



**Buxton Woods Reserve  
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, 9 December 2020, 2:00pm-3:00pm**

**Attendance**

| <b>LAC Partner Organization Members</b>                 | <b>Present</b> |
|---|----------------|
| Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Boone Vandzura         | Yes            |
| UNC Coastal Studies Institute, John McCord              | No             |
| NC Wildlife Resources Commission, David Turner          | Yes            |
| NC Natural Heritage Program, Scott Pohlman              | Yes            |
| Dare County Sheriff's Office, Doug Oberbeck             | Yes            |
| Dare County Government, Danny Couch                     | Yes            |
| NC Division of Forest Resources, Kayla Barnes           | Yes            |
| NC Division of Forest Resources, John Cook              | Yes            |
| <b>Community Members</b>                                |                |
| Karen Lebing  | Yes            |
| Russ Kiddy  | No             |
| Michael Flynn   | No             |
| Harvey Scarborough, Jr.                                 | Yes            |
| <b>Others Present</b>                                   |                |
| Rebecca Ellin, DCM, Reserve Program Manager             |                |
| Woody Webster, DCM, Buckridge Site Manager              |                |
| Steve Jarvis, DCM, Northern Sites Stewardship Assistant |                |
| Christy Simmons, DCM, Public Information Officer        |                |
| Sharon Smith, Albemarle Commission                      |                |
| Michele Clower, interested community member             |                |

**Due to Coronavirus restrictions, this meeting was held through the Webex remote meeting platform.**

Ms. Simmons began by sharing a brief overview of the operational side of the meeting platform, and remained in the meeting to ensure the technology functioned efficiently.

**Reserve-wide Updates (Rebecca Ellin)**

The Reserve-wide Update was shared with committee members before the meeting via email. Ms. Ellin reviewed the public health guidelines per departmental standards, and made note of the current lack of a Northern Sites Manager on staff. For site management issues, please contact either the Buckridge Site Manager or the Northern Sites Stewardship Assistant. The hiring process for a new Northern Sites Manager is underway, and hopefully the position will be filled around the first of the year. The Northern Sites Office has been moved to the National Park Service headquarters at Fort Raleigh. Currently staff are

teleworking but will return to that office when deemed appropriate. The Update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

- Committee member application and selection process

Some of the Reserve's Local Advisory Committees (LAC) 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 (Rebecca Ellin)**

#### Hunting Report

- Deer hunting at Buxton Woods saw a harvest of 4 bucks and 3 does last season, for a total take of 7. As of December 8, 2020, 2 bucks and 3 does have been harvested this season.
  - Mr. Turner acknowledged that while the number of animals harvested is relatively low, Buxton Woods operates under a conservative season, and that can limit some of the hunting totals. For Buxton Woods as a whole, there are likely additional deer harvested on adjacent properties that are not under the same conservative season restrictions.
  - Mr. Jarvis asked Mr. Turner about the status of a former jawbone collection box for Buxton Woods. Mr. Turner indicated a different N.C. Wildlife Resource Commission (NCWRC) biologist was in charge of that effort. Ms. Ellin asked that Mr. Jarvis follow up with that biologist, Mr. Chris Turner.

#### Wildfire Plan Update

- The plan remains in draft form and has been shared with the N.C. Natural Heritage Program and the N.C. Forest Service for input.
- Internal policy decisions are necessary to determine the best way to proceed with fire mitigation strategies.
- The Division of Coastal Management secured funding to work with a contractor to develop wildfire policy and wildfire response plans for priority reserves. LAC input will be sought regarding the work of the contractor.
  - From a broader context, staff asked whether talks regarding regional wildfire planning efforts had gone forward, or whether they had been affected by virus restrictions. Mr. Cook noted that nothing was planned currently.

#### Recent Publication

- Guide to the Vascular Flora of Buxton Woods has been published. It represents the work of Amanda Faucette, Alexander Krings and David Lindbo from N.C. State University. While not advocating a purchase, staff recognize it as a valuable resource to those who enjoy Buxton Woods.

It can be found at: <https://shop.brit.org/Buxton-Woods>. Mr. Scarborough remarked he already ordered his copy.

### **Member Roundtable**

Mr. Scarborough mentioned the passing of Delmer Willis, a great resource on the history of Buxton Woods. He also reported some vandalism to trees and his efforts regarding that with NCWRC enforcement. Mr. Jarvis will work with Mr. Scarborough and Mr. Oberbeck to try and address this issue and will likely deploy additional trail cameras to that end.

Ms. Lebing reminded everyone that the annual Christmas bird count would occur this year, though with some safety modifications added due to the virus. So, if you see “odd” people walking around with binoculars during that time, know that it is likely people performing the bird count. Historically, the counts were done in teams, but this year the counters will be working as individuals. Mr. Oberbeck said the bird count folks usually notify the sheriff’s office about their work in advance, but he will try and make sure the patrol deputies are aware as well.

Mr. Turner offered that staff should continue to ask NCWRC for assistance with road, gate and boundary posting. He also brought up the issue of the game land Memorandum of Agreement and its current operational status.

Mr. Cook offered his assistance to the wildfire plan contractor when they are hired.

Mr. Couch shared the phenomenal levels of visitation to Hatteras Island this year, and voiced his confidence that Buxton Woods is a good location to maintain social distancing guidelines. He mentioned also that much of the visitation this year was driven by newcomers, not return visitors, and as such, are likely unaware of the potential hazards of the area. Mr. Couch also mentioned the knowledge base lost with the passing of Mr. Delmer, and how he understood the extensive past utilization of Buxton Woods, though many newcomers only see a ‘pristine’ forest. He suggested that a more thorough telling of the history of Buxton Woods may be in order, and that it may be a good project for a future intern or student. Ms. Ellin responded to Mr. Couch’s comments, acknowledging that while visitor tracking is a continuing issue at the Reserves, anecdotally visitation is up at all sites. She continued by voicing her support for a history piece on Buxton Woods, and that perhaps even the Reserve Communications Specialist might be able to be a resource for such an effort.

Mr. Vandzura acknowledged the increased island visitation as well, and the differences compared to typical return summer visitors. He voiced appreciation to partners who’ve worked to care for these visitors while protecting the natural resources here. He echoed Mr. Couch’s comments on the naiveté of this new batch of visitors. He added that he is very interested in contributing to the work toward wildfire fuel break installation, especially along the boundary National Park Service shares with the Reserve.

### **Public Comments**

Sharon Smith thanked the LAC for the opportunity to join the meeting, and for the great work done at Buxton Woods.

### **Review of Action Items**

Spring meetings are being planned, though possibly still virtual. As directives are modified, staff will reach out. Mr. Jarvis and Mr. Scarborough will connect with Mr. Oberbeck regarding reports of vandalism. Mr. Couch is on the list for history project contacts. Mr. Cook and Vandzura voiced their interest helping with fire mitigation strategies.

## **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 readoption timeline of November 30, 2021 for Coastal Reserve rules (15A NCAC 070). 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 070 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.