



Local Advisory Committee Meeting
Currituck Banks Coastal Reserve

December 6, 2022 – 10:00 a.m.
The Outer Banks Center for Wildlife Education
1160 Village Lane, Corolla, NC 27927

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Currituck County Planning Department, Jennie Turner	Y
Currituck County Sheriff's Office, Terrence Sutton	N
Currituck National Wildlife Refuge, Mike Hoff	N
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Jarrett Culbreath	N
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, OBX Center for Wildlife, Sharon Meade	Y
The Nature Conservancy, Aaron McCall	Y
APNEP, Jimmy Johnson	N
NHP, Nathan Shepherd	Y
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Brett Harrison	N
Edward Ponton	Y
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, NCCR, Northern Sites Manager	
Steve Jarvis, NCCR, Northern Sites Stewardship Assistant	
Dan Lane, Corolla Citizen	

Reserve-wide Program Business

*** Please see appendix for complete Reserve-wide updates ***

Individual Reserve Business (Erik Alnes)

- *Boardwalk Refurbishment Project*

Construction began on the boardwalk refurbishment project October 31, 2022. The parking lot was barricaded off and the trail has been closed with signage. Crews removed boards from the Sound back to the parking lot and completed demolition November 15th. The crew subsequently began replacing the boards back toward the Sound. Only 20 joists were identified as needing replacement, which will be changed out as the crew works back. Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) facilities staff will be on site the week of December 12th to cap the 400 pilings along the boardwalk. This project should increase the lifespan of the boardwalk substantially. We look forward to reopening the site on schedule by January.

- *Interpretive Signage Update*

NC Coastal Reserve (Reserve) staff have drafted eight signs that are under DEQ review. Some of the drafts were shared with the Local Advisory Committee (LAC). The Coastal Reserve would like to thank Sharon Meade with the Wildlife Resource Commissions Center for Wildlife Education as well as the Corolla Wild Horse Fund for providing local images of waterfowl, historical images of the County, and pictures of Corolla's wild horses. Staff expects the signs will be sent for print in winter of 2023 and will be installed shortly after.

- *Chronolog*

Three Chronolog stations were purchased for each of the Northern sites. Chronolog is a small phone mount that is installed in a natural area, that allows visitors to take pictures from the same place, upload them, and organizes them into a timelapse. This community science tool will allow visitors to contribute to the understanding of changes on the site, and help managers understand how certain ecological processes impact the site. Staff plans to install this in the Reserve after the boardwalk project is completed.

- McCall noted that placement should be based on a scientific question. "What do we want to know?" It would be interesting to place it somewhere where changes could be monitored.
- Alnes noted that they will likely mount it on the boardwalk to monitor water level changes and vegetation changes in the marsh and surrounding woodline.
- McCall mentioned it would be beneficial to include a water level meter in the frame of the photos to provide quantitative observations in the images.
- Ponton stated that it may be interesting to put it on the maritime forest trail where it floods to monitor the effects of storms on the water table and species diversity.

- *Additional Fencing Proposal*

Five horses have been escaping daily from the Southern fence line of the Reserve. Staff found the trail they were using to bypass the fence, and met with Meg Puckett, the Herd Manager, on-site to discuss possible solutions to this issue. The Herd Manager recommended that a temporary electric fence was placed between the fence line and the boardwalk to deter this behavior. Reserve staff agreed to allow this fence while the site was closed to the public and monitor the horses to identify if this changed

behavior. The fence was installed on December 2nd, and as of this meeting date, only two horses have found their way south of the fence, one evening. Staff will continue to monitor the fence and trail cameras to attempt to find a solution to this behavior.

