



**Masonboro Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, May 10, 2023, 1 pm**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
NC Audubon, Lindsay Addison	Yes
New Hanover County Sheriff's Office, Sergeant Steve Schmidlin	No
New Hanover County Planning Department, Dylan McDonnell	No
NC Coastal Land Trust, Jesica Blake	No
Division of Marine Fisheries, Anne Deaton	No
Division of Parks and Recreation – Carolina Beach State Park, Chris Helms	No
Natural Heritage Program, Judith Ratcliffe, Scott Pohlman	Yes
UNCW Center for Marine Science, Martin Posey	No
Town of Wrightsville Beach Administration	No
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Neal Andrew	No
Nevin Carr	Yes
Thomas Carter	No
Dr. Lynn Leonard	No
Dr. Zachary Long	Yes - call in
Masonboro.org, Tom Hackler	No
William Raney	Yes
Jud Watkins	No
Ted Wilgis	No
<u>Others Present</u>	
Elizabeth Pinnix, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Southern Sites Manager Byron Toothman, Research Biologist NCNERR Dwight Jessup, Representative for Masonboro.org	

Welcome

The southern sites manager welcomed the committee to the Spring 2023 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and led introductions.

Reserve-wide Administrative Update

The Reserve-wide Update was shared with committee members prior to the meeting. The update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

The site manager provided some reminders from the Reserve-wide update:

- Local Advisory Committee term expiration - you have been contacted if your term is expiring and more details on the application period will come out in mid-May. If you know of others that would like to apply, please send me their contact information or forward along the application details when they become public.
- Staffing updates:
 - Dr. Justin Ridge - Research Coordinator
 - Jillian Daly - Communications Specialist

Site Update

General site conditions

Reserve staff are preparing for the summer field season and activity on the island is rapidly increasing. Staff have reviewed and approved eleven special activity authorizations for ecotour related activities at Masonboro Island Reserve.

Dredging

The site manager updated the committee on dredging and sediment placement projects ongoing in the reserve area. She reported the activities around the Masonboro Yacht Club and Trails End boat ramp is wrapping up soon and the spoil island across from Trails End is being prepped for disposal by the US Army Corps of Engineers within their easement for an Intracoastal Waterway Management project. The site manager encouraged the committee to be cautious when boating near these operations on the reserve.

4th of July

The site manager reminded the committee about the contracting of the New Hanover County Sheriff's Department to enforce rules and prevent underage drinking on the reserve. This activity will be continued for 2023 and includes up to 23 officers staged at the Wrightsville Beach Coast Guard station to keep watch on the island and regularly patrol the surrounding waters. Officers will deploy to the island if needed.

Mr. Jessup said the overall trend of the holiday seems to be decreasing and contributes this to law enforcement presence, outreach, and social media campaigns to encourage responsible use. He also noted that Masonboro.org volunteers have donated their time on the holiday to clean up litter and remind others to pack out their trash. The organization has reported a decreasing trend in the amount of trash collected over the years, but they plan to continue their effort in 2023.

Seasonal activities and research

Terrapin Tally

The site manager reminded the committee about the 9th annual [terrappin tally](#), a community science project that collects diamondback terrapin abundance data in N.C. estuaries, that kicked off this past week at 10 sites across the coast.

Painted Buntings

The site manager informed the committee that new research is being conducted by the [Cape Fear Bird Observatory](#) (non-profit) to tag and band painted buntings at multiple sites in southeast N.C., including Masonboro Island. The birds are tagged with coded leg bands and some receive cellular tracking tags to help understand movement in coastal habitats.

Motus Tower

Additionally, ongoing research with Motus towers is happening at Masonboro Island. The site manager shared this topic at previous meetings. The network will help track migratory movements and habitat preferences of birds and potentially other species. Existing towers include Fort Macon State Park, Lea-Hutaff Island, and Bald Head Island Conservancy. Motus towers will soon be installed at Hammocks Beach State Park and Bird Island Reserve.

Spanish Language Outreach

The reserve will have a NOAA Hollings Scholar joining us for 10 weeks during the summer to continue translating and developing materials in Spanish to improve accessibility.

Sea Turtles

Routine monitoring will be conducted approximately three times weekly from May - October for nesting sea turtles. Masonboro Island received its first nest Friday night, which was the first in the state and earliest nest on record for Masonboro Island.

Site Improvements

Nature Trail Signage

Interpretive signs will be installed during fall 2023. Topics focus on species of interest, research, how to be a good steward, resilience, and barrier island habitats. The signs were provided by a grant from the National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) Land Acquisition and Construction Fund. Funds are also provided for the construction of storm-resistant research platforms to replace the current research structures at Loosins Creek and Research Creek; construction of walkways in the marsh to allow for monitoring activities while protecting the marsh from damage; and for interpretive signs at the Currituck Banks Reserve.

