



**Bald Head Woods Reserve  
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, November 12, 2025, 1 pm**

**Attendance**

| <b><u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u></b>  | <b><u>Present</u></b> |
|---|-----------------------|
| Bald Head Island Conservancy (BHIC), <b>Chris Shank</b> , Beth Darrow, <b>Jennifer Wiggen</b> | Yes                   |
| Village of Bald Head Island, <b>Chris McCall</b> , <b>Jae Kim</b>                             | Yes                   |
| Village of Bald Head Island Public Safety   | No                    |
| Natural Heritage Program (NHP), Mike Schafale   | Yes                   |
| <b><u>Community Members</u></b>   |                       |
| Stephanie Kelly   | Yes                   |
| <b><u>Others Present</u></b>  |                       |
| 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:

*Mr. Shank asked if lemonade stands run by children would not be allowed according to this proposed policy? He stated the Conservancy hosts fundraising efforts that have happened along Federal Road but not within the reserve property.*

*Ms. Pinnix responded that if they are selling goods on the reserve property and this policy goes through, then yes, they would not be allowed to set up a lemonade stand on the reserve.*

*Mr. McCall stated he has not seen this type of activity take place on reserve property.*

*Overall, the committee was supportive of the proposed policy.*

### **Site Specific Update – Elizabeth Pinnix**

#### *General Site Conditions*

The site manager provided the following site-specific updates:

- **Trail Maintenance:** Reserve and BHIC staff have conducted trail maintenance throughout the year, and the reserve is appreciative of all the efforts from BHIC staff and interns during the busy season. There are a few trail hazards that need to be addressed but overall, storms resulted in relatively low impacts on the site. Flooding and high-water events throughout the summer and fall were observed in the swales and lower elevation areas but nothing major to note. The reserve will continue to coordinate trail days with BHIC staff.

*Mr. Shank asked how long the chainsaw certification lasts that was part of training provided by reserve staff in 2022. He asked if BHIC needs to renew this.*

*Ms. Pinnix replied she will check in with Mr. Alnes (Northern Site Manager) that provided the training course and report back.*

- **Research projects at Bald Head Woods Reserve:** Lauren Collver a research student associated with the BHIC, is monitoring forest to marsh transition (ghost forest) along the edge of Bald Head Woods Reserve on the north side of Federal Road and Bald Head Creek. Her work is looking at forest lost and marsh conversion due to sea level rise.

*Mr. Shank added Lauren presented her work at the 2025 Coastal & Estuarine Research Federation Conference and has provided talks at various meetings on Bald Head Island and there appears to be an interest in the work. Lauren will be leaving at the end of the calendar year, but BHIC is looking into ways to continue this project.*

*Ms. Pinnix suggested the reserve would be interested in continuing this work and keeping us in the loop.*

#### *New and ongoing projects*

- **Parking platform project:** The reserve wants to thank the Village and Public Services department for working with us and completing this project. The parking platforms along Federal Road are complete and provide safer and increased accessibility to the site.

*Ms. Wiggen added that she has used them all throughout the fall for education programs and it has been helpful to have the additional room for parking and gathering.*

*Mr. Shank also stated this has been a great addition and seems to be more inviting to visitors and clear that it is a trail and location they can access the site.*

- **Winter deer culling:** The Village in coordination with NC Wildlife Resources and the reserve are planning to conduct a deer culling in early 2026 to manage the deer population on the island. This has been done historically and is conducted to protect the ecological health of the forest

and surrounding habitats and keep population numbers within an identified range. Efforts will be made to keep the public and residents safe and all proper permits and rules will be followed. The reserve has provided written authorization for access to Bald Head Woods Reserve for this activity, and it is proposed to take place in early January of 2026, lasting approximately 2-3 weeks. The site manager asked the Village representative at the meeting to add any additional comments.

*Mr. McCall added that the Village received approval from BHI governors club and the BHI association to use the areas owned and managed by those entities as well as the fringing areas. The Village is waiting on census numbers that the BHIC will be providing on accounts of the deer population so they can make recommendations for how many deer they propose to cull. He added their plan is still to start activities in the first of January and plan to finish before February but will extend, if necessary. Additionally, he explained the precautions that the Village is taking to keep the public safe and that the deer harvested will be processed and donated to feed the less fortunate.*

*Mr. Shank added that staff from all parties should be prepared to answer questions from the public because there may be strong opinions associated with the activity.*

