



Local Advisory Committee Meeting
Kitty Hawk Woods Coastal Reserve

April 23, 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	N
UNC Coastal Studies Institute, John McCord	N
Town of Kitty Hawk Administration, Melody Clopton	Y
Town of Kitty Hawk Administration, Lauren Garrett	Y
N.C. Forest Service, John Cook	N
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	N
Jeff Pruitt	Y
Clifton Perry	Y
Gary Perry	N
Paul Henriques	N
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, NCCR, Northern Sites Manager	
Woody Webster, NCCR, Buckridge Manager	

Reserve-wide Update

Please see appendix for complete Reserve-wide updates.

Northern Sites Update

The Northern Sites Manager hosted a Chainsaw Safety Training for all N.C. Coastal Reserve Staff in February 2025, at the Buxton Woods Reserve. This training increased staff capacity to respond to

significant storm events and maintain trail networks. Coastal Reserve Staff appreciate the National Park Service for allowing staff to utilize their facilities for the classroom portion of the training.

The Northern Sites Manager hosted a tour of the Currituck Banks Reserve for the Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail. Roughly 30 participants enjoyed a tour of the recently refurbished boardwalk and maritime forest trail. The group learned about barrier island systems, the ecology of maritime forests and estuarine systems, the flora and fauna found on the site, and the significance of natural resource protection on the Outer Banks.

The Northern Sites will host an intern this summer. Samuel Suber will be joining us for 12 weeks, filling the N.C. Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship which is funded by the Friends of the Reserve; a non-profit organization that supports the North Carolina Coastal Reserve. He is a junior studying Environmental Sciences at the University of North Carolina Wilmington. Staff are excited to have Samuel onboard.

In 2024 59 cases of misuse were documented at 8 of the 10 Reserve Sites. At the Northern Sites, Currituck Banks had 2 instances of misuse, Kitty Hawk Woods had 4, and Buxton Woods had 12. The most common types of misuse included littering and dumping (23%), disallowed uses (21%), vandalism (16%) "Other" (11%) and policy violations (6%). "Other" misuses included instances of abandoned personal property, inappropriate visitor behavior, lock removals, and encroachments. Policy violations included horses on trails designated for hiking and the removal of signage from sites. Less commonly reported misuses included disturbance or removal of plants or animals (4%), ADVs (3%), acts detrimental to the maintenance of the Reserve (3%), unlawful habitation (3%), unlawful vehicle or parking (1%), unlawful fire (1%), and disturbance of research (1%). From the total 59 cases of misuse, staff worked with various law enforcement partners to resolve 9 of these issues. Examples included ADVs reported to the Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC), a fence erected on Reserve property reported to WRC, drug paraphernalia found in Buxton Woods reported to Dare County Sheriff's Office, and an illegal fire reported to the North Carolina Forest Service. There is no apparent correlation for instances of misuse by month. July and October of 2024 had the highest documented cases of misuse, but no trend exists.

With the use of remote trail counters, staff have monitored use of the Connector Trail in Kitty Hawk Woods and the Boardwalk in Currituck Banks since January of 2023. In 2024, 3,883 individuals utilized the Connector Trail: averaging roughly 11 visitors per day. This is up 34% from estimates in 2023. Use of the Connector Trail peaked in February, averaging nearly 42 visitors per day. In 2024, the Currituck Banks Boardwalk boasted 61,328 visitors, averaging roughly 168 visitors per day. This is up 22% from the estimates in 2023. Peak visitation of the Currituck Banks Reserve was during the summer months of June through August, averaging 450 visitors per day during those months. Comparing the months of January through March from 2024 to 2025, the Connector Trail had a 32% decrease in use and the Currituck Banks Boardwalk had a 9% decrease in use for the start of 2025.

In 2025, 135 individuals acquired authorizations to hunt Currituck Banks and/or Kitty Hawk Woods Reserves. From 2024-2025 (Format used for bracketed real numbers: 2024 # / 2025 #), there was a 100% (percent change) increase in strictly Currituck Banks hunters (3/6), a 2% decrease in strictly Kitty Hawk Woods hunters (58/57), and a 3% decrease in hunters that obtained authorizations for both sites (74/72). Interestingly, there was a 750% increase in authorizations granted to hunters from outside of Currituck and Dare Counties (2/17). In 2024, non-local hunters came from Vermont

and Greenville, NC. In 2025, hunters flocked from the states of Vermont, Iowa, and Virginia, and North Carolina cities including New Bern, Elizabeth City, Greenville, Littleton, Grimesland, and Lexington. All reported harvests were from Kitty Hawk Woods. Comparing years, there was a 60% decrease in does taken (5/2), a 33% increase in bucks taken (3/4), a 14% reduction in squirrels taken (14/12), no wood ducks reported in the 2025 season (2/0), and no hogs taken from the Currituck Banks Reserve during the seasons ending in 2024 or 2025.

Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve Business

Kitty Hawk Potential Acquisition

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has applied for North Carolina Land and Water grant funding to purchase a 26-acre tract of land near the intersection of The Woods Road and Carrenda Lane. This parcel borders the boundary of the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve and possesses high conservation value. If TNC is successful in acquisition, they plan to work with the State to transfer the parcel for inclusion in the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve.

