



**Emily and Richardson Preyer Buckridge Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, 18 November 2025, 10:30am-12:00pm
Tyrrell County Library 414 Main Street Columbia NC**

Attendance

LAC Partner Organization Members	Present
Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Sarah Toner	No
NC Natural Heritage Program, Michael Schafale	Yes
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, William Ridgeway, Dwayne Norman	Yes
NC Wildlife Resources Commission – Enforcement, Captain Brad Stoop	Yes
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, Bill Crowell	No
Tyrrell County Government, David Clegg	Yes
Tyrrell County Government, Nina Griswell	No
NC Division of Forest Resources	No
Tyrrell County Sheriff	No
Community Members	
Mike Clements	Yes
Others Present	
Woody Webster, DCM, Buckridge Site Manager	

Reserve-wide Updates (Woody Webster)

The Reserve-wide Update was shared with committee members before the meeting via email. The Update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

Site Update (Woody Webster)

Property Updates

- Staff shared Visitor Misuse Data in 2025 for the Reserve Program. Buckridge had few issues reported, only three throughout 2025. Masonboro Island receives the most misuse reports. The biggest misuse category for all Reserve sites was littering violations. This misuse data helps the Reserve identify problem areas to better address them, potentially with law enforcement partners.
- The Grapevine Landing Water Access draft design was then shared. This engineered design is the working draft that Staff and the design firm use while meeting with regulatory agencies. A few items from the drawing will be altered slightly, but those updates are occurring now. The project will include a 300-foot long ADA accessible fishing pier parallel to the Grapevine Canal, four docking slips for commercial fishermen along the canal, a shallow-draft concrete boat ramp and launching platform, as well as parking for boat trailers and regular vehicles. Living shoreline erosion protection is planned, and

a small dredge area from the canal to the river were also illustrated. Whether the dredge portion of the project proceeds is undetermined but has been included in the regulatory paperwork in case it does. Mr. Clegg wondered about potential for overcrowding at Grapevine Landing. Mr. Ridgeway manages a similar location called the Outfall Canal and has found that the small parking access size has balanced use there, preventing overuse while not discouraging it either. Mr. Stoop asked whether DCM would apply to have the area made a No Wake Zone. LAC members and staff were uncertain whether that was warranted at this time, given the physical constraints of the project area.

- A subset of this project will build an equipment shed three miles inland from the river. Design approval is ongoing with the State Construction Office, which manages floodplain concerns for State-owned facilities.
- The NC Division of Water Resources (NCDWR) continues to treat certain riverside portions of Buckridge for alligatorweed and *Phragmites* through a 50% cost-share agreement. Last year's project cost totaled \$1,859.51. The 2025 invoice should be received this winter. Funding for this work is secure for 2026. Mr. Schafale asked about biocontrol efficacy, and NCWRC and Reserve staff indicated winter dieback is a limiting factor. Mr. Schafale noted a number of native plants use the alligatorweed mats as a rooting substrate, and given the seasonality of floating mat dominance, wondered if controls could be timed to benefit native species. Mr. Ridgeway indicated their spray scheduling at Futch Impoundment wouldn't work, but Staff indicated that NCDWR scheduling might. Staff said they would inform Mr. Schafale of NCDWR field schedules if possible.
- The Division of Coastal Management (DCM) purchased \$21,123.31 of gravel this year, through an agreement with the NC Department of Transportation. WRC staff used this gravel to extend improvements to the road surface along southern Buckridge Road, opening more than 3,000 feet of additional road to hunters this year. Previously purchased geogrid material was installed over problem areas to extend the road's operational life. A smaller portion of gravel was used for routine repairs throughout Buckridge's roads. Staff indicated that the funding source for this gravel is in question for the upcoming year.

Hunting

- The 2024-25 season recorded a harvest of three deer and seventeen bear. No turkey were harvested. Staff have no preliminary numbers for the current season. Mr. Ridgeway and Captain Stoop indicated harvest numbers are much more difficult to access with their agency's 'Go Outdoors' system. The previous 'Alvin' system allowed widespread access, but now even those few who are allowed to access the system find it difficult to do so. When discussing the low deer harvest numbers, Mr. Clegg asked whether it could affect the management of the property. Staff indicated that population monitoring showed good condition and numbers of deer. Captain Stoop opined that some of the number declines may be attributed to diminished hunter effort. Mr. Ridgeway indicated that other game lands had come online since the earlier high deer harvest numbers at Buckridge, so hunters may be choosing locations which require less hunting effort. Bear harvest numbers are likely more stable due to high demand and more restricted opportunity.

