



**Bald Head Woods Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, May 18, 2022 – 2 pm**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Bald Head Island Conservancy (BHC) – Beth Darrow, Chris Shank	Yes
Village of Bald Head Island, JP McCann	Yes
Village of Bald Head Island Public Safety	No
Natural Heritage Program, Mike Schafale	Yes
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Al Buzzard	Yes
John Kinney	Yes
<u>Others Present</u>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator	
Elizabeth Colhoun, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Southern Sites Manager	

Welcome – Hope Sutton

The Stewardship Coordinator welcomed the committee to the Spring 2022 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and completed a roll call.

Reserve-wide Administrative Update – Hope Sutton

The Reserve-wide Update, which includes a range of reserve activities, was shared with committee members prior to the meeting. Members had no comments or questions about the updates. The update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

Mr. Kinney inquired if the budget included the entire east coast or nationally. He also asked for clarification on the location of all the NCNERR sites and the amount that is allocated for NC. *The*

stewardship coordinator clarified that the Federal budget listed on the update provides funds for all 30 of the National Estuarine Research Reserves.

The stewardship coordinator provided some reminders from the Reserve-wide update:

- Brandon Puckett started a job with NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science in April. A search for a new Research Coordinator will be conducted following some internal human resources work is completed.
- Elizabeth Pinnix is the Reserve's new Southern Sites Manager, providing site management for the four sites managed out of the Wilmington office, including the Bald Head Woods Reserve.
- Hope Sutton continues as the Reserve's Stewardship Coordinator, coordinating the efforts of the stewardship team and focussing on program-wide initiatives, policy, and partnerships.

Site Update and Old Business – Hope Sutton

Trail maintenance

- The stewardship coordinator reported on efforts to improve trail conditions and address maintenance needs. The stewardship coordinator and southern sites manager performed trail maintenance on December 6, 2021, January 26, 2022, February 9, 2022, March 2, 2022, and May 18, 2022. All trails are passable and in acceptable condition. The east and middle trails would benefit from additional effort to address encroaching shrubs.
- Reserve staff is interested in pursuing options for trail maintenance that would lighten the burden on Reserve and Conservancy staff. Developing a spring break crew or other volunteer options will be considered.
- In March, reserve staff recently completed chainsaw training that makes it possible for staff to complete a wider range of trail maintenance tasks. Bald Head Island Conservancy staff participated in the training and have also advanced their capacity to complete trail maintenance.

Discussion took place regarding trail conditions and maintenance.

Mr. Buzzard asked if there was a way to let visitors know that a trail is not open. He suggested signage be placed at the trail heads to alert the public. To address the trail maintenance and fast growth over the trails he suggested mulching or putting some type of material on the trails to keep the new growth from happening. He also inquired about if volunteers were able to operate and use chainsaws or was this activity only authorized by trained individuals within our organization. *The stewardship coordinator explained that the reserve's Standard Operating Procedures for trail maintenance include details regarding who can perform what types of maintenance. In general, chainsaw work must be completed by fully trained persons following specific safety protocols, including the use of personal protective equipment. Other power tools can be used by volunteers following safety training and sign-off by a site manager.*

Mr. Schafale asked whether the trail maintenance issues are in part related to limbs and trees damaged by storms in the past several seasons finally coming down and ending up on the trails. *The southern sites manager agreed that this is the case. Frequently, trails are cleared, then a small wind storm occurs and brings down a new group of limbs and trees and requires maintenance again.*

Mr. Shank suggested implementing a stop light color sign system. Conservancy staff in collaboration with the reserve could place color coded signs at the trails heads to indicate trail status for public knowledge.

The southern sites manager responded that some type of system could be developed and that it could potentially include creating a QR code to post at the trailheads for the public to report trail hazards for reserve staff to respond to.

Mr. Shafale suggested that yaupons that are creeping in on the trails may continue to be an issue with seasonal trimming because they are not being allowed to grow to the size where the canopy is high enough above head height.

Mr. Shank recalled that the ice storm a handful of years back was the beginning of when the canopy started opening which was followed by consecutive years of tropical storms. He also proposed the introduction of a research project to better understand the succession of maritime forests. He suggests instead of trimming seasonally, there could be a study that looks at the change on the trails from the increase in canopy gaps in order to plan for the future. He suggests exploring high level GIS mapping for the forest and being proactive, rather than reactive, in the approach.

Dr. Darrow mentioned BHIC uses a platform similar to sign up genius to schedule volunteers and offered to share information about this option to manage a BHW Site Stewards group.

