



**Emily and Richardson Preyer Buckridge Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, 2 December 2019, 10:00am-12:00pm**

Attendance

LAC Partner Organization Members	Present
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (Enforcement), Lt. Mark Cagle	Yes
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (Enforcement), Sgt. Daniel Kennedy	Yes
Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Howard Phillips	Yes
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, David Turner	Yes
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, William Ridgeway	Yes
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, Dwayne Norman	Yes
Albemarle Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, Jimmy Johnson	Yes
N.C. Natural Heritage Program, Michael Schafale	Yes
Tyrrell County Sheriff, Kevin Sawyer	No
Tyrrell County Government, David Clegg	Yes
Tyrrell County Government, Nina Griswell	No
N.C. Division of Forest Resources, Dan Feola	No
Community Members	
Mike Clements	Yes
Others Present	
Woody Webster, DCM, Buckridge Site Manager	

Reserve-wide Updates

The Reserve-wide Update, which now includes a range of Reserve activities was shared with committee members. Members expressed appreciation for the updates, but questioned the amount of detail included. The Rules Review topic is included below. The Update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

Rules Review

The committee was asked for input on draft rule language developed as part of the Legislative Periodic Rules Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process (G.S. 150B-21.3A) that began in 2016. Committee members were provided draft language per rule section for each section of the N.C. Administrative Code sections related to the N.C. Coastal Reserve (NCAC 15A 70). Committee input per section:

SECTION .0100 – GENERAL PROVISIONS

15A NCAC 070.0101 – STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

- No comment.

15A NCAC 070.0102 – DEFINITIONS AS USED IN THE SUBCHAPTER

- No comment.

15A NCAC 070.0103 – RESPONSIBILITIES: DUTIES OF THE COASTAL RESERVE PROGRAM

- No comment.

15A NCAC 070.0104 – STATE AND LOCAL COASTAL RESERVE ADVISORY COMMITTEES

- No comment.

15A NCAC 070.0105 – RESERVE COMPONENTS

- No comment.

SECTION .0200 – MANAGEMENT: USE AND PROTECTION OF THE NORTH CAROLINA COASTAL RESERVE

15A NCAC 070.0201 – MANAGEMENT PLAN

- No comment.

15A NCAC 070.0202 – RESERVE USE REQUIREMENTS

- Members discussed Item 2d, use of motorized vehicles. There were questions about what makes a designated corridor and whether this language agreed with N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) language (it does). It was also questioned whether electric motors are included, given that the Department of Interior has recently allowed them on their lands.
- Item 4, camping, was of particular interest to one LAC member. They felt camping opportunities could be expanded to reserves such as Buckridge. A discussion exploring the limitations of staff oversight, potential pitfalls, and conflicts with the primary mission of the reserve occurred. The majority of the LAC expressed an understanding that expansion of camping to reserves other than Masonboro would be problematic and detrimental to the resources the reserve program is tasked with stewarding.
- For Item 5, Mr. Turner requested the addition of trapping to the language, along with hunting and fishing. This would make it consistent with language in Item 2a.
- Item 8, WRC staff expressed concern that limiting personal property to 24 hours might confuse hunters, who often leave hunting stands and step screws for long periods of time on Commission-owned game lands. Staff noted that step screws are not allowed on reserve property, and hunting stands are only one small part of a widespread personal property abandonment issue. Additionally, the reserve has experienced

numerous user conflicts over stands left for longer periods of time, and those stands installed for longer periods have been more likely to be abandoned or attached to trees in an illegal manner. Reserve staff also pointed out that WRC does not have any rule language concerning duration a hunting stand may be left unattended, only an internal policy. As such, there is no approved rule language which reserve rule language might mirror. Mr. Turner stated that conflicting stand policy still might confuse hunters, and that such potential conflicts should be published in the regulations digest. There was no further discussion regarding personal property.

15A NCAC 070.0203 – SPECIAL ACTIVITY AUTHORIZATION

- The addition of trapping to the language was suggested for consistency.

Site Update and Old Business

Property Updates

- Acquisition of the 2,226 acre Woodley Tract was completed in January. Funding for the Woodley Tract was supplied by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Air Force (USAF). The deal was brokered by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The Air Force's interest in the project is in protecting operational areas around the Dare County Bombing Range. Efforts to add the Woodley Tract to Buckridge's formal Nature Preserve Dedication are ongoing.
- The same TNC/USAF partnership also pursued the purchase of 260 acres at Grapevine Landing, known as the Primland Tract. The Division of Coastal Management (Division) had previously secured funding for this parcel in 2016, but that effort was aborted by the landowner. After additional negotiations by TNC, the landowner sold the property to TNC for a reduced price. The Division secured 50% of the purchase price via a Clean Water Management Trust Fund grant in September. The remaining funds will be supplied by TNC and USAF. After a conservation easement is placed on the tract by the USAF, the state will complete their acquisition of the property. Afterward, the Division hopes to work with NCWRC and Tyrrell County to develop a regional water access on the Grapevine Landing portion of the Primland Tract. The next step for staff is to meet with the US Army Corps of Engineers and Division regulatory staff to determine the possible size of a project footprint.