- Ponton noted that this behavior occurs every winter, as the horses search for winter fescue to eat when they run out of green grasses north.
- McCall stated that this may be an indicator that the horse population is outcompeting the carrying capacity of the northern area.
- Sharron asked if the Wild Horse Fund has still purchasing property in Swan Beach for horse habitat, which was confirmed.
- Alnes stated that this is an ongoing issue with a lot of underlying questions that the Corolla Wild Horse Fund will need to analyze. Alnes hopes that this short-term solution will result in behavior changes, but staff will continue to monitor to learn more about the group.

- *Parking Enforcement*

The new parking rule passed in 2022 that allows the State to tow vehicles left in the Currituck Banks parking lot over the two-hour limit. Due to logistical and monitoring issues, the rule was not enforced by DCM staff this summer. Staff reached out to the Currituck County Sherriff's Office to see if they would be willing to help enforce this rule. The Office did not respond to requests. During the slower season of winter, the Site Manager will reach back out to the Sheriffs Office to discuss potential options for assistance with enforcing this rule. Staff opened the issue up for recommendations from the LAC.

- All LAC members noted that this will be a consistent issue, with no good solution.
- Alnes presented an idea for a QR code system that would force visitors of the Reserve to think more about the time they would be allowed to legally park there.
- McCall stated he thought that paid parking may be the only solution, but that would impose fees on visitors of the Reserve and dissuade hiking. There is no good solution.
- Alnes will follow up with the Sheriff's office and continue to brainstorm solutions to this issue.

Member Roundtable (Staff response in italics)

- Sharron Meade expects the Eco-Explorer program to pick back up this spring and asked if she could see the resources Reserve staff use for the Masonboro Island Explorer Program. *Alnes will try to get her some resources.* Meade also noted that she will be staffing the OBX Center for Wildlife Education through June, but is unsure for the future, as the County is taking over management of the building.
- Jennie Turner reported that County Planning Staffing had several vacancies. If interested in a position, please see the Currituck County Government Career Page.
- Nathan Shepherd was happy to be in attendance and noted that he had not seen the Reserve. *Alnes agreed to take him to the site following the meeting.*

Public Input

- In reference to the horse fence issue, Dan Lane noted that it may be beneficial to talk with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) staff out west who manage horse populations. He also noted that planting persimmon in the northern sections of beaches may provide the horses with food and passively change their behavior of travelling into Corolla Village.

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

- Reserve Staff will set up a meeting with the Currituck County Sheriff's Office to investigate the efficacy of using police to enforce the two-hour parking limit at the Currituck Banks Parking Lot.
- Reserve Staff will send educational resources to Sharron Meade to assist with furthering the Eco-Explorer Program.
- Reserve Staff will alert the LAC when the boardwalk is complete, and the site opens back up.

Adjourn

N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Fall 2022 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

Local Advisory Committee Membership

Thank you for your continued service to the Reserve's Local Advisory Committees! A number of community member appointments will expire at the end of 2023. As a reminder, community members may apply to serve consecutive or non-consecutive terms per the [Local Advisory Committee Operating Procedures](#). Details on a 2023 application period will be provided in the spring.

