



Rachel Carson Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
May 2, 2019 3:00 p.m.
Administration Building, NOAA Beaufort Lab

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Town of Beaufort Administration, John Day	No
Town of Beaufort Police, Paul Burdette	No
N.C. State Parks, Fort Macon, Ben Fleming	No
N.C. Maritime Museum – Beaufort, Ben Wunderly	Yes
National Park Service, Cape Lookout – Sue Stuska	No
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership – Trish Murphey	Yes
N.C. Natural Heritage Program – Laura Robinson	Yes
NOAA’s National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science – Greg Piniak	Yes
N.C. WRC Enforcement – Brandon Joyner	Yes
<u>Community Members</u>	
Ann Carter	Yes
Perry Barrow	No
John Fussell	Yes
Stan Rule	Yes
Margaret Garner	No
Dan Rittschof	Yes
Robin Newton	No
Miriam Sutton	Yes
George Everett	Yes
<u>Others Present</u>	
Rebecca Ellin, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Program Manager	
Paula Gillikin, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Central Sites Manager	

Reserve-wide Administrative Update

30th Anniversary

The Reserve is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year! Based on the success of establishing the NCNERR in the mid-1980s, the State was inspired to protect additional coastal habitats for research, education, and stewardship. The Coastal Area Management Act (CAMA) was amended in June 1989 to create the N.C. Coastal Reserve to protect both state and national reserve sites for research, education, and compatible traditional uses. The Reserve will kick off its celebration in May with an outreach campaign extending through the summer, celebrating 30 years of research, education, and stewardship.

Hurricane Florence Recovery Update

Hurricane Florence recovery continues, although many operations have returned to normal.

All Reserve sites are open except a portion of the Bald Head Woods Reserve. The Division is partnering with the N.C. Forest Service to address downed trees and limbs at the Reserve to ensure visitor safety and forest health.

The Division is also working with the N.C. Coastal Federation to secure federal funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Emergency Watershed Protection program to address large marine debris such as dock sections and lumber and remaining vessels stranded on public lands as a result of Hurricane Florence. This funding will address these issues at the Rachel Carson and Masonboro Island Reserve sites.

Thank you to the many volunteers who have helped clean up the sites post-Florence.

Periodic Rules Review

The Rules Review Commission approved the requested reoption timeline of November 30, 2021 for Coastal Reserve rules (15A NCAC 070). Staff are discussing potential rule language based on committee input on 15A NCAC 070.0202 at the fall 2018 meetings. 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 Reserve addressed feedback from NOAA on the draft management plan for the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve that will cover 2019-2024 and the plan is currently under review by the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality. A 30-day public comment period for the draft management plan will be scheduled after all reviews are complete and 3 public meetings, in the northern, central and southern regions of the coast, will be scheduled during the comment period.

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	President's Budget Request FY2020
NERRS Operations	\$23.5 M	\$25 M	\$27M	\$0 M
CZM Grants	\$70 M	\$75 M	\$75.5M	\$0 M

- Federal Fiscal Year 20: The President's budget request does not include funding for the NERRS Operations or the CZM Grants budget lines. Next steps for the federal fiscal year 20 budget include the House and Senate marks and chamber votes, conferencing between the chambers, chamber votes to agree on a final budget, and a final budget going to the President for signature into law.
- 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.

Margaret A. Davidson Fellowship Program

A 2016 external Blue Ribbon Panel Report recommended that the National Estuarine Research Reserve System establish a graduate fellowship program to increase graduate research within reserves and develop the next generation of scientists and managers. Congress provided an additional \$2M to NOAA in the FY19 Omnibus appropriations bill for the National Estuarine Research Reserve System to implement the Margaret A. Davidson Fellowship (see table above).