Discussion also included the topic of wildfire management and forest monitoring. Mr. Buzzard commented that more knowledge about fire in this forest ecosystem is needed and that the wildfires in western states could be studied for better understanding. Mr. Schafale responded that a great deal of work has been done about fire ecosystems in our region in regards to pine dominated systems. He stated that although maritime forests are not fire dominated systems and live oak litter is not flammable like pine straw, there is still a lot to learn about the dynamics of maritime forests. Mr. Shank inquired about Buxton Woods and whether any parallels to that system could help with understanding fire as related to BHW.

Mr. Schafale suggested that LiDAR (light detection and ranging) could support study of the forest. Mr. Kinney informed the group that the Village conducted flights to collect LiDAR data following Hurricane Florence to help identify where natural low points were in association with stormwater engineering. Mr. Schafale responded that if the raw data from the Village could be made available, a trained GIS technician could use the data to map specific features and habitat types, including getting measures such as canopy height.

Mr. Shank suggested looking into research that could help inform forest replanting efforts of the Conservancy and Village. He reiterated that little is known about this forest type's succession and regeneration patterns. He stated that understanding the natural processes would result in better management and planning decisions for the Village and homeowners. Mr. Kinney mentioned an effort to do large-scale replanting on the island and the need for more information to make this effort successful.

Mr. Schafale suggested revisiting the Carolina Vegetation Survey vegetation plots and establishing new ones if necessary or exploring the deer exclosures to see if they would represent the forest well in composition. Ms. Darrow responded that the deer exclosures lack edge habitats, so examination of these areas will not accurately reflect the larger concerns about the forest and development impacts. Mr. Schafale suggested looking outside of the reserve property, if necessary, to see how the maritime forest edge communities are responding to increased salt spray.

Mr. Buzzard inquired about the possibility of replacing any of the boardwalk infrastructure if it became needed. *The stewardship coordinator responded that reserve staff have recently completed an inventory and will begin planning for replacement of some items that are showing wear. There are several State grant fund sources that may be able to be used to do this work.*

Mr. Shank asked about the property donation/purchase. He asked for clarification on the BHW land acquisition, the price the state paid for the property, and how much was donated or purchased. *The stewardship coordinator stated that information will be provided by email as follow-up to the meeting.*

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

- No progress has been made on the MOU since a draft was provided to BHIC staff. Discussions will occur over the coming months to refine the document for mutual benefit. An approval process will then occur that includes internal, Division, and Departmental review.

Mr. Shank stated he will get input from BHIC board and staff on the draft MOU before communicating further with reserve staff.

Forest monitoring

- The stewardship coordinator and the southern sites manager met with Dr. Darrow and Jodi Forrester of N.C. State University on January 18 and with Dr. Darrow, Mike Schafale, and Scott Pohlman, both of the Natural Heritage Program, on April 25. Both discussions highlighted the need to continue monitoring efforts related to deer impacts on tree seedlings and to develop monitoring activities to better understand the relationship between canopy condition and tree regrowth. Fire management planning and the role of fuel loads was also discussed. Reserve staff and BHIC staff will continue to discuss options to address these forest monitoring needs and identify opportunities to move forward with additional studies. The reserve is currently working on a fire management plan for the Buxton Woods Reserve and plans to complete similar documents for additional sites, including the Bald Head Woods Reserve.

Roundtable

Laurel wilt, the disease affecting redbay trees, was brought up for discussion. Mr. Shafale mentioned there is a fungicide that has been used elsewhere to combat the wilt. He suggested trying to keep as much as the local genetic stock as possible is preferred. Mr. Shank reminded the group that injecting anything to deal with the disease can be difficult due to the aquifer on the island. Mr. Kinney mentioned a professor from University of Florida was working on this issue in recent years and suggested looking for treatments or a naturally resistant species of red bay to reintroduce.

Public comments

None

Action Items

- Reserve staff will contact committee members during the summer to establish a date for the fall meeting.
- Reserve staff in collaboration with BHIC staff will brainstorm forest monitoring plan and begin compiling a list of potential interested parties to form a working group
- Reserve staff will plan a site stewards training in collaboration with Dr. Darrow to recruit and train volunteers for a more sustainable trail maintenance plan.
- Reserve staff will investigate new information regarding laurel wilt and red bay resistance.
- Reserve staff will clarify the acquisition and purchase of BHW to committee members.
- Reserve staff will stay in touch about potential swale monitoring during September 2022.