



**Buxton Woods Reserve  
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes  
May 14, 2018  
Buxton Fire Hall  
Buxton, NC**

**Attendance**

<b><u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u></b>	<b><u>Present</u></b>
National Park Service, Law Enforcement Ranger, Karol Jones	y
N.C. Forest Resources, Dare County Ranger John Van Riper	y
Coastal Studies Institute, John McCord	y
Dare County Sheriff's Department, Lt. Doug Oberbeck	n
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, Officer Robert Martine	n
Dare County Commissioner, Danny Couch	y
<b><u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u></b>	
Harvey Scarborough	y
Russ Kiddy	y
Carol Anderson	n
<b><u>Others Present</u></b>	
Bryan Perry, Buxton Fire Department	
Steve Kovacs, Dare County Emergency Management	
Chief Ranger Boone Vandzura, National Park Service, Cape Hatteras National Seashore	
Michael Flynn, N.C. Coastal Federation	
Scott Pohlman, N.C. Natural Heritage Program	
Kate Jones, NCNERR Northern Sites Manager	
Rachel Veal, NCNERR Northern Sites Stewardship Assistant	

*Site Manager Kate Jones recognizes guest attendee Scott Pohlman from NC Natural Heritage who will give a presentation on his organization during the meeting (after updates).*

### **Reserve-wide Administrative Update**

Staff will share these written updates with the local advisory committees prior to the committee meetings so that members have the opportunity to review them in advance; this change is in response to committee member suggestions at the fall 2017 meetings.

- *Local Advisory Committees*

The Division solicited applications from citizens and community organizations January 8-February 5, 2018 to fill vacancies on the local advisory committees. Committee members are appointed by the Secretary of the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality; the Secretary's office is currently reviewing the Division's recommendations for appointment. Letters will be sent to applicants after the appointments are made.

The local advisory committee [Operating Procedures](#) document is to be updated every five years according to the Operating Procedures. Staff will initiate the update process this fall and seek committee input on potential changes for Division consideration.

- *Periodic Rules Review*

Staff is working with the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality to establish a timeline and process for readoption of the Coastal Reserve rules (15A NCAC 070) identified in the final Rules Review Commission report. 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*

In 2017, the local advisory committees and N.C. Coastal Resources Commission reviewed and provided input on the draft management plan for the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve that will cover 2018-2023. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is currently reviewing the plan. 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
NERRS Operations	\$23,500,000	\$25,000,000	\$0
CZM Grants	\$70,000,000	\$75,000,000	\$0

- Federal Fiscal Year 18: Congress passed an omnibus budget bill for federal fiscal year 18 in March which includes a \$1.5 million increase for the NERRS Operations budget line and a \$5 million increase for the CZM Grants budget line. The NERRS appropriation resulted in \$50,000 increase to base operational funding for each reserve within the System. As a result, the Division will receive \$690,000 from NOAA for operation of the NCNERR portion of the Coastal Reserve during the upcoming state fiscal year (July 2018-June 2019). The additional funds will be used to cover direct and indirect cost increases and to fund stewardship-focused temporary staffing positions in the north and south via the annual budget.
- 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 releasing their respective budgets and then a conference between the chambers and chamber votes to agree on a final budget.

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.

- *Staffing News*

Thirteen seasonal temporary staff and interns are helping the Reserve with a variety of projects this summer including the general public and summer camp education programs, various site management and research activities including sea turtle and shorebird monitoring, exploring alternative substrates for living shorelines, and a thin-layer deposition marsh enhancement project (see fall 2017 update for more information on this project). Funding for the paid positions comes from the Division, Reserve, and Youth Advocacy Involvement Office. Three interns are volunteering their time, and an additional three are working for university credit.

- *Recent and Upcoming Program Activities*

Find upcoming event information on the event calendar at [www.nccoastalreserve.net](http://www.nccoastalreserve.net).