The goal of the Margaret A. Davidson Fellowship is to build the next generation of leaders in estuarine science and coastal management by affording graduate students the opportunity to conduct collaborative science addressing key reserve management issues, partake in professional development opportunities, and receive quality mentoring to support their professional growth. The fellowship will offer graduate students enrolled in a M.S. or Ph.D. program the opportunity to conduct estuarine research within a National Estuarine Research Reserve. One fellow will be selected at each of the 29 reserves in the system for a two-year duration. A strong emphasis will be placed on mentoring the fellows at a local and national level, as well as providing professional development opportunities to build knowledge and skills to enter the workforce.

The Request for Proposals for the fellowship will be published in the next few months with proposals due towards the end of the calendar year. Look for more information from the Reserve regarding this exciting opportunity in the coming months.

Staffing News

- Paula Gillikin, Central Sites Manager, received a 2018 Governor's Award for Excellence in Public Service in October. Paula's exceptional commitment to serving the public

extends throughout and beyond her work with the Division to her volunteer work which focuses on those cannot speak or advocate for themselves including animals and children.

- Whitney Jenkins, Coastal Training Program Coordinator, received a 2018 Department of Environmental Quality Distinguished Employee award in November. Whitney was recognized for her work in delivering trainings to and assisting local communities such as the Town of Beaufort in taking action to address stormwater and harbor management challenges. Whitney also received the National Estuarine Research Reserve System's Cathy Angell Communication Award for bringing diverse stakeholders together to make environmental improvements to local coastal communities as well as for incorporating communication best practices in her outreach activities.
- Kate Jones left the Northern Sites Manager job in early November to take a job with the Town of Nags Head. Thank you to Kate for her hard work during her tenure with the program and best of luck in her new position. Interviews have been conducted for the vacant position.

Upcoming Program Activities

Find upcoming event information on the event calendar at www.nccoastalreserve.net.

- Join Reserve staff in celebrating Earth Day at Crystal Coast Earth Day at Fort Macon State Park on April 21 and at the Wilmington Earth Day Festival on April 27.
- The Reserve will host an informational session and training for those interested in volunteering for the 2019 sea turtle nesting season at the Masonboro Island Reserve. The event takes place on April 25 in Wilmington.
- Reserve local advisory committees will meet this spring beginning the week of April 29.
- For the sixth year, the Reserve and NC Wildlife Resources Commission are teaming up to estimate the diamondback terrapin populations through the use of citizen science. Citizen scientists who attended the April training will kayak designated routes at the Masonboro Island Reserve and document terrapin sightings in May. WRC is expanding this methodology to Carteret County, hosting a pilot Tally this season.
- A teacher and educator workshop will be held in Wilmington on May 14. Participants will receive content aligned with state and national education standards to support incorporation of estuary and watershed topics into classroom teaching. Teacher renewal credits and Environmental Education Certification credits are available for this workshop. Registration is required.
- The Coastal Training Program will host two workshops on low impact development & water quality for real estate agents and property owners May 22 and 23 in Wanchese. These trainings provide real estate professionals background in how land use decisions impact water quality and how to help protect water quality by using low impact development techniques. Participants will also learn how to use stormwater control measures to meet state and local regulations while maintaining functionality and aesthetics.
- The Coastal Training Program will also host 'Social science basics for coastal managers' with NOAA on July 11 in Beaufort. This training provides the basic knowledge and skills

to help coastal managers understand their stakeholders and includes modules on survey design, conducting focus groups, and conducting interviews. Registration is required.

- Registration for Summer Science School, in partnership with the NC Maritime Museum in Beaufort, is open. Reserve education staff will lead programs for students in Preschool to 10th grade from June to August.
- Sarah Donaher is the recipient of the 2019 North Carolina Coastal Research Fellowship. Sarah is a graduate student at UNC-IMS (advised by Dr. Rachel Gittman from ECU) and will study the resilience and restoration of seagrass beds. The fellowship is co-sponsored by North Carolina Sea Grant and the N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve, and supports work on priority coastal management issues at the N.C. reserve sites.

* 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 grant funds DCM receives provides funding for Reserve staffing, state site operations, and administrative support.

