



**Buxton Woods Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
April 27, 2017
Buxton Fire Hall
Buxton, NC**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
National Park Service, Karol Jones	y
NC Forest Resources, John Cook	y
Wildlife Resources Commission, Bob Martine	n
Coastal Studies Institute, John McCord	n
Dare County Sheriff's Department, Doug Oberbeck	n
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Pat Moore	y
Harvey Scarborough	y
Marcia Lyons	y
Russ Kiddy	y
Carol Kiddy	n
Carol Anderson	n
<u>Others Present</u>	
Brian Perry, Buxton Fire Department	
Boone Vandzura, NPS	
Kate Jones	

Reserve-wide Administrative Update (Site Manager)

- *Management Plan*
The NERR management plan update process adheres to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's requirement to have and maintain an updated management plan that adheres to guidelines established for all Reserves within the National Estuarine Research Reserve System. This process included a public input process to inform the plan update. It also considers the history of NCNERR management plans and that this document serves as the fourth plan for the Reserves.

Buxton Woods Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

There are four themes identified from the public input process - program visibility, visitor use, research awareness, and partnerships. *No Comments.*

The plan was reviewed during the March 2017 Local Advisory Committee (LAC) meetings. The deadline for committee members to submit written comments was March 22. The plan was updated to reflect local advisory committee input and will be presented to the N.C. Coastal Resources Commission at their April 2017 meeting. The Department of Environmental Quality and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration will then review the plan. A 30-day public comment period for the draft management plan will be scheduled after all reviews are complete and three public meetings, in the northern, central and southern regions of the coast, will be scheduled during the comment period. *No Comments.*

- *Budget Update*

The federal budget was released by the president. The new budget may impact grants NERR would receive in the summer/fall of 2018. As many of you are aware, the 2017 budget is under a continuing resolution (those are the operations funds that will start this summer/fall). We do not have much information about the 2017 budget right now; we are under the impression that it will be a continuing resolution for the whole year and we will receive about the same budget line, but there may still be changes to what we receive because the administration can put across the board cuts on the budget to fund high priorities. NERRA (National Estuarine Reserve Research Association) will be working on both the FY17 and FY18 budgets in the coming weeks. *No Comments.*

- *Staffing*

The Southern Sites office of the NC Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve located in Wilmington, NC, hired Elizabeth Calhoun, to be their full-time Stewardship and Education Specialist. Elizabeth is a UNCW grad, who recently completed her Masters in Marine Biology and will be assisting the Site Manager with sea turtle and shore bird monitoring, volunteer management, and outreach activities associated with the Southern sites near Wilmington. *No Comments.*

Site Update - Old Business (Site Manager)

- *Fire Management Plan*

Site Manager circulated a draft of the Fire Management Plan, which is not complete, but started discussion on the topic. The plan is an overall Fire Management Plan for Buxton Woods that includes both wildfire management and prescribed fire activities. The first objective will be to uphold public safety and the protection of property. Site Manager asked for general concerns and comments having to do with fire management. Also, the site manager asked members to share the history of wildfire or

Buxton Woods Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

any prescribed fires in the area – especially when the fires occurred, what area the fire burned, and sources of ignition.

Members remarked that they were very glad the plan was being pursued and support an overall fire management plan. Building on the NPS's vegetation transects that were implemented, members agree that it is a good idea to get transects in place (or locate existing transects) and begin monitoring again. The plant communities are changing; what used to be forest is becoming inundated with more standing water creating a thick shrub layer and generally no trees. Discussion about wildfire ensued, and all agreed that a wildfire plan is important, but that an overall wildfire plan would be most effective.

Site Update - New Business

- *Boundary Marking*

Site manager worked with WRC this spring to mark site boundaries in the Piney Ridge Trail area. Ongoing boundary marking will be done in this area, and in other areas of the Reserve as needed.
- Signage updates
 - The Reserve is going through a signage inventory of each site, to determine needs. Site Manager is currently assessing needs for several types of signs including: trail posts, information signs, welcome signs
 - The top priority are trail post signs which could have the trail name on the post, and distance along the trail. If any LAC members have comments on what trails need marking the most, please share. There was agreement that signs are currently in ok condition, but more wayfinding signs would be helpful. This led to a discussion about which trails are passable in wet conditions. Site Manager mentioned the Reserve could apply for grant funding to build raised walkways in certain areas.
- *Volunteers*

In March 2017, the Site Manager worked with two Alternative Spring Break groups from Western Carolina University, and Eastern Kentucky University clearing trails and picking up trash in Buxton Woods. Trails that were cleared were: Sedge Trail, Lookout Loop, North Trail, and West Trail. Portions of the Boundary Trail were also cleared.

Roundtable Discussion (Staff response in italics)

- Pat Moore – She favors burning the sedges if it is possible, because that will improve habitat for birds. *(Site manager agreed that some prescribed burning can improve wildlife habitat, but care needs to be taken to ensure the burning is done at the right season to minimize damage to nests)*
- John Cook – Ideally you could identify units to burn and prioritize them and have a rationale. Keep in mind that burning in the winter won't affect hardwoods in a negative way. You can still work towards hardwood regeneration if that is your goal. Mechanical removal is an option, but due to

Buxton Woods Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

the delicate sandy soil, large equipment could have a more negative effect on the woods. Prescribed burning in Nags Head Woods was successful, and can serve as a model. Money to burn could be available from North Carolina Forest Service. *(Site manager thanked him for his expert input and as the plan is further refined, the Reserve will be in touch)*

- Marcia Lyons – Happy to see fire management being worked on. *(Thank you)*
- Karol Jones – Happy to work with the Reserve on fire management and will consider what plans have been produced by NPS. *(Yes, please forward any existing fire management plans on to site manager).*
- Russ Kiddy – Happy to see that fire is being discussed again. *(Acknowledgement of his appreciation.)*
- Harvey Scarborough – Remarked that he did not want to see a boardwalk on the sedge trail, because he often hunts this area and most hunters feel it would bring more people there and disturb the waterfowl in the area. *(Site manager agreed to discuss further before pursuing this option).*

Public Comments

- Brian Perry – mentioned he has 11 acres of property nearby and he has seen many changes recently. His land is wet for longer periods of the year, and the vegetation is changing.
- Boone Vandzura – wants to work cooperatively with the Reserve on a range of issues, and looks forward to an enhanced partnership.

Action Items

- John Cook will look for a copy of the NPS Fire plan and pass onto site manager.
- Boone Vandzura will also look for a copy of the plan.
- Site Manager will finish the fire/wildfire management plan.
- Site Manager will reach out the LAC before initiating any trail improvements in Buxton Woods.
- Site Manager will select date for Fall meeting.