- **2018 NCSG-NCCR & NERR Coastal Research Fellow** – N.C. Sea Grant, the Reserve and Division co-sponsor a graduate research fellowship each

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- year for a student to conduct work within the sites of the Coastal Reserve on mutually beneficial priorities. The 2018 fellow is Chris Moore, a doctoral student in Biology at East Carolina University. Under the advisement of Dr. April Blakeslee, Chris will be measuring parasite diversity to evaluate the success of shoreline stabilization practices in restoring biodiversity.
- **Alternative living shoreline substrate project** - In collaboration with Dr. Rachel Gittman (East Carolina University) and Dr. Niels Lindquist (Sandbar Oyster Co. & UNC-CH Institute of Marine Sciences), Reserve Research Coordinator Dr. Brandon Puckett is testing the effectiveness of an alternative settlement substrate developed by Sandbar Oyster Co. as a living shoreline material to protect eroding salt marshes at the Rachel Carson Reserve.
- **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. 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 are underway. On-site surveys of visitors will be conducted throughout the summer at the Currituck Banks, Kitty Hawk Woods, Rachel Carson, Masonboro Island, Zeke's Island, and Bird Island Reserves. A study report will be complete in 2019.
- **Spring community paddle at the Masonboro Island Reserve (06/27)** - Wilmington: Join Reserve staff for a paddle to the Masonboro Island Reserve for an evening of fun and education! Equipment is available for rental, see the event calendar for more details and registration.
- **Sea turtle walks (M-F, daily throughout summer)** - Wilmington: The Masonboro Island Reserve is looking for volunteers for the summer sea turtle nesting season. Contact Elizabeth Colhoun ([colhoun@uncw.edu](mailto:colhoun@uncw.edu)) for more information.
- **Teachers on the Estuary Workshop (06/19-20)** - Beaufort: K-12 teachers will participate in field-based training to improve their understanding of estuarine environments. Participants will receive content aligned with national education standards and/or N.C. Essential Standards to support incorporation of estuary and watershed topics into classroom teaching. Renewal credits are available for participation.
- **Summer camps (June - August)** - Beaufort: Registration for Summer Science School, in partnership with the NC Maritime Museum in Beaufort, is open. Reserve education staff will lead programs for students ranging from Preschool to 10th grade including Preschool Storytime and Crafts, Seashore Life I & II, and Maritime Adventurers.

- **Public field trips to the Rachel Carson Reserve** (June - August) - Beaufort: Public field trips to the Rachel Carson occur on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30-10:30am during June, July and August. All programs are open and free to the public but reservations are required as boat space is limited.
- **Birding by Ear** (05/24) - Kitty Hawk: The NC Wildlife Resources Commission and NC Coastal Reserve are offering a bird identification workshop. This class involves fieldwork in the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve to identify birds by their songs and calls. Participants are eligible for Criteria II of the NC OEE Environmental Education Certification program. Registration is required, see the event calendar for more details.
- Keep an eye out for the Reserve's spring **Tidal Flat newsletter** coming out in May.
- **Coastal Explorations Educator Workshop** (05/08) - Corolla: Participants of this workshop learned about estuaries and the Reserve program through classroom activities that they can use with their students and groups. Field-based explorations and activities were also conducted during a field trip to the Currituck Banks Reserve. Teachers were eligible to receive renewal credits and Environmental Education Certification credits for this workshop.
- **Adaptation Planning for Coastal Communities** (04/17-18) – Beaufort: NOAA's Office for Coastal Management and the Coastal Training Program hosted this course for planners, public works staff, floodplain managers, hazard mitigation planners, sustainability managers, emergency managers, and coastal resource managers to gain a thorough grounding and practical skills for incorporating adaptation strategies into planning processes. Continuing education credits were offered to participants.
- **Citizen science presentation** (4/12) - Wilmington: Participants learned about research projects at the Masonboro Island Reserve and in the local community that citizens can participate in.
- **Promoting Living Shorelines for Erosion Control – A Workshop for Real Estate Professionals** (04/13) - Beaufort: Participants learned about the benefits and limitations of using living shorelines for erosion control, different shoreline stabilization techniques, including living shorelines shoreline stabilization permitting process, and the best practices for use of marsh plants and oyster shell in erosion control.
- **Clean Marina Workshop** (2/28) - Wilmington: Marina operators and workers learned about environmentally sensitive practices for marinas, marine debris, marina safety hazards, and the Clean Marina Program including sewage pumpout grants. This workshop was conducted in partnership with the Clean Marina Program.