Site Update/New Business

- As per Section II.F.10 of the Operating Procedures, the N.C. Coastal Reserve Local Advisory Committee Operating Procedures document will be reviewed and updated every five years. Reserve staff have reviewed and updated the document that was presented to the committee via email prior to the local advisory committee meeting. Technical changes such as changes in agency names or site acreages and minor edits that serve to clarify existing language were made. A few more substantive changes were made to more accurately reflect current implementation of procedures. Stewardship staff will determine the best method to resolve any comments received and will be in communication with committee members, as appropriate, to finalize a revised document if any additional changes are required.
- Education programs, including field trips to the Rachel Carson Reserve and presentations about the site, benefited over 220 participants since the October 2018 local advisory committee meeting.
- Currently, there are 13 permitted research projects being carried out at the site.
- Thirteen Site Stewards volunteers were trained to conduct general and/or specific field monitoring tasks. Volunteer observations will be reported electronically.
- 2018 wild horse population dynamics included a total of 30 horses (18 female, 12 male), 3 deaths, and 1 birth. The youngest horse was less than a year and the oldest 28 years.

As of April 2018, there are 28 horses present on the island. Two deaths have occurred since the beginning of 2019.

- A study was conducted by Reserve staff and Duke Marine Lab students to understand how overhead fixed-wing drone flights influenced wild horse behavior. Study results suggested that wild horses experience disturbance by overflights at both 63.5 and 90 meters. During the 30 minutes post-flight behavior monitoring, often horses did not return completely to pre-flight behaviors suggesting that the effects of disturbance could be longer than 30 minutes. Future studies will investigate the impact of visitors on wild horse behavior.
- The Reserve is sharing the Town of Beaufort's success story of managing abandoned and derelict vessels with other local advisory committees to inspire and inform participating municipalities about their authority to address this issue.
- Upcoming activities at the site include: Bird and Seabird Ecological Assessment Network surveys, hurricane debris removal, shoreline change monitoring, summer camps, and the summer public field trip series.

Roundtable Discussion

- Some committee members indicated they had suggested minor changes to the Local Advisory Committee Operating Procedures document via email.
- Brandon provided information about possibly marking a sunken vessel that is within the site boundaries and just underwater at high tide.
- Miriam inquired about the previous research structure at Middle Marsh that became a nesting platform for an osprey pair. The structure was damaged in Hurricane Florence and is currently not able to support a nest; however, the birds are continually showing interest in using it as a nesting site.
- Committee members discussed recreational use of drones at the Rachel Carson Reserve and the risks for wild horses. If drones cause wild horses to erratically run, visitors could also be in danger. It was acknowledged that recreational use of drones at most of the Rachel Carson Reserve is illegal given the proximity of the local airport.
- Committee members commented that annexation of the east end of Carrot Island into Beaufort town limits could be beneficial to rules enforcement and public safety given that the Town has both law enforcement and fire boats.
- John Fussell commented, based on recent field observations, that the changes at Bird Shoal due to Hurricane Florence could be beneficial for nesting Wilsons plover. The east end of Bird Shoal has received a substantial amount of new sand and Piping plover have recently been observed there; the area should be monitored to see if the plovers nest there. Least terns have also been observed exhibiting nesting behavior.
- Trish explained that the Albemarle Pamlico National Estuary Partnership and the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries will be flying the coastline, including the Rachel Carson Reserve to map submerged aquatic vegetation during the summer. A living shoreline technical workshop, hosted by Restore America's Estuaries and local partners, will be held at the Boat House conference center on 8-9 October.

- Ann notified the committee that periodic maintenance dredging of Bulkhead Channel will occur, soon.
- Committee members asked for an update for the proposed dredging project at the east end of Taylor's Creek. Reserve staff explained that initial consideration had been given to placing spoils at the Rachel Carson Reserve; however, those options are currently not under consideration and other options, such as landside disposal are being investigated by the County.

Public comment

- None

Action items

- Paula Gillikin will inquire about the potential for making the old research structure at Middle Marsh available for osprey that are trying to nest there.
- Paula Gillikin will ensure staff review of LAC member comments that were received via email for the Local Advisory Committee Operating Procedures document.