



**Masonboro Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
May 17, 2018 – 2 pm
Habitat Conference Room, UNCW CMS**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
NC Audubon, Walker Golder	Yes
Friends of the Reserve (FOR)	No
New Hanover County Sheriff's Office, Sergeant Steve Schmidlin	Yes
New Hanover County Planning Department, Dylan McDonnell	Yes
NC Coastal Land Trust, Jesica Blake	No
Division of Marine Fisheries	No
Division of Parks and Recreation – CB, Chris Helms	Yes
Town of Wrightsville Beach	No
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations</u>	
<u>Members</u>	
Neal Andrew	No
Masonboro.org, Richard Johnson	Yes
Haywood Newkirk	No
William Raney	Yes
Pat Rittenmeyer	No
Sam Romano	Yes
Surfrider, Cape Fear – Abbey Perry	Yes
Ted Wilgis	Yes
Martin Willard	Yes
<u>Others Present</u>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator & Southern Sites Manager	
Heather Wells, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Research Specialist	
Elizabeth Colhoun, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Specialist	
Byron Toothman, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Research Specialist	

Welcome – Hope Sutton

The Site Manager welcomed the committee to the Spring 2018 meeting and reviewed the agenda.

Reserve-wide Update – Hope Sutton

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.

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

Site Update and Old Business – Hope Sutton

General site conditions –

There are no unusual conditions to report. Research and monitoring programs have continued as usual. Winter storms resulted in some erosion and sediment movement as well as occasion overwash in the southern stretches of the island but within normal parameters.

Seasonal activities – In addition to Elizabeth continuing to act in a long-term fulltime temporary position, the Southern Sites office has two seasonal staff - one shorebird monitoring technician and one field technician for the 2018 season. We will also have one paid intern, three interns working for credit, three volunteer interns, and approximately 50 community volunteers who may be involved with seasonal activities. **Sea turtles** – Sea turtle patrols have begun but no nests have been laid on Masonboro Island yet. The Reserve continues to participate in the regional DNA fingerprinting project that has been going on since 2010; one egg sample is collected from each nest for this effort. **Shorebirds** – Shorebird nest monitoring and protection began in late March. Monitoring of reproductive success of 45 pairs of American oystercatchers continues to be the focus of our monitoring program. The predation rate has been high and is primarily attributed to red fox. No funds were available to complete predator removal during the winter and at least one red fox has been seen on the island recently. Several enclosures were posted at popular landings to avoid disturbance effects where birds were attempting to nest. **Diamondback terrapins** – The Terrapin Tally citizen science project was conducted again this year in April and May. Training was provided to 23 new paddlers and an online refresher training was developed for returning paddlers, 16 of which participated again. Five data collection sessions were completed on April 28, May 5 and 6. Although data are still considered preliminary until some quality control is completed, data appear to include sightings of over 140 terrapins. Weather conditions were excellent for several of the data collection sessions. These data will continue to help us understand population trends, habitat utilization and blue crab fishery interactions.

Fourth of July preparations – This operation is being handled at a maintenance level approach, with a systematic, multi-agency collaboration. New Hanover County is the lead coordinating agency for the effort. The first planning meeting occurred Tuesday, May 15. Multiple other law enforcement and emergency response agencies continue to support this county-wide effort to coordinate law enforcement and emergency services response to holiday activities at and around the Masonboro Island Reserve and throughout the county's waters. On site medical assistance will again be provided by the New Hanover County Regional Medical Center State Medical Assistance Team. The Reserve will again spend around \$6,500 for contract law enforcement officers to supplement the county's scheduled staff to ensure that officers are present on the island throughout the day. Reserve staff will again participate in planning meetings, install temporary signage on site, conduct media relations activities, and complete site visits to assess any impacts.

Access study – update provided within the Reserve-wide update

Shellfish leases – Conversations regarding the existing shellfish leases at the Masonboro Island Reserve are ongoing between the Departments of Environmental Quality and Natural and Cultural Resources. Although the Coastal Reserve and Division of Coastal Management have worked closely with the Natural Heritage program staff through the years on a variety of site management topics, a need to clarify processes for interaction between the agencies was identified and a Memorandum of Understanding is being drafted for this purpose. Committee members discussed some concerns regarding handling of the shellfish lease process and the need for members of the public to have some opportunity to know how the nature preserves dedication affects activities at the site. It was noted that the many LAC members expressed support of the idea of shellfish leases, although some also offered concerns. The site manager stated that, due to the layers of legislative instruments and therefore various agencies with some level of responsibility, it can be complicated to resolve complex issues such as this but explained that the departments are working to clarify processes and ensure transparency for the public.

New Business

None

Roundtable

- Mr. Romano mentioned that he holds a shellfish lease near the Permuda Island Reserve and asked if his lease would be impacted by the recent decision not to allow shellfish leases within nature preserve boundaries. The site manager responded that because the Permuda Island site is not a dedicated state nature preserve, that these questions will not affect that site.
- Mr. Rainey asked if any progress had been made on acquiring the remaining inholdings. The N.C. Coastal Land Trust continues to send out letters to private property owners during the summer months but no progress occurred in 2017.
- Mr. Wilgis reported that there would be three meetings related to water quality in the Lower Cape Fear River being held at the Center for Marine Science the following week. He encouraged interested parties to register and attend.
- Mr. Johnson stated that his name was not included in the March 2017 attendance record in the minutes. He also discussed his desired to have the Island Explorers program curriculum redeveloped to include content about birds and nesting habitat given the importance of the site for nesting shorebirds.
- Lt. Schmidlin reported that planning for the Fourth of July operation was nearly complete.
- Mr. Golder expressed appreciation for the species of concern monitoring updates and offered the continued support of Audubon in trying to address predation. He also asked about the status of sand placement along the ocean beach. The site manager responded that to date the Army Corps of Engineers has no funds dedicated to placing material on Masonboro Island.

Public input

None

Action Items

- The Site Manager will contact committee members during the summer to plan the next meeting date.