



Local Advisory Committee Meeting
Buxton Woods Coastal Reserve

November 5, 2025 – 1:00 P.M.
Fessenden Center
46830 NC-12, Buxton, NC 27920

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Noah Leffel	N
UNC Coastal Studies Institute, John McCord	N
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Anna Barbosa	N
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Jonathan Montague	N
NC Natural Heritage Program, Lauri Hamon	Y
Dare County Sheriff's Office, Doug Oberbeck	N
Dare County Government, Danny Couch	N
NC Forest Service, Kyle Breslin	N
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Karen Lebing	Y
Russ Kiddy	N
Jacqueline Thomas	N
Alyson Flynn	Y
Harvey Scarborough, Jr.	Y
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, DCM, Northern Sites Manager	
Madilyn Deifell, NCCR Intern	

Reserve-wide Update

Please see appendix for complete Reserve-wide updates.

Northern Sites Update (Erik Alnes)

- *Internships*

Two interns worked in the northern sites this year. This summer, the Friends of the Reserve sponsored a summer intern, Samuel Suber, who worked with the Reserve from UNC Wilmington. He focused on re-examining a Carolina Vegetation Survey transect in Kitty Hawk Woods that was first studied in 1988. He also continued to monitor and record water quality data in Kitty Hawk Woods, installed plant identification signage, and helped with the site maintenance of the three northern sites. This fall, Madilyn Deifell worked with staff as part of her Outer Banks Field Site semester at the Coastal Studies Institute. She completed a georeferenced signage inventory of the 115 informational signs at the three northern sites, assisted staff with the ongoing submerged aquatic vegetation study in Currituck Banks, and supported the maintenance of the northern sites. Staff are hopeful to have an internship during the summer of 2026 and will share the posting with the LAC to encourage applications. Staff appreciate all the work these interns helped with this year.

- *Brochure Update*

Staff revised the brochures for the northern sites, and they were reprinted this summer. Updates included corrections to contact information, logo revisions, boundary and trail adjustments to the maps, and updates to species lists. Staff are in possession of freshly printed brochures and have begun distributing them to visitor centers and partner agencies.

In addition to the brochure updates and reprinting, each Reserve website page now contains Spanish versions of the brochures. Staff continue to work on providing multilingual publications found on their websites to augment engagement and education.

- *Research Report*

Three new research permits were administered for the northern reserves this year. These include a Formosan termite monitoring study from N.C. Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and N.C. State University (Currituck Banks Reserve), a population genetics and diversity study of yaupon holly out of the University of Georgia (Kitty Hawk Woods and Buxton Woods Reserves), and a study to advance the conservation and management of spotted turtles from N.C. State University (Kitty Hawk Woods and Buxton Woods Reserves).

- Harvey Scarborough noted he has been independently monitoring spotted turtles and can share his local knowledge with the researcher.

Internally, staff have continued to monitor water quality and salinity (Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve), completed a replication study of a 1988 CVS plot (Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve), and continued the submerged aquatic vegetation study in Ships Bay (Currituck Banks Reserve). Staff opened the conversation to the LAC to solicit future research ideas.

- Alyson Flynn stated that there is a gap in knowledge regarding the impact of the special environmental district buffer on the protection of Buxton Woods. She recommended finding a way to research how surrounding development affects the health of reserve.

- Harvey Scarborough noted that it would be interesting to do an insect or mammal inventory. He also discussed an event where over-wash from a recent storm had increased salinity in a pond on Park Service property. This resulted in a fish kill of freshwater bass. He indicated that he was worried about salinity, and that there are culverts that lead to the sedges in the Buxton Woods Reserve. A water quality study would be beneficial to undertake in the future.

Buxton Woods Reserve Business

- *Misuse Report*

Of the 63 reports of misuse documented by managers in the 10 Coastal Reserves, 18 occurred in the northern sites. The most common types of misuse in the northern sites included littering and dumping, vandalism, illegal parking, and disallowed uses including things like ATV use, construction of permanent hunting stands, and the installation of bee boxes. 11% of the cases were elevated to or shared with law enforcement partners.

- Erik Alnes pointed out that in Buxton Woods, signs are commonly shot, and they had experienced increased instances in dumping, including a chicken coop and a hog corpse.
- Harvey Scarborough suggested putting cameras up behind signs to catch vandalizers.

- *Retail Sales Policy*

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, such as food, 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 uses 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 in July because of ice cream being sold from a boat at the Rachel Carson Reserve in Beaufort. The business' special activity authorization application was denied due to the above reasons. We've also denied this use in the past, when requested, before the special activity authorization process was implemented.

- All present LAC members were in favor of the policy.

Member Roundtable

- Karen Lebing shared that the organizer of the Hatteras Christmas Bird Count had passed. She will be taking on the organization of the event this year as the Primary Compiler. During the event, volunteers will travel around Hatteras Island, including into the Reserve, looking for and documenting the birds they see. She noted volunteers are encouraged to sign up. The event will be on the 27th of December this year.

- Alyson Flynn discussed the Coastal Federation's recent work and support to uphold the Zone of Influence that has been discussed at recent Dare County Commission meetings. She also stated the Coastal Federation was pushing forward with their support for ocean-front septic amendments. She mentioned the largest fundraiser of the year for her agency, an oyster roast, would be occurring in February. Last she stated that she was aware of locals that may be interested in volunteering with the Reserve and would share information regarding opportunities.
- Mrs. Flynn also described the Coastal Federation's current effort to get a 78-acre tract that is adjacent to the Reserve into a trust. She noted Dare County was interested in a conservation easement but were worried about the liability of the old mine located on the property. She also noted there was interest from the Buxton Civic Association in putting the tract into protection.
- Harvey Scarborough indicated he was aware of this land for sale.
- Erik Alnes stated that the Coastal Reserve was also aware and had previously engaged the landowner. He indicated that when he walked the property, there was still an open mining permit on the property.
- Alyson Flynn told the group to contact her about the topic if there was further interest.
- Harvey Scarborough indicated his interest in more reptile, insect, spider, and mammal surveying. He also asked about the results of the bat survey that occurred in 2024. Erik Alnes said he would provide Mr. Scarborough with more information.
- Laurie Hamon of the Natural Heritage Program noted she was also interested in the bat survey results. She went on to reveal that Andy Walker, of the Heritage Program, had moved on to a different job opportunity. Mrs. Hamon is now the primary contact, and Mr. Walker can be removed from email lists. Last, she gave an overview of her work with butterfly and other pollinators in the area. She mentioned she would be happy to assist or facilitate community activities to study pollinators in the reserve.

Public Comment

No members of the public were present to make comment.

Final Comments, Review of Action Items, and Wrap-Up

The following action items were reviewed:

- Erik Alnes will share the turtle researcher and bat researcher information with Harvey Scarborough.
- Erik Alnes will remove Andy Walker from all email lists.
- Karen Lebing will identify locations to display the new brochures in Buxton.

Adjourn

1:53 P.M.

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.