



**Bird Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, April 21, 2021, 1 pm
WebEx**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
NC Coastal Land Trust – Jessica Blake	No
NC Coastal Federation – Lauren Kolodij	Yes
Bird Island Preservation Society - Bill Ducker	No
Sunset Beach Police Department	No
Town of Sunset Beach Administration – Cindy Steveson	Yes
Natural Heritage Program – Scott Pohlman	Yes
<u>Community Members and Community Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Katie Hovermale	Yes
Noelle Kehrberg	Yes
Jud Watkins	Yes
Sunset Beach Turtle Patrol - Carmel Zetts	Yes
Cape Fear Audubon – Charley Winterbauer	No
<u>Others Present</u>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR, Stewardship Coordinator and Southern Sites Manager	
Elizabeth Colhoun, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Specialist	
Christy Simmons, DCM Public Information Officer	

Welcome – Hope Sutton

The site manager welcomed the committee to the Spring 2021 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and called roll. A brief introduction to the web meeting platform was provided by Christy Simmons, DCM Public Information Officer.

Reserve-wide Administrative Update – Hope Sutton

The Reserve-wide Update, which includes a range of Reserve activities and information 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:

- Local Advisory Committee member application period open until May 5. Applications will be reviewed by Reserve staff and a list of applicants and recommendations will be sent to the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality. Appointments will be completed by the Secretary. Reserve staff will notify new members. It is expected that new members will be present at the fall committee meetings.
- The Reserve's new Northern Sites Manager, Erik Alnes, started work in February.

Site Specific Update – Hope Sutton

- *General site conditions*
 - Site conditions have been normal for the off season. Reserve staff visited the site on December 7 and March 27 to participate in the sparrow research project being conducted by the reserve's Margaret A. Davidson fellow, Marae Lindquist. Staff were also on site on March 28 to conduct reconnaissance for finalization of kayaking routes for the Terrapin Tally community science program.
- *Seasonal activities*
 - The spring meeting with the Bird Island Preservation Society Site Stewards will be held April 29th to discuss what seasonal activities will be conducted. The reserve is still operating under the Governor's Executive Orders and Departmental guidance related to Covid-19 and has not begun to do any in-person activities with the public or to work directly with volunteers. Reserve staff are preparing for the 2021 season to be similar to the 2020 season in terms of volunteer and outreach activities.
- *Outreach activities*
 - For 2021, the Reserve is operating under similar guidance and protocols to 2020 for outreach activities. Reserve staff have been working to develop creative ways to continue to engage the local community and volunteers by modifying outreach activities. Virtual field trips are being publicized and live remote field trips have been hosted at the Rachel Carson Reserve. In celebration of Earth Day, members of the public are being encouraged to collect species occurrence data through the use of iNaturalist, a smart phone application that allows users to collect images and geospatial data for any plants and animals seen on the site. These records then are verified by experts and added to the database related to the "Bird Island Reserve project." In addition, the Reserve's community science diamondback terrapin survey project is being expanded in 2021 to include 11 sites along the southern half of the coast, including the Bird Island/Sunset Beach area. Two trainings were held on April 8 and 10, with around 300 volunteers participating. Data collection will take place from April 28-May 2 and May 12-16. Additional outreach activities will be developed as needs arise and as time allows.

- *Signage plan*
 - The signage featuring information about the Bird Island Reserve located near the Sunset Beach gazebo is being replaced due to degradation of the sign material. This opportunity is being used to make a few minor updates to content. The company that manufactured the signs is replacing the signs under warranty and the Bird Island Preservation Society is paying for the changes to be made. The reserve, the N.C. Coastal Federation (NCCF), and members of the local advisory committee worked together to complete these changes. The new signs will be installed by local volunteers as soon new panels are received.
 - Other interpretive signage that has been under discussion includes: replacing the posts with QR codes currently located along the nature trail with interpretive signage, installing some type of welcome and site information signage on the new parcel where it would provide the first opportunity for contact with visitors coming from Sunset Beach, and/or installing signage at the end of 40th Street where many people come to look out over the marsh or to enjoy the sunset. Signs that can be disconnected from their frames and pedestals have been discussed as a possibility to avoid storm damage or loss. This same smaller group, consisting of reserve staff, NCCF staff, and two local volunteers will continue to work on these ideas and will include the Town and additional local volunteers as any decision points come up.
 - If approved by the Legislature, funds remaining from the land acquisition project may be used for additional signage. Alternately, the Bird Island Preservation Society may be interested in contributing to the project.

Roundtable

- No additional comments.

Public comments

- None

Action Items

- Reserve staff will contact committee members during the summer to establish a date for the fall meeting.
- Reserves staff will provide photos of potential sign types and continue to work with a small group of local stewards and committee members together to discuss further signage plans.

APPENDIX A.

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

COVID-19 Update

Below is a summary of how the Reserve is working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Staff continue to telework and all offices remain closed to visitors.
- All Reserve sites are open to visitors. The Reserve will continue to closely monitor state and local COVID-19 guidelines and directives and encourage Reserve visitors to comply with these measures to protect themselves and their communities; current guidelines and directives are located [here](#).
- All in-person trainings and public programming remain canceled; education and training staff are conducting virtual programming as well as assisting partners with virtual meeting support.
- Research and stewardship work is continuing at the sites, although activities are more limited as they must meet social distancing requirements.

