



Local Advisory Committee Meeting
Kitty Hawk Woods Coastal Reserve

April 29th, 2021 - 1400
Virtual via WebEx with a call-in option

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
The Nature Conservancy, Aaron McCall	Y
UNC CSI, John McCord	N
Town of Kitty Hawk Administration, Andy Stewart	Y
NC Forest Service, John Cook	N
Town of Kitty Hawk Police, Joel Johnson	N
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Anna Barbosa	Y
Natural Heritage Program, Misty Buchanan	Y
NC Forest Service, Kayla Barnes	Y
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Dana Thomason	Y
Jeff Pruitt	N
Clifton Perry	Y
Mayor Gary Perry	Y
<u>Others Present</u>	
Rebecca Ellin, DCM, Reserve Program Manager	
Erik Alnes, DCM, Northern Sites Manager	
Christy Simmons, DCM, PIO	
Steve Jarvis, DCM, Northern Sites Assistant	
Woody Webster, DCM, Buckridge Coastal Reserve Manager	
Jesse Davis, Public	
Paul Henriques, Public	

Reserve-wide Program Business (Rebecca Ellin)

The Reserve-wide Update was shared with committee members before the meeting via email. Ms. Ellin reviewed highlights from the document, which is included in its entirety in Appendix A.

Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve Business (Erik Alnes)

- *Connector Trail Update – Andy Stewart*

Town Manager Andy Stewart gave an overview of the Connector Trail project. Through State grant funding, the project has been contracted and construction has begun. The first and largest water crossing has been completed, and the crew is progressing toward the Birch Lane Trail. The project is expected to be completed by mid-June. The town is working closely with Reserve staff to develop signage, and a local Eagle Scout will be implementing mile marker posts along the Birch Lane Trail.

- *Hard Tract Misuse*

On the Hard tract, staff identified several new unauthorized trails that were built by unknown parties. Also, trees were cut and holes were dug on the property to create bike ramps and cat-walks. Reserve staff posted signs alerting individuals that unauthorized trails and damage to habitats was not acceptable per Coastal Reserve rules, and Reserve staff worked to rehabilitate the natural area. Mayor Gary Perry and Town Council Member Jeff Pruitt walked the tract, and the Mayor reflected on it in a subsequent Council Meeting. The Reserve staff thank the Town for taking the time to observe what was occurring. The trails on this tract will not be maintained because the trails are not authorized and are accessed by private property. The Reserve staff will continue monitoring for misuse, and work to restore the tract.

- *Management Plan Update*

The current Kitty Hawk Woods Management Plan has not been updated since 1998 and is in need of a review. With additions such as the Hard Tract and Meter Point acquisitions, as well as the Connector Trail, the management plan needs to reflect current land holdings and infrastructure. Over the next year, Erik Alnes will begin updating the management plan. He will work closely with the Town of Kitty Hawk and LAC. The Reserve also plans to seek ways of engaging the public during the process.

- *Hunting Update*

This past hunting season, 124 hunters registered to hunt in Kitty Hawk Woods and Currituck Banks Coastal Reserves. 7 hunters reported from Kitty Hawk Woods and reported taking 10 wood ducks, 3 green winged teal, 5 squirrel, and 2 nutria. Reporting is voluntary, so these numbers underestimate what was harvested.

- *Infrastructure-related Project Updates*

- The guard shack on Covered Bridge road will undergo a roof replacement and minor repairs in the fall by DEQ facilities employees.

- The Hard tract's abandoned structures will be removed. Requests for funding have been submitted, and staff are awaiting on the budget cycle to hear when this project will be funded.
- Similarly, Reserve staff are working to secure funding for the fire access road that will allow large fire apparatus to access Kitty Hawk Woods from Ridge Road.
- *NC Coastal Federation Abandoned Vessel Removal Project*

Twelve vessels will be removed from Reserve owned marsh, along with about a dozen others within Dare County's waters. The ADV removal is expected to begin in early-mid May. When the tentative schedule is set with the contractor, NCCF will share information with local media outlets. The Reserve will also update the Town and citizens through our social media platforms.