*Mr. McCall agreed but stated that most of the public have been respectful and asked thoughtful questions about the process. Additionally, this has been discussed with the council over the past few meetings so it should be well known at this time.*

*Mr. Shank and Ms. Wigen both expressed concern about visitors coming to the island that may not be in the circles that are being made aware of this activity and insisted that the BHIC be informed of the dates this will take place as soon as possible so the proper groups can be given a heads up or education programs altered.*

*Ms. Pinnix asked if historically they post this information physically anywhere on the island and if the reserve should post a sign on the trailhead access points to let the public know.*

*Mr. McCall responded they have not posted in the past and have used the proper channels with the BHI PIO by getting information out via socials, island newsletters and other meetings.*

- Trail improvement planning: In October, reserve staff brought staff from the NC Trails Program with State Parks to assess the trail system. We discussed various efforts that could be taken to improve the trail system, including tapping into resources like Conservation Corps of NC that could provide on the ground assistance for annual maintenance. Tentatively we are planning to apply for funds through the Recreational Trails Grant Program to complete improvement work. Once we receive feedback and suggestions from the trails staff and form a proposal, we will reach out to the committee for feedback and comment.

*Mr. McCall asked if there would be value in attending a BHI council meeting to bring up this topic and ask for volunteers to help. He said historically, there have been volunteers on the island that would help to maintain the trails but that is not the case recently. He also asked what the biggest challenge was with maintaining the trails and suggested that it may be because of their location on a barrier island with logistics to get to them.*

*Ms. Pinnix agreed that it may be beneficial to attend a council meeting later when we have a more defined plan and will follow up accordingly. Additionally, she agreed that the location of the site is challenging to access with gear and tools that must be brought each time that trail maintenance is needed. Other challenges are the cost associated with getting there and staff capacity. The goal would be to have a core group of well-trained volunteers that can help to maintain the trails throughout the year and we are working to get the trails to a point where this could be implemented.*

*Mr. McCall asked if we store our maintenance equipment on the island.*

*Ms. Pinnix responded no, we must bring everything out each time we come because we manage 3 other properties in the area and cannot keep things there exclusively.*

*Mr. Kim asked if we knew when we could expect to hear back from the trails staff regarding suggestions. He also requested that if new signage is to be installed that the reserve work with the Village to try and keep signage formatting like the existing signs.*

*Ms. Pinnix said the trails staff told them before the end of the year, but they are bringing on new hires and may be in a transition time, so the exact timeline is unknown. She also stated that when signage discussions began that the reserve would include the committee for feedback and suggestions.*

*Ms. Wigger offered assistance in creating educational signage if needed.*

*Ms. Kelly offered her help with trail maintenance when needed.*

#### *Feedback requested*

- Live oak tree donation: A member of the public has offered to donate live oak trees that have been locally sourced and grown near Wilmington, NC. The Reserve has not approved this due to its lack of a research component, as well as the unknown specific origin of the plants. I informed the individual I would solicit feedback from the committee before sending our formal response. The site manager asked for feedback regarding the donation and planting of live oaks within the Bald Head Woods Reserve property.

*Mr. McCall stated there is a group called operation reforest started by the Bald Head Association after Hurricane Florence that focuses on replanting oaks around the island (not on the reserve property).*

*Mr. Kim mentioned that Jim Nichols is the individual leading this effort and they conduct plantings of multiple species, but it is difficult because live oaks require significant amount of care to survive.*

*Mr. McCall suggested connecting the individual with the organization on the island to see if there are options.*

*Ms. Wigger suggested oak tree preservation on Oak Island could be a good option for the individual because they grow live oak saplings and give them to homeowners to plant on their own property.*

*Ms. Kelly suggested the alliance for Cape Fear Trees may be another option.*

*Overall, the committee did not think planting these donated trees within the Bald Head Woods Reserve property was a good idea but supporting the growth of native plants around the island and for homeowners was the underlying message.*

#### **Roundtable**

*Mr. Schafale asked if the swales in the forest stayed flooded all year.*

*Multiple committee members said they have been wet at times but not flooded consistently like in previous years.*

#### **Public comments**

None

#### **Action Items**

- Coordinate trail maintenance days for 2026.
- Follow up with BHIC staff regarding chainsaw training requirements.
- Inform committee when application period opens for new Local Advisory Committee members in late spring/early summer 2026.
- Coordinate with Mr. McCall about attending a Village Council meeting to report out about trail improvements and potential site stewards volunteer program.
- Keep committee in the loop regarding trail planning and grant applications for funding.

## **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.