



**Zeke's Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, December 1, 2020 – 2 pm
Meeting held by WebEx**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Division of Parks and Recreation – FFRA, Jeff Owen	Yes
Division of Archives and History, Stephen Atkinson	Yes
NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher, Renee Weeks	Yes
Natural Heritage Program, Judith Ratcliffe	Yes
<u>Community Members</u>	
Devon Eulie	Yes
Stephen Rice	Yes
Angela Marshall	Yes
<u>Others Present</u>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager	
Elizabeth Colhoun, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship and Education Specialist	
Whitney Jenkins, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Coastal Training Program Coordinator	

Welcome – Hope Sutton

The site manager welcomed the committee to the Fall 2020 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and called roll. A brief introduction to the web meeting platform was provided by Whitney Jenkins, NCCR Coastal Training Program Coordinator.

Reserve-wide Administrative Update – Hope Sutton

The Reserve-wide Update, which includes a range of Reserve activities and information was shared with committee members prior to the meeting. Members had no comments or questions about the updates. The Update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

Site Update and Old Business – Hope Sutton

- *General site conditions*
 - The site manager reported that conditions at the site have been fairly typical, despite the pandemic. This site was not closed at any point during the year in relation to any emergency orders or governor's orders. Both stewardship and research activities have continued on a limited basis due to Covid restrictions on the number of people allowed to travel together in vehicles and vessels. A clean up was held on September 24, in conjunction with Kayak Carolina and LAC member

Angela Caldwell. A variety of storm generated marine debris and visitor use trash was removed from the island. Both Ms. Caldwell and Mr. Owen reported witnessing greater than usual number of visitors at the site through the season with use of the driving beach having increased due to changes at Freeman Park, the other 4WD access beach in the area.

- *Storm report*
 - Impacts of the 2020 hurricane season were largely unnoticeable at the site with the exception of the East Cribbings water quality station, which was entirely lost. Research staff are working to replace research equipment and re-establish a deployment structure at the site. Attempts using unmanned aerial systems were made to locate the lost piling with research equipment attached to it, but these efforts were unfruitful. The station located at the edge of the basin remains intact. Mr. Atkinson suggested that during times of normal operations, the Underwater Archeology Branch may be able to assist with searching for lost research equipment using side scan sonar.

New Business – Hope Sutton

- *Spanish-language outreach project*
 - Throughout the Fall semester, the Reserve has had two UNCW students, Lilly Triolo and Juanita Gonzales, working to address the need for outreach targeted to our Spanish-speaking and Hispanic community visitors. They have worked to translate several materials into Spanish, including the site brochure, the Estuaries: Where Rivers Meet the Sea coloring book, and the Estuary Activity Book. They also conducted an informal survey with site visitors to inform our planning for outreach activities and materials and inventoried the Spanish language offerings of other public entities in the Fort Fisher/Federal Point area. As a result of discovering that minimal offerings are available in the area, the Reserve invited area partners to participate in a workshop, to be held in early February, to promote collaboration in the development of environmental education and outreach programs for this community of visitors. Reserve staff hope that development of signage, printed information, and/or hands-on outreach efforts will result from this collaboration. Mr. Rice suggested that the USCG Auxiliary has been working to create Spanish language boater safety materials.
- *Member selection process*
 - Some of the Reserve's Local Advisory Committees have members whose terms have expired, so we will be preparing to hold a member application and selection process during the late spring or early summer of 2021. We wanted to provide this advance notice to committee members since the application period will be announced to the public in conjunction with the press release for the spring meetings. As per the Operating Procedures, individual and organizational community members are allowed to serve consecutive terms but must reapply to be considered. Current members who will need to reapply in order to be considered for continued service will be contacted directly by the respective site managers closer to the announcement of the application period.
- *Permit hunt program*
 - The Reserve is pursuing working with the Wildlife Resources Commission to include the Zeke's Island Reserve in the permit hunting program. This change would allow the Reserve to work with the WRC to customize the regulations around hunting to best suit site conditions and serve both management and adjacent community concerns such as visitor conflicts. There are several steps to be completed in working toward this approach, including gathering input from a variety of entities such as the LAC and Division and Department leadership. It could eventually result in the WRC including the site in the 2022-23 Hunting Regulations Digest where information about the sites and may include the requirement to obtain a permit before hunting and to report take. For the Zeke's Island Reserve, inclusion in the permit hunt program would also help provide clarity for hunters

given the adjacent Parks properties where hunting is not allowed. The Reserve is interested in gathering any input from committee members regarding this approach.

