



**Bald Head Woods Reserve  
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, December 2, 2021 – 1 pm  
WebEx**

**Attendance**

<b><u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u></b>	<b><u>Present</u></b>
Bald Head Island Conservancy (BHIC) – Beth Darrow, Chris Shank	yes
Village of Bald Head Island, Chris McCall, JP McCann, Jae Kim	yes
Village of Bald Head Island Public Safety	no
Natural Heritage Program, Mike Schafale	yes
<b><u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u></b>	
Al Buzzard	no
John Kinney	yes
<b><u>Others Present</u></b>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager	
Elizabeth Colhoun, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship and Education Specialist	
Whitney Jenkins, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Coastal Training Program Coordinator	

**Welcome – Hope Sutton**

The site manager welcomed the committee to the Fall 2021 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and led introductions. An item about implementation of recently adopted rules was added. John Kinney was welcomed to the committee as a new member.

**Reserve-wide Administrative Update – Hope Sutton**

The Reserve-wide Update, which includes a range of reserve activities, was shared with committee members prior to the meeting. Members had no comments or questions about the updates. The update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

The site manager provided some reminders from the Reserve-wide update:

- The Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Fellowship funding opportunity application period is currently open with the deadline of December 10. This will be the second cohort for this NERRS-specific fellowship program. Reserve staff have been meeting with prospective applicants and look forward to a strong group of applications to review.
- The Friends of the Reserve will again be funding an undergraduate internship award for the summer of 2022. This internship is focused on increasing diversity and providing opportunities to underrepresented populations. The 2022 intern will be working out of the Beaufort office. Deadline for application is February 6.

The site manager also shared the following news item that occurred after the Reserve-wide update was sent out.

- *New staff position approved - southern sites manager*

With the passage of the State budget, a Southern Sites Manager position has been funded. Reserve staff are working to define the job description and post the opening. When filled, the current Stewardship Coordinator and Southern Sites Manager will become the full-time Stewardship Coordinator for the program, allowing more time for activities that span the full network of sites, including resilience, accessibility, GIS, and a variety of administrative tasks such as updates of management plans and MOUs, pursuing grant funding for special projects, and policy work.
- *Rules implementation and special activity authorization*
  - The reserve's readopted and updated rules will become effective on February 1. Local Advisory Committees have been involved with several steps throughout this process and the final rule language will be provided to committee members and the public via the website on January 31, 2022. The purpose of changes approved through the required periodic rules review is to enhance the Reserve's ability to balance ecosystem protection and compatible traditional uses through rule clarifications, including modifications and restrictions, and the addition of the special activity authorization which addresses a significant gap in the existing rules.
  - Starting February 1, 2022, written authorization will be required for organized events, commercial activities, and other special activities or uses within the boundaries of any Reserve component not included in the primary uses of research, education, and compatible traditional uses. The rule lays out the process and conditions around special activity authorizations. The new special activity rule will help address requests received by the Reserve for special activities such as organized eco-tour trips. The rule describes the process to request a special activity authorization and also the process the division will use to review requests. This supports transparency between the applicants and reviewers. There is no fee to apply for a special activity authorization.
  - The reserve will be holding a webinar at 6 pm on February 22, 2022 to introduce the new rules and the special activity authorization process to known commercial users of the sites, including transport providers and ecotour companies.
  - Other changes that were included and previously reviewed by Local Advisory Committee members include: defining traditional uses as fishing, hunting, navigation, and recreation as it is referenced in the purposes of the program; defining camping at Masonboro as being

- allowed for 2 consecutive nights; and strengthening and clarifying rules related to littering and vehicles.
- Other actions staff are taking to inform the public about the updated rules include: updating website, sign, and brochure language; doing website hot topic and social media posts; and sending out a press release shortly before the effective date.

### **Site Update and Old Business – Hope Sutton**

- *Tree work*
  - The site manager reported on efforts to make response for trail and tree work easier following storm damage. Options explored include: the possibility of contracting staff from The Nature Conservancy to do tree work; creating an Memorandum of Understanding with the N.C. Forest Service to facilitate rapid response; and developing a standing contract with a professional tree service. Each of these approaches has been ruled out as the primary approach that will be able to be used. The Nature Conservancy is willing to support tree work on a partnership basis, as it fits into their existing workload and availability. The Forest Service prefers the approach that has been used previously which can result in delays for approval of single project MOUs and may result in slower response depending on other priorities in the State. State contracting processes do not easily allow for the use of a standing contract. To try to be prepared for quicker response following storms, the reserve staff have arranged for chain saw training for several staff members. The reserve's Northern Sites Manager is qualified to teach chain saw skills in line with the Wildland Fire Chainsaws S-212 training. The training will be a modified version of that training, focussed on building safe chain saw skills that may be needed to address future storm damage in the Bald Head Woods Reserve. The training will be held on Bald Head Island in late January 2022. Staff from the Bald Head Island Conservancy have been invited to join the training.
  - Group discuss occurred regarding options that might be available to support storm damage. Mr. McCall suggested gaining better understanding of how and when FEMA funding can be accessed and used. He also suggested that some Village staff have chainsaw skills and may be able to be involved.
  - Additional discussion about routine trail maintenance occurred. The Reserve's Standard Operating Procedure regarding trail maintenance contains details to guide this activity. The Reserve and BHIC will work together to make sure that the document is clear and includes enough guidance to support BHIC staff completing trail maintenance as they are able.
- *Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)*
  - A draft MOU was provided to BHIC staff in November. Discussions will occur over the coming months to refine the document for mutual benefit. An approval process will then occur that includes internal, Division, and Departmental review.

