steps in the management plan process. The deadline for committee members to submit written comments on the plan is March 22. The plan will be updated to reflect local advisory committee input and presented to the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission at their April 2017 meeting. The Department of Environmental Quality and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will then review the plan. A 30-day public comment period for the draft management plan will be scheduled after all reviews are complete and 3 public meetings, in the northern, central and southern regions of the coast, will be scheduled during the comment period. The Program Manager thanked the committee members for their review of the plan and thoughtful comments.

Site Update and Old Business – Hope Sutton

The following written update was provided to the committee in advance of the meeting.

Staffing Update

- Elizabeth Colhoun joined the Coastal Reserve in January as the Stewardship and Education Specialist. She will spend approximately 75% of her time supporting stewardship activities and 25% on education activities. Originally from Apex, NC, Elizabeth attended UNC-Wilmington for an undergraduate degree in Oceanography (2011-2015). While at UNCW, she worked as a summer intern with the Coastal Reserve assisting in the sea turtle monitoring program on Masonboro. She recently completed a Master's degree in Marine Biology at Nova Southeastern University in Florida where she worked for USGS as a research assistant focusing on benthic organisms and seagrass health in the Port of Miami. She also worked as a sea turtle specialist for the Broward County Sea Turtle Conservation Program monitoring nesting and hatching sea turtles.

Species of concern monitoring programs

- A predator removal effort was completed during February. Two red foxes and six raccoons were removed. Wildlife cameras were utilized before, during, and following the removal operation to inform best management practices for these and similar efforts. This work and the shorebird monitoring technician for the season are being funded through a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, for which Masonboro is being utilized as a demonstration site. This grant, obtained in partnership with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission and Audubon North Carolina, involves efforts to protect and manage shorebirds across the Atlantic Flyway. The American oystercatcher (AMOY) will continue to be the focus of monitoring efforts; least terns and Wilson's plovers will also be documented. Audubon will continue to support these efforts by providing training for the seasonal monitor, leading banding of adults and hatchlings, and supporting transportation occasionally. One focus for the season will be to improve understanding of the causes of nest failure through utilization of wildlife cameras.
- Sea turtle nesting monitoring will begin in May. A seasonal staff person will be hired to assist with coordination of this effort and to maintain quality control of data and samples. The annual session for community members interested in participating as volunteers to support sea turtle monitoring will be held on Thursday, April 20, from 6-7:30 pm in the Center for Marine Science auditorium.
- The Terrapin Tally for 2017 is scheduled for April 29, May 6 and May 13. Training dates for participants are April 6 from 6-8 pm or April 8 from 10-12 pm. Times on the data collection days vary, depending on the tides. This citizen science effort is in its fourth year. Reserve staff attended the Diamondback Terrapin Working Group meeting in October to rally interest among the members in building on the project to develop a customized phone application for data collection and to expand data collection to a wider area. A recently submitted National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant, coordinated through SC Department of Natural Resources, if funded, will pay for this effort, which the Coastal Reserve will help to coordinate in partnership with NC WRC.

Outreach programs

- Given the more limited focus on education in the Southern Sites office, general public outreach for the spring will consist of engaging community members in species of concern activities (sea turtle, shorebird, diamondback terrapin) and community paddling events on March 24, June 8 and June 23.

Volunteer programs

- A volunteer work day for the Feather Friends program will be held on Saturday, April 1 from 10 am -1 pm at the Big Bay landing just north and east of the Trails End Park boat ramp. Volunteers will assist with installation of bird nesting protection enclosures.
- Other volunteer activities upcoming include sea turtle nest monitoring and the Terrapin tally, discussed above.

Action Items

- The Reserve Program Manager will inform committee members when the public comment period for the management plan is scheduled.
- The Site Manager will contact committee members to plan the next meeting.