



**Bird Island Reserve  
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, December 3, 2020, 9 am  
WebEx**

**Attendance**

<b><u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u></b>	<b><u>Present</u></b>
NC Coastal Land Trust – Jessica Blake	Yes
NC Coastal Federation – Lauren Kolodij	Yes
Bird Island Preservation Society - Bill Ducker	Yes
Sunset Beach Police Department	No
Town of Sunset Beach Administration – Cindy Steveson	Yes
Natural Heritage Program – Scott Pohlman	Yes
<b><u>Community Members and Community Organization Members</u></b>	<b><u>Present</u></b>
Katie Hovermale	Yes
Noelle Kehrberg	Yes
Jud Watkins	Yes
Sunset Beach Turtle Patrol - Carmel Zetts	No
Cape Fear Audubon – Charley Winterbauer	No
<b><u>Others Present</u></b>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR, Stewardship Coordinator and Southern Sites Manager	
Elizabeth Colhoun, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Specialist	
Whitney Jenkins, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Coastal Training Program Coordinator	

**Welcome – Hope Sutton**

The site manager welcomed the committee to the Fall 2020 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and called roll. A brief introduction to the web meeting platform was provided by Whitney Jenkins, NCCR Coastal Training Program Coordinator.

## **Reserve-wide Administrative Update – Hope Sutton**

The Reserve-wide Update, which includes a range of Reserve activities and information was shared with committee members prior to the meeting. Members had no comments or questions about the updates. The Update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

## **Site Update and Old Business – Hope Sutton**

- *General site conditions*
  - The upland portions of the Bird Island Reserve, including the ocean beach, were closed from April 3 through May 9 to support state and local efforts to reduce the spread of Covid-19. During this period and throughout the stay-at-home period of the Governor’s emergency declarations, visitation at the site was lower due to parking and visitor restrictions implemented by the Town of Sunset Beach. The site was reopened to support access to outdoor recreation for socially distanced activities. Reserve staff communicated with local volunteers and then visited the site following Hurricane Isaias to assess storm impacts. In general, the tropical storm season had only moderate effects on the site with no major dune loss and deposition of small quantities of marine debris.
- *Seasonal activities*
  - After much consideration and discussion, the local volunteers and the reserve decided to cancel the weekly public field trip for the season to protect the safety of the volunteer field trip leaders and the public. Reserve staff, with input from and coordination with the local community, created a virtual field trip so that potential field trip participants could still receive much of the information typically shared during the on-site field trips. The virtual field trip was designed using a “story map” format and can be viewed at: <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/d504acc8679d454eb52a9f5c8d6fed29>
  - The site manager expressed gratitude for the efforts of the local volunteers who support the education and stewardship missions of the reserve so strongly in their ongoing work on the site. Also, the site manager thanked the Sunset Beach Turtle Watch for their efforts to identify, protect, and monitor sea turtle nests at the site.
- *Site work/trail maintenance*
  - The eastern welcome sign was moved to a location on the new parcel near the new eastern boundary of the site during May and local volunteers conducted trail maintenance and moved a bench to the end of the loop portion of the nature trail during June. Reserve staff and interns met local stewards and visited the site on October 15 to conduct trail maintenance and clean up remaining storm debris. Purchase of replacement signage and additional trail markers was delayed, so these items will be installed during the winter months. Ms. Hovermale stated her thanks for the efforts of the Bird Island Stewards to clean up the site and conduct trail maintenance during the season, as well as to Ms. Kehrberg for her ongoing efforts to maintain the on-site trail cameras.
- *Wildlife camera project*
  - Wildlife cameras have been continuously deployed and have been maintained by member Noelle Kehrberg. The photos and videos collected have documented the regular presence of several mammal species. The reserve is considering ways to formalize this work to allow for images to be used to predict population abundance or density as well as ways to use these

photos and videos for outreach purposes. Ms. Kolodij and Mr. Pohlman expressed interest in these data and images being available to other public entities and the public.

- *Personal watercraft regulations*
  - Following conversation with Mrs. Hovermale over concerns about personal watercraft operating in the creeks within the reserve boundary, the site manager looked into the regulations associated with PWC and met with a representative from the Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC), the agency responsible for enforcing these regulations. The activities witnessed and described by property owners adjacent to the reserve appear to be within the acceptable operation standards. The WRC can ticket PWC operators for reckless operation under certain conditions, but it is a difficult activity to address directly as it is rare for enforcement officers to be in a specific location at the moment that the activity is occurring. Outreach and education to increase awareness about the nature preserve boundaries and to encourage responsible PWC operation was suggested as the most effective way to address these concerns. This topic has been added to the list of possible outreach activities associated with this site for 2021.

