



Local Advisory Committee Meeting
Currituck Banks Coastal Reserve

April 19, 2024 – 10:30am
Virtual Meeting

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Currituck County Planning Department, Jennie Turner	N
Currituck County Sheriff's Office, Terrence Sutton	N
Currituck National Wildlife Refuge, Mike Hoff	N
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, Jarrett Culbreath	N
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, OBX Center for Wildlife, Sharon Meade	N
The Nature Conservancy, Lora Eddy	Y
Albemarle Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, Jimmy Johnson	Y
N.C. Natural Heritage Program, Nathan Shepherd	Y
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Bo Dame	Y
Edward Ponton	Y
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, NCCR, Northern Sites Manager	

Reserve-wide Program Business

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

Individual Reserve Business (Erik Alnes)

- *Hunting Report*

For the 2023-2024 hunting season, 130 authorizations were written for Currituck Banks and Kitty Woods Reserves. This is up 41% from the 85 authorizations written the previous year. For both Currituck Banks and Kitty Hawk Woods, nine deer, 21 squirrel, two wood ducks, and four teal were harvested.

Bo Dame was curious about the demographics, and who the new hunters are. After the meeting, Alnes ran statistics and found the most significant authorization increases were from Dare County Beach communities, rising from 69 authorizations to 114 (65% increase) from 2023-2024. Other trends included a 100% increase in Currituck County mainland authorizations (seven to 14 between 2023-2024), and a slight mean date of birth increase from 1981 in 2023 to 1984 in 2024. Lora Eddy noted that they have seen a significant increase in shoulder season users at the Nags Head Woods Preserve.

- *Volunteer Work*

Staff shared that their one full-time resident who volunteered for Currituck Banks had moved away, and five volunteers that work in the northern sites had completed 35 hours of work in 2023. Staff also shared their work with Appalachian State University students, who helped The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and N.C. Coastal Reserve (NCCR) with projects over their spring break. The group helped staff repaint the Currituck Banks Boardwalk, and assisted with trail maintenance at the site. Staff extend a huge thank you to the Appalachian State student group for their work.

- *SAV Information Sharing*

Staff had several meetings with Albemarle Pamlico National Estuary Partnership (APNEP), Chowan University, Coastal Studies Institute (CSI), and the Division of Marine Fisheries staff that conduct submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) research in the area this summer. This has provided a better understanding of what certain groups are looking at, and methods used. There is interest from CSI to utilize drones to analyze SAV, but the turbidity of Currituck Sound may make this impossible. Work from Chowan University is analyzing the seasonal change of SAV through the growing season, which will start May 5. NCCR staff plan to study the permanent transects again annually this fall. The group of agencies has not met since early spring, and it was recommended to reconnect with the group. Alnes will follow up.

- *Horse Fence Update*

In 2023, while the boardwalk was being worked on, horses were escaping nightly along the southern fence line. While the site was closed, a 80' electric fence was erected along the southern fence line, and replaced with rope as the site reopened. This stopped the behavior of the horses escaping.

To match the existing fence, staff have hired a contractor to replace the rope fence with boards. The contractor is currently working on a project in Kitty Hawk Woods, but as that project is

finished, the crew will move in to complete the fence. This will hopefully provide a solution to the long-term problem of horse escapes into town.

- *2024 Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship Update*

The Northern Sites will host an intern for ten weeks in the summer of 2024. Haley Jenkins, a senior from N.C. State University majoring in Sustainable Materials and Technology, with minors in Spanish and Business Administration, will begin working with the Reserve in June. Staff are excited to have her on board, and appreciate the support through the Friends of the Reserve (FOR) board to sponsor this paid internship.

- *Northern Sites Update*

There has been an increase in use of the Northern Sites. Trail counters that have been in place for a calendar year show an 80% increase trail use at the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve. Additionally, hunter authorizations, written for Kitty Hawk Woods and Currituck Banks Reserve hunters totaled 130 this year, which is up 40% from the 85 written in 2023.

Bo Dame and Edward Ponton suggested putting a trail counter on the maritime forest trail to see differences in visitation compared to the boardwalk entryway. Alnes noted that he may move one of the trail counters from Kitty Hawk Woods up to Currituck Banks. Lora Eddy noted that The Nature Conservancy visitation rose during the pandemic, and they estimate totals of roughly 60,000 visitors a year at Nags Head Woods. Edward Ponton noted their on-site observations matched with an uptick in visitation since the pandemic. Bo Dame also noted that the comparative annual number of visitors between Kitty Hawk Woods (~10,000 visitors / year) and Currituck Banks (~95,000 visitors / year) matches what he observes between both sites.

There were eight research permits administered in 2023, including four for Currituck Banks Reserve. These studies include assessment of biodiversity on Natural Heritage sites, timber tracking with DNA analysis, biodiversity of interdune ponds and maritime forest habitats, seasonal change in SAV community composition. NCCR staff plan to assess SAV growth along their permanent transects again this fall in Ships Bay.

Bo Dame inquired about monitoring or research that had occurred at the long leaf pine stand on the north end of the property. Alnes noted that he was not aware of any research, but was aware of the location of the trees. Dame recommended reaching out to the Geography Department at East Carolina University, as a late professor, Ernie Marshburn, had done research at the site years ago. It would be interesting to assess changes to that tract.