Program Highlights

- The Coastal Reserve partnered again with the NC Maritime Museum this summer to offer “**Summer Science School**”. The Reserve took the lead on 3 camps: Seashore Life 1, Seashore Life 2, and Coastal Adventures. A total of 62 students ranging from first grade to ninth grade participated in the camps. Favorite activities included field trips to the Rachel Carson Reserve, plankton viewing, and squid dissections.
- Earlier this month, partners and supporters of the **Masonboro Island Explorers** program gathered in Carolina Beach to celebrate the 10,000th student going to the Masonboro Island Reserve since the program's inception in 2013. This program aims to take every 5th grade student in New Hanover County to the Reserve to experience hands-on learning and exploration in a natural barrier island ecosystem. The Reserve partnered with Carolina Ocean Studies early on to create the curriculum that has been taught by Richard Cecelski and his staff for nearly 10 years. This program is funded through donations to Masonboro.org by corporations, businesses, and grass roots support from the public at various events. Masonboro.org's persistence for continuing this program has resulted in over 1,000 volunteer hours and a lasting impact on participating students. The Reserve is pleased to be a part of this program and thankful for the great partnerships and individuals that provide fulfilling experiences and education to New Hanover County 5th grade students. Congratulations on reaching this exciting milestone!
- The Reserve hosted summer and fall **educator workshops** and 30 participants received continuing education credits for attending.
 - In June, Carteret County teachers participated in the Reserve's free TOTE or Teachers On The Estuary Program. The day included a field trip to the Rachel Carson Reserve to explore North Carolina's coastal habitats, learning about local research projects, and conducting curricular activities for use in the classroom. TOTE is a teacher education program implemented at all 30 reserves in the National Estuarine Research Reserve System.
 - In October, educators joined Reserve and N.C. Maritime Museum staff for a free Coastal Explorations workshop to learn about estuaries and local maritime history. Classroom activities and a field trip to the Rachel Carson Reserve were provided for participants to bring lessons to their students.
- The **Coastal Training Program** continues to offer trainings in partnership with Division regulatory staff to support management of estuarine shorelines and barrier islands.
 - “*Promoting Living Shorelines for Erosion Control - A Virtual Workshop for Real Estate Professionals*” was held on September 9. Close to 100 participants learned about the benefits and limitations of using living shorelines for erosion control; different shoreline stabilization techniques, including living shorelines; living shoreline permitting process; and living shoreline projects in North Carolina. This workshop supported the Division's [estuarine shoreline strategy](#) and the [recent Coastal Habitat Protection Plan amendment](#).
 - An in-person “*Living on a Barrier Island*” workshop was hosted in partnership with Cape Fear Realtors Association in Wilmington on September 28. One hundred one participants learned about barrier island ecology and geology; the rules and policies that govern

development on barrier islands; updates to the National Flood Insurance Program; and native plantings for the coastal landscape.

Participants in both workshops received continuing education credits from the NC Real Estate Commission and workshop content is available on the Reserve's website [here](#).

- The Reserve began implementing the **Special Activity Authorization** when the Reserve rule amendments became effective February 1, 2022. To date, 26 authorizations have been issued with 3 applications pending. Information about the Special Activity Authorization is available [here](#).
- The Reserve is committed to working with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission on **permit hunts** at the Reserve sites, yet this work is currently on hold until several vacant staff positions are filled.
- The State recently closed on the **Primland tract** (260 acres) for inclusion in the Buckridge Reserve. Funding for the acquisition was provided by the NC Land and Water Fund (previously the NC Clean Water Management Trust Fund), the Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Preparedness Initiative, and The Nature Conservancy. Planned future site improvements at the tract include an improved boat ramp, fishing pier and educational signage. The Division will make a public announcement about the acquisition once the Reserve boundary is updated on the website.

Upcoming Student Opportunities

Application periods for Summer 2023 student opportunities in the Beaufort office are currently open.

- The Friends of the Reserve (FOR) is requesting applications for the **2023 NC Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship Award**. This internship encourages promising and talented students from traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations to pursue study and careers in coastal and estuarine science by gaining professional experience working with the Coastal Reserve for the summer. The 2023 intern will work with staff at the Rachel Carson Reserve in the Beaufort office. More details are available on FOR's website [here](#) and the deadline for submitting applications is **December 15, 2022**. FOR is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that supports the N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve, including its sites and programs.
- Two **State of NC Internship** opportunities are available at the Beaufort office for summer 2023. Applications are due **January 9, 2023**, and more details are available [here](#). One intern will work with the Education Coordinator on summer camps, field trips and classroom activities and the other will work with the Coastal Training Program Coordinator on living shoreline communication products.

Wilmington office opportunities will be shared on our website in early 2023.