Research Update

- Susan Cohen and her team with the Carolina Drone Lab have finalized a Scope of Work for Buckridge, but funding has been held up. This work will assess current conditions at Buckridge and be the initial comprehensive condition assessment for some 11,000 acres that have been added to Buckridge since 1999. It's hoped that measures of shoreline erosion and habitat flux will benefit future restoration action at Buckridge and at nearby National Wildlife Refuges.

- Elizabeth Culp, a master's student at NCSU, is scheduled to begin research on spotted turtles (*Clemmys guttata*) at Buckridge and Buxton Woods Reserves Spring 2026. In addition to trapping spotted turtles, all animals found in their turtle traps will be identified and added to the Reserve's iNaturalist project.
- The Scuppernong Water Study's engineering report was completed and shared with the Steering Committee this year. As an outgrowth of those efforts, two additional NC FIMAN (Flood Inundation Mapping & Alert Network) gauge sites have been sited, and SECOORA (Southeast Coastal Ocean Observing Regional Association) has installed monitoring equipment on the Little Alligator River.
- A summary of the Buckridge Coastal Reserve iNaturalist project was shared, showing 553 observations representing 352 species. Staff explained that this information can be added to by anyone with the app or online, who takes a picture of a species within the project boundary. They further shared that other users often help identify species for observers as well. Mr. Schafale said his agency will use iNaturalist data as well.

Policy Update

The Reserve is developing a policy that prohibits the sale of retail items, including food, on Reserve sites. This means that retailers will not be able to obtain permission to sell goods at Reserve sites through the Reserve's Special Activity Authorization process. Retail sales of goods on a Reserve site conflicts with the principal purposes of the Reserve as defined in the NC Administrative Code. These sales are not compatible traditional use of the Reserve, and the activity has the potential to disturb the environment and interfere with compatible educational and recreational activities that occur on the site. Traditional uses are defined as public trust uses including fishing, hunting, navigation, and recreation (15A NCAC 07O .0102 (3)). The need for this policy came about because of repeated, similar SAA requests which were denied due to the above reasons. Staff asked for LAC input on this policy direction, and all members agreed that retail activities were incompatible on Reserve property.

Member Roundtable

- Mr. Schafale informed the group of several staffing changes within his agency. Their botanist left for a position with NC State Parks and has been replaced by Katherine Culatta. Her current position as eastern regional field biologist will be vacant until a replacement can be found. Additionally, several staff positions will be added that deal directly with the NC mountain region.
- Mr. Schafale also shared the Peatland Inventory Report has completed its fieldwork phase, and should be written soon, perhaps this winter.
- Mr. Ridgeway shared that NCDOT and NCWRC are in talks regarding the informal boat ramp on the Little Alligator River near Bailey's Store. Most of the management of the current ramp will pass to NCWRC, though NCDOT plans to retain some space for their continued operations. Mr. Ridgeway indicated the ramp is tight on space but expected to remain popular. Mr. Clegg noted utility systems being installed in the immediate vicinity.
- When asked about mowing at Buckridge, Mr. Norman indicated the last of the year's mowing should be completed today, in the vicinity of Juniper Swamp Road.
- Captain Stoop reported that even in the absence of a Tyrrell County officer, area staff have been able to keep up with the workload. He reported a high number of bear hunter interactions, but no significant enforcement issues. Officers from Elizabeth City, Washington County and Hyde County all help cover Tyrrell, and he is ready to help.

- Mr. Clegg shared several infrastructure development projects ongoing near Buckridge. One mentioned was a water tower in Gum Neck near the Rose Crane facility. In response, Mr. Clements asked whether cell phone equipment would be installed on it. Mr. Clegg responded that the county would certainly be willing to entertain offers from private companies.
- Mr. Clegg continued that the county plans to develop a riparian access at the NC-94 barge landing on the Northwest Fork, noting that demand is high. A public hearing for that project is coming in December. He added that he is pleased to see the plans for Grapevine Landing's Water Access and asked to be kept in the loop regarding any pertinent information for that project.

