



Local Advisory Committee Meeting
Currituck Banks Coastal Reserve

December 1st, 2021 - 1030
Virtual via WebEx with a call-in option

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	Y
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Jarrett Culbreath	N
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, OBX Center for Wildlife, Sharon Meade	Y
The Nature Conservancy, Aaron McCall	N
APNEP, Jimmy Johnson	N
NHP, Nathan Shepherd	Y
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Brett Harrison	Y
Edward Ponton	Y
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, NCCR, Northern Sites Manager	
Paula Gillikin, NCCR, Central Sites Manager	

Reserve-wide Program Business

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

Individual Reserve Business (Erik Alnes)

- *Boardwalk Refurbishment Project*

NCCR staff has been closely working with DEQ facilities staff to commence the boardwalk refurbishment project. The project will go out to bid in January of 2022, and work is expected to be completed by late winter. The project will likely be phased between the marsh and wooded areas of the boardwalk to limit closures of the walkway and trails in the Currituck Banks Reserve. Staff is developing signage to notify users of parking lot closures during the work, and NCCR will work closely with Currituck County to advertise closures of the boardwalk.

- *Interpretive Signage Update*

PAC funding was awarded for new interpretive signage along the boardwalk. Staff are working on developing eight signs that will be installed after the refurbishment project is complete. The topics of signs will include information regarding waterfowl and hunting in Currituck, flora and fauna common to the site, barrier island ecology, and information about our wild horse population that frequents the site.

- *Abandoned and Derelict Vessel (ADV) Update*

The Coastal Federation assisted with contracting the removal of ADV's in our area. Twenty vessels were removed from Dare County waters, resulting in over 80,000 pounds of waste removed. The grant runs through August of 2022, and the crew is expected to return to remove the sole ADV located in Ships Bay, in the Currituck Banks Reserve.

- *Subaquatic Vegetation (SAV) Study Results*

Before this study, no research had been completed to measure the SAV within our Reserve. Working in Ships Bay, staff collected data on 22 points along three transects, measuring percent coverage and species composition of SAV, along with depth of water and sediment type. This project also helped inform future studies, as Matt Duval of Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) joined to understand methods and learn local species. The NRCS will be conducting a Currituck Sound-wide study of soils and SAV over the next several years.

This baseline study revealed several results. There was a dominance of wild celery (*Vallisneria*) accompanied by seven other species in the study area. Points were sampled using a 0.25-meter quadrat, and all points possessed some SAV. Coverage of SAV was most dense the closer plots were to the marsh platform, and as water depth increased, the presence and cover percentage of wild celery increased. We look forward to continuing this study annually to gather long term data on these transects.

- *Site Stewards Expansion Project*

The Northern Site Manager is excited to announce the Site Stewards volunteer program! Site Stewards are volunteers who are educated in the N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve System that want to help monitor site conditions, maintain public access and trails, and assist with community-based projects. The pilot Site Stewards program will begin in December in the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve, and the program will expand the project to Currituck Banks and Buxton Woods Reserves in the early spring of 2022. If you are interested in volunteering in Currituck Banks, be on the lookout for outreach regarding the initial training in April of 2022. The Friends of the Reserve (FOR) has provided funding for volunteer t-shirts to increase the visibility of volunteers and promote public engagement in the field. We are very excited to increase community engagement and grow volunteerism at our sites!

Member Roundtable (*Staff response in italics*)

- Jennie Turner noted the County has horse tour operator ordinances in its Code that may or may not interact with the new Reserve special activity authorization. *Erik Alnes will follow up with the County to discuss how the new rule will interact.* Jennie also noted that the Audubon's Marsh Conservation Plan was published and recognized the multi-agency discussions that went into the document. Last, Jennie noted there is an education specialist position open for the Wildlife Center in Corolla that is posted on the County website.
- Mike Hoff informed the LAC that the Refuge closed on a 70-acre tract north of Currituck Banks Reserve. This year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) performed hog eradication in Corolla and Carova Beach areas removing 22 hogs, which is a high number when compared to years past. Last, the memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Reserve, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and The Nature Conservancy is expired and needs an update. Mike will reach out to involved parties soon to begin discussions.
- Sharon Meade was interested in reading the new parking rule for the Currituck Banks lot. Also, Sharon requested a copy of the SAV study. *Erik Alnes will send a copy of the SAV study out to the LAC.*
- Nathan Shepherd had no comment.
- Brett Harrison is interested in the Site Stewards program.
- Edward Ponton is interested in the Site Stewards program as well. Edward also noted that new signage would be beneficial to depict the loop trail that was installed in 2020. *Erik Alnes will investigate signage to properly explain the loop trail.*

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

- Mike Hoff will be in touch regarding the MOU.
- Erik Alnes will follow up with Jennie about possible permits needed for the Currituck Banks Boardwalk refurbishment project as well as outreach for the new parking rule.
- Erik Alnes will contact committee about the Site Stewards training before it is held in April of 2022.
- Erik Alnes will let members know about the dates of boardwalk repair as they become solidified.

Adjourn