



**Bald Head Woods Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, November 12, 2024, 10:00 am**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Bald Head Island Conservancy (BHIC), Chris Shank, Beth Darrow	Yes
Village of Bald Head Island, Chris McCall, Jae Kim	Yes
Village of Bald Head Island Public Safety	No
Natural Heritage Program (NHP), Mike Schafale	Yes
<u>Community Members</u>	
Stephanie Kelly	Yes
John Kinney	No
<u>Others Present</u>	
Elizabeth Pinnix, NCNERR Southern Sites Manager Morgan Penrose, NCNERR Stewardship & Research Specialist Anna Poston, NCNERR Biological Technician	

Welcome

The southern sites manager welcomed the committee to the Fall 2024 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and led introductions.

Reserve-wide Administrative Update

The Reserve-wide Update 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.

The site manager provided a reminder from the Reserve-wide update:

- The Stewardship Coordinator position that has been vacant since August 2022 was recently filled by Paula Gillikin, the former Central Sites Manager in Beaufort.

Site Specific Update

The site manager provided the following site-specific updates:

General Site Conditions

Trail Maintenance

There was a low impact on the forest from large windstorms during 2024, but flooding was a major issue during the fall from an unnamed storm that brought extreme flooding to the island and surrounding communities. There were no major impacts on the forest in the short term, but some standing water can still be seen throughout the low elevation areas in the woods. Since implementing routine trail maintenance days in coordination with the Bald Head Island Conservancy (BHIC), we have been more successful than previous years keeping the trails clear and safe for visitors. We aim for quarterly trails days and appreciate the support and strong working relationship with the BHIC to support this effort. We plan to continue this model of quarterly trail maintenance days into 2025.

Many committee members shared stories and recounted the flooding event that took place in late September including restricted access to the island, flooding damage to local resident homes, and flood water mitigation that was conducted by the Village. Mr. Kim stated it took about a week for the water to begin to recede back to normal levels. The site manager thanked everyone for their efforts and sharing.

Ms. Darrow informed the committee that white tail deer surveys were conducted, which included baiting the deer and capturing population numbers using wildlife cameras. They plan to have official study numbers by the end of 2025. Based on observations, they are seeing more untagged does and fawns, likely due to the discontinued contraception work to control population numbers.

The site manager asked if the plan was to do contraception work again. Ms. Darrow replied that it would be a decision made by the Village, but the BHIC has reported increased numbers and suggested that contraception work may need to happen in the future. Mr. Shank suggested he thinks the Village would likely want to do the contraception work again and it is better when the BHIC conducts the work in house, rather than a contractor because they have ultimate responsibility and can control deer survival and success of contraception better. The BHIC will keep the committee and site manager informed as the project progresses.

New and Ongoing Projects

Terrapin Tally

The Terrapin Tally community science project completed its tenth year of data collection during spring 2024. This reserve project in collaboration with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC), aims at collecting diamondback terrapin sighting data in the state to better understand population trends and improve management efforts. During the 2024 tally, there were eight days with a total of 99 data collection sessions paddled, across 10 sites ranging from Sunset Beach to Cape Lookout. This resulted in over 300 diamondback terrapin sightings recorded combined, 15 of which were reported from Bald Head Island during the event.

The site manager thanked the BHIC for their partnership in this project and helping to coordinate volunteers. BHIC staff noted they have noticed terrapin mortality at Bald Head Island and are concerned. These encounters have been reported to Sarah Finn with NC WRC.

Forest & Aquifer Monitoring

In October 2023, Reserve, BHIC, Natural Heritage Program (NHP), and past monitoring plan participants convened to conduct vegetation monitoring in the four swale communities with existing monitoring transects. These transects are from the original 2015 monitoring plan. This had not been conducted since 2015 due to wet conditions in the swales.

At this time, no progress was made in summarizing the 2023 data and official reports still need to be obtained from the contractor hired by the Village (Applied Resource Management). The site manager has requested this information with no success.

The site manager proposed we hold a separate meeting outside of the Local Advisory Committee meetings to convene the partners involved and bring all data/reports to the group. Action items include:

- Site manager to organize a meeting with the monitoring plan group
- Village to request final report and models from the contracted work completed by Applied Resource Management funded by the Village

Infrastructure and Trail Updates

At the fall 2023 meeting, the committee brainstormed ideas that would benefit the forest and access to the site, including various updates to existing infrastructure, trail improvements, and signage. Lapsed salary funds from NC Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) are available to potentially support some of these improvement efforts. Following a site visit with the DEQ facilities and safety staff, the following are priority items.

1. Improving trail safety and maintenance plan. Work with the NC Parks State Trails Division to assess trail status and identify where improvements can be made (E.g. Removing or replacing wooden infrastructure, rerouting trails to better use the natural features of the forest, etc.). Potential grant funding includes the Recreational Trails Grant Program and assistance from the Conservation Corps of NC.
2. Addressing safety concerns. The parking platforms at the entrance to the trail heads are aging and in need of replacement. Current efforts between the Village and Reserve are underway to address these. Additionally, to improve safety while using the site, suggestions were made to add and improve signage to include information like trail conditions, maps, and hazardous plants or animals.

The site manager acknowledged this will not happen quickly, but the Reserve is dedicated to improving the site and visitor experiences. The Reserve will request input from the committee as things progress and sign designs or trail improvements will be passed through the committee before implementation.

Old-Growth Forest Dedication

The site manager was approached by a non-profit organization called the [Old-Growth Forest Network](#) with interest in dedicating Bald Head Woods Reserve into their national network. This dedication does not provide additional protection for the site but rather honor and recognize its importance and publicizes it on their website.

To celebrate Bald Head Woods being dedicated to the network, they would like to host a small dedication ceremony on site with local partners and organizations that were instrumental in the protection of the woods. The event will consist of brief remarks with photo opportunities, followed by a hike along the loop trail. More information to come.

Roundtable

The site manager reminded the committee about Local Advisory Committee meeting requirements and asked for feedback regarding meeting frequency and times.

- Mr. Schafale favored meeting once a year in the fall with additional meetings called as needed. He also requested for meetings to not take place before 11am to provide ample travel time to the island.
- Mr. Shank and Ms. Darrow both agreed that additional meetings can be called as needed but confirmed once a year in the fall would be best.
- Ms. Kelly agreed and expressed interest in helping with site and trail maintenance.

Mr. Shank expressed interest in adding more historical information to the website or signage to provide more context about the development of Bald Head Island including the purchase and protection of Bald Head Woods Reserve.

- Ms. Darrow added that some of this information is mentioned in the reserve site profile, but it is not easily accessible and suggests adding it to the BHIC website.
- The site manager mentioned a student project at UNCW where they were creating land acknowledgments, and this could fall into a similar category.
- Mr. Shank suggested the idea of a kiosk or a small visitors center as you get off the ferry. He mentioned many people do not know where they are or how to receive information about what is offered on the island and this could be beneficial.
- Mr. Kim stated there were talks about a town hall to be built near the ferry terminal that could house this information but will not be moving forward due to cost. He agreed that information at this location would be beneficial and there was an overall lack of direction when arriving on the island.

Public comments

None

Action Items

- Trail maintenance days are April 14 & May 14
- Site manager will coordinate a meeting with the monitoring plan group
- Village will request the monitoring report from Applied Resource Management to assess monitoring needs
- Meetings will be held annually in the fall with additional meetings as needed
- Committee will receive a meeting poll to plan for the Old-Growth Forest Network event