Roundtable Discussion (*Staff response in italics*)

- Misty Buchanan updated the LAC on the Meter Point designation as a Dedicated Nature Preserve. This designation will add 61 acres of maritime evergreen forest and marsh to the Nature Preserve system. It has been approved by the Council of State and the dedication is awaiting final signatures.
- Dana Thomason shared the aquariums are still open to the public with reservations, and summer camps will be offered this summer, in-person and virtually. If interested in coastal training programs, contact the Reserve to sign up for the CTP listserve.
- Anna Barbosa assisted with the tagging of ADVs throughout Dare County and will be helping monitor the removal of the vessels from Dare County waters.
- Mayor Gary Perry inquired about the use of the guard shack and the funding of the fire access road. *Rebecca Ellin noted that the guard shack is used for storage of Reserve equipment. Also, because the State owns the land that the fire access road is proposed, the Reserve must go through the State construction process to get approval for the project.* Mayor Gary Perry offered additional support from Town staff to proceed with the fire access road.
- Clifton Perry noted that over time, Kitty Hawk Woods has had historic cart trails and logging railroad tracks. He provided perspective of the uses in Kitty Hawk Woods over time.

Public Comments

- Jesse Davis asked why the Reserve would not maintain the trails on the Hard tract if they are used by the public and could be accessed through the powerline corridor. *Erik Alnes noted that the two trails on that tract run into private property, and the state cannot include trails that encourage entry to private property. Rebecca Ellin followed up that on top of the access issues, permission was not given to those that constructed the trails. There was no planning or hard look at the ecological impacts of the trail system. All projects occurring on Reserve property must go through Reserve Staff. Last, Mayor Gary Perry stated that he believed the powerline was owned by Dominion Power and, therefore, was not public access.*
- Paul Henriques brought up concerns of safety on the trails west of The Woods Road. He stated the trails were not safe for bikers due to logs cut as steps, and slippery pine straw and leaf litter on the trails. *Erik Alnes agreed to visit the site with him to see his concerns and identify if there are any maintenance projects volunteer groups could work on.* Paul Henriques also proposed a loop to

connect existing trails within State owned property to limit the potential for individuals to wander onto private lands. *Erik Alnes will walk the trails in question with him to see if this is a viable option.*

Final comments, Action Items, and Wrap-up

- Aaron McCall suggested looking at trail apps to ensure designated trails were accurately represented on the application.
- Reserve staff will analyze how reserve trails are depicted on trail apps to ensure the correct information is getting out to the public.
- Reserve staff will begin constructing a timeline for the Management Plan update.
- Staff will provide an update on when the ADV removal begins, and when the work on the guard shack commences.
- Reserve staff will inquire about ways the Town of Kitty Hawk can support projects, including the fire access road, when they meet with DEQ facilities.
- Reserve staff will provide clarity on the ability of public access through the powerline corridor off Eckner street.
- Erik Alnes will meet with Paul Henriques to discuss trail concerns.

Adjourn

Appendix A

N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Spring 2021 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

COVID-19 Update

Below is a summary of how the Reserve is working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Staff continue to telework and all offices remain closed to visitors.
- All Reserve sites are open to visitors. The Reserve will continue to closely monitor state and local COVID-19 guidelines and directives and encourage Reserve visitors to comply with these measures to protect themselves and their communities; current guidelines and directives are located [here](#).
- All in-person trainings and public programming remain canceled; education and training staff are conducting virtual programming as well as assisting partners with virtual meeting support.
- Research and stewardship work is continuing at the sites, although activities are more limited as they must meet social distancing requirements.

Local Advisory Committee Member Application Period – April 5-May 5, 2021

Community members are needed to serve on local advisory committees for each of the Coastal Reserve's ten sites. Community members with knowledge and experience of relevant topical areas and an interest in serving as a local advisory committee member are encouraged to consider applying. More information about the application period and how to apply is located on the Reserve's website [here](#).

Periodic Rules Review

The Rules Review Commission approved a readoption timeline of November 30, 2021 for Coastal Reserve rules (15A NCAC 07O) as part of the Legislative Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process (G.S. 150B-21.3A). The required fiscal analysis for the proposed rule amendments is under review.

N.C. NERR Federal Program Evaluation

NOAA conducts periodic evaluations of coastal management programs and National Estuarine Research Reserves as required by the federal Coastal Zone Management Act. The virtual site visit for NOAA's evaluation of the N.C. coastal management program and N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve took place the week of October 5, 2020 with a public meeting for both programs held on October 7. Final findings were provided by NOAA to the Department of Environmental Quality in March 2021; NOAA concluded that the department is adhering to the programmatic requirements of the federal Coastal Zone Management Act in implementing both of the programs. The findings include a number of accomplishments and four recommendations, with no required actions.

