



**Bird Island Reserve  
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, December 6, 2023, 10:00 am**

**Attendance**

<b><u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u></b>	<b><u>Present</u></b>
NC Coastal Land Trust – Jessica Blake	No
NC Coastal Federation – Lauren Kolodij	No
Bird Island Preservation Society – Bill Ducker	No
Sunset Beach Police Department	No
Town of Sunset Beach Administration – Lisa Anglin	Yes
Natural Heritage Program – Scott Pohlman	No
<b><u>Community Members and Community Organization Members</u></b>	
Katie Hovermale	Yes
Noelle Kehrberg	Yes
Sunset Beach Turtle Patrol – Carmel Zetts	No
Cape Fear Audubon – Charley Winterbauer	No
<b><u>Others Present</u></b>	
Elizabeth Pinnix, DCM/NCNERR Southern Sites Manager Morgan Penrose, DCM/NCNERR Stewardship Specialist Rebecca Williams, DCM/NCNERR Intern	

**Welcome**

The southern sites manager welcomed the committee to the Fall 2023 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and led introductions.

**Reserve-wide Administrative Update**

The Reserve-wide Update, which includes a range of Reserve activities and information was shared with committee members prior to the meeting. The Update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

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

- This is the last meeting for those LAC members that have terms expiring at the end of the calendar year. New appointments will be present at the Spring 2024 meeting.
- Staffing update: Abby Williams is the new Natural Resource Resilience Specialist located in the Beaufort office. The goal of this position is to plan and implement resilience plans for Masonboro Island, Zeke's Island, and Currituck Banks reserve sites.

Ms. Kehrberg suggested someone from the sea turtle patrol at Sunset Beach should be included and looped in with these meetings. Discussions between committee members and Ms. Zetts will take place to look for a representative.

### **Site Specific Update**

#### *Site conditions and seasonal activities*

Sunset Beach and Bird Island experienced another busy year with visitation and storm impacts were minimal with slight dune erosion and marine debris present. Trail maintenance took place in October and the nature trail looks great, thanks to the site stewards! Additionally, the end of Main Street was revitalized by the Town of Sunset Beach and the public works department which adds a comfortable resting spot to overlook the reserve and enjoy the view.

Ms. Hovermale mentioned the end of Main Street looks great and noted seeing many people enjoying the new update!

Ms. Anglin informed the committee that parking has been an ongoing issue at this location and the town plans to readjust the parking design to have 9-10 straight-in spots rather than 4 parallel.

#### *Public field trips*

Over the summer, fifteen public field trips were conducted by site stewards which reached 372 members of the public and resulted in 225 documented volunteer hours. These field trips are free to the public and provide information about Bird Island Reserve, its habitats, history, and commonly found species. Thank you to the stewards for another great field season.

Ms. Anglin thinks the refurbishing of the end of Main Street will help draw in people for the public field trips.

Ms. Hovermale added that the stewards are proposing starting the public field trips at the end of Main Street instead of on the beach. Ms. Anglin was in support of this and doesn't see any issues with that new plan. She also mentioned the town provides magnets for refrigerators in rental units that state beach rules and other important visitor information. She suggested the reserve provide magnets that have QR codes that can link to Bird Island web page and public field trip information. The town would be happy to distribute them, and we should plan to make ~500 magnets for this cause.

#### *Species Monitoring*

Two research projects took place at Bird Island Reserve during the spring and summer seasons. The first was the [Terrapin Tally](#) community science project. This year resulted in 509 volunteer hours with 71 routes paddled across the coast from Cape Lookout to Bird Island at Sunset Beach with approximately 119 terrapins documented, four of those at Bird Island. Dates for the 2024 tally can be found on the [website!](#)

The second project was conducted by the [Cape Fear Bird Observatory](#) that obtained a research permit through the reserve to tag Painted Buntings. This work was completed by trained staff with the goal of banding individual birds to better understand the species' use of habitat, patterns in movement, and general abundance. From five sample sites, a total of 231 buntings were tagged over the summer season with twelve being from Bird Island Reserve. They plan to continue and expand their project in 2024.

Ms. Kehrberg noted finding multiple derelict crab pots during a terrapin tally and suggested organizing an outing to locate derelict crab pots to remove. She offered to help organize this effort.

