



Local Advisory Committee Meeting
Kitty Hawk Woods Coastal Reserve

November 12, 2025 – 1:00 P.M.

Kitty Hawk Town Hall

101 Veterans Memorial Dr., Kitty Hawk, NC 27949

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
The Nature Conservancy, Lora Eddy	Y
UNC Coastal Studies Institute, John McCord	Y
Town of Kitty Hawk Administration, Melody Clopton	Y
Town of Kitty Hawk Police, Lt. James Helms	Y
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, Alex McPhail	N
Natural Heritage Program, Katherine Culatta	Y
N.C. Forest Service, Kyle Breslin	Y
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Dr. James “Bo” Dame	Y
Jeff Pruitt	Y
Clifton Perry	Y
Gary Perry	N
Paul Henriques	N
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik D. Alnes, NCCR, Northern Sites Manager	
Woody Webster, NCCR, Buckridge 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, that 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.

- *Volunteerism*

Year to date, 46 hours of volunteerism were reported at the northern sites, with 45 of those hours being reported in the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve. At a rate of \$33.01 per hour, our volunteers have generated \$1,518.46 in match while helping with the stewardship of the site. Staff shared feedback from volunteers, including forgetting to document volunteer hours and interest in large, organized projects. Staff reiterated the purpose of the Site Stewards volunteer program was to train volunteers to work individually, or with other Site Stewards, with the ability to call on volunteers for larger projects. Staff opened the discussion to the LAC members for recommendations on encouraging more volunteerism and lessons learned from their volunteer programs.

- John McCord noted that there was a new effort from the Dare County Visitor's Bureau to increase community engagement and voluntourism. He shared Jeff Schwartzenbergs contact information with Erik Alnes and noted a program and website that helps connect volunteer opportunities with interested parties that may be vacationing locally.
- Mr. McCord went on to state that there may be opportunities for more volunteer engagement through the Coastal Studies Institute's connection with Eastern Carolina University students. He noted students will be in the area January through May, as well as summer.
- Laura Eddie offered to connect Mr. Alnes to Julie Kern who interacts with the student groups.

- Mrs. Eddie, Mr. McCord, and Bo Dame reflected on the amount of work it takes to manage volunteer programs, and finding a balance of volunteer interaction and oversight with capacity.

Lt. Helms, with the Kitty Hawk Police Department stated public safety was planning an upcoming event and mentioned it may be a good way to acquire volunteers and get the police and fire department personnel more familiar with the Reserve trails. He noted an idea to pair citizens with public safety staff and go for a hike with a cop or a firefighter. He stated he will update Mr. Alnes as the event approaches if they decide to do something like that.

- *Visitation*

Staff maintain two counters at popular trailheads to estimate visitation. From October 2024 through October 2025, data indicates 46,664 individuals visited the Currituck Banks Reserve boardwalk: averaging 128 per day, with peak visitation observed in June and July. The boardwalk observed a 23% decrease in visitation from last year's data.

During the same period, 3,261 individuals visited the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve Connector trailhead averaging 9 visitors per day, with peak visitation observed in the cooler months of January and February. This trailhead observed a 16% decrease in visitation when compared to last year's data. While overall visitation decreased, May and July of 2025 showed the highest use per month since data collection began in 2023, averaging roughly 400 visitors during those months 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 accessibility of information.

- *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).

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).

Findings from the 1988 CVS recreation study showed the largest species decrease in percent cover was switchcane and water oak, both reducing by 30% cover. Other notable findings included the absence of swamp chestnut oak, red maple, service berry, pepper vine, chokecherry, and black willow, which were found in the original plot in 1988. Novel species were found in the plot, including devils walking stick, American holly, eastern red cedar, swamp bay, summer grape, willow oak, sourwood, black cherry, and Virginia creeper. Muscadine experienced the largest increase in percent cover with a 61% upsurge.

- Lora Eddie stated surprise at the decrease in switchcane, but noted that she had passively noticed similar trends at the Nags Head Woods Preserve.
- Discussions led to suggestions about future research.
- Bo Dame shared his wish for photo points at sites like this to see the difference between two pictures. He noted that it may be a good citizen science project, or future project for an intern. He stated it could be done with an [SLR] or simply a phone camera. He also noted that he feels the woods have opened up more, based on his lengthy experience working in the area.