### **New Business – Hope Sutton**

- *Permit hunt program*
  - The Reserve is pursuing working with the Wildlife Resources Commission to include the Bird Island Reserve in the permit hunting program. This change would allow the Reserve to work with the WRC to customize the regulations around hunting to best suit site conditions and serve both management and adjacent community concerns such as visitor conflicts. It would result in the WRC including the site in the 2021-22 Hunting Regulations Digest where information about the sites and would include the requirement to obtain a permit before hunting and to report take. For the Bird Island Reserve, inclusion in the permit hunt program would help Reserve staff better manage potential visitor conflicts and better understand what types and levels of hunting are occurring at the site. The Reserve is interested in gathering any input from committee members regarding this approach.
    - Committee members suggested strengthening the existing rules regarding distance from residential structures hunters can engage in hunting activities. They also expressed support for considering limits on the types of firearms that could be used on site, noting that shotguns have less range and power, and for limiting the number of days per week hunting would be allowed, particularly to make weekends off limit due to the level of recreational users at the site on weekends. Members also expressed appreciate for addressing these concerns in a controlled and regulated way through the NCWRC.
- *Member selection process*
  - Some of the Reserve's Local Advisory Committees have members whose terms have expired, so we will be preparing to hold a member application and selection process during the late spring or early summer of 2021. We wanted to provide this advance notice to committee members since the application period will be announced to the public in conjunction with the press release for the spring meetings. As per the Operating Procedures, individual and organizational community members are allowed to serve consecutive terms but must reapply to be considered. No members of the Bird Island Reserve's committee's terms are expiring until 2023, but an application period does make it

possible for additional community members to join the committee if the need and interest exist.

- *Pandemic friendly outreach*
  - During this time of socially distanced activities, the reserve has been working to creatively modify public outreach offerings. In addition to the development of the virtual field trip discussed above, the reserve is looking forward to offering volunteers the opportunity to get involved with collecting data about diamondback terrapins at the Bird Island Reserve during the spring of 2021. Working with a variety of partners along the coast, the reserve is expanding the Terrapin Tally, a citizen science project designed to collect diamondback terrapin population data through repeated head count surveys. The project will include a virtual training during April and data collection sessions during May. This project, conducted in partnership with the Wildlife Resources Commission and piloted at the Masonboro Island Reserve, will be expanded to up to ten sites, including the Bird Island Reserve, in 2021. The Reserve is working to develop local coordinators for each of the new sites to assist with route development and recruitment and management of local volunteers. Another outreach activity in the new year will be the collection of site species occurrence data through the use of iNaturalist, a smart phone application that allows users to collect images and geospatial data for any plants and animals seen on the site. These records then are verified by experts and added to the database related to the “Bird Island Reserve project.”
- Signage
  - The signage near the Sunset Beach gazebo is in need of maintenance and/or replacement. Interpretive signage could be installed to replace the posts with QR codes currently located along the nature trail and/or signage could be installed on the near parcel since it would provide the first opportunity for contact with visitors coming from Sunset Beach. The reserve is interested in hearing the committee’s thoughts on what the priorities should be. Discussion resulted in Bird Island Preservation Society representatives indicating that they would work with the Reserve staff and local stewards to get the signs near the gazebo updated before the summer season. Further discussion occurred regarding signage on the new parcel, with an acknowledgement that new signage with additional content would require additional funding and more time for development. Reserve staff agreed that getting a smaller group of concerned parties together on site to consider options would be the next step.

#### **Roundtable**

- No additional comments.

#### **Public comments**

- None

#### **Action Items**

- Reserve staff will contact committee members during the winter to establish a date for the spring meeting.
- Reserves staff will invite a small group of local stewards and committee members together to discuss further signage plans.

## Appendix A

### **N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Fall 2020 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update**

#### COVID-19 Update

Below is a summary of how the Reserve is working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Staff continue to telework and all offices remain closed to visitors.
- All Reserve sites are open to visitors. The Reserve will continue to closely monitor state and local COVID-19 guidelines and directives and encourage Reserve visitors to comply with these measures to protect themselves and their communities; current guidelines and directives are located [here](#).
- All in-person trainings and public programming remain canceled; education and training staff are conducting virtual programming as well as assisting partners with virtual meeting support.
- Research and stewardship work is continuing at the sites, although activities are more limited as they must meet social distancing requirements.

#### Hurricane Isaias Reserve Impacts

- All Reserve sites remained open during and following Hurricane Isaias.
- Four vessels were displaced during Isaias on the Masonboro Island Reserve; three of the displaced vessels were removed by the owners/contractors.
- A water quality monitoring sonde and its piling infrastructure at the Zeke's Island Reserve disappeared in the storm. Staff are investigating replacement options.
- All of the trails at the Bald Head Woods Reserve were littered with downed trees and limbs. Thank you to The Nature Conservancy staff for assisting Reserve staff with the trail clean-up.

#### Periodic Rules Review

The Rules Review Commission approved the requested re-adoption timeline of November 30, 2021 for Coastal Reserve rules (15A NCAC 070). At its September 2020 meeting, the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission provided unanimous support of the Division's proposed amendments for re-adoption of 15A NCAC 070 to inform its recommendation to the Department. The proposed amendments reflected the input previously provided by the local advisory committees. Staff are preparing the required fiscal analysis as part of the rule-making process. This work is part of the Legislative Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process (G.S. 150B-21.3A).