Public Comments

No members of the public were in attendance.

Review of Action Items

Staff will keep LAC members, particularly Mr. Clegg, apprised of progress and changes at the Grapevine Water Access project. If possible, Mr. Schafale will be notified of NCDWR alligatorweed spray schedules for potential observation of its effect on water pennywort.

Appendix A: Reserve-wide Administrative Update:

N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Fall 2025 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

Periodic Rules Review for Reserve Administrative Code Rules

The Coastal Reserve's rules, 15A NCAC 07O, are scheduled to be reviewed by the Rules Review Commission in April 2026 as part of the Legislative Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process (G.S. 150B-21.3A). This process requires that all rules are classified as necessary or unnecessary. Following input from the Local Advisory Committees and Coastal Resources Commission, all 8 15A NCAC 07O rule citations are classified as necessary in the proposed initial determination.

This **proposed initial determination is currently published for public comment September 30, 2025-December 1, 2025** on the [Department of Environmental Quality and reserve's websites](#). After the comment period ends, the Department will review all comments and make final determinations prior to submission to the N.C. Rules Review Commission for approval in April 2026.

The Division will provide an update to the Local Advisory Committees after the public comment period closes with a summary of and agency responses to the comments received during the public comment period and from the Local Advisory Committees and Coastal Resources Commission. See the memorandum emailed to committee members on September 24, 2025 summarizing committee and commission input.

Preview of items for 2026

- **Local Advisory Committee Operating Procedures Review:** Per the Operating Procedures, the document shall be reviewed every 5 years and is up for review in 2026. Reserve staff will review the document and propose changes if necessary. The Local Advisory Committees will provide feedback on the proposed changes at the spring 2026 meetings and the document will be finalized later that year. If a spring meeting is not held, feedback on the proposed changes will be solicited via email.
- **Local Advisory Committee Community Member and Organization Application Period:** The reserve will solicit applications from community members and organizations to fill vacancies on the committees in spring 2026. Newly appointed and re-appointed members will begin their terms in 2027. Appointments are made by the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality.
- **N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve Management Plan Update:** The management plan is scheduled for its 5-year update as required by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and staff are working on updates to the plan now. Proposed changes will be brought to the national site Local Advisory Committees (Currituck Banks, Rachel Carson, Masonboro Island, and Zeke's Island Reserves) in 2026 for feedback.

Program Highlights

- The Division celebrated the **40th anniversary** of N.C.'s National Estuarine Research Reserve this year, designated by the state and NOAA to protect special places in N.C. including the Currituck Banks, Rachel Carson, Masonboro Island, and Zeke's Island Reserves. This designation inspired the state to later create the umbrella N.C. Coastal Reserve which is authorized by the N.C. Coastal Area Management Act.
- The reserve hosted its fourth stop on the **"Discover the N.C. Coastal Reserve"** tour on May 16, 2025 at the Masonboro Island Reserve. The tour began with brief remarks by Department Secretary Reid Wilson, Division Director Tancred Miller, UNCW Center for Marine Science Executive Director Ken Halanych and Bill Raney, Masonboro Island Reserve Local Advisory Committee member, followed by a boat trip to and nature walk at the site. The event highlighted how the Masonboro Island Reserve serves North Carolinians through its science and monitoring,

delivery of information to educate and inform decision making, and by providing natural buffers to waves and storms enhancing community resilience. Explore the [Discover the N.C. Coastal Reserve's Virtual Passport](#) and enjoy short videos from past tour events. Local Advisory Committee members will be invited to the site-based events so stay tuned for upcoming event information in 2026.