- *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.

- Lt. Helms noted that they had noticed increased dumping along the powerline corridor. He also shared that with the assistance of a drone, the Police Department had found and resolved a homeless encampment on the North end of the Birch Lane Trail, near Kitty Hawk Estates. He offered the use of the Police owned drone in the future to Mr. Alnes.
- Kyle Breslin asked if the reporting tool was public or if it was an internally used reporting device. Mr. Alnes clarified it was only used by staff, but that the Site Stewards Survey123 tool was available for the public to use. Mr. Breslin asked if Mr. Alnes could re-share the QR code for the application so he could report what he finds when he walks in the woods.
- Jeff Pruitt asked if staff knew anything about the “No Wake” buoy that was placed on the southern end of Jean Guite Creek. Mr. Alnes stated he was aware of it, but was

unsure who placed it there. He noted the Wildlife Resources Commission may know more about it if it is a registered no wake zone.

Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve Business

- *Paddle Trail*

The old blue paddle trail markers have been replaced with higher visibility markers. Stickers have been drafted and are in the process of being ordered. The new markers will help visitors follow the 5-mile kayak trail and are now uniform at all N.C. Coastal Reserve Sites with kayak trails.

- *Signage Update*

Staff developed, ordered, and installed new plant identification signs at the Currituck Banks and Kitty Hawk Woods Reserves. These signs include the common and scientific name of the plant and were installed on the southern side of the Birch Lane trail as well as the southern side of Ridge trail. These signs augment the educational experience for visitors, and staff have received positive feedback since their installation.

- *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 070 .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. Bo Dame mentioned support, noting that he could see a food truck trying to utilize the Currituck Banks Reserve parking lot.

Member Roundtable

- Kyle Breslin of the North Carolina Forest Service stated that his office is still without a heavy equipment operator. If anyone knows of potential CDL holders interested in the position, please share the opportunity. He also mentioned planned burns in Nags Head

that may cause worry on the beach. These controlled burns will be advertised heavily before commencing via the N.C. Forest Service website and social media. Last, he noted that the fire season had been very slow.

- Katherine Culatta of the Natural Heritage Program stated that she would be taking over the biologist position in May, and there will likely be a new representative from the agency at the next meeting.
- Town Manager Melody Clopton highlighted the completion of a nature trail in the woods that surround Town Hall. She also provided an update that their application for an additional boardwalk from Sandy Run Park to the Birch Lane Trail was not funded this cycle. The Town will continue to seek funding for the project in the future. Last, she noted that the Town was working on a bicycle plan.
- Lt. Helms of the Kitty Hawk Police Department did not have anything further to add.
- Jeff Pruitt had no comments.
- Clifton Perry had no comments.
- Lora Eddie of The Nature Conservancy updated the group that they are re-doing the pavilion at Nags Head Woods, and it should be completed by Spring. She also noted attending a meeting with a newly formed Northeast Regional Trails Organization. This group promotes recreational access to trails in the northeast region of North Carolina and encourages community involvement. Last, she asked if there were restrictions on hunting by trails in Kitty Hawk Woods and mentioned Nags Head Woods enforces a 100-yard setback from any trail for their bow hunters. Mr. Alnes stated the educational training for the Reserve instructs hunters to position away from trails and makes them aware of the multiple uses on the property, but that the Reserve does not have a formal setback rule. He also noted the Town ordinance that restricts the areas where individuals can hunt with certain firearms.
- John McCord of the Coastal Studies Institute shared several upcoming events at the campus, including a Science on the Sound presentation on remote sensing, the Outer Banks Field Site capstone presentation on December 11th at 3:00 p.m., as well as the second year of the Maritime Careers Expo coming up December 4th.

Public Input

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 contact Jeff Schwartzenbergs regarding potential volunteer outreach.
- Laura Eddie will connect Mr. Alnes to Julie Kern regarding student volunteers.

- Lt. Helms will reach out to Mr. Alnes to collaborate regarding the public safety event if the Reserve is used.
- Erik Alnes will send a QR code to Kyle Breslin to reconnect him to the Site Stewards Survey on Survey123.
- Erik Alnes will deliver brochures to The Town and The Nature Conservancy.

Adjourn

2:06 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.