- Dr. Eulie asked about the species and spatial extent of the permit hunt. The site manager explained that these are items that are to be determined based on input from the committee members, partner agencies, the community, and in consultation with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission staff. Mr. Owen expressed support for clarifying the boundaries for hunting activities given the adjacent property ownership with Parks properties, where hunting is not allowed.

- *Terrapin Tally expansion and Diamondback Terrapin Management Area*

- The Reserve is working with a variety of partners on expanding the Terrapin Tally, a citizen science project designed to collect diamondback terrapin population data through repeated head count surveys. The project will include a virtual training during April and data collection sessions during May. This project, conducted in partnership with the Wildlife Resources Commission and piloted at the Masonboro Island Reserve, will be expanded to up to ten sites in 2021. The Reserve is working to develop local coordinators for each of the new sites to assist with route development and recruitment and management of local volunteers. The other news related to diamondback terrapins is that the Division of Marine Fisheries adopted two diamondback terrapin management areas where blue crab pots will be required to be outfitted with excluder devices to reduce diamondback terrapin bycatch. The Zeke's Island Reserve and the Bald Head State Natural Area are entirely included within the Bald Head Island Diamondback Terrapin Management Area. These management measures take effect early in 2021. Members expressed support for the expansion of these activities to the Zeke's Island site and Ms. Ratcliffe stated that the data would be of interest to the Natural Heritage Program.

Roundtable

- Mr. Rice suggested signage to alert visitors to the potential for flooding of the parking area near the boat ramp during high tides. Mr. Owen suggested talking with NC WRC or NC Department of Transportation about this signage and offered Parks support for installation.
- Ms. Weeks shared that the Aquarium had conducted no on-site activities due to Covid restrictions.
- Dr. Eulie shared about a project she is working on that will utilize drones and calibrate them with on-site water quality equipment.
- Ms. Caldwell shared that the tides had been extraordinarily high and that the sea turtle nest she located on the riverine boundary of the site had likely been inundated numerous times.

Public comments

- None

Action Items

- Reserve staff will contact committee members during the winter to establish a date for the spring meeting.
- Reserve staff will contact Meredith Wojcik, at the Natural Heritage Program, to work out a data sharing plan.
- Reserve staff will request that research staff attend the next meeting to share water quality information with the committee.

N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Fall 2020 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.

Hurricane Isaias Reserve Impacts

- All Reserve sites remained open during and following Hurricane Isaias.
- Four vessels were displaced during Isaias on the Masonboro Island Reserve; three of the displaced vessels were removed by the owners/contractors.
- A water quality monitoring sonde and its piling infrastructure at the Zeke's Island Reserve disappeared in the storm. Staff are investigating replacement options.
- All of the trails at the Bald Head Woods Reserve were littered with downed trees and limbs. Thank you to The Nature Conservancy staff for assisting Reserve staff with the trail clean-up.

Periodic Rules Review

The Rules Review Commission approved the requested re-adoption timeline of November 30, 2021 for Coastal Reserve rules (15A NCAC 070). At its September 2020 meeting, the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission provided unanimous support of the Division's proposed amendments for re-adoption of 15A NCAC 070 to inform its recommendation to the Department. The proposed amendments reflected the input previously provided by the local advisory committees. Staff are preparing the required fiscal analysis as part of the rule-making process. This work is part of the Legislative Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process (G.S. 150B-21.3A).

N.C. NERR Management Plan

The final revised management plan for the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve for 2020-2025 is located [here](#) on the Reserve website. NOAA will publish notification of the plan's availability in the federal register shortly.

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 with a public meeting for both programs held on October 7. Findings from the evaluations are anticipated in early 2021.

