



**Zeke's Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
November 8, 2017 – 10 am
Fort Fisher Recreation Area Education Room**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Division of Archives and History, Nathan Henry	No
Division of Parks and Recreation – FFRA, Jeff Owen	Yes
NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher, Renee Weeks	Yes
<u>Community Members</u>	
Captain John Carty	No
Dr. Anthony Snider	No
<u>Others Present</u>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager	
Scott Pohlman, Natural Heritage Program	
Steve Rice, prospective committee member	

Welcome – Hope Sutton

The Site Manager welcomed the committee to the Fall 2017 meeting and reviewed the agenda.

Reserve-wide Update – Hope Sutton

The Reserve-wide Update now includes a broader range of Reserve activities with the addition of a new section titled “Recent and Upcoming Program Activities”. This section will share events that committee members may be interested in and enhance the awareness of activities across the Reserve’s programs. The activity descriptions are intentionally brief; committee members may request more information and/or future presentations for topics of interest and find event information on the event calendar at www.nccoastalreserve.net.

Periodic Rules Review

Both the Rules Review Commission (RRC) and the Joint Legislative Administrative Procedures Oversight Committee approved the rules review report for the Coastal Reserve rules 15A NCAC

070 this summer. These actions follow input received on the classification of each rule in 070 from the local advisory committees (Spring 2016), N.C. Coastal Resources Commission (July 2016), and a 60-day public comment period (September-November 2016). One comment was received during the public comment period and it was supportive of the proposed classification of the rules. The rules identified in the final report must be readopted using the permanent rulemaking process. Staff is working with the Department to establish a timeline and process for readoption.

Federal Budget

The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget for fiscal years 17 and 18 as it relates to the Coastal Reserve. Recall that the federal fiscal year is October 1-September 30. The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) budget line provides funding to the 29 reserves within the System through cooperative agreements that are matched by the states, and supports national coordination of programs and implementation of system-wide and competitive projects. The Coastal Zone Management (CZM) grants budget line provides funding to coastal states with approved coastal management programs through cooperative agreements that are matched by the states. The Division of Coastal Management (DCM) receives funding from both budget lines to operate the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve (NCNERR) and N.C. Coastal Management Program. The CZM grant funds DCM receives provides funding for Reserve staffing, state site operations, and administrative support.

Federal Budget Lines	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2017	President’s Budget Request FY2018	House Appropriations FY2018	Senate Appropriations FY2018
NERRS	23,500	0	23,500	25,000
CZM Grants	70,000	0	45,000	70,000

In thousands of dollars

- Federal Fiscal Year 17: Congress approved the federal budget for fiscal year 17 in April with a \$500,000 increase for the NERRS (see budget table), resulting in a \$14,000 increase to base operational funding for each reserve within the System. As a result, the DCM received \$633,000 from NOAA for operation of the NCNERR portion of the Coastal Reserve during this state fiscal year (July 2017-June 2018). The additional funds are being used to cover fixed cost increases and to fund a portion of the temporary staffing positions through the annual budget.
- Federal Fiscal Year 18: Congress passed a continuing resolution in September to fund the federal government from October 1, 2017 through December 8, 2017 based on fiscal year 17 funding levels. The budget table summarizes the President’s budget request and the House and Senate appropriations committees’ numbers for fiscal year 18:
 - The President’s budget request does not include funding for the NERRS or the CZM grants budget lines.
 - The House supports fiscal year 17 level funding for the NERRS and the Senate supports a \$1.5 million increase for the NERRS.

- The House reduces funding for the CZM grants to \$45 million and the Senate supports fiscal year 17 level funding for the CZM grants.

Next steps for the federal fiscal year 18 budget include individual House and Senate votes for their fiscal year 18 budgets and then a conference between the chambers to agree on a final budget.

Thank you to the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association and Friends of the Reserve for their work to educate Congress on the value of the national system and the NCNERR.

Staffing News

- Michelle Brodeur started as the Reserve's new Communications Specialist in August. Michelle is a marine ecologist who recently completed her PhD at UNC Institute of Marine Sciences. As a graduate student, she worked as a NOAA-NERRS Fellow to explore how interactions within oyster reef communities affect oyster reef growth and restoration success in the Rachel Carson Reserve. Michelle has always held a passion for science communication and is excited to join the Reserve staff as the Communications Specialist. She brings her knowledge of estuarine ecosystems and her experience communicating research to broad audiences through formal education, public outreach events, and filmmaking.
- Elizabeth Colhoun, the Stewardship and Education Specialist working in the Southern Sites office, will continue with the Reserve for an additional 11-month period starting in late January.

Recent and Upcoming Program Activities

- **Coastal Explorations Educator Workshop (11/2/2017)** - Beaufort: Participants of this workshop will learn about estuaries and the Reserve program through classroom activities that they can use with their students and groups. Field-based explorations and activities will also be conducted during a field trip to the Rachel Carson Reserve. Teacher renewal credits and Environmental Education Certification credits are offered for this workshop.
- **Coastal Government Planning for Open Space Workshop (11/30/2017 Wilmington & 12/5/2017 Plymouth)**: Participants will learn about the benefits of open space protection; learn how open space can service multiple needs; identify contacts that build framework for open space protection; and learn how other communities approach open space protection. This event is being held in partnership with the Division of Coastal Management.
- **Marine Planning Process Workshop (1/8-9/2018)** - Beaufort: Marine and coastal resource managers are challenged to address key ocean challenges, give states and communities greater input in governmental decisions, streamline federal and international decision-making, save taxpayer dollars, and promote economic growth. This course provides managers with the tools to utilize effective marine planning techniques.
Partners: Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment.