Invasive Controls

- Small outbreaks of alligatorweed along Eastern Road canal were treated and monitored this year using in-house resources. These outbreaks are smaller than the one previously treated near Otis Road, but still bear vigilant monitoring.
- As part of a cost-share agreement, the Division of Water Resources (DWR) is treating alligatorweed and non-native *Phragmites* along the Alligator River at Buckridge, both at Gum Neck Landing and the Northwest Fork of the river. The Division nearly tripled the funds for this effort by request of DWR. DWR noticed a rebound of alligatorweed in the Northwest Fork area and wished to get ahead of the problem. This effort is in addition to ongoing treatment of Gum Neck Landing by Tyrrell County.

Hunting Statistics

- Bear harvest in 2018 decreased dramatically to 4 from 19 the previous year. However, the bear harvest as of 11/25/2019 at Buckridge has already climbed to 8. The reported deer harvest grew from 6 to 11. Thus far this year, only 1 deer harvest has been reported on Buckridge. Reserve

staff have evidence, corroborated by WRC staff observations, that there are still ample numbers of deer and bear at Buckridge, despite harvest reports.

- Mr. Turner opined that harvest numbers rely on hunters reporting a harvest correctly. Some fail to report their success, and others may incorrectly record the location of a harvest. There is also some feeling of falsified/omitted harvest locations, thought to be perpetrated by hunters who wish to mask success in an area, much like fishermen not wishing to share the location of a favorite fishing spot.
- Last year was the first record of a turkey harvest at Buckridge, with two recorded.
- WRC has continued their progress rehabilitating the roads at Buckridge. The gravel added this year improved Eastern Road all the way to the temporary gate at Otis Road. Holes were patched along parts of Buckridge Road, but WRC staff ran out of time this year to finish rock spreading work. The Division was able to add an additional \$18,000 of gravel toward this year's effort. Hunter discussions indicate an appreciation of the ongoing road improvements.
- Side-mowing was completed along a portion of Eastern Road and Juniper Road using a specialized excavator, equipment shared in the WRC coastal region. The work allowed more sunlight to reach the roadbed and reestablished original travel lane width.

Research Update

- A multi-agency Bat Blitz visited Buckridge in June. Using mist-netting they confirmed the presence of the common evening bat (*Nycticeius humeralis*), and the rare Rafinesque's big-eared bat (*Corynorhinus rafinesquii*) at Buckridge. The effort spent time at many different conservation properties in the area, but just one night at Buckridge.
- As part of work surrounding the addition of the Woodley Tract to Buckridge's Dedication, N.C. Natural Heritage Program staff visited this area in July, witnessing several rare species. American alligators, a red-cockaded woodpecker, and an unknown population of riverbank evening primrose were observed. This rare plant lives on cypress knees at the water's edge, and is mostly known from southeastern NC.

Visitor Access Issues

- N.C. Department of Environmental Quality Secretary Regan visited in late August, Buckridge becoming the second reserve he has visited. Potential plans around the Primland Tract were shared, in addition to an overview of the area and the Woodley Tract addition. The Secretary was very interested in the ecotourism efforts Tyrrell County is pursuing, and how the Division can support it.
 - Mr. Clegg mentioned Secretary Regan has since returned to the area and met with him, further voicing his support for a partnership with the county for ecotourism around Grapevine Landing.
- Staff again shared the Division's overall hopes for Grapevine Landing. Potential options may include a small pier, a formal boat ramp, parking, docks for commercial fishermen and a boardwalk. LAC members were assured their input would be sought on potential project designs.

Upcoming Activities

- The acquisition of the Primland Tract and planning a water access project.

- Meter Point Acquisition for Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve in Dare County, which is being handled by the Buckridge Site Manager.
- Revision of Game Land memorandum of understanding for Buxton Woods and Buckridge Reserves.