Staff have been working to update brochures for all Northern Sites. Updates include new maps and updating rare species found on the site. As of this meeting, the brochures were under final review, and should be sent to print in May. Staff hope to have new brochures by the end of summer.

Several projects have been ongoing at the Northern Sites, including the removal of seven abandoned structures in Kitty Hawk Woods. Work is nearly complete, and staff are rehabilitating the tract by planting 200 seedlings of water oak and live oak in the disturbed area. A fence was also constructed around the cemetery on the site. Staff are excited to return this tract back to its natural state.

Member Roundtable (Staff response in italics)

Bo Dame asked if staff were aware of a beach run that occurs throughout the summer every Wednesday. The run starts at the lighthouse and turns around in or near the Currituck Banks parking lot. Alnes noted that they would have to acquire a special activity authorization if they were using the site, but mentioned that the county has a right of way along the sidewalk. Ponton added that it was through a rental company, Brindley Beach Vacations. Alnes will follow up with the company to figure out what they do, and where they are setting up the turnaround.

Edward Ponton had no report, but stated he enjoys the site frequently and encourages vacationers to visit the site. He also applauded the refurbishment of the boardwalk.

Jimmy Johnson stated that APNEP continues to work with leadership to implement the \$700,000 funds from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill. He noted that many of their projects are focused in the northeast part of the state. He encouraged continued collaboration with SAV work.

Lora Eddy advertised several open positions at The Nature Conservancy, including two at the Nags Head office. The advertisements can be found on TNC's website. Also, she provided updates regarding work at Nags Head Woods, including the installation of wayfinding signage and trails included in the Butterfly Monitoring Network. This network allows citizen-scientists to collect butterfly data and uses the data to track distributions, timing, yearly changes, and more.

Nathan Shepherd reported they have started to assess conservation tracts for the Land and Water Fund grant cycle, and will be busy in the field through the summer. He also stated the Natural Heritage Program is hiring a second field representative for the northeast side of the state.

Public Input

- No public participation.

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

- Erik Alnes will send SAV data and findings to APNEP, and set up a meeting with them to discuss how agencies could collaborate with SAV work.
- Erik Alnes will follow up with the Brindley Beach Vacation group to understand if they are utilizing the site for road races.

Adjourn

N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Spring 2024 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

Local Advisory Committee Membership

Welcome to our newly appointed and reappointed community members/organizations of the Local Advisory Committees! Updated committee membership is available on the reserve website [here](#). To all members, thank you for your service to the reserve's Local Advisory Committees.

Program Highlights

- Spring **student field trips** to the Rachel Carson Reserve and Masonboro Island Reserve via the Island Explorer Program are starting, and **summer camps** at the Rachel Carson Reserve will start in June in partnership with the NC Maritime Museum.
- The Coastal Reserve and NC Wildlife Resources Commission are gearing up for the 10th annual **2024 Terrapin Tally** to help better understand the overall population status and condition of the diamondback terrapin within the state. This citizen science project takes a snapshot of the diamondback terrapin population numbers in a given area by conducting kayak surveys at specified times and prescribed routes. Terrapin Tally paddling routes are available at 11 locations including: Cape Lookout National Seashore, Rachel Carson Reserve, Calico Creek, Hammocks Beach State Park, Lea Hutaff Island, Masonboro Island Reserve, Carolina Beach State Park, Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, Zeke's Island Reserve, Bald Head Island, and Bird Island Reserve. Data collection will occur during established windows April- June. More information is available [here](#).
- The reserve is hosting its third stop on the “**Discover the NC Coastal Reserve**” tour at the Rachel Carson Reserve in April. The tour is a multi-year campaign spanning 2023-2026 to connect target audiences with the program and places with events to be hosted at reserve sites along the coast. Two events were hosted in 2023, enjoy these short videos from the first tour stop at the [Currituck Banks Reserve](#) in June and the second tour stop at the [Bird Island Reserve](#) in December. Local Advisory Committee members will be invited to the site-based events so stay tuned for upcoming event information.
- The reserve is hosting a **Research Symposium** May 8-9, 2024 to highlight work conducted across reserve sites with posters and presentations from researchers including students, faculty, partner agencies, and staff. This will also be an opportunity for the research community to network and provide input on future research priorities.

Student Internships

Several interns and seasonal staff will be working with the reserve in Manteo, Beaufort, and Wilmington this summer. Thank you to Friends of the Reserve, the N.C. Internship Program, and UNCW for their support and partnership for the internships. Students will work on a range of stewardship and education projects. Stay tuned to the reserve's website and social media to meet the interns and staff once they start in May.

Federal Budget

- The budget table below is a summary of the status of the federal budget* for fiscal years 2020-2025 as it relates to the N.C. Reserve. 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	FY2022 Enacted	FY2023 Enacted	FY2024 Enacted	<i>FY2025 President's Request</i>
NERRS Operations	\$27.5M	\$28.5M	\$29.7M	\$32.5M	\$33.3M	\$32.5M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$6.5M	\$8.5M	\$8.5M	\$3M
CZM Grants	\$77M	\$78.5 M	\$79M	\$81.5M	\$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 Reserve staffing, state site operations, and administrative support.