#### N.C. NERR Management Plan

The final revised management plan for the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve for 2020-2025 is located [here](#) on the Reserve website. NOAA will publish notification of the plan's availability in the federal register shortly.

#### N.C. NERR Federal Program Evaluation

NOAA conducts periodic evaluations of coastal management programs and National Estuarine Research Reserves as required by the federal Coastal Zone Management Act. The virtual site visit for NOAA's evaluation of the N.C. coastal management program and N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve took place the week of October 5 with a public meeting for both programs held on October 7. Findings from the evaluations are anticipated in early 2021.

#### Federal Budget

The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget\* for fiscal years 17, 18, 19, and 20 as it relates to the Coastal Reserve.

Federal Budget Lines	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2017	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2018	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2019	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2020
NERRS Operations	\$23.5 M	\$25 M	\$27M	\$27.5 M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$1.7M	\$1.7M	\$1.9M	\$4.5M
CZM Grants	\$70 M	\$75 M	\$75.5M	\$77 M

- Federal Fiscal Year 21: The President’s budget request does not include funding for the NERRS Operations and PAC, or the CZM Grants budget lines. The House funding level for NERRS Operations for FY21 is \$28.25M and the Senate funding level is \$29M.
- 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.

#### Program Highlights

- **Living on a Barrier Island Workshop:** The Coastal Training Program hosted a virtual workshop in September for real estate professionals to learn the ecology and geology of barrier islands and the rules and policies that govern development. The workshop covered updates to the National Flood Insurance Program, hurricane-resistant construction and wind insurance incentives, and using native plantings for the coastal landscape.
- **Drones in the Coastal Zone Virtual Workshop Series:** Reserve staff assisted in organizing and facilitating the Drones in the Coastal Zone virtual workshop series hosted by SECOORA in October. The series covered the use of unoccupied aircraft systems in ecosystem and fisheries management in the Southeast and U.S. Caribbean, including governmental policy and procedures, mission planning, data management, demonstrations on emerging drone technologies, and more. Session recordings are available to view on this [webpage](#) and a workshop report will be available soon.
- The Reserve was selected to receive funding from the DCM Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Program for the replacement of decking, structural joists, and pilings for the **Currituck Banks Reserve boardwalk** which ends at a viewpoint of the Currituck Sound. Work will take place in 2021.

#### Staffing News

- Congratulations to Reserve staff award winners!
  - **Whitney Jenkins** (Coastal Training Program Coordinator) and **Paula Gillikin** (Central Sites Manager) each received 2020 Pelican Awards from the NC Coastal Federation in a virtual awards program on August 6. Both were recognized in the “Coastwide Winners” category – Paula received an award for “Exceptional Leadership and Facilitation of Coastal Stewardship” and Whitney for “Exemplary Commitment to Coastal Resource Training and Collaboration.”
  - **Brandon Puckett**, Research Coordinator, received the Division of Coastal Management’s 2020 Distinguished Service Award at a virtual Department of Environmental Quality awards program on November 10. Brandon was recognized for his scope of high quality and impactful work, including his work on living shorelines and

leadership in the multi-component Beaufort Inlet Dredging Monitoring Project to inform the state's response to the US Army Corps of Engineers' proposals for summertime dredging of federal shipping channels at NC State Ports.

- **Duncan Anderson** joined the Reserve as a temporary GIS Specialist. Duncan is a recent graduate of NC State University where he received his B.S. in Environmental Technology and Management. He is working to organize and further the program's mapping and cataloging spatial information from all 10 Reserve sites.
- **Marae Lindquist** is our first National Estuarine Research Reserve System Margaret A. Davidson Fellow. Marae is a PhD student from UNC-W Department of Biology and Marine Biology. She will be researching the impacts of sea level rise on wintering populations of saltmarsh and seaside sparrows at four reserve sites (Rachel Carson, Masonboro Island, Zeke's Island, and Bird Island Reserves). This research will address management priorities for the Reserve and will provide important information to inform management of habitats that benefit sensitive species. The two-year fellowship began in September; click [here](#) to learn more about Marae's work and the fellowship.
- **Grace Roskar** will join the Reserve November 30 as the temporary Natural Resources Resilience Specialist. Grace has a B.S. in marine science and biology from the University of Miami and a M.S. in biology from Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute. Grace recently completed a Sea Grant Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship, during which she worked for NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology as a habitat science specialist. Grace will be working with staff on the Rachel Carson Reserve resilience plan, funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Emergency Coastal Resilience Fund.
- **Jason Brown**, Reserve Northern Sites Manager, accepted another job within DEQ in Raleigh and his last day with the Reserve was September 4. **Steve Jarvis** re-joined the Reserve as a part-time employee to help manage the Currituck Banks, Kitty Hawk Woods, and Buxton Woods Reserve. Interviews were conducted to fill the vacant position November 5-6.

\* 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 cooperative agreement that DCM receives provides funding for Reserve staffing, state site operations, and administrative support.