Member Roundtable

Lt. Cagle asked if any biological survey of reptiles had been completed. Agencies around the table acknowledge this gap in knowledge, but all lack resources to address. Lt. Cagle proceeded to share that poaching of reptiles for illicit trade continues to be a large issue. Parts of Asia are becoming large markets, with many reptile and bird species native to Buckridge fetching high prices. As an example, one eastern box turtle may fetch \$1,000 while a spotted turtle can go for \$2,000. Most states have placed the spotted turtle on protected lists, but NC and SC, where the turtles are relatively abundant, still have no special protection in place. An individual may possess as many as four spotted turtles legally, but often poachers will remove hundreds. This quickly destroys a local population, given that even seized turtles cannot be easily reintroduced due to biosecurity concerns. Mr. Clegg asked how the animals were being transported, and Lt. Cagle responded that FedEx and UPS are common choices, though some individuals still choose to fly with animals in their luggage or secured on their person. While animal mortality can be high, smugglers consider losses of half or more of a shipment the price of doing business. There is also a secondary market for dead “exotic” animal parts as well.

Sgt. Kennedy encouraged everyone to report anything suspicious, as it can lead to breaks in much larger cases being worked. In addition to poaching of non-game species, WRC is also working on some local issues of hunter harassment. He offered that Lt. Cagle, himself or Officer Cronk are all excellent resources at the ready.

There was a brief discussion regarding pond pine mortality at Woodley Tract, including potential causes, possible community transitions and existing carbon studies at Pocosin Lakes. There was acknowledgement of many potential stressors on natural communities, but none identified as the main cause. Mr. Schafale mentioned how useful drones could be for areas difficult to access, like the Woodley Tract.

Mr. Klegg wished to recognize the importance of timing for moving forward on a water access at Grapevine Landing. He stated that currently the right mix of personalities and politics have aligned for this project, and it is important for all involved to move forward quickly.

Public Comments

No members of the public were present.

Review of Action Items

WRC, the Division, and Tyrrell County will work to make connections regarding Grapevine Landing.

Appendix A Reserve-wide Update

N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Fall 2018 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

Hurricane Florence and Tropical Storm Michael

All Reserve sites and the Kitty Hawk, Beaufort, and Wilmington offices closed September 11 in preparation for Hurricane Florence. The Columbia office closed September 13. The eye of Hurricane Florence passed directly over the Masonboro Island and Zeke's Island Reserves on September 14.

The Kitty Hawk and Columbia offices received little to no damage as a result of the storm and reopened September 17. The Beaufort office at the NOAA Beaufort Lab sustained a variety of damage and fully reopened September 28. The Wilmington office at University of North Carolina Wilmington's (UNCW) Center for Marine Science also sustained a variety of damage and reopened to staff on October 1. Damage assessment and repair is handled by the respective partners that own the office facilities and not by Reserve staff; thank you to NOAA Beaufort Lab and UNCW staff for getting the facilities up and running again so that more regular business operations could resume.

Storm impacts to the Reserve sites varied geographically based on the track of the storm. The Currituck Banks, Kitty Hawk Woods, Buxton Woods, and Buckridge Reserves received little to no damage. The remaining sites located in the central and southern portions of the state experienced the following general impacts: erosion and deposition on oceanfront and estuarine shorelines, grounded vessels at the Rachel Carson and Masonboro Island Reserves, significant accumulation of marine debris such as lumber, staircases, floating docks and pilings, downed trees, missing signs, and damage to the boardwalk at the Rachel Carson Reserve. Eight of the ten Reserve sites reopened on September 24 following site assessments; Permuda Island and Bald Head Woods Reserves remain closed at this time.

Potentially hazardous conditions associated with storm damage remain at the Reserve sites and visitors should exercise caution. Grounded vessels are being addressed under Emergency Support Function #10 staffed by the U.S. Coast Guard, NOAA, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, and N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, including Reserve staff. Pollutants and a subset of vessels that remain grounded will be removed from the Reserve sites under this operation. Visitors should refrain from disturbing the vessels to protect personal safety and respect vessel owners' personal property while removal efforts are underway. Clean-up of smaller marine debris items has begun with the help of volunteers at select sites while storm recovery funding sources are being explored for removing the larger marine debris items described above and addressing the downed trees.

Reserve programming was and continues to be impacted by the storm. K-12 student field trips, teacher workshops, public education programming, and Coastal Training Program workshops have been cancelled, postponed, and rescheduled. Research staff are measuring storm impacts on several current research projects including performance of marsh sills and living shorelines constructed of alternative

substrates. Water quality monitoring equipment remained deployed at the Masonboro Island and Zeke's Island Reserves during the storm and staff will be evaluating those data in the near future. Stewardship staff are addressing the site-related items described above.

No additional impacts were observed from Tropical Storm Michael.

Local Advisory Committees

In August 2018, the Secretary of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality appointed new community members and re-appointed community members interested in continuing to serve to the local advisory committees following an application process earlier in the year to fill vacancies. Additional government agencies were also appointed to fill gaps on the committees.