Ms. Hovermale mentioned finding a Wilson's storm petrel on the site, but it ended up passing away. Since this is relatively rare to find on the beach, the individual was taken to the Museum of Natural Science in Raleigh to keep as a sample.

### *Enforcement concerns*

#### Commercial users and jet skis

In the effort to address the ongoing concerns including use of personal watercraft (PWC), safety in the marsh creeks and other commercial uses, the reserve developed an informational packet to provide to local operators that includes: a letter from the site manager, site brochures, tips on how to be a responsible user, stickers, and reserve social media information. The contact list for packet distribution was reviewed by the Town of Sunset Beach and police department and will be hand-delivered in early Spring 2024.

Ms. Hovermale suggested laminating the "how to be a responsible user" pamphlets for the Bird Island Stewards to have.

The committee discussed different examples of PWC encounters but concluded that it seems to be individual users of concern, rather than organized groups from commercial companies.

The topic of no wake zones came up during this discussion and Ms. Anglin added she has talked with the NC Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF), specifically Betsy Haywood, to address these concerns through development of new signage that will go along the creek running along the bridge. She also mentioned working on strengthening the town's ordinances to help with this and reiterated that the town has enforcement on the water during the summer months.

#### Dogs off leash

Recently, the reserve has received emails expressing concern for dogs off leash on the reserve. Based on staff experience and input from the town and site stewards, this does not seem to be an increasing problem and there will not be any substantial action taken to address this at this point. The reserve has added additional rule signs to the property, including one immediately when you access the beach from the 40th Street ramp. At this point, no further action will be taken.

Ms. Anglin added that if people are concerned, they are welcome to contact her, and she will dispatch enforcement to respond. Additionally, they have two full time officers dedicated to the beach during the peak season.

We also briefly discussed expanding enforcement abilities by the Sunset Beach Police Department to extend past the city limits, but no decisions or plans were made to forward that topic at this time.

### *Motus tower*

The site manager reminded the committee about the [Motus Network](#) and the partnership between the reserve and [Cape Fear Bird Observatory](#) to construct a new motus tower at Bird Island. Funds from the most recent land acquisition of Sunset Beach West are helping to support this new research infrastructure and upkeep. A scoping trip with reserve and observatory staff took place the afternoon of December 6, 2023 to plan for the tower's location. Installation will take place in spring 2024 at the earliest.

### *Discover the Reserve event – late addition to agenda*

This event aims to bring together the Department of Environmental Quality Secretary, other dignitaries, community partners, and reserve staff to highlight reserve sites and the great partnerships surrounding them. The first stop of the Discover the Reserve was Currituck Banks followed by Bird Island on Friday, December 8th, 2023. This ongoing event will take place over the next three years to highlight all 10 reserve sites.

The committee all agreed this was a great opportunity to highlight the acquisition and partnerships with the town and reserve.

Ms. Hovermale reiterated the Friends of Reserve (FOR) is a non-profit organization that supports the work of the reserve. She added that this was an event that the FOR board was invited to and they are working to provide food and other resources for future events.

Ms. Anglin asked Ms. Hovermale if she knew that the Town of Sunset Beach awards yearly grants and funding to qualifying non-profit organizations that conduct activities that would benefit the town and residents within the town limits. Supporting Bird Island would fall into that category. Ms. Hovermale was not aware of these funds and expressed interest in applying. Ms. Anglin informed us the applications come out in January and are due in April.

### **Roundtable**

The site manager asked Ms. Anglin to report on the status of the Resilient Coastal Communities Project (RCCP) with Sunset Beach. Ms. Anglin reported that the 40<sup>th</sup> street living shoreline is in design phase but still needs some additional encroachment agreements to go through. She also added that the town was funded for all three stages up to construction through the RCCP, but implementation is being funded by the Town of Sunset Beach. She mentioned a new park (Majestic Oaks) on the east end of the island that will include a kayak launch, boardwalk with educational signage, fishing pier, 18 parking spaces, solar powered bathrooms, and pervious pavement. Currently this project is in the development phase. Lastly, she reported that the park on the mainland under the bridge that provides water access