



Rachel Carson Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
March 15, 2017 4p
Administration Building, NOAA Beaufort Lab

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Town of Beaufort Administration, John Day	Yes
Town of Beaufort Police, Paul Burdette	Yes
NC State Parks, Fort Macon, Randy Newman	No
NC Maritime Museum – Beaufort, Ben Wunderly	Yes
<u>Community Members</u>	
Ann Carter	Yes
Perry Barrow	Yes
John Fussell	Yes
Stan Rule	No
Margaret Garner	No
Dan Rittschof	No
Robin Newton	No
<u>Others Present</u>	
Rebecca Ellin, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Program Manager	
Paula Gillikin, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Central Sites Manager	
Brandon Puckett, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Research Coordinator	
Lori Davis, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Education Coordinator	
Elise Gilchrist, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Communications Specialist	
Rodney Guajardo, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR GIS Analyst	

Welcome – Paula Gillikin

The Site Manager welcomed the committee to the Spring 2017 meeting and explained that the focus of this meeting will be the NCNERR management plan update. The Site Manager reminded the committee that a site update was sent out electronically prior to the meeting and

explained that there will be time at the end of the meeting for questions/comments regarding the site update.

NCNERR Management Plan Update – Rebecca Ellin

The Reserve Program Manager welcomed the committee and thanked the members for their participation in the management plan update process.

The Program Manager explained that the purpose of this meeting is to review the updated NCNERR management plan and gather feedback from the local advisory committee. She provided a brief overview of the management plan update process including: 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; the public input process that the NCNERR conducted to inform the plan update; the history of NCNERR management plans and that this document serves as the fourth plan for the Reserve; and reminded the committee of the four themes identified from the public input process - program visibility, visitor use, research awareness, and partnerships. Committee members were reminded to submit written comments on the plan to the Program Manager by March 22.

The Program Manager reviewed the agenda for this portion of the meeting: discuss each section of the plan; discuss general questions regarding the plan; public comments; and next steps.

Section by section review of the management plan

The Program Manager walked the committee through each section of the plan, providing an overview of each section and requesting their input on the following questions for each section: What works well in this section? What needs improvement in this section? What suggestions would you make to improve this section? The input is provided by section.

Introduction

- Ann commented that the introduction is very comprehensive.
- Ben inquired as to why sea turtles are not listed in the key habitats and species section of the Rachel Carson Reserve site description. Paula explained that because sea turtles are not known to come up on land they were not mentioned but acknowledged that they should be added to that section because they utilize the sea grass at Middle Marsh.
- Ann asked why there was not more detail regarding the management of the wild horses. Staff gave a brief overview of the Reserve's horse management strategy and explained the decision not to include much detail in the management plan in order to keep the management of the horses flexible. There is a separate horse management plan that contains more detail.

Education Program Plan

- Ben commented on the good level of detail within this chapter. He also mentioned that it would be great to have more staff to support education in the northern and southern regions, recognizing that this is already identified as a need in the plan.
- Ann asked why the education program is so focused in the central region, wondering if it was due to the close proximity to various marine research labs. Staff explained that the biggest limitation to the education program is capacity, given that the one full time education staff member is based at the Central Sites office. The education program does leverage partners to provide educational programs, such as the Masonboro Island Explorer Program.

Coastal Training Program Plan

- Ann mentioned that this chapter was very well done.
- Ben commented on the importance of this work and asked if there is coordination with the Division of Coastal Management (DCM). Rebecca explained that there is regular coordination with DCM and DCM staff give presentations for many of the training topics.
- Perry asked if there is a list of individuals that we reach out to regarding these training events. Rebecca described the Coastal Training Program listserv that the Reserve sends email notices to about upcoming events. All of the committee members expressed interest in being added to the list. Dan asked if there are legislators on the list to which Rebecca explained that they are not a group that has been specifically targeted but all are welcome. Rebecca also mentioned the Coastal Training Program's close work with local governments. John Day suggested coordinating with the Park Service to post information about upcoming trainings at their facility. Ann asked if we utilize NPR and Rebecca discussed the Reserve's use of Public Radio East.

Research and Monitoring Plan

- Ann asked if researchers share their data and results with the Reserve after they have completed their study. Staff explained that part of the research permit requests that researchers submit a report when they are finished but the Reserve does not always receive these reports.
- Ben asked if there has ever been research on visitor use. Paula and Brandon explained that the stewardship program usually leads research on visitor use in consultation with the research program and they are now partnering with UNCW to determine which research questions are most important to assessing visitor impacts over time. Perry commented that he brings a lot of tourists onto the Rachel Carson Reserve and he could share reports of the number of visitors he takes with Paula.
- Ann asked why there was no mention of the shellfish leases. Rebecca explained that the Reserve is continuing to work with the Natural Heritage Program to determine the compatibility of that use and that information will be added to the plan before it goes out for the public comment period.

Stewardship Plan

- Ann asked if the Army Corps can use the dredge spoil sites. Paula explained that the Army Corps has an easement but the Reserve aims to work with them ahead of time to be aware of any plans. John asked if there is any opportunity to sell the sand or use it in

a way that would be beneficial. Rebecca mentioned that there have been discussions about the beneficial uses of dredge material and the Reserve has looked into potential opportunities for thin layer deposition on the marshes to enhance their resilience to sea level rise.