### **Roundtable**

- Dr. Darrow discussed the importance of continuing to study the forest, including deer impacts to oak regeneration and fire hazard reduction. She has been working with Jodi Forrester, a professor from N.C. State University, to look at forest vegetation and this work may be useful to inform fire management planning.
- Mr. McCall shared that the Village is looking into ordinances that would support reduction of wildlife hazard, including a prohibition on pine straw in residential landscaping.

- Mr. Schafale commented that fire moving from residential areas into the forest is more likely than fire moving from the forest to structures as the maritime forest litter is not highly flammable, the canopy is not likely to sustain an ignition, and fire is not likely to carry effectively through the forest under normal conditions.
- The group discussed the recent wildfire on the island that impacted several structures and actions the Village is pursuing in response, including the purchase of an additional fire truck.

#### **Public comments**

- None

#### **Action Items**

- Reserve staff will contact committee members during the winter to establish a date for the spring meeting.
- Reserve staff will reach out to N.C. Forest Service staff regarding future options for fire management and community outreach.
- Reserve staff will meet with BHIC staff and NCSU researcher to discuss forest monitoring.
- Reserve staff will work with BHIC on MOU language.
- Mr. McCall will reach out to Applied Resource Management regarding a data summary report for the wellfield monitoring program. Following receipt of the report, Reserve staff will reconvene the Monitoring Advisory Group.

## N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Fall 2021 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

### Local Advisory Committee Membership

The Division and Reserve welcome the newly appointed and reappointed community members, community organizations, and partner organizations to the Reserve's Local Advisory Committees. Appointments were made following the application period held earlier this year. Thank you to all committee members for their service and participation.

### Coastal Reserve Rule Amendments

The amendments to the Coastal Reserve rules are in the final stage of the rule making process. As a reminder, these amendments satisfy the Legislative Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process requirements, and address priority updates to enhance clarity of existing rules and address issues and gaps to ensure effective management of the Coastal Reserve in accordance with Coastal Area Management Act. The Office of State Budget and Management approved the fiscal analysis for the rule amendments in April 2021. The public comment period for the amendments was held July 15 – September 13, 2021; one written comment letter was received during the comment period and no comments were provided at the August 26, 2021 public hearing. Changes were made to 2 rule sections (15A NCAC 070.0102 (1) and 15A NCAC 070.0202 (9)) following the public comment period. The Department adopted the rule amendments on October 1, 2021. Staff addressed technical changes requested by the Office of Administrative Hearings, and the Rules Review Commission will hear the updates to the Coastal Reserve rules at its November 18th meeting. The proposed effective date is February 1, 2022.

### Program Highlights

- The Division of Coastal Management has wrapped up its federally funded project to **remove Hurricane Florence debris and abandoned vessels** from public lands and waters along North Carolina's coast. In total, 1,254,280 pounds of debris and 24 vessels were removed from Brunswick through Carteret, including Craven and Pamlico Counties and 4 of the Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve sites managed by the Division (Zeke's Island, Masonboro Island, Permuda Island, and Rachel Carson). The debris included damaged shoreline infrastructure such as pilings, docks, and pieces of treated wood related to these structures. Funded by the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Emergency Watershed Protection program and matched with State funding (\$2,006,925 total), the Division contracted with the NC Coastal Federation to complete the debris and vessels removal, working closely with the Wildlife Resources Commission on the vessel removals given their authority over that activity. This project was part of the largest coordinated debris removal effort along North Carolina's coast in the State's history. Funds provided by other partners were focused primarily on removal of additional vessels. Debris and vessel removal is important activity to avoid resuspension and relocation of debris in future storms, maintain ecosystem functionality and aesthetic, and protect public safety.
- The Coastal Training Program and Division regulatory staff are offering a **Coastal Area Management Act Basics Webinar** on December 1. Participants will learn how DCM balances competing coastal pressures through development permitting under the rules of the Commission. This includes an overview of permits needed for coastal development; development rules for the oceanfront, inlet hazard areas, and estuarine shorelines; and development rules related to coastal habitats including wetlands and primary nursery areas. A question-and-answer session will follow the presentation. Registration is full, but a recording of the webinar will be available after the event given the high demand for the offering.