\* 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.

### **Meeting Topic: Fire Management in Buxton Woods**

- *Fire Management in Buxton Woods (presentation by Site Manager)*
  - Three topics to consider when making fire management plan for Buxton Woods: (1) Ecology of Maritime Forest; (2) Dedicated Nature Preserve status with N.C. Heritage Program; and (3) Firebreaks in Buxton Woods
  - The Maritime Forest: Rare Plant Community. What kind of forest community is a climax community at this location? Disruptive events can damage forest and create dramatic changes quickly (i.e. storms creating many downed trees, high amounts of forest litter, etc.). What is hardwood (i.e. live oak) response to fire? Historically, it was thought to be more easily damaged than pines. Historic human disturbances over time have mostly stopped (fire, grazing, etc.). How has the maritime forest in Buxton Woods responded? There are also many other things to consider when maintaining maritime forest such as habitat fragmentation, edge effects, etc. Need to proceed with caution when considering possibility of burning. A multifaceted approach is called for:
    - Step 1: Firewise for homeowners- education for homeowners to protect life and property in event of fire
    - Step 2: Install firebreaks in Buxton Woods appropriately
    - Step 3: Manage upland areas for oak regeneration
    - Step 4: Consider controlled burn for future
- North Carolina Natural Heritage Program Presentation (Scott Pohlman, Property Manager)
  - *Mission of N.C. Natural Heritage Program*  
Dedication of State Nature Preserves is authorized by G.S. 143B-135.250  
*“It is important to the people of North Carolina that they retain the opportunity to maintain contact with these natural communities and environmental systems of the earth and to benefit from the scientific, aesthetic, cultural, and spiritual values they possess. The purpose of this Article is to establish and maintain a State Registry of Natural Heritage Areas and to prescribe methods by which nature preserves may be dedicated for the benefit of present and future citizens of the State.”*

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- N.C. Natural Heritage Program provides assistance in establishing nature preserves and works with partners (and has small staff) to help establish priority conservation areas.
- Dedication is an agreement like a conservation easement, which needs approval of the governor and cannot be rescinded.
- Two types of dedications: State-owned property and private/local government owned. Site custodian identified for each Reserve.
- Clean Water Management Trust Fund (CWMTF) uses dedications to allocate funds to property when approved.
- Twelve management principles; idea is that natural area is preserved and maintained along with compatible appropriate cultural uses.
- Brief history of Buxton Woods Coastal Reserve:
  - o 1986: golf course proposed for area; to be sited in Buxton Woods over aquifer
  - o 1987: Cape Hatteras Area of Environmental Concern expanded Buxton Woods well field
  - o State began to acquire tracts from willing sellers; and through the efforts of the local community and environmental organizations, Buxton Woods was dedicated as a State Nature Preserve in 1992
- The importance of Buxton Woods: In addition to maritime forest habitat, Buxton Woods has one of only four interdune marsh systems in N.C., and by far the largest; also hosts a combination of rare organisms and in great quantity (ex. Gulf Coast Spikerush, *Eleocharis cellulosa*) that make it a significant place to protect from development.
- Scott opens the floor for questions. Discussion between Boone Vandzura (National Park Service) and Bryan Perry (Buxton Fire Department) regarding details of the state acquisition of the property in the late 80's. Bryan said that the possibility of a golf course atop the aquifer and the negative environmental consequences of that placement spurred community members to action. He lamented the lack of a shooting range in Buxton Woods Reserve, but said that otherwise he was pleased with the way things had turned out with state acquisition of the property.