Local Advisory Committee Member Application Period – April 5-May 5, 2021

Community members are needed to serve on local advisory committees for each of the Coastal Reserve's sites. Community members with knowledge and experience of relevant topical areas and an interest in serving as a local advisory committee member are encouraged to consider applying. More information about the application period and how to apply is located on the Reserve's website [here](#).

Periodic Rules Review

The Rules Review Commission approved a readoption timeline of November 30, 2021 for Coastal Reserve rules (15A NCAC 07O) as part of the Legislative Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process (G.S. 150B-21.3A). The required fiscal analysis for the proposed rule amendments is under review.

N.C. NERR Federal Program Evaluation

NOAA conducts periodic evaluations of coastal management programs and National Estuarine Research Reserves as required by the federal Coastal Zone Management Act. The virtual site visit for NOAA's evaluation of the N.C. coastal management program and N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve took place the week of October 5, 2020 with a public meeting for both programs held on October 7. Final findings were provided by NOAA to the Department of Environmental Quality in March 2021; NOAA concluded that the department is adhering to the programmatic requirements of the federal Coastal Zone Management Act in implementing both of the programs. The findings include a number of accomplishments and four recommendations, with no required actions.

Program Highlights

- **Hurricane Florence Marine Debris and Vessel Clean-Up:** The Division of Coastal Management received \$1,873,764 from the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Emergency Watershed Protection program, matched by \$543,120 in State funds to remove debris and abandoned vessels resulting from Hurricane Florence along North Carolina's coastline from Brunswick through Carteret, including Craven and Pamlico Counties. Four Reserve sites (Zeke's Island, Masonboro Island, Permuda Island, and Rachel Carson) benefited from the project with a total of 4 vessels and 371,460 pounds of debris being removed by N.C. Coastal Federation contractors. The total for all removals along the coast to date is 7 vessels and

691,260 pounds of debris.

- **Spring Virtual Field Trips:** Education Coordinator Lori Davis is bringing the Rachel Carson Reserve to the classroom with virtual field trips to the site in lieu of in-person trips as a result of the pandemic. Fifteen classes are scheduled to learn about estuaries and see sand, mud, salt marsh cordgrass, fiddler crabs and pickleweed virtually.
- **Living shorelines training for marine construction professionals:** To increase the knowledge of living shoreline construction practices among marine contractors, engineers, environmental consultants, and regulators, the Reserve, North Carolina Coastal Federation, and North Carolina Sea Grant are partnering to offer a new training course. This course will focus on living shoreline design for typical structures in residential settings along North Carolina's estuarine shorelines. The training combines three online classroom sessions with on-the-ground field training. The online classroom sessions will be held April-May 2021 with field trips in May or June as COVID-safety guidelines and directives allow.
- **7th Annual Terrapin Tally:** The Terrapin Tally is a citizen science project conducted in partnership with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to measure the status of diamondback terrapin populations. Volunteers work in pairs to conduct headcount surveys on specific kayak routes to document diamondback terrapin sightings. This volunteer opportunity is compatible with current COVID-19 safety guidance and Governor Cooper's executive orders and can be completed by members of the same household or while maintaining appropriate social distancing in an outdoor setting. For the 7th season of the Terrapin Tally, the project is expanding to include numerous federal, state, and local partners with the addition of ten sites, spanning the coast from Carteret to Brunswick County. The 2021 Terrapin Tally will be conducted April 28-May 16 and sites include Cape Lookout National Seashore, Rachel Carson Reserve, Pine Knoll Shores, Hammocks Beach State Park, Lea Hutaff Island, Masonboro Island Reserve, Carolina Beach State Park, Ft. Fisher State Recreation Area, Zeke's Island Reserve, Bald Head Island, and Bird Island Reserve.
- **iNaturalist:** Help us document plants and animals on the Reserve sites using the free app, iNaturalist, and start submitting your pictures while visiting the Reserve sites. You can explore other locations and see what others have found while visiting, as well.

Friends of the Reserve – N.C. Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship Award and New Website Friends of the Reserve, or FOR, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that supports the N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve, including its sites and programs.

FOR is sponsoring a new **N.C. Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship Award** to encourage promising and talented students from traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations to pursue study and careers in coastal and estuarine science. **Juanita Gonzalez** was selected as the first Internship Award recipient and will be working with Reserve staff at the Masonboro Island Reserve this summer. Juanita is a sophomore at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, double majoring in environmental studies and biology. Thank you to Friends of the Reserve for its support of this award program, and congratulations and welcome to Juanita!

FOR also [recently launched a new website](#) with assistance from the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association; explore the website to learn more about the organization and its work.

Staffing News

Erik Alnes joined the Reserve in February as the Northern Sites Manager. Erik comes to us from the NC Forest Service where he worked for the past 2 years as the Currituck County Ranger. Prior to that, Erik

worked for the US Forest Service on the Lewis and Clark Hotshot Crew in Montana. He has a Bachelor’s degree in Resource Conservation from The University of Montana and a Master’s degree in Resource Conservation, specializing in Natural Resources Policy, also from The University of Montana. Welcome to Erik!

Federal Budget

The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget* for fiscal years 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 as it relates to the Coastal Reserve.

Federal Budget Lines	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2017	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2018	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2019	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2020	FY2021 Enacted (Consolidated Appropriations Act)
NERRS Operations	\$23.5 M	\$25 M	\$27M	\$27.5 M	\$28.5 M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$1.7M	\$1.7M	\$1.9M	\$4.5M	\$4.5M
CZM Grants	\$70 M	\$75 M	\$75.5M	\$77 M	\$78.5 M

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.

* 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.