



Local Advisory Committee Meeting
Buxton Woods Coastal Reserve

November 12, 2024 – 11:00 A.M.
Fessenden Center
46830 NC-12, Buxton, NC 27920

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Shane Bryan	Y
Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Noah Leffel	Y
UNC Coastal Studies Institute, John McCord	N
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Anna Barbosa	Y
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Jonathan Montague	Y
NC Natural Heritage Program, Lauri Hamon	Y
Dare County Sheriff's Office, Doug Oberbeck	N
Dare County Government, Danny Couch	Y
NC Forest Service, Kyle Breslin	N
NC Forest Service, John Cook	N
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Karen Lebing	Y
Russ Kiddy	N
Jacqueline Thomas	Y
Alyson Flynn	Y
Harvey Scarborough, Jr.	N
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, DCM, Northern Sites Manager	

Reserve-wide Update

Please see the appendix for complete Reserve-wide updates

Northern Sites Update (Erik Alnes)

Two interns worked in the northern sites this year. This summer, the Friends of the Reserve sponsored Haley Jenkins, from N.C. State University. She focused on replicating a 20-year-old water quality study in Kitty Hawk Woods, and helped with herpetology monitoring in Buxton Woods, general site maintenance of the northern sites, and developed and installed a new interpretive sign at Currituck Banks. This fall, Kaitlen Harmon worked with us as part of her Outer Banks Field Site semester at the Coastal Studies Institute. She completed the water quality study and drafted a report on change, and assisted staff with general site maintenance at the northern sites. If new internship opportunities arise, staff will notify the LAC to encourage applications. Staff appreciate these interns' help!

In 2023, volunteers completed 37 hours of work at the northern sites. This year, through October 31st, we already have 45 hours reported. Currently, there are four active volunteers in Kitty Hawk Woods, one in Buxton Woods, and no volunteers in Currituck Banks. We thank our volunteers for their service and are always looking to add to our supportive volunteer base. To celebrate National Estuaries Week this year, another marsh cleanup occurred at Kitty Hawk Woods. Staff, along with three volunteers, picked up three 42-gallon bags of trash, consisting of mostly buoys, bottles, and cans. The crew also picked up over 10 boards of treated lumber, lawn chairs, pool floaties, plastic containers, and a cable spool. It was a great way to celebrate and give back to our estuary.

Staff have been monitoring visitation since 2023 at the Currituck Banks Boardwalk and Kitty Hawk Woods Connector Trail; two of the most popular trails at each site. Currituck Banks has peak visitation from June through August and saw 51,035 visitors from October 2023 to October 2024. This is up 0.5% since 2023, indicating relatively uniform visitation from year to year. Kitty Hawk Woods has peak visitation from November through January and saw 3,923 visitors from October 2023 to October 2024. Comparing January through October, between 2023 and 2024, visitation increased 75%, but daily visitation remains generally low, averaging roughly 11 visitors per day.

There are currently 23 active research permits in the northern sites: eight at Currituck Banks, ten at Kitty Hawk Woods, and five at Buxton Woods. Researchers are from four federal and state agencies, and six universities, spanning from the University of Georgia to Chowan University.

Hunting at Currituck Banks and Kitty Hawk Woods is becoming more popular, as hunter authorizations are up 17.5% from 2023. Analyzing demographics, hunters are all Dare and Currituck County residents. Most are deer hunters, but there are four hunters that specifically target the invasive nutria.

In January of 2024, staff developed a tool to document and analyze misuse at all 10 coastal reserve sites. This better helps managers understand "hot" areas of misuse to target monitoring and education, assists in documenting misuse to better understand trends, organize work planning, and inform management decisions through resolution documentation. Since January 2024, 50 instances of misuse have been documented by managers. The highest instances of misuse at the northern sites have been at the Buxton Woods. The most common instances of misuse have been disallowed uses (i.e. infrastructure built on site and

interruptions with research), littering and dumping, vandalism, visitor use conflicts, alteration of natural character, abandoned and derelict vessels, and unlawful fires. Staff thank local law enforcement partners for their assistance in resolving some of these misuses.