**Wildfire Management.** Site manager introduces the wildfire management topic: The focus will be on the urban interface and protecting surrounding houses from potential wildfires that begin within the Reserve, and protecting the Reserve from fires begun on private property. Site manager notes that 20' firebreaks have been suggested as potential width, and that she hopes to rely on NC Forest Service for equipment for clearing breaks. Site Manager invites attendees to spend some time looking at the maps provided which display the Buxton Woods urban interfaces (where homes border the Reserve) as well as access points and habitat data. After viewing the maps, the following discussion took place:

Bryan Perry: Requested confirmation that we were discussing wildfire spread only, not prescribed burning. *Site manager confirms.* He also notes that another concern as far as firebreaks is a house fire that spreads into Buxton Woods.

Site Manager: What are priority areas (for firebreaks)? Many areas (sedges) stay very wet, but during times of drought, become tinder for fire. *Russ Kiddy notes his agreement.*

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Bryan Perry: Thinks that the National Park Service and N.C. Reserve should talk since properties are adjacent. Could coordinate and make firebreaks continuous.

John Van Riper: The width of the firebreaks shouldn't be so wide as to affect the aesthetics or change wilderness aspect of the woods.

Bryan Perry: When we are trying to put fires out (that get onto the Reserve) things can get ugly. For example, the Indian Ridge Fire. Some things are beyond the capability and knowledge of the Buxton Fire Department once they are in the woods. He notes that North Carolina Forest Service (NCFS) has been able to rehab areas with their equipment in the past when we have had to go in, but he wonders what to do in the short term if there is a fire that spreads into Reserve.

John Van Ripper: If there is a fire, a strike team leader will be the first to arrive by helicopter. The plows are far away (Hyde Co.) and may do more damage than good. The best protection is to educate about Firewise, and then install firebreaks. Firewise is the best protection for homes and for the woods.

Danny Couch: Wonders how to spread information/educate public about Firewise measures without getting public riled up. Perhaps contact representatives of home owner associations, etc.?

Bryan Perry: We have had trouble getting turnout from local homeowners to come to Firewise educational meetings.

John Van Riper: Firewise is just a step toward getting homeowners to acknowledge that they have placed themselves in a high fire risk area. They need to understand this and takes steps to mitigate. You can't prevent every fire, but homeowners can take responsibility and decrease their risk.

Scott Pohlman: Wonders if large firebreaks would make situation worse because of the rapid shrub regeneration?

John Van Riper: You would need to cut it, masticate it and then apply herbicide.

Many participants noted that they feel there is increased fire risk from inside the Reserve due to increased trail usage, more cigarette butts, etc.

Boone Vandzura: Wonders about Open Ponds Trail- could it be made larger (it is already wide)? It would change dynamic of area, but could be a firebreak. Also, wonders who owns boundary trail- Coastal Reserve or the National Park Service? Does it make more sense to make Open Ponds or Boundary Trail wider?

John Van Riper: Believes widening Tunnel Trail would make more sense. Clearing low stuff near roads would be preferable, could still maintain high canopy.

Danny Couch: Would mailer to local homeowners about Firewise and fire risks be a possibility? With information about what homeowners can do in their own yards.



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John Van Riper: This could be possible- we have information and a website.

Boone Vandzura: Is there a way to get a fire indicator (like the ones you see for National Forest Service) on the island? It would be a visible way for locals to see what daily fire risk level is at and increase awareness.

Bryan Perry: We do not have one on the island. Sometimes the threat on Hatteras is higher than what is reported due to our microclimate. Also, burn permits can now be obtained online and no one must interact with me to get them. When this was the case (in the past), I could inform citizens about fire risk for a specific day, and whether burning would be advised.

John Van Riper: Who maintains the roads and who has the keys to the gates?

Site Manager: Wildlife Resources Commission maintains roads and gates.

Bryan Perry: We have had problems in the past keeping the keys up to date (when they get changes). For a fire plan, we would need to coordinate between necessary parties, then let the Buxton Fire Department know what the fire plan is. We can fight fire on the urban interface, and can follow into woods if it is safe. We need to make sure the two plans mesh.

Site Manager: A missing component is locating where the firebreaks are going to be.

John Van Ripper: Doesn't want firebreaks to be too big, wants people to be able to enjoy wilderness.

Site Manager: My plan is to work with other agencies to move forward with putting a fire plan in place.