- John Day asked how the Reserve communicates with visitors about what is allowed and what is not. Staff explained that the rules are available online as well as through signage on the sites. Paula mentioned that signage is used sparingly so as to not take away from the natural integrity of the site. Rebecca described other platforms such as social media as tools for promoting responsible use and Perry said that he provides tourists with trail brochures and lists of do's and don'ts.

Topical Areas

- Perry mentioned that the shoreline has changed in the last decade. Ann agreed and talked about the increase in dredging. The committee discussed the dynamic nature of the system at the Rachel Carson Reserve and the anthropogenic influence on these changes. Rebecca acknowledged these changes and discussed the initiatives the Reserve has taken on to better understand these changes over time. There was interest from the Committee to add wording to the plan acknowledging the potential sources that contribute to this dynamic nature and the Reserve's efforts to better understand the interplay of natural and anthropogenic factors.

Administration Plan

- No comments.

Facility Development and Improvement Plan

- Ann asked is the Reserve wants to minimize infrastructure on the Rachel Carson Reserve. Rebecca explained that the Reserve only puts up infrastructure that enhances visitor experience but that there is an aim to minimize infrastructure in order to protect the sites.
- Ann mentioned that the National Park Service facility in the Town Hall would be a great place for a free-standing exhibit. Paula referenced a previous discussion about this and expressed a need to reopen that conversation with the Town and Park Service. Perry talked about the importance of communicating how fragile the Rachel Carson Reserve is and the importance of the research and education.

General questions

The committee discussed the following general questions regarding the plan.

- Is the format and presentation of the plan effective? Is the plan user friendly and easy to read/navigate? Are the maps, keys, and images easy to read and understand?
 - Yes to all questions.
- Four themes emerged from the public input process: program visibility, visitor use, research awareness, and partnerships. Does the plan adequately acknowledge and address these themes through its goals, objectives and actions?
 - Ann said that the plan is the most intensive she has ever seen.

- Ben asked if there was a way for the Committee to help the Reserve transition the management plans to ten-year plans. Rebecca said that Committee members could submit a comment during the public comment period to that effect.

Public comments

- None

Next steps

The Program Manager provided an overview of the next steps in the management plan process. The deadline for committee members to submit written comments on the plan is March 22. The plan will be updated to reflect local advisory committee input and 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 3 public meetings, in the northern, central and southern regions of the coast, will be scheduled during the comment period. The Program Manager thanked the committee members for their review of the plan and thoughtful comments.

Site Management Update and Old Business – Paula Gillikin

The following written update was provided to the committee in advance of the meeting.

Upcoming on-site educational activities

- The Rachel Carson Reserve free public field trip series will begin on June 13 and end on August 24. Trips will be led by volunteers and will be held most Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. Types of experiences will include two boat-based trips and one ~1.25 mile nature hike. The trip schedule will be posted, soon, at the following link: <http://nccoastalreserve.net/web/crp/summer-public-field-trips>.
- The Reserve, in partnership with the Maritime Museum, will offer summer camps for children beginning in June. The schedule will soon be posted on the Reserve and Museum websites. Reserve-sponsored science camps will serve children entering pre-school and grades 1,2,5, and 6.

Hunting Permit System

- At the fall LAC meeting, members were informed about a proposal to implement a WRC-administered permit system in areas that are currently open to hunting. The goal of the permit system is to better balance site user interests and respond to recurring complaints from citizens. A public meeting was held on March 9 to accept comments on the proposal and there was no public opposition. If the next steps go smoothly, the system will be in place for the open of fall 2017 hunting season. The start date for hunting will be pushed back a week or more to avoid conflicts with Labor Day visitors. Hunting will be limited to 2 days (Tuesday and Saturday) and the maximum number of parties will be two on any hunting day.

Horse Management

- The annual birth control darting and body condition scoring is currently underway and will be complete by the end of March. The herd is currently comprised of 18 females and 15 males, including one female foal.

Survey activities

- The annual Christmas Bird Count was conducted in December. International Shorebird Surveys led by John Fussell will begin in the next week and conclude in May. At the end of May, a mapping survey will be conducted to detect change in the distribution and abundance of the invasive Tamarix or “salt cedar” tree that is located on Town Marsh and Bulkhead Shoal.

Commercial Shellfish Aquaculture

- The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program is formally evaluating this use and their formal opinion should be released, soon, and will be shared with the committee.
 - Ben Wunderly inquired if the committee needed to understand the entire scope of the shellfish lease process to provide more informed feedback about the use. Paula explained that for the sake of time, the committee was provided with a basic level of information that would help them give the appropriate level of input on the questions the Reserve posed to the committee during the previous meeting. The committee members agreed that they received enough information to provide input.

Action Items

- Paula will let the committee know when the Natural Heritage Program has released their opinion on commercial shellfish aquaculture within Reserve boundaries.
- The Reserve Program Manager will inform committee members when the public comment period for the management plan is scheduled.
- Paula will be in touch with the committee to schedule a fall meeting.