Buxton Woods Reserve Business

- Misuse Issues

Since collecting data in January, Buxton Woods has had the second most documented instances among Reserve sites, totaling 12, behind Masonboro Island with 19. Highest instances of misuse in Buxton Woods have included littering and dumping, disturbance of vegetation, vandalism (shooting) of signs, encroachments, and misuse of trails (horses on trails designated for hiking). Staff have added “No Horseback Riding” signage at all trailheads, except for Piney Ridge Trail where horseback riding is allowed, and “No Dumping” signage at locations commonly used for dumping. Staff also worked with local law enforcement to solve several issues and appreciate their assistance.

Danny Couch noted that the county was building a new transfer station, which should be open in 2025. Hopefully this will help with the dumping issue at the site.

- Horseback Riding Policy

Staff have continued to attempt to resolve resource and trail damage from horseback riding through education. Signage and visitor interaction do not appear to be resolving the issue. At the last LAC meeting, it was discussed that a rule could be put in the Wildlife Resources Commission’s (WRC) hunting digest which would allow WRC to enforce this. Staff will work with WRC to submit new language rules for the 2025 digest. The rule will focus on resource and trail protection by formally disallowing horseback riding on trails not designated for horseback riding. Piney Ridge Trail will remain open to horseback riders, as it is outside of the game lands boundary, and allows access to the National Park Service (NPS) horseback riding trails.

Anna Barbosa noted that this is not an unusual rule for game lands, as there is precedence at other game land sites. She also noted that it would be a gradual enforcement; a verbal warning in year one, a written warning in year two, with ticketing beginning in year three. Last, she noted that E-bikes, a growing issue on trails, is not allowed on game lands, and WRC can enforce.

- Boundary Marking

Because Buxton Woods is a game land, staff work with WRC annually to improve site conditions at the Reserve. Last year, WRC staff cut vegetation adjacent to the road to provide more adequate access to the site. This year, staff plan to work with WRC to improve boundary marking along the Reserve edge; something that has not been completed in over 20 years.

NPS staff noted that they are currently working on a similar project, are mapping their boundary, and will be re-posting their property soon.

- LAC Meeting Schedule

Due to limited agenda items, and often low participation from LAC members, staff asked the LAC if they would prefer to meet once a year in the Fall or meet virtually in the Spring. LAC members did not have a preference. Staff indicated that if an agenda was light, they would reach out to the LAC to assess cancellation of the Spring meeting or meet virtually.

Member Roundtable

WRC indicated that pheasant surveys may be occurring soon on Hatteras Island, including in Buxton Woods. This is due to a new season for pheasants in our area. Other LAC members noted that pheasants used to exist on the island but haven't been seen since the 1990's. WRC also noted several new hires in the area and introduced new officer Jonathan Montague.

Karen Lebing shared that the Christmas Bird Count will occur again this year from Buxton to Hatteras. It will likely occur December 26th or 27th.

NPS shared they were underway with a comprehensive mapping of their boundary. They will be re-marking their boundary after this project is complete. They also noted an increase in use of their site, including an increase in horseback riding and trail damage.

Alyson Flynn, from the Coastal Federation shared they currently have four full-time staff at the Wanchese Office. Recently they have been working on a watershed restoration plan and have been occupied with oceanfront structure collapse work and the diesel spill in Buxton.

Danny Couch shared that he is leaving his position, and a new appointee will join the LAC in his place from Dare County Government. He emphasized that Dare County will always be an ally to the Buxton Woods Reserve, and they are always here to help. He also shared history of pheasants on the island, indicating the Fipps brothers would bring pheasants down to the island, and release them to hunt.

The Natural Heritage Program shared they had three new hires, including new staff that will assist with work in the northeast region. They also requested that if anyone comes across a rare species, please report it to them.

