



**Emily and Richardson Preyer Buckridge Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, 8 December 2020, 10:00am-10:45pm**

Attendance

LAC Partner Organization Members	Present
Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Howard Phillips	No
NC Natural Heritage Program, Michael Schafale	Yes
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, David Turner	Yes
NC Wildlife Resources Commission – Enforcement, Cpt. Robert Wayne	Yes
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, Jimmy Johnson	No
Tyrrell County Government, David Clegg	Yes
Tyrrell County Government, Nina Griswell	No
NC Division of Forest Resources	No
Tyrrell County Sheriff	No
Community Members	
Mike Clements	Yes
Others Present	
Woody Webster, DCM, Buckridge Site Manager	
Whitney Jenkins, DCM, Coastal Training Coordinator	
Sharon Smith, Albemarle Commission	

Due to Coronavirus restrictions, this meeting was done through the Webex remote meeting platform. Mrs. Jenkins shared a brief overview of the operational side of the meeting platform, and remained in the meeting to ensure the technology side of things ran smoothly.

Reserve-wide Updates (Woody Webster)

The Reserve-wide Update was shared with committee members before the meeting via email. Staff reviewed current public health guidelines per departmental standards, and made note of the current lack of a Northern Sites Manager on staff, which requires additional attention from the Buckridge Site Manager. The Update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

- Committee member application and 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 to be considered for continued service will be contacted directly by the respective site managers closer to the announcement of the application period.

Site Update (Woody Webster)

Property Updates

- Acquisition of the 260-acre Primland Tract is moving forward. The Nature Conservancy bought the property and is in the process of recording the survey. The U.S. Air Force has accepted the final version of the easement language to be placed on the property. Soon, The Nature Conservancy will be ready to transfer the parcel to state ownership. The Division of Coastal Management has already secured grant funding for the purchase of this property.
- Staff have worked with N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) personnel to develop a preliminary site plan for a Grapevine Landing water access on the Primland Tract. Staff then shared a very preliminary site plan with LAC members, and a brief discussion ensued regarding the future of the location.

Invasive Controls

- Small outbreaks of alligatorweed were recorded along Eastern Road and Grapevine Landing Road canals. These smaller outbreaks will be treated with in-house resources in 2021.
- As part of a cost-share agreement, the Division of Water Resources (DWR) treated 2.5 acres of alligatorweed over summer 2020. Not as much work was necessary along the Northwest Fork, so their attention was focused on canals that emptied into that reach of the river. Phragmites was also sprayed at some shoreline locations.

Hunting Statistics

- Bear harvest in 2019 rebounded from 4 to 14. Preliminary numbers for the November 2020 season shows a further increase in hunter success, reaching 16 in the first 3 days of the season. The reported deer harvest fell from 11 to 3 for the 2019 season, but 5 successful harvests have already been reported for the 2020 season. One turkey was registered at Buckridge during the 2019 season, but numbers for the 2020 season are not yet available.
- NCWRC has continued their progress rehabilitating the roads at Buckridge. The gravel added this year completed improvements to Eastern Road all the way to the temporary gate at Otis Road, and improved many bad spots in the Buckridge Road as well. In fact, both roads remained very passable even after the November bear season, something heretofore unheard of. The Division was unable to add any additional funding toward gravel this year but hopes to be able to before the end of this fiscal year.
- Chemical treatment to prolong the efficacy of side-mowing was completed along many of the public roads at Buckridge. This process is more cost-effective than annual side-mowing would be and helps to maintain travel lane width between mowing.

Research Update

- NOAA plans to install a seasonal tide gauge at Grapevine Landing during the winter of 2021-22. It, and sensors like it around the area, will begin to fill some regional water level data gaps.
- Staff confirmed the presence of a second species of pitcher plant at Buckridge this year, *Sarracenia purpurpea*. The flowers of this plant are reddish-purple, but the leaves are much lower-growing than those of the more familiar yellow pitcher plants, not growing much higher than 6 inches.
- Staff have begun using the iNaturalist app to collect species data and for long-term mapping and species data storage. This user-friendly app has enabled an increase in species monitoring.

Upcoming Activities

- Acquisition of the Primland Tract and subsequent planning for a water access project.
- Hiring of Northern Sites Manager and transition of duties back to that position.

Member Roundtable

Mr. Clegg asked about the length of the potential boardwalk at Grapevine Landing, while Mr. Schafale asked about its route. Staff explained the length was not yet set, as material choice can greatly affect the cost of such a project. As to the route, it will likely swing out into the swamp and return to the river shoreline at an overlook. A question was posed about the length of the Columbia boardwalk, and committee members suggested something of a similar length should be long enough to be worthwhile from a tourism and academic standpoint.

Mr. Turner volunteered that current virus restrictions caused the suspension of most of the travelling weighing teams this bear season, so while there are preliminary harvest numbers, size data on harvested bears is lacking. He went on to thank Mr. Webster for his support of the local NCWRC staff who have worked so diligently on road improvements at Buckridge.

Mr. Clegg asked Mr. Turner what an ideal bear harvest number might be. Mr. Turner went on to explain that there are many factors involved, therefore it is a difficult question. One year's harvest may be hampered by bad weather, while another by access issues. NCWRC staff look at overall harvest trends to see whether a problem might be developing, rather than a single data point. The Commission learned some hard lessons when Van Swamp game land was opened, and an initial overharvest of bear resulted in years of subsequent low bear numbers. Many regional game lands are now restricted to a 3-day season, like Buckridge, to help ensure sustainable bear harvest levels. As such, the trends for area game lands indicate a sustainable harvest level has been achieved.

Staff asked about the status of Sunday hunting on public lands. Mr. Turner indicated that landowner consent was one main point, and after that lands are ranked based on things like access, hunting pressure, stress on wildlife populations, etc. He added that currently, NCWRC is not recommending an expansion of bear hunting to Sundays on coastal game lands.

Public Comments

Sharon Smith with the Albemarle Commission spoke. She was appreciative of the opportunity to attend this meeting and learn more about Buckridge as a resource for their 10-county program area. She is developing a few ideas and extended an offer to help the Reserve.

Review of Action Items

Staff will continue to pursue plans for a water access area at Grapevine Landing.

Appendix A: Reserve-wide Administrative Update

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 07O). 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 07O 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 **NERRS Science Collaborative** recently funded a proposal submitted by Research Coordinator Brandon Puckett titled ‘Bridging the gap between quadrats and satellites: Assessing utility of drone-based imagery to enhance emergent vegetation biomonitoring.’ The Reserve will work with other reserves in the region including North Inlet-Winyah Bay (SC), ACE Basin (SC), Sapelo Island (GA), Guana Tolomato Matanzas (FL), and Jobos Bay (PR) on this project. More information on the project is located here.
- 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.