Program Highlights

- **Hurricane Florence Marine Debris and Vessel Clean-Up:** The Division of Coastal Management received \$1,873,764 from the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Emergency Watershed Protection program, matched by \$543,120 in State funds to remove debris and abandoned vessels resulting from Hurricane Florence along North Carolina's coastline from Brunswick through Carteret, including Craven and Pamlico Counties. Four Reserve sites (Zeke's Island, Masonboro Island, Permuda Island, and Rachel Carson) benefited from the project with a total of 4 vessels and 371,460 pounds of debris being removed by N.C. Coastal Federation contractors. The total for all removals along the coast to date is 7 vessels and 691,260 pounds of debris.

- **Spring Virtual Field Trips:** Education Coordinator Lori Davis is bringing the Rachel Carson Reserve to the classroom with virtual field trips to the site in lieu of in-person trips as a result of the pandemic. Fifteen classes are scheduled to learn about estuaries and see sand, mud, salt marsh cordgrass, fiddler crabs and pickleweed virtually.
- **Living shorelines training for marine construction professionals:** To increase the knowledge of living shoreline construction practices among marine contractors, engineers, environmental consultants, and regulators, the Reserve, North Carolina Coastal Federation, and North Carolina Sea Grant are partnering to offer a new training course. This course will focus on living shoreline design for typical structures in residential settings along North Carolina's estuarine shorelines. The training combines three online classroom sessions with on-the-ground field training. The online classroom sessions will be held April-May 2021 with field trips in May or June as COVID-safety guidelines and directives allow.
- **7th Annual Terrapin Tally:** The Terrapin Tally is a citizen science project conducted in partnership with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to measure the status of diamondback terrapin populations. Volunteers work in pairs to conduct headcount surveys on specific kayak routes to document diamondback terrapin sightings. This volunteer opportunity is compatible with current COVID-19 safety guidance and Governor Cooper's executive orders and can be completed by members of the same household or while maintaining appropriate social distancing in an outdoor setting. For the 7th season of the Terrapin Tally, the project is expanding to include numerous federal, state, and local partners with the addition of ten sites, spanning the coast from Carteret to Brunswick County. The 2021 Terrapin Tally will be conducted April 28-May 16 and sites include Cape Lookout National Seashore, Rachel Carson Reserve, Pine Knoll Shores, Hammocks Beach State Park, Lea Hutaff Island, Masonboro Island Reserve, Carolina Beach State Park, Ft. Fisher State Recreation Area, Zeke's Island Reserve, Bald Head Island, and Bird Island Reserve.
- **iNaturalist:** Help us document plants and animals on the Reserve sites using the free app, iNaturalist, and start submitting your pictures while visiting the Reserve sites. You can explore other locations and see what others have found while visiting, as well.

Friends of the Reserve –N.C. Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship Award and New Website

Friends of the Reserve, or 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.

FOR is sponsoring a new **N.C. Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship Award** to encourage promising and talented students from traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations to pursue study and careers in coastal and estuarine science. **Juanita Gonzalez** was selected as the first Internship Award recipient and will be working with Reserve staff at the Masonboro Island Reserve this summer. Juanita is a sophomore at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, double majoring in environmental studies and biology. Thank you to Friends of the Reserve for its support of this award program, and congratulations and welcome to Juanita!

FOR also [recently launched a new website](#) with assistance from the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association; explore the website to learn more about the organization and its work.

Staffing News

Erik Alnes joined the Reserve in February as the Northern Sites Manager. Erik comes to us from the NC Forest Service where he worked for the past 2 years as the Currituck County Ranger. Prior to that, Erik worked for the US Forest Service on the Lewis and Clark Hotshot Crew in Montana. He has a Bachelor's degree in Resource Conservation from The University of Montana and a Master's degree in Resource Conservation, specializing in Natural Resources Policy, also from The University of Montana. Welcome to Erik!

Federal Budget

The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget* for fiscal years 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 as it relates to the Coastal Reserve.

Federal Budget Lines	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2017	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2018	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2019	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2020	FY2021 Enacted (Consolidated Appropriations Act)
NERRS Operations	\$23.5 M	\$25 M	\$27M	\$27.5 M	\$28.5 M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$1.7M	\$1.7M	\$1.9M	\$4.5M	\$4.5M
CZM Grants	\$70 M	\$75 M	\$75.5M	\$77 M	\$78.5 M

- 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.

* The federal fiscal year is October 1-September 30. The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) budget line provides funding to the 29 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.