- **CCVATCH NERRS Science Collaborative Transfer Grant:** The Reserve received a Science Transfer grant with the North Inlet-Winyah Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve to facilitate the use of a new tool, known as the Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment Tool for Coastal Habitats (CCVATCH), to assess habitat vulnerability to ecosystem stressors using the knowledge of Reserve staff and local experts. To enhance resilience through management actions, the tool produces vulnerability scores which can help guide and prioritize land acquisition, restoration, policy, and other management decisions. Meetings are currently underway to score the vulnerability of marshes at the 4 national sites in North Carolina.
- **Seeds to Shoreline NERRS Science Collaborative Transfer Grant:** The Reserve is a partner on a multi-Reserve project through which participating teachers and students will learn hydroponic growing techniques to grow saltmarsh cordgrass (*Spartina alterniflora*) in their classrooms and plant for future restoration efforts. *Partners:* Guana Tolomato Matanzas NERR, ACE Basin NERR, North Inlet-Winyah Bay NERR, Sapelo Island NERR, and the marine education specialist with the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium.
- **Thin Layer Deposition NERRS Science Collaborative Grant:** The Reserve will serve as an experimental site for a project testing the effectiveness of thin-layer sediment placement as a climate adaptation strategy. The project tests how small additions of sediment affect the resilience of marshes to sea level rise and develops standardized monitoring protocols as well as siting and permitting guides for this technique. *Partners:* Elkhorn Slough, Great Bay, Waquoit Bay, Chesapeake Bay Maryland, Chesapeake Bay Virginia, and San Francisco Bay NERRS; University of New Hampshire.

LAC member nomination process

- The Reserve will be accepting applications for Local Advisory Committee members from January 8 – February 5. The application will be available through the Reserve’s website and will be publicized via press release. The community members whose seats are expiring on the Zeke’s Island committee are Dr. Anthony Snider and Captain John Carty. The remaining community member seats have been extended through December 31, 2019. Partner organizations and agencies hold permanent seats. This committee would benefit from representation from a commercial entity conducting educational activities and a recreational/traditional user. Current members are encouraged to share names of community members who could be approached to apply or to directly encourage individuals to consider serving the site in this capacity. Following the application period, the Reserve staff will review applications, utilize a matrix to rank the applicants, and forward the names and applications to the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality for review and appointment. It is hoped that new members will be selected and notified in time to attend the spring meeting of the committee in May.

Site Update and Old Business – Hope Sutton

General site conditions

- Conditions at the site have been typical of the season with moderate numbers of visitors and an increase in ocean beach fishing. Overall visitation appears to be continuing to

increase compared to several years ago, based on spot checks of high tide and weekend activity around the basin and boat ramp areas. Mr. Owen stated that although overall visitation at the Fort Fisher Recreation Area was down, use of the 4-wheel drive area of the beach had increased.

- Mr. Owen reported that crossover 4 is permanently closed to allow for bird nesting and crossover 3 was partially closed during the nesting season. Rangers monitor nesting and post closure areas with 4x4's and rope. No visitor uses are disallowed as a result of these closures, but the total amount of area available for some activities is smaller. He also reported that bird nesting was impacted by predation by coyotes.

Site activities

- Reserve staff and volunteers visited the site in May to install signs in heavy use areas on Zeke's Island proper. Site name signs, signs displaying visitor use rules, and "no camping" and "no campfires" signs were installed in several areas that regularly show these types of uses. Several bags of trash were also removed from these areas. Motion activated cameras were installed during the same visit in areas showing signs of wildlife activity. Although the cameras were left in place for approximately six weeks, no wildlife was photo-documented.
- Reserve staff visited the site in April to conduct treatment of the white poplar stand. Multiple treatments will be needed, as the stand is quite extensive and many individual trees are 2-14 inches in diameter. The next round of treatment will be undertaken during the off season.
- Ms. Weeks reported that the Aquarium had conducted less canoe trips than usual due to weather conditions. They continue to use canoe trips as service learning opportunities to complete cleanups on Zeke's Island proper. They completed a total of 10 canoe trips with 148 participants.

New Business – Hope Sutton

Access Study

- The Reserve has contracted researchers from UNCW to conduct a study to better understand how the public is accessing the sites and how public access can be better supported. The Masonboro Island Reserve is one of six sites that will be included in this study. The process will include focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and on-site surveys. It is hoped that this study will help the Reserve understand patterns of use, prioritize access improvements, and support potential applications for access improvements.

Natural Heritage Program – Scott Pohlman

- The Site Manager introduced Scott Pohlman, Property Manager for the Natural Heritage Program. Mr. Pohlman provided a presentation describing the Natural Heritage Program, its purpose and activities, and the Nature Preserves Act. The status of the sites of the Coastal Reserve as Dedicated State Nature Preserves and how this affects management of the sites was also discussed. The Dedication letter describing the expectations for management of the Masonboro Island Reserve is included in the

NCNERR Management Plan and the Natural Heritage Program staff has worked closely with the Reserve staff on many topics at various sites. Discussion about various activities on the sites demonstrated that differing definitions of words such as “traditional” and “commercial” and a variety of interpretations of how management principles need to be applied may exist. The Department of Natural and Cultural Heritage through the Natural Heritage Program has the authority to interpret and enforce the dedication letters; however, it will continue to work with the Coastal Reserve to ensure that the Reserve’s mission and purposes are also met.

Roundtable

- The Site Manager expressed gratitude for the strong ongoing partnership with the Division of Parks and the Aquarium. She also thanked the Natural Heritage Program for attending and providing information to the committee members.

Public comments

- Mr. Rice expressed his desire to get involved with the site and his intention to apply for a seat of the LAC.

Action Items

- The Site Manger will be in touch with committee members to plan a next meeting.