During the Potential Acquisition presentation, Mr. Perry expressed support for the purchase, with Ms. Clopton indicating it is an exciting possibility. Mr. Pruitt indicated that State ownership would resolve the parcel's controversial issues which town government has been trying to deal with.

Kitty Hawk Woods Hard Tract Survival

In April of 2024, staff and volunteers planted 200 live oaks and water oaks to restore the Hard Tract; the site where 7 structures were removed. In April of 2025, staff assessed the survival and natural stocking of the tract. From the plantation stocking computation, assessing the survival of planted trees, staff calculated 77 trees (live oak / water oak) per acre. This represents a 17% survival rate from the original planting effort. During the natural stocking computation, utilizing fixed 1/1,000th acre plots, staff found 79% of plots were stocked, dominated by loblolly pine, red bay, American holly, and red maple seedlings. At an estimated minimum stocking density of 789 trees per acre, this represents a well to likely overstocked stand. No additional planting is necessary.

During the Planting Survival Discussion, Mr. Pruitt asked whether removing the structures had reduced vandalism in the area. Staff indicated that it had, but after removal there was some vandalism of the planting area and cemetery, but signs were erected that helped. Mr. Perry stated that he is glad that the area has now been cleaned up.

Kitty Hawk Woods Paddle Trail

Staff are currently working on revamping the markers along the Kitty Hawk Woods paddle trail. Staff have worked with CAMA permitting staff for the appropriate approvals and secured funding for the new posts.

Kitty Hawk Woods Educational Signage

Staff have ordered plant identification signage to be installed at the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve. These signs will be installed adjacent to respective plants to educate visitors.

Member Roundtable

Ms. Culatta (Natural Heritage Program) indicated that she is a big fan of the plant identification outreach at the Reserves. She then shared that she and Mike Schafale would be assessing the potential acquisition along Carrenda Lane to assess it for the NC Land and Water Fund grant.

Mr. Perry indicated that several people had contacted him regarding a bad actor among the duck hunters, who had set up decoys in the main boating channel too close to neighboring houses. He first suggested this individual was in violation of county and town hunting regulations. Staff and Mr. Pruitt explained the particulars of those regulations, and that this individual is not technically in violation of any rules. Staff further explained that they have pursued the issue with WRC enforcement and neighboring property owner(s), but there wasn't anything illegal being done. Mr. Pruitt added that this sort of conflict has a long history on Colington Island, but has only recently occurred here. Staff indicated they would make additional educational efforts to curb poor hunter behavior prior to next season.

Mr. Breslin (North Carolina Forest Service) indicated he had nothing to update, but that they continue to push Firewise programs.

Mrs. Clopton (Town of Kitty Hawk) indicated that the Town had submitted an application for grant funding to install an additional boardwalk from Sandy Run Park to the Birch Lane Trail. She noted that the Town should hear back from the grant agency in May of 2025. She also stated that the Town Recreation Committee has started to install a trail on Town property, looping behind Town Hall. The trail is expected to be completed soon.

Lt. Helms (Town of Kitty Hawk Police) indicated appreciation for staff adding parking placards to the Kitty Hawk hunter registrations and is hopeful it will help clarify that allowed use. He then stated that there was a recent complaint regarding actions of Covered Bridge Road landowners, and that he expects complaints to increase with upcoming prom and wedding seasons. Staff asked whether commercial photographers are allowed there by town ordinance. There was some confusion among LAC members about exact zoning locations and regulation regarding commercial photography at the Covered Bridge. Mr. Alnes asked that Lt. Helms let him know if additional conflicts with Covered Bridge Road homeowners occurs. Ms. Clopton asked whether talks with said homeowners had progressed. Mr. Alnes said there had been a series of questions traded between parties, but also indicated that pedestrian access to the area will be maintained.

Lt. Helms then asked if staff could provide paper trail maps to help police officers. Staff agreed to do so and further indicated that the Reserve website and certain smartphone apps may be an additional help to officers. Mr. Breslin also asked for Buxton and Kitty Hawk Woods map data.

Public Input

No members of the public were in attendance.

Meeting adjourned at 2:09 p.m.

N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Spring 2025 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

Periodic Rules Review for Reserve NC 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; rules with a final classification of necessary must be readopted. 15A NCAC 07O rules are administered by the Department of Environmental Quality and last went through the periodic review process in 2017.

The reserve will be seeking input on the classification of the rules from the Local Advisory Committees and the Coastal Resources Commission this spring to inform the Department of Environmental Quality's classification of the rules which will be published for public comment later this summer. **Input from the 10 advisory committees will be solicited via an email form that will be distributed to all members of the committees in May.** The email will include background information and a timeline for providing input. Staff will be available to answer questions throughout the input and periodic review process. We look forward to hearing your feedback on the rule classifications.