Federal Budget

The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget* for fiscal years 17, 18, 19, and 20 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
NERRS Operations	\$23.5 M	\$25 M	\$27M	\$27.5 M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$1.7M	\$1.7M	\$1.9M	\$4.5M
CZM Grants	\$70 M	\$75 M	\$75.5M	\$77 M

- Federal Fiscal Year 21: The President’s budget request does not include funding for the NERRS Operations and PAC, or the CZM Grants budget lines. The House funding level for NERRS Operations for FY21 is \$28.25M and the Senate funding level is \$29M.
- 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.

Program Highlights

- **Living on a Barrier Island Workshop:** The Coastal Training Program hosted a virtual workshop in September for real estate professionals to learn the ecology and geology of barrier islands and the rules and policies that govern development. The workshop covered updates to the National Flood Insurance Program, hurricane-resistant construction and wind insurance incentives, and using native plantings for the coastal landscape.
- **Drones in the Coastal Zone Virtual Workshop Series:** Reserve staff assisted in organizing and facilitating the Drones in the Coastal Zone virtual workshop series hosted by SECOORA in October. The series covered the use of unoccupied aircraft systems in ecosystem and fisheries management in the Southeast and U.S. Caribbean, including governmental policy and procedures, mission planning, data management, demonstrations on emerging drone technologies, and more. Session recordings are available to view on this [webpage](#) and a workshop report will be available soon.
- The Reserve was selected to receive funding from the DCM Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Program for the replacement of decking, structural joists, and pilings for the **Currituck Banks Reserve boardwalk** which ends at a viewpoint of the Currituck Sound. Work will take place in 2021.

Staffing News

- Congratulations to Reserve staff award winners!
 - **Whitney Jenkins** (Coastal Training Program Coordinator) and **Paula Gillikin** (Central Sites Manager) each received 2020 Pelican Awards from the NC Coastal Federation in a virtual awards program on August 6. Both were recognized in the “Coastwide Winners” category – Paula received an award for “Exceptional Leadership and Facilitation of Coastal Stewardship” and Whitney for “Exemplary Commitment to Coastal Resource Training and Collaboration.”
 - **Brandon Puckett**, Research Coordinator, received the Division of Coastal Management’s 2020 Distinguished Service Award at a virtual Department of Environmental Quality awards program on November 10. Brandon was recognized for his scope of high quality and impactful work, including his work on living shorelines and

leadership in the multi-component Beaufort Inlet Dredging Monitoring Project to inform the state's response to the US Army Corps of Engineers' proposals for summertime dredging of federal shipping channels at NC State Ports.

- **Duncan Anderson** joined the Reserve as a temporary GIS Specialist. Duncan is a recent graduate of NC State University where he received his B.S. in Environmental Technology and Management. He is working to organize and further the program's mapping and cataloging spatial information from all 10 Reserve sites.
- **Marae Lindquist** is our first National Estuarine Research Reserve System Margaret A. Davidson Fellow. Marae is a PhD student from UNC-W Department of Biology and Marine Biology. She will be researching the impacts of sea level rise on wintering populations of saltmarsh and seaside sparrows at four reserve sites (Rachel Carson, Masonboro Island, Zeke's Island, and Bird Island Reserves). This research will address management priorities for the Reserve and will provide important information to inform management of habitats that benefit sensitive species. The two-year fellowship began in September; click [here](#) to learn more about Marae's work and the fellowship.
- **Grace Roskar** will join the Reserve November 30 as the temporary Natural Resources Resilience Specialist. Grace has a B.S. in marine science and biology from the University of Miami and a M.S. in biology from Florida Atlantic University's Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute. Grace recently completed a Sea Grant Knauss Marine Policy Fellowship, during which she worked for NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology as a habitat science specialist. Grace will be working with staff on the Rachel Carson Reserve resilience plan, funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Emergency Coastal Resilience Fund.
- **Jason Brown**, Reserve Northern Sites Manager, accepted another job within DEQ in Raleigh and his last day with the Reserve was September 4. **Steve Jarvis** re-joined the Reserve as a part-time employee to help manage the Currituck Banks, Kitty Hawk Woods, and Buxton Woods Reserve. Interviews were conducted to fill the vacant position November 5-6.

* 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.