



**Currituck Banks Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Friday, 11 December 2020, 10:30am-11:15am**

Attendance

LAC Partner Organization Members	Present
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, Jimmy Johnson	Yes
Currituck National Wildlife Refuge, Mike Hoff	No
The Nature Conservancy, Aaron McCall	Yes
NC Natural Heritage Program, Nathan Shepard	Yes
NC Wildlife Resources Commission- Outer Banks Center, Sharon Meade	Yes
Currituck County Sheriff's office	No
Currituck County Planning	No
NC Wildlife Resources Commission - Enforcement	No
Community Members	
Brett Harrison	No
Others Present	
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	
Michael Flynn, NC Coastal Federation	
Justin Williams, NC Division of Water Resources	

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 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.

Currituck Banks Reserve Business (Rebecca Ellin)

Maritime Forest Trail Reroute

- The Maritime Forest Trail re-route has been completed. The trail is now a loop trail. All that remains is to update signage to inform the public of this change.

Parking Lot Update

- Misuse of the parking lot continues to be an issue. Recently an individual abandoned a vehicle in the lot, taking up two spaces for an extended period. Mr. Jarvis worked with a towing company and N.C. Highway Patrol to get the vehicle removed.
- Rules regarding the parking lot go into effect next year and should allow staff greater ability to correct instances of misuse.

Hunting Update

- 108 permits for hunting at Kitty Hawk Woods and Currituck Banks have been issued to date. That is about 20 permits fewer than usual for this time of year.
- The three Northern Sites are managed differently for hunting, and the program recognizes hunting as an important traditional use. Next year staff will investigate moving reserve sites that are not game lands into the N.C. Wildlife Resource Commission (NCWRC) permit hunt program. The move would hopefully promote consistency and clarity for hunters. This option was raised in 2018 while considering topics for rule changes. Now that major rule changes have moved into the rule-making process, staff are revisiting this possibility again.
- There will be a process to work with NCWRC to customize regulations according to site conditions while gathering input from a variety of entities. The timeline for making these types of changes would be no earlier than the 2022-2023 hunting season.

Currituck Banks Reserve Boardwalk Project

- A grant of \$122,329 was awarded from Division of Coastal Management's Public Beach and Coastal Waterfront Access Grant program.
- The proposed project will replace the aging decking boards, seat boards on benches, railings, and side guards of the existing boardwalk. The structural components of the boardwalk (i.e., joists and pilings) will be replaced as needed depending on current condition. All work will take place within the current footprint of the existing boardwalk. These replacements were identified as a facility need in the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve's 2020-2025 Management Plan.

- The Currituck Banks Reserve boardwalk winds through maritime forest and swamp before ending at a deck offering views of the Currituck Sound, and provides access to the Maritime Forest Trail at the site.
- Construction work will begin after Labor Day to avoid the summer season.

Audubon's Currituck Sound Marsh Resilience Project

- This update comes from Cat Bowler (cat.bowler@audubon.org), Coastal Resilience Manager with Audubon NC.
- During spring 2020 Audubon completed geospatial assessment on the mid-Currituck marsh complex and the surrounding region including Currituck Sound, Back Bay, and portions of the North Landing River watershed. The assessment identified areas where existing marshes, which provide habitat for birds and resilience benefits to people, are vulnerable to threats like sea-level rise. Based on the assessment, Audubon created a screening tool to ground marsh resilience projects in the best available data and local expertise. Using the tool, input from partners in the Currituck Sound Coalition, and field site assessments, Audubon selected two priority marsh sites and contracted with EA Engineering, Science and Technology to develop one preliminary engineering design for each site by summer 2021. Those interested in more information about the tool can find it at:

<https://audubon.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=61fe95985334451ea8566e9b9fa0a54c&extent=-8608776.9787%2C4294347.6658%2C-8315258.79%2C4431475.6946%2C102100>

Staff asked if the Local Advisory Committee (LAC) would like to hear about the project directly from Ms. Bowler, and the consensus was yes.

N.C. Coastal Federation's Abandoned Vessel Removal Project (Michael Flynn)

- Mr. Flynn with the N.C. Coastal Federation shared news about their grant to remove marine debris along the coast, including 11 abandoned vessels at Kitty Hawks Woods, and 1 at Currituck Banks. Most of the work at Kitty Hawks Woods will be around Baum Point Island. This is a cooperative effort, involving agencies such as NCWRC and local governments. Solicitation of bids will begin early 2021. A press release with additional information is found at:

<https://www.nccoast.org/2020/09/federation-receives-marine-debris-removal-grant-from-noaa/>

Member Roundtable

Ms. Meade commented that the boardwalk has been well used, and she's heard nothing but good things about people's visit. She did mention that some are confused by the new loop trail, given the outdated trail sign at the entrance. She admitted that she hasn't visited the loop trail herself yet but looks forward to a chance to do so.

Mr. McCall stated that he has hiked the new loop, and felt it made sense. He only encountered 2 other hikers, but overall it was a pleasant experience. Mr. McCall asked whether changes to the hunting system might include the addition of a duck blind for public use. Staff was uncertain how that would interact with the county's game commission rules on blinds.

Mr. Johnson said he serves with the Audubon Coalition, and Albemarle Pamlico National Estuary Partnership has helped move forward the initiative between North Carolina and Virginia, including a signed

Memorandum of Understanding concerning shared waters in this area. His program has also been in the midst of the Coastal Habitat Protection Plan rewrite, which is due in 2021.

Public Comments

Mr. Flynn and Mr. Williams both expressed gratitude for their participation in the meeting.

Review of Action Items

Spring meetings are being planned, though possibly still virtual. As directives are modified, staff will reach out. Staff will reach out to Ms. Bowler to try to arrange a talk about the Audubon project.

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 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.