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 and NC Wildlife Resources Commission are gearing up for the 11th annual **2025 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 diamondback terrapin population numbers by conducting kayak surveys at specified times and prescribed routes. Terrapin Tally paddling routes are available at 9 locations including: Rachel Carson Reserve, Calico Creek, Hammocks Beach State Park, Lea Hutaff Island, Masonboro Island Reserve, Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, Zeke's Island Reserve, Bald Head Island, and Bird Island Reserve. Data collection will occur during established windows April- June and attendance at a training session is required; more information is available [here](#).
- The reserve will host two stops on the **"Discover the NC Coastal Reserve"** tour in 2025 – at the Masonboro Island Reserve and a rescheduled event for the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve. The tour is a multi-year campaign spanning 2023-2026 to connect target audiences with the program and places with events to be hosted at reserve sites along the coast. Explore the [Discover the NC 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.
- The Bald Head Woods Reserve was recognized as an old growth forest by the **Old Growth Forest Network** at a ceremony in January 2025. The Old Growth Forest Network is a national network of protected, old-growth, native forests that are publicly accessible for all to experience and enjoy. This designation complements and is consistent with the site's protection as a Coastal Reserve and Dedicated Nature Preserve. Partners from the Village of Bald Head Island, Bald Head Island Conservancy, Natural Heritage Program, volunteers and advisory committee members attended the brief ceremony and short hike through the woods.
- Public access improvements are coming soon to the Buckridge Coastal Reserve in Tyrrell County. The Office of State Budget and Management is funding the **Grapevine Landing Public Water Access** project at \$2.59M with Repairs and Renovations (R&R) funding for State Agencies to design and construct the project. The access project will provide public water access to the Alligator River and service to a Tier 1 county; replace a hurricane-destroyed community

pier with a storm-resilient, ADA accessible pier; and include a public shallow-draft boat ramp and berths for continued commercial fishing presence. The project will provide a focal point for educational outreach to increase public awareness and understanding of coastal ecosystems; accommodate traditional recreational activities and other water and nature-dependent uses; and increase ecotourism opportunities while providing continued use by working watermen.

- **Upgrades to the long-term water quality monitoring stations** at the Masonboro Island and Zeke's Island Reserves are underway. The updated piling-platform structure was designed by the US Naval Academy in partnership with NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System to establish more disaster-resilient monitoring infrastructure. The design is being piloted at 3 reserves in the south and Gulf regions to better provide continuous water quality information through the System-wide Monitoring Program (SWMP) which is conducted at all 30 reserves in the system to evaluate long-term variability and short-term change. The upgrades are funded by National Estuarine Research Reserve System operations and procurement, acquisition, and construction funding. To access data and learn more about the reserve's monitoring programs, please visit our [website here](#). Learn more about the value of these data and the results of a **20-year water quality analysis** at the Masonboro Island Reserve that was recently published in the December 2024 issue of [Estuarine, Coastal, and Shelf Science](#) by Brown, Reserve team member Toothman, and Mallin.
- Reserve staff recently **shared their work** at the NC Coastal Conference, National Estuarine Research Reserve System Annual Meeting, Coastal GeoTools Conference, and Southeastern Estuarine Research Society Meeting. Topics included: community engagement to inform flooding resilience and water management planning in the Scuppernong River watershed, contributions of site steward volunteers in managing reserve sites, education partnerships with Carteret Community College and Carteret County Special Olympics, water quality analysis at the Masonboro Island Reserve, and best practices for using drones to monitor wetland vegetation and oyster reefs.

Student Internships

Several interns will be working with the reserve in Manteo, Beaufort, and Wilmington this summer. Thank you to Friends of the Reserve, the N.C. Internship Program, and UNCW for their support and partnership for the internships. Students will work on a range of stewardship and research projects. Stay tuned to the reserve's website and social media to meet the interns once they start in May.

Staffing News

Ben Wunderly recently joined the reserve team as Central Sites Manager with site management responsibilities for the Rachel Carson and Permuda Island Reserves. Ben brings strong NC state government and coastal stewardship and education experiences to the job from his service with NC State Parks, Aquarium at Pine Knoll Shores, and the Maritime Museum in Beaufort. Ben also previously served on the Rachel Carson Reserve Local Advisory Committee. Ben works at our Beaufort office – welcome Ben!

Federal Budget

The budget table below is a summary of the federal budget* for fiscal years 2020-2025 as it relates to the NC Coastal Reserve. Congress passed a continuing resolution for federal fiscal year (FY) 2025 on March 14, 2025 with top-line budget numbers; NOAA received \$4.4B, an approximate 12% reduction from FY24. The budget allocations for the program areas listed in the table are pending Congressional approval of the NOAA Spend Plan. 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	FY2022 Enacted	FY2023 Enacted	FY2024 Enacted	<i>FY2025 Continuing Resolution</i>
NERRS Operations	\$27.5M	\$28.5M	\$29.7M	\$32.5M	\$33.3M	<i>TBD</i>
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$6.5M	\$8.5M	\$8.5M	<i>TBD</i>
CZM Grants	\$77M	\$78.5 M	\$79M	\$81.5M	\$81.5M	<i>TBD</i>

* 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.