Roundtable

- Mr. Carr inquired about a tide table that was more accurate for the creek system on the sound side of Masonboro Island. He asked if the reserve or other partners had a gauge accessible to the public that was closer to the back side of the island than the Wrightsville Beach bridge for safety and more accurate information for public recreation. Mr. Toothman responded that there was not one at this time, but we would look into the possibility of [Coastal Ocean Monitoring Program](#) (CORMP) data from UNC-Wilmington's Center for Marine Science dock be made available for tidal gauge reference.
- Mr. Raney asked about the status of the shorebird nesting season. The site manager responded that it was a difficult start with increased depredation from a coyote. Luckily, we were able to conduct a second round of predator management and we are hopeful for a more successful year than 2022. Mr. Pohlman suggested researching other methods of predator management to help with the issue, including fladry, etc.
- The site manager mentioned a presentation that will be given at the fall 2023 LAC meeting by researchers from UNC-Wilmington. The presentation will focus on predicting the effects of storms and calm periods on the habitats and ecosystems of Masonboro Island.
- It was also discussed that 2024 LAC meetings will be planned in the beginning of the year for improved coordination.

A written update was provided on behalf of Ted Wilgis - NC Coastal Federation (NCCF) staff and LAC committee member:

- N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries, the reserve program, Bald Head Island Conservancy and the NCCF worked together to locate and remove about 45 derelict crab pots from the Diamondback Terrapin Management Areas at Masonboro Island Reserve and Bald Head Island during the March 2023 blue crab fishing closure.
- The NCCF has been recommended for funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to continue the marine debris and abandoned and derelict vessel (ADV) removal program. The \$4.5 million will be provided over four years and will cover the entire coast, including reserve sites.
- The NCCF is working with N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and members of the N.C. General Assembly to secure additional funding and support for a permanent ADV prevention and removal program.

Public comments

Ms. Dunn requested route and landing access maps from the reserve to help with safe navigation for personal and ecotour use.

Action Items

None

N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Spring 2023 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 and the reserve is seeking community member applications in June 1-30, 2023 for each of the reserve's ten committees. As a reminder, community members may apply to serve consecutive or non-consecutive terms per the [Local Advisory Committee Operating Procedures](#). More information about the upcoming application period will be available in mid-May.

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's **Training Program** hosted three workshops for real estate professionals this April on living shorelines and low impact development for water quality protection. The workshops were held in partnership with the Brunswick County Association of Realtors and Cape Fear Realtors. At these workshops, real estate professionals received 4 elective continuing education credits. Since 2020, the training program has hosted 11 real estate professional workshops reaching over 700 people.
- The Coastal Reserve and NC Wildlife Resources Commission are gearing up for the 9th annual **2023 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 during May and June.
- North Carolina is celebrating the [Year of the Trail](#) in 2023, as designated by the N.C. General Assembly. The reserve will highlight available trails at sites on social media throughout the year.
- Repairs to the **Currituck Banks Reserve boardwalk** are complete and the boardwalk has reopened to visitors. The original footprint of the boardwalk was maintained, and the aging decking boards, benches, and railings were replaced. These replacements are identified as a facility need in the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve's 2020-2025 Management Plan. This project was made possible with funding from the Division's N.C. Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Grant Program, DEQ, and NOAA. A big thank you to staff and the DEQ facilities team for their hard work on this project. An event will be held in early June to celebrate the enhanced public access at the site.

Staffing News

- Dr. Justin Ridge joined the reserve as the new Research Coordinator in February. Justin comes to us from the Duke University Marine Lab where he led the Marine Robotics and Remote Sensing (MaRRS) Lab's coastal mapping research program. Justin has a Master's degree in biological oceanography from Florida Institute of Technology and a PhD in marine science from UNC Chapel Hill where his research focused on North Carolina's sounds (and primarily within the Rachel Carson Reserve), examining growth of oyster reefs and their influence on saltmarsh sedimentation and erosion. Justin's recent research includes the application of novel methods

(e.g., drones, deep learning, etc.) for coastal resource management to address human and climatic driven changes, working with the southeast national estuarine research reserves and beyond, along the east and gulf coasts and in Belize.

- Jillian Daly joined the reserve as the new Communications Specialist in February. Jillian is a recent graduate of UNC Chapel Hill with a BS in Environmental Science and a minor in Marine Science, with a strong interest and experience in science communication. In her free time, she enjoys spending time at the Rachel Carson Reserve.
- Several interns and seasonal staff are working with the reserve in Beaufort and Wilmington this summer. Thank you to Friends of the Reserve, the N.C. Internship Program, and NOAA’s Education Partnership Program with Minority Serving Institutions for their support of the internships. Students will work on stewardship and education projects, including Spanish translation of materials to better serve this visitor population.
- NOAA provided capacity building funds to the Division of Coastal Management from its allocation of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (or Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) to hire time-limited staff to work on conservation and restoration projects. The reserve’s time-limited position will conduct habitat resilience planning and project implementation at the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve sites to increase coastal habitat resilience to ensure the sites continue to provide ecological services and protective services to the communities where they are located. The position will be posted soon.

Federal Budget

- The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget* for fiscal years 2020-2024 as it relates to the N.C. Reserve. The Senate and House are currently working on their versions of the FY2024 federal budget. 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 Enacted	FY2024 President’s Request
NERRS Operations	\$27.5M	\$28.5M	\$29.7M	\$32.5M	\$32.5M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$6.5M	\$8.5M	\$4.5M
CZM Grants	\$77 M	\$78.5 M	\$79M	\$81.5M	\$78.5M

* 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.