The local advisory committee Operating Procedures document is to be updated every five years according to the Operating Procedures. An update was originally planned for fall 2018 but has been rescheduled to spring 2019 as staff focus on Hurricane Florence recovery.

Periodic Rules Review

Per the Division's request, the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality is seeking the Rules Review Commission's approval of a readoption timeline of November 30, 2021 for Coastal Reserve rules (15A NCAC 070). This item is scheduled for the Rules Review Commission's November 2018 meeting. Staff will begin preliminary discussions regarding 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).

Comments from Suggested Rules Edits/Additions:

Currituck Parking Lot -

Committee questioned who would be involved with enforcement, and staff indicated this would likely be a cooperative effort with the Currituck Sheriff's office.

Abandoned Vessels –

Committee was supportive of any streamlining effort, and suggested Staff investigate recently-enacted ordinances which now govern vessels on Silver Lake at Ocracoke.

Special Use Permit –

While largely supportive of this, Committee was surprised that the Reserve does not already possess this rule. Mr. Phillips cautioned that this may lead to additional paperwork/ staff time demands, as his organization has several types of permits, one for commercial use, one for research, etc. Staff reminded the Committee that a Research permit process is already in place, and seems to work well.

Private Property –

Committee members representing different agencies shared their differing approaches to personal property. NCWRC allow hunting stands to remain in place for a season, though ownership may not be claimed if left overnight, to prevent someone erecting a stand to “claim” a favorable hunting location. USFWS allows nothing to remain overnight. Staff shared that State Parks has no set policy, but rely largely on local staff decisions regarding disposal and retention. The Committee supported cementing a policy on personal property at the Reserve.

Permit Hunts – no comments.

N.C. NERR Management Plan

The Reserve received feedback from NOAA on the draft management plan for the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve that will cover 2018-2023 in late August 2018. Staff are currently working to address the feedback. Review by the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality will follow. 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, and 19 as it relates to the Coastal Reserve.

Federal Budget Lines	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2017	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2018	President’s Budget Request FY2019	Senate Approps Committee Mark FY2019	House Approps Committee Mark FY2019
NERRS Operations	\$23.5 M	\$25 M	\$0 M	\$27.5 M	\$27 M
CZM Grants	\$70 M	\$75 M	\$0 M	\$90 M	\$75 M

- Federal Fiscal Year 19: 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 19 budget include the House and Senate 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.

State Budget

The N.C. General Assembly appropriated \$2.5M to the Division in the State Fiscal Year 18 budget for acquisition of the Sunset Beach West tract to be included in the Bird Island Coastal Reserve. The early stages of the acquisition are underway. The appropriation supports implementation of a Memorandum

of Understanding between the Town of Sunset Beach and Sunset Beach and Twin Lakes, INC to resolve a legal battle regarding the tract. The tract is adjacent to the Bird Island Coastal Reserve and includes similar pristine beach and salt marsh habitats.

Visitor Access Study

Reserve Site Managers are working with a team of researchers from UNCW (Environmental Science Department, School of Health, Applied Human Science Recreation, Tourism Management Program) to implement a visitor access assessment project at select Reserve sites titled “Understanding Access and Visitor Use on North Carolina’s Coastal Reserve System.” The project focuses on six of the ten Reserve sites – Bird Island, Zeke’s Island, Masonboro Island, Rachel Carson, Kitty Hawk Woods, and Currituck Banks. The goal of the project is to understand visitor access patterns and inform planning and projects to accommodate visitor access of the sites. Interviews and stakeholder sessions with community members and government and business leaders, and on-site surveys of visitors are complete. Data collected will be analyzed by the research team and a study report will be complete in 2019. Results will be used by Reserve staff to inform visitor access management and planning.

Upcoming Program Activities

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

- **NOAA Tools Training Workshop (11.6, Wilmington)** - Participants will learn about NOAA’s resources available to improve local decision-making. Participants will get hands-on experience with various tools, including the Sea Level Rise Viewer and the Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper, as well as learn about resources available through NOAA’s Digital Coast. American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) will receive 4 Certification Maintenance credits. Registration is required.
- **Low Impact Development Basics for Water Quality Protection - Workshop for Real Estate Professionals (12.4 and 12.5, Wilmington)** - Participants will learn the following: how land use decisions impact water quality; Low Impact Development techniques that help protect water quality; the costs and benefits of implementing LID; managing stormwater control measures to meet state and local regulations and to maintain functionality and aesthetics; and tour stormwater control measures on the Wrightsville Beach Loop. Real estate professionals will receive 4 elective continuing education credits from the N.C. Real Estate Commission. Registration is required.

*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.