Final Comments, Review of Action Items, and Wrap-up

- Staff will draft rule language for horseback riding and provide it to WRC by December.

Adjourn

N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Fall 2024 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

Program Highlights

- Reserve **summer camps** were another success this summer. Rising first through tenth graders learned about estuaries and experienced estuarine habitats and plants and animals through hands-on experiences at the Rachel Carson Reserve and in the laboratory to increase understanding and appreciation of coastal resources. Favorite activities include the reserve field trip and squid dissection. Camps are conducted in partnership with the NC Maritime Museum in Beaufort.
- Two thousand two hundred seventy-two students have participated in **field trips** to the Rachel Carson and Masonboro Island Reserves so far this year. Students from Carteret, Onslow, and Craven Counties traversed the Rachel Carson Reserve and the Masonboro Island Explorers program is hosting fifth grade students from nearby counties at the Masonboro Island Reserve in partnership with Masonboro.org and Carolina Ocean Studies.
- The Coastal Training Program offered **workshops and partner engagement meetings** for decision-makers throughout coastal North Carolina this year. Thirteen events served 591 professionals including real estate agents, local government staff, federal and state agency staff, and land use planners delivering science-based information and technical assistance to protect and manage NC's coastal resources.
- The reserve hosted a **Research Symposium** May 8-9, 2024 in Beaufort to highlight work conducted across the reserve sites and gather input on research priorities to inform future work and partnerships. The event kicked off with a field trip to the Rachel Carson Reserve and poster reception with 11 posters at the NC Maritime Museum on May 8 followed by research presentations and breakout group discussions on May 9 focused on water quality, coastal and estuarine ecosystem protection, and coastal habitat resilience. Approximately 65 researchers, students, and resource managers attended. A summary of the symposium will be released shortly.
- The reserve hosted its third stop on the "**Discover the NC Coastal Reserve**" tour at the Rachel Carson Reserve May 17, 2024. The tour is a multi-year campaign spanning 2023-2026 to connect target audiences with the program and places with events to be hosted at reserve sites along the coast. Planning is underway for the fourth tour stop at the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve. Explore the [Discover the NC Coastal Reserve's Virtual Passport](#) and enjoy short videos from the tour events. Local Advisory Committee members will be invited to the site-based events so stay tuned for upcoming event information.
- The reserve celebrated **National Estuaries Week** September 21-28, 2024 by hosting and participating in a variety of activities in tribute to NC's estuaries; thank you to all who came out to help us celebrate estuaries!
 - A *bioblitz* was held at Masonboro Island, Kitty Hawk Woods, and Rachel Carson Reserves to encourage visitors to photograph flora and fauna at the sites and upload them to iNaturalist. Documentation of species at reserve sites contributes to natural occurrence records and provides baseline data for existing species.
 - On September 28, reserve staff hosted a booth at the *Olde Beaufort Farmers Market* in Beaufort and also hosted a booth at *Femme in STEM at the NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher*. *Femme in STEM* showcases the variety of STEM fields, provides an opportunity to interact with STEM professionals, and celebrates women in working in these fields.
 - The reserve hosted a *marsh cleanup* with volunteers in Kitty Hawk Bay, part of the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve.

Student Internships

- The reserve had a fantastic group of interns this summer in Manteo, Beaufort, and Wilmington. The students worked on a range of stewardship and education projects including monitoring wildlife use of the Carrot Island living shoreline, counting live and dead oysters in the field and in drone photos and comparing accuracy of counts, leading student summer camp activities, developing interpretive signage, and monitoring fish, turtle, and shorebird populations. These invaluable experiences give the students hands-on experience in research, education and stewardship fields and help inform their future career paths. Thank you to Friends of the Reserve, the N.C. Internship Program, and UNCW for their support and partnership for the internships.
- Student opportunities for summer 2025 in our Manteo, Beaufort, and Wilmington offices will be announced soon on our website.

