



**Bird Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Thursday, November 6, 2025 at 1pm
Virtual via Webex**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
NC Coastal Land Trust – Jessica Blake, Mellissa Dionesotes	Yes
NC Coastal Federation – Lauren Kolodij	Yes
Bird Island Preservation Society - Bill Ducker	No
Sunset Beach Police Department	No
Town of Sunset Beach Administration – Lisa Anglin	Yes
Natural Heritage Program (NHP) – Scott Pohlman	Yes
<u>Community Members and Community Organization Members</u>	
<u>Others Present</u>	
Elizabeth Pinnix, NCNERR Southern Sites Manager Morgan Penrose, NCNERR Stewardship Specialist	

Welcome

The southern sites manager welcomed the committee to the Fall 2025 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and led introductions.

Reserve-wide Administrative Update – Elizabeth Pinnix

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 solicited feedback regarding a new proposed reserve-wide policy and it is described below.

The Reserve is developing a policy that would prohibit 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 conflict with the principal purposes of the Reserve as defined in the NC Administrative Code. These sales

are not compatible with traditional use 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 2025 because ice cream was 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.

The following feedback was provided from the committee:

Ms. Kolodij was supportive but asked if there would be any benefit to providing clarification between retail sales of food items vs. rental items, such as beach chairs and umbrellas.

Ms. Pinnix suggested this policy would only be for selling, not rentals, so those allowed activities per other local and state ordinances would be allowed.

Ms. Anglin informed the committee that outside vendors are not permitted on the beach for sale of any item per the Town of Sunset Beach rules. She added that Sunset Slush has come to the town looking for permission, but the Town Council has not approved of this activity.

Mr. Pohlman was supportive of the policy and stated it would be consistent with the site's Natural Heritage Program dedication, so NHP is supportive.

Ms. Dionesotes was also in agreement with the policy as suggested.

Site Specific Update - Elizabeth Pinnix

General Site Conditions

The site manager reported the following:

- Reserve staff have conducted multiple site visits during the summer and fall with no major concerns.
 - Trail maintenance in coordination with the Bird Island Stewards was conducted in September.
 - Two reports of misuse were documented at the Bird Island Reserve in 2025 by reserve staff and were addressed in a timely manner. This reporting helps us identify the reoccurring issues on the sites and how we can improve or address these.
 - In September 2025, the Bird Island Stewards coordinated a bench dedication of one of the benches at the west end of Main Street at the new overlook and parking area in honor of Ed Gutknecht, a wonderfully passionate Bird Island steward that dedicated his time to educating others. Sadly, Ed was battling stage 4 pancreatic cancer and passed away on October 25, 2025. [View Ed's obituary.](#)

Seasonal Activities

- The Bird Island Stewards hosted public field trips to Bird Island Reserve during the summer months from May 28 - September 10. A total of 253 volunteer hours were contributed throughout the season and 285 individuals participated in the field trips.

New and Ongoing Projects

- New Steward-led "Walk & Talk" trips will be held every Wednesday during the off-season running October – April. Thirty-eight participants attended the inaugural trip on October 15, 2025.
- Maintenance dredging in Little River Inlet coordinated by the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) out of the Charleston district is proposed to take place in early 2026. According to the Corps, beach compatible sediment will be deposited to the west end of Bird Island Reserve, entirely on

the South Carolina Side of the property. Reserve and Division of Coastal Management staff are included in the planning meetings and will relay further information as it becomes available.

Ms. Anglin has requested to be included in the planning meeting calls with the ACOE.

- The site manager shared a draft sign design with the committee that explains the Motus tower along the nature trail. The sign would provide information about the tower and be a similar design to the already existing signs along the trail. After the sign goes through graphic design internally, the site manager will send a draft out to the committee for feedback and comments.

Ms. Kolodij insisted that the funding needed for this sign could come from the Bird Island Preservation Society (BIPS) funds housed with the NC Coastal Federation.

Ms. Pinnix appreciated the offer and agreed to keep her in the loop once the design is reviewed and approved for ordering.

- The site manager informed the committee that [Spanish translated site brochures](#) are now available on our website. If print copies are desired, please let the site manager know.

Roundtable

Ms. Kolodij reminded the committee of the history of the NC Coastal Federation and BIPS and the existing funds available to the reserve for activities or site needs for Bird Island Reserve. She suggested NCCF is looking into investing options for the funds and that the society members still involved were supportive of this.

Ms. Anglin updated the committee about how their first year of paid parking on Sunset Beach went and added that crews are finishing up finalizing parking spaces along Main Street that will cater to golf-cart parking on one side with vehicle parking on the other. She also elaborated on the plans for a new public park on the east end of Sunset Beach that will host many benefits to the community, including a kayak launch, educational signage, playground, and boardwalk through the marsh.

Ms. Anglin also added that a reoccurring issue reported on Bird Island is nudity and asked if there was a specific policy in place to address this.

Ms. Pinnix acknowledged this is a challenge with enforcement and asked for any suggestions on how to better enforce. She also added that a separate policy is not necessary due to existing rules that prohibit this activity already. The committee discussed briefly but did not have direct suggestions to address this concern. Reserve staff will continue to monitor and encourage reporting.

Public comments

None

Action Items

- The site manager will circulate information regarding the opening of the application period for new Local Advisory Committee members in 2026.
- The site manager will solicit feedback and comment for the draft Motus tower sign that is proposed for installation along the nature trail. [View the Bird Island Motus Station](#) to learn more about Motus and what species are detected.

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 070, 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 070 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.