



Local Advisory Committee Meeting  
Buxton Woods Coastal Reserve

December 12, 2023 – 2:00 p.m.  
Fessenden Center  
46830 NC-12, Buxton, NC 27920

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Mike Henry	Y
UNC Coastal Studies Institute, John McCord	N
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, David Turner	N
NC Natural Heritage Program, Scott Pohlman	Y
Dare County Sheriff's Office, Doug Oberbeck	Y
Dare County Government, Danny Couch	Y
NC Forest Service, Kyle Breslin	N
NC Forest Service, John Cook	N
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Karen Lebing	
Russ Kiddy	Y
Harvey Scarborough, Jr.	Y
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, DCM, Northern Sites Manager	
Steve Jarvis, DCM, Northern Sites Stewardship Assistant	

Reserve-wide Update

Please see appendix for complete Reserve-wide updates

## Site Updates (Erik Alnes)

- *Herpetofauna Study Progress*

This fall, a coverboard and PVC study was implemented to expand the knowledge of species composition and abundance of herpetofauna in Buxton Woods Reserve. A survey of herpetofauna had not been conducted on the site since 2010. With the help of expert herpetologists and Reserve staff, a Coastal Studies Institute intern surveyed eight PVC pipes, eight coverboards, and two tin sheets five times throughout the Fall. The study documented 152 organisms on the site. Commonly recorded organisms included southern leopard frogs, green treefrogs, Carolina anoles, cottonmouths, black racers, and five-lined skinks. A few uncommon sightings included spotted turtles, eastern mud turtles, and eastern glass lizards. Staff will continue to monitor the survey locations through the spring and develop a report to document herpetofauna at the site. All work was conducted under appropriate Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) and NC Coastal Reserve (NCCR) research permits.

- *Fire Management Plan Implementation*

A fire management plan (FMP) was developed in 2022 for the Buxton Woods Reserve. Since its development, the North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) hired a new Dare County Ranger. Reserve staff met with the new County Ranger twice in 2023 to review the FMP and begin to develop a three to five-year plan to implement fuel treatment recommendations in the plan. Staff will perform a site visit with NCFS in 2024 to identify wildland urban interface areas to target with treatments, work with NCFS to identify funding sources for fuels treatments, and set implementation timelines.

- Danny Couch noted that he was happy this was proceeding, but continues to receive input from local citizens that more needs to be done. He inquired about additional resources he could supply to concerned individuals.
- Erik Alnes shared that the Firewise USA Program, which teaches people how to adapt to living with wildfire and encourages neighbors to work together and take action on their properties, could be of assistance. This program offers training, grants for fuels mitigation work, and assistance for communities to encourage fire protection of their homes.
- Mike Henry added that one of National Park Service's (NPS) focuses is developing fuel breaks adjacent to the Buxton Woods Reserve, and there may be areas for collaboration between NCCR and NPS on projects. He also noted that when they conduct fuel work, they send project Firewise information to nearby landowners.

- *Horse Misuse*

In November, staff noticed trampling of marsh along the Sedge Trail, and horse feces along the trail. Hunters using the Reserve also notified staff that horseback riders were riding several trails in the Reserve that are designated for foot traffic only. Staff plan to order and install additional signage and continue to educate users when misuse is observed. Staff opened the floor to the committee for suggestions.

- Russ Kiddy stated that he noted horse misuse has increased, and they cause damage to the roads.

- Danny Couch reflected on how the NCCR dealt with ATV misuse in the past, and asked if there were any regulations within the game lands designation that would allow enforcement. The committee could not think of any but will research possible regulations for enforcement of misuse. He also offered suggestions of education through volunteers, or trail cameras on trails to identify misusers for targeted education.
  - Erik Alnes asked Mike Henry how NPS deals with misuse. NPS utilizes signage on trails designated for horse riding.
  - Scott Pohlman and Danny Couch noted that staff should investigate enforcement options or laws that could address misuse.
- *2024 N.C. Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship*

To encourage promising and talented students from traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations to pursue study and careers centered in coastal and estuarine sciences, the N.C. Coastal Reserve and the Friends of the Reserve created a funded summer internship program. The N.C. Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship will assist with stewardship activities at the northern sites (Currituck Banks, Kitty Hawk Woods, and Buxton Woods Reserves), working out of the Manteo office in the summer of 2024.

The award will consist of a travel/housing stipend of \$1500 and a paid summer internship consisting of 30 hours/week for 10 weeks at \$15.00/hour. Staff encouraged LAC members to share the opportunity with candidates that may be interested in working with the Reserve. Applications for the 2024 are due January 19, 2024 (11:59 pm). Further information can be found on the Friends of the Reserve website ([for-nc.org/intern](http://for-nc.org/intern)).

#### Member Roundtable (Staff response in italics)

- Harvey Scarborough stated he was excited to continue the herpetofauna in the spring.
- Scott Pohlman revealed significant vacancies in the State government. The Natural Heritage Program is working to fill several vacancies.
- Danny Couch recommended adding individuals to the LAC with historical knowledge of the place, and expressed the importance of maintaining the heritage of the site. He also inquired about illegal camping in the woods.
  - *Erik Alnes stated he would inform Mr. Couch when the LAC Application window opens to share with community members. Alnes also stated staff have cleaned up several abandoned campsites and have worked with WRC enforcement to identify active campsites.*
- Doug Oberbeck had no updates from the sheriff's office but would like to be informed when campsites are found.
- Mike Henry noted Boone Vandzura had taken another position within NPS, and Henry is now the Chief Ranger for the NPS Outer Banks Group. One priority NPS has been focusing on is fuel treatments on NPS lands.
  - *Erik Alnes and Mike Henry planned to set up a meeting for early 2024 to discuss fire management of adjacent properties.*

#### Final Comments, Review of Action Items, and Wrap-up

- Staff will share the herpetology study findings with LAC members upon completion of Spring 2024 surveys.

- Staff will meet with NCFS staff in early 2024 to discuss fire management plan implementation.
- Staff will investigate enforcement options for horse misuse.
- NCCR and NPS staff will meet to discuss fire management of adjacent properties in Buxton.
- The LAC expressed interest in a field visit during the Fall 2024 LAC meeting.

Adjourn