Research Fellowships Awarded

- **2022 NC Coastal Research Fellows Announced**

Madison Lytle and Andrew McMains are the 2022 North Carolina Coastal Research Fellows. Their research will look at reduced water clarity's influence on seagrass growth; and the effects of dredging on inlet-inhabiting fish, respectively. [North Carolina Sea Grant](#) and the [N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve](#) jointly fund this opportunity, which is open to graduate students across North Carolina. With funding for one year, recipients conduct research within one or more of the Coastal Reserve's 10 sites. Learn more about this year's fellows and projects [here](#).

- **Margaret A. Davidson Fellow announced for the NC Reserve for 2022-2024**

Daniel Bowling, a PhD student at North Carolina State University, is assessing the effectiveness of using remote sensing to monitor intertidal oyster habitat as a Margaret A. Davidson Fellow at the NC Reserve. Daniel will also develop a model to generate sample designs to support future coast-wide population assessments and for Reserve sites to be able to quickly detect and respond to changes in habitat health. This fellowship will advance his dissertation research working to develop methods for a fishery-independent survey program for oysters in North Carolina. The [Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Fellowship](#) provides funding to graduate students to conduct estuarine research within one of the 30

reserves in NOAA’s National Estuarine Research Reserve System. Fellows address a key coastal management question to help scientists and communities understand coastal challenges that may influence future policy and management strategies.

Upcoming Grant-funded Projects

- **NC Reserve to benefit from 2 NERRS Science Collaborative-funded projects**

The [NERRS Science Collaborative](#) announced its awarded projects for the 2022 funding cycle. The NC Reserve is benefiting from 2 projects that address management needs identified by the program - see details below. Reserve staff are partnering with NC State University and other reserves in the region for the projects and will serve as collaborative leads for the projects, bringing together project stakeholders and end users. The projects will begin this fall and last for 2 years. More detail is provided [here](#).

PI/Host Institution	Project Title	Reserves Involved
Celso Castro-Bolinaga, <i>North Carolina State University</i>	Improved Understanding of Sediment Dynamics for the Rachel Carson Reserve, North Carolina	North Carolina (NC)
Peter Kingsley-Smith, <i>South Carolina Department of Natural Resources</i>	Collaborative Development of Novel Remote Sensing Workflows for Assessing Oyster Reef Condition to Inform Management and Restoration	ACE Basin (SC); North Inlet-Winyah Bay (SC); North Carolina (NC); Sapelo Island (GA); Guana Tolomato Matanzas (FL)

- **NC partners funded to develop engagement strategy to support the Scuppernong Regional Water Management Study**

The NC Reserve, Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, The Nature Conservancy, and NC Sea Grant have received Digital Coast Connects funding from the [NOAA Digital Coast Partnership](#) to develop an “Engagement Strategy to support the Scuppernong Regional Water Management Study”. The Study was requested by local governments and land managers to help with water related issues in the Albemarle-Pamlico region. This grant will develop a collaborative stakeholder engagement process that is recognized as a need by the Study partners. The Engagement Strategy will be centered around equity and inclusion, assist with communication and potential conflict resolution, provide opportunity for stakeholders to shape Study development, and support development and implementation of a collaborative, regional water management strategy. The Engagement Strategy will rely on connections with multiple NOAA Digital Coast partners and use Digital Coast data, tools, facilitation guides, and training resources to inform the Strategy and workshop development and implementation. The project begins this fall.

- **NC Reserve participating in multi-Reserve wetland migration pathway project**

“Wetland Migration Pathway Planning, Prioritization and Community Engagement (FL, MA, NC, NJ, RI, SC)” is an America the Beautiful Challenge project awarded to the Narragansett Bay, RI Reserve by the

National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. The project will create a pipeline of tidal wetland migration pathway protection projects in areas served by National Estuarine Research Reserves in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Southeast regions of the US. Working with communities and partners, the NC Reserve will convene those interested in wetland migration pathway protection, share existing information, and identify technical products such as maps and models that are needed to support pathway planning. This will inform future steps of product acquisition and identification and prioritization of pathway projects. Information and lessons learned through project activities will be shared with all 30 Reserves within the National Estuarine Research Reserve System and their partners. More information is located [here](#). This work will begin shortly and supports the NC Reserve's focus on habitat and coastal hazards resilience, the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan, and the NC Climate Risk Assessment and Resilience Plan.