- The Coastal Training Program will host NOAA Office for Coastal Management's **Nature-Based Solutions for Coastal Hazards 101 training** on January 11, 2022. This virtual course is a starting point in preparing coastal managers and planners to plan and implement green (natural) infrastructure projects to reduce impacts to coastal hazards in their community. Registration is required and more details are located on the Reserve's website.
- The Reserve received funding from NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System to **update and improve its on-site research and select public access infrastructure**. Federal funds in the amount of \$277,100 are matched by Division of Coastal Management Public Access Grant Funds for the Currituck Banks Reserve boardwalk refurbishment, and will be used to design and construct storm-resilient research platforms to support the Reserve's implementation of the System-wide Monitoring Program including water quality monitoring platforms and marsh vegetation platforms to protect salt marsh habitat. The funding will also be used to develop and install interpretive signage at existing trails at the Currituck Banks and Masonboro Island Reserves. The funding was recently awarded, and design work is underway.

### Student and Grant Opportunities

- NOAA released the funding opportunity for the second cohort of the **Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Fellowship** and applications are due December 10, 2021. This program offers graduate students admitted to or enrolled in a Master's or Ph.D. program the opportunity to conduct estuarine research within a National Estuarine Research Reserve. The NC Coastal Reserve & National Estuarine Research Reserve will host one fellow beginning in 2022 to conduct research on a key reserve management question within one of the four National Estuarine Research Reserve sites, which include the Currituck Banks, Rachel Carson, Masonboro Island, and Zeke's Island Reserves. Each 2-year project will employ the tenets of collaborative research, including engaging end-users, incorporating multi-disciplinary perspectives, and ensuring outcomes are applicable to local management needs and decision-making. The Reserve's current Davidson Fellow, Marae Lindquist, a PhD student at UNCW, is studying the impacts of sea level rise on wintering populations of marsh sparrows at multiple reserve sites. More information about the fellowship is available [here](#).
- The application period for the **2022 Coastal Research Fellowship** hosted by the Coastal Reserve and NC Sea Grant is coming soon. The fellowship funds a North Carolina-based graduate student for one year to conduct research at one or more of the Coastal Reserve sites on identified focus areas. More details will be provided on the Reserve's website.
- The Friends of the Reserve (FOR) is requesting applications for the **2022 NC Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship Award**. This internship encourages promising and talented students from traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations to pursue study and careers in coastal and estuarine science by gaining professional experience working with the Coastal Reserve for the summer. More details are available on FOR's website [here](#) and the deadline for submitting applications is February 6, 2022.
- The **NERRS Science Collaborative** has two funding opportunities open to address identified management needs of the reserves within the National Estuarine Research Reserve System. [Collaborative research project](#) pre-proposals are due December 7, 2021, and [science transfer grant](#) proposals are due February 24, 2022. More details are available on the NERRS Science Collaborative website.

### Staffing News

Dr. Brandon Puckett, Reserve Research Coordinator, received a 2021 Pelican Award from the NC Coastal Federation in an awards program on August 7, 2021. Brandon was recognized in the "Coastwide Winners" category, receiving an award for "Leadership and Expert Scientific Research Advancing Coastal Restoration." Brandon's doctoral research at North Carolina State University and subsequent work at the Reserve, helped build the foundation for hundreds of acres of new oyster sanctuary in

Pamlico Sound, a better understanding of marsh resiliency, and has helped to advance water quality protection efforts in the state. Additionally, Brandon helped bring national perspectives and understanding to the statewide Oyster Steering Committee’s “North Carolina Oyster Restoration and Protection Strategy: A Blueprint for Action.”

Federal Budget

- The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget\* for fiscal years 19, 20, 21, and 22 as it relates to the Coastal Reserve. The FY2022 budget is currently in a continuing resolution until December 3, 2021. 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	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2019	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2020	FY2021 Enacted (Consolidated Appropriations Act)	FY2022 President’s Request	FY2022 Senate Mark	FY2022 House Mark
NERRS Operations	\$27M	\$27.5 M	\$28.5 M	\$42.5M	\$34M	\$30.5M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$1.9M	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$10M	\$6.5M	\$4M
CZM Grants	\$75.5M	\$77 M	\$78.5 M	\$108.5M	\$88.5M	\$82.5M

- The [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) that Congress recently passed includes \$77M for the NERRS for habitat restoration to be spent over five years. The Act states that equal amounts of funding shall be provided in Fiscal Years 22-26, approximately \$15.4M annually for the NERRS. Details on how the funds will be allocated are not yet available.

\* 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 cooperative agreement that DCM receives provides funding for Reserve staffing, state site operations, and administrative support.