Boone Vandzura: Need to get together with Cory Smith to find out what we know? What has been planned/done in the past regarding fuelbreaks? Does this make sense with local knowledge, or should plan be modified from past plans? Areas cleared in past include: Buxton Spur (west of National Park Service housing), Ridgeline, Frisco East Fire Road, and the boundary area around Frisco.

Bryan Perry: Need to factor in winds when considering a fire break- larger break to block NE movement and SW movement (known points). But, you must start somewhere and Firewise seems like a good start. Need to get the properties more isolated, and get more involvement. Also, regarding marsh fires- they are extremely difficult to fight, but will burn even when it is wet underneath.

John Van Riper: Would not recommend firebreaks in marshes. Make as Firewise as possible and understand risk. Also, don't need large breaks, but should thin ladder fuels. Need to sit down with agencies and report back to LAC in fall 2018.

Scott Pohlman: What is most helpful (to NCFS) data to have?

John Van Riper: Responds that latitude/longitude is easiest, and entrances in degree/ decimal/ minute.

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Russ Kiddy: Notes that when he clears, he just backs up and clears under trees. Is this how it should be done?

Site Manager: Asks that she be contacted before any clearing happens, and that the Wildlife Resources Commission is responsible for clearing.

Russ Kiddy: Responds that the Wildlife Resources Commission has not done a good job of keeping roads cleared in the past.

John Van Riper: Notes that maybe we need to get performance checks written into agreement so that these duties get done in a timely manner.

### **Other Buxton Woods Updates (Site Manager)**

- **Gypsy Moth.** Pheromone treatment was done in June of 2017. Chris Elder (U.S. Department of Agriculture) checked recently and didn't see any larva, but will be treating again in June 2018.

Russ Kiddy: Noted that he has seen lots of larva in his yard this year.

Site Manager: Chris would be interested in knowing, so please contact him if they are on your property.

- **Horse damage on trails.** Trail with horse use (West Trail) where horses are not allowed is causing damage to trail. Also, removal of vegetation and piling of vegetation in ponds and sedges is occurring on the trail. Horses should only be on Piney Ridge Trail.

Harvey Scarborough: I've been seeing them up there a lot.

Russ Kiddy: They tear up trails wherever they go, and even the roads.

Site Manager: We are aware now that this is happening and that we need to post signs informing users. Please keep me updated so I can document and deal with misuse of trails.

### **Roundtable Discussion (Staff response in italics)**

- Harvey Scarborough: Would like it noted that as budgets are being cut, he thinks that land acquisition should remain a top priority. Shared his experience with Ducks Unlimited (squandering money, not spending it on land, etc.). Think all environmentally-minded organizations should focus on land acquisition. Danny Couch agrees with Harvey's comments and is worried that in the future we could turn into another high-end property like Martha's Vineyard or Nantucket. *Site Manager asks that she be informed of any properties that are for sale as the state needs a willing seller to offer money for a property. She further notes that it is important to prioritize parcels so we can work with partners to let owners know we are interested, but cannot approach owners directly. Also, grants are sometimes available for property acquisition of appropriate properties.*

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- Boone Vandzura (National Park Service): Will put in a proposal for fuelbreaks- need to know what types, where, and reason why they are needed to complete proposal. He also appreciates everyone going to the Firewise meeting and hopes to continue to get the word out.
- Russ Kiddy: Thinks someone is trying to claim Reserve property through a quick claim deed. (Showed site manager the parcel on the map). Also wants to know is there is a way to keep track of volunteer hours. *Site manager responded that there is a spreadsheet online that you can use to record your volunteer hours.* Russ noted that he did not know how to use the program, and the site manager said he could just email her his hours. Russ also noted that there was a gillnet stuck in a pond off Doctors Road that he wanted to remove.
- Michael Flynn: Noted that he will be joining LAC in fall pending approval, and that he lives in Waves and works for the N.C. Coastal Federation. He can allocate time to land acquisition and coastal protection.

### **Action Items**

- Site Manager will be sharing maps with attendees who requested them
- Site Manager will email minutes for comments/changes