Research Fellowship Updates

- **2024 NC Coastal Research Fellow**
Grace Loonam, a MS student at East Carolina University is the 2024 North Carolina Coastal Research Fellow. Grace's research will investigate changes in habitat complexity and community assembly in restored versus natural oyster reefs at the Rachel Carson Reserve. [North Carolina Sea Grant](#) and the [N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve](#) jointly fund this opportunity, which is open to graduate students across North Carolina. With funding for one year, recipients conduct research within one or more of the Coastal Reserve's 10 sites.
- **NOAA Margaret A. Davidson Fellow 2024-2026 Fellow**
Mina Surprenant, a PhD student at the University of North Carolina Wilmington is the 2024-2026 Davidson fellow at the NC Reserve. Mina will evaluate salt marsh responses to sea-level rise at the Masonboro Island and Zeke's Island Reserves by integrating drone technology data with computational models to help predict how marshes adapt to changing sea levels. The [Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Fellowship](#) provides funding to graduate students to conduct research within one of the 30 reserves in NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System. Fellows address a key coastal management question to help reserves, scientists, and communities understand coastal challenges that may influence future policy and management strategies.

Staffing News and Accolades

- **Paula Gillikin** was recently promoted to serve as the reserve's Stewardship Coordinator. Paula has worked with the reserve's stewardship team for the past 17 years, serving the past 12 years as the Central Sites Manager for the Rachel Carson and Permuda Island Reserves. She has a Bachelor's degree in Biology and Environmental Science from UNC Wilmington and a Master's degree in Animals and Public Policy from Tufts University. Paula has also served in leadership roles for the state's work on marine debris and abandoned and derelict vessels. She will continue working from our Beaufort office. Congratulations Paula!
- **Kerryanne Newman** joined the reserve research team this summer and is working on research and monitoring projects at the reserve sites and supporting GIS needs for the program. She recently completed her master's degree in marine biology at the College of Charleston and works at our Beaufort office.
- The reserve's recently released film "Secrets of the Estuary" took home two National Estuarine Research Reserve Association FilmFest awards - the Egret Award for Best Scenery and the Tidal Award for Estuary Ambassador! Watch the film [here](#) and congratulations to reserve filmmakers Communications Specialist **Jillian Daly** and Research Coordinator **Justin Ridge**.
- The Carrot Island Living Shoreline Team received a Department of Environmental Quality Team Achievement Award for its work across divisions to complete the living shoreline at the Rachel Carson Reserve in partnership with Carteret County and Moffatt & Nichol. Division of Coastal Management team members include **reserve staff Paula Gillikin, Justin Ridge, Abby**

Williams, and Rebecca Ellin, and regulatory staff Gregg Bodnar and Wayne Hall. Their teamwork ensured the project was completed on time, met all requirements, and will serve as a model for future resilience strategies in NC.

Federal Budget

- The budget table below is a summary of the status of the federal budget* for fiscal years 2020-2025 as it relates to the NC Reserve. Congress has not passed the FY2025 federal budget, and the federal government is operating under a continuing resolution based on FY2024 allocations until December 2024 when the continuing resolution expires. 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.

Federal Budget Lines	FY2020 Enacted	FY2021 Enacted	FY2022 Enacted	FY2023 Enacted	FY2024 Enacted	FY2025 President's Request	FY2025 House Mark	FY2025 Senate Mark
NERRS Operations	\$27.5M	\$28.5M	\$29.7M	\$32.5M	\$33.3M	\$32.5M	\$32.5M	\$34M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$6.5M	\$8.5M	\$8.5M	\$3M	\$10M	\$8.5M
CZM Grants	\$77M	\$78.5 M	\$79M	\$81.5M	\$81.5M	\$81.5M	\$80M	\$83M

* The federal fiscal year is October 1-September 30. The National Estuarine Research Reserve System (NERRS) budget line provides funding to the 30 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 cooperative agreement that DCM receives provides funding for Reserve staffing, state site operations, and administrative support.