Staffing News

- Hope Sutton, Reserve Stewardship Coordinator, started a new job in August with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission, focusing on species of interest. We thank Hope for her tireless work in establishing a stewardship program for the Reserve and management of the four southern sites during her many years with program.
- Michelle Brodeur, Reserve Communications Specialist, started a new job with Division of Marine Fisheries as their Outreach and Communications Specialist in August. We thank Michelle for her work in elevating the visibility of the Reserve and its work and partnerships through various communications efforts over the years.
 - We look forward to collaborating with both Hope and Michelle on mutually beneficial projects moving forward, and wish them both the best of luck in these new endeavors.
 - We are currently working to fill the vacant Research Coordinator and Communications Specialist positions. Work to fill the vacant Stewardship Coordinator position will begin after these positions are filled.

Staff Awards

Congratulations to Reserve award winners!

- **Paula Gillikin**, Central Sites Manager, received a **DEQ Distinguished Employee Award** in November for the Division for her leadership on the externally funded project awarded to the Division to clean up Hurricane Florence-related large marine debris and abandoned vessels from public lands and waters along the coast. 1,254,280 pounds of debris and 24 vessels were removed from Brunswick through Carteret, including Craven and Pamlico Counties and 4 of the Reserve sites managed by the Division as part of this project. This project was highly visible with high impact, and was part of the largest coordinated coastal debris removal effort in the State's history. Paula's leadership on all aspects of this project, from facilitating new partnership agreements to identifying Florence-specific debris to protecting coastal habitats during debris removal, guaranteed its success and significant on-the-ground impact.
- **Rebecca Ellin**, Coastal Reserve Program Manager, received the 2022 National Estuarine Research Reserve Association/National Estuarine Research Reserve System's **Award for Outstanding Achievement**. This national award honors leaders that demonstrate sustained commitment to the National System. Rebecca was instrumental in the development of NOAA's Margaret A. Davidson Fellowship that supports all 30 Reserves within the System. She works with NOAA to problem-solve administrative, staffing, and partnership challenges the System is facing. As a past NERRA President, she developed the national non-profit organization's strategic plan that continues to serve as a guiding document today. Locally, the NC Reserve addresses a range of complex coastal management topics with partners to guide management of the sites and the state's coastal resources, and collaborates at local, regional, and national levels to leverage its work. Since 2005, Rebecca is a recognized leader at the NC Reserve and in the national system, working at multiple levels to advance coastal management.

Federal Budget

- The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget* for fiscal years 2020-2023 as it relates to the NC Reserve. A budget for FY2023 has not yet been passed and a continuing resolution is in place for FY2023 through December 16, 2022. 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	FY2020 Enacted	FY2021 Enacted	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2022	FY2023 President's Request	FY2023 House Mark	FY2023 Senate Chair Mark
NERRS Operations	\$27.5M	\$28.5M	\$29.7M	\$28.5M	\$31.5M	\$34.5M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$6.5M	\$4.5M	\$7.5M	\$8.5M
CZM Grants	\$77 M	\$78.5 M	\$79M	\$78.5M	\$89M	\$84M

- The [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) includes \$77M for the NERRS for habitat restoration to be spent over five years. The Act states that equal amounts of funding shall be provided in Fiscal Years 22-26, approximately \$15.4M annually for the NERRS. All Reserves are eligible to receive \$100k annually for 5 years to build capacity for habitat restoration. The NC Reserve anticipates receiving these funds in early 2023 and will develop habitat resilience plans and implement projects on the ground at the national sites of the Reserve.

* 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 Reserve staffing, state site operations, and administrative support.