- Spring **student field trips** to the Rachel Carson Reserve and Masonboro Island Reserve via the Island Explorer Program were a big success and fall trips are underway.
- Reserve **summer camps** were well attended this year. Rising first through tenth graders learned about estuaries and experienced estuarine habitats and plants and animals through hands-on experiences at the Rachel Carson Reserve and in the laboratory to increase understanding and appreciation of coastal resources. Camps are conducted in partnership with the N.C. Maritime Museum in Beaufort.
- The reserve hosted a variety of **workshops** since the spring update. Participants at all workshops received continuing education credits.
 - Educators participated in a “*Teachers on the Estuary*” workshop in June, a program that is delivered at reserves nationwide and tailored to N.C. content. Participants engaged in hands-on experiences at the Rachel Carson Reserve such as measuring marsh vegetation, learned how drones are being used to inform management of coastal resources, and became familiar with our data and curricular offerings to use in the classroom.
 - The training program hosted “*Adaptation Planning for Coastal Communities*” in partnership with NOAA’s Office for Coastal Management to build skills for incorporating adaptation strategies into planning processes.
 - The training program held “*Living on a Barrier Island*” workshops for Cape Fear and Outer Banks realtors.
- The reserve was selected for **funding and participation in several NERRS Science Collaborative projects**, a program that funds applied science to meet reserve needs within the national reserve system. *Unfortunately, the funding for these projects was cut by NOAA in the latest round of budget reductions.* Staff will explore alternate ways to accomplish these important projects.
 - Justin Ridge, Research Coordinator was to lead a ~\$1M project in collaboration with Whitney Jenkins, Training Coordinator titled “Drone-Based Analysis of Intertidal Oyster Reef Condition to Enhance Fishery Management in the Southeastern U.S.”, with the 5 southeast reserves participating.
 - Reserve staff planned to participate in 3 other funded projects focused on submerged aquatic vegetation, tools to enhance utilization of NERRS science, and transferring realtor training models to other states. The N.C. training program serves as a model for realtor training within the system and would help share this approach with other reserves.
- **Public access at the Bald Head Woods Reserve** is enhanced because of a partnership with the Village of Bald Head Island. The golf cart parking platforms were improved, transitioning to a more durable and lower maintenance design that provides additional spaces for golf cart parking. Thank you, Village of Bald Head Island!
- The reserve celebrated **National Estuaries Week** September 20-27, 2025 by hosting a variety of activities in tribute to N.C.’s estuaries; thank you to all who came out to help us celebrate estuaries! Below are some of the activities that were held.
 - Masonboro Island Reserve: Site steward volunteers participated in a debris cleanup on the site’s dredge spoil islands.
 - Zeke’s Island Reserve: Staff led a public paddle trip around the site and participants learned about the reserve and participated in a community science activity – a bioblitz of the area using iNaturalist. Kayak Carolina partnered with us to provide equipment, thank you!

- Rachel Carson Reserve: Volunteers and partner agencies participated in a Bird Shoal cleanup and community science day. Participants picked up debris and used iNaturalist to practice identifying plants and birds.

Student Internships

- The reserve had a fantastic group of interns this summer in Manteo, Beaufort, and Wilmington. The students worked on a range of stewardship and research projects at sites along the coast. These invaluable experiences give the students hands-on experience in research and natural resource management and help inform their future career paths. Thank you to Friends of the Reserve, the N.C. Internship Program, and UNCW for their support and partnership for the internships.
- Student opportunities for summer 2026 in our Manteo, Beaufort, and Wilmington offices will be announced soon on our website.

Federal Budget

The budget table below is a summary of the federal budget* for federal fiscal years 2024-2026 as it relates to the N.C. Coastal Reserve.

- Congress passed a continuing resolution for federal fiscal year 2025, continuing fiscal year 2024 funding levels for fiscal year 2025. Receipt of funds was delayed several months and are now in place to fund the reserve from July 2025-June 2026.
- As Congress did not pass a budget or continuing resolution prior to October 1, 2025 for federal fiscal year 2026, the federal government is shut down until a budget or continuing resolution is passed. The President's budget zeros out the related budget lines and the Senate and House marks restore funding for the programs. Once Congress is back in session and a continuing resolution is passed, the next step would be to reconcile the budgets between the two chambers. Federal fiscal year 2026 funds would fund the reserve from July 2026-June 2027.
- 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.

Federal Budget Lines	FY2024 Enacted	FY2025 Full Year Continuing Resolution (FY24 levels)	FY2026 President's Budget	FY2026 Senate Mark	FY2026 House Mark
NERRS Operations	\$33.3M	\$33.3M	0	\$34M	\$33.5M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$8.5M	\$8.5M	0	\$8.5M	\$10M
CZM Grants	\$81.5M	\$81.5M	0	\$81.5M	\$81.5M

* The federal fiscal year is October 1-September 30. The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) budget line provides funding to the 30 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 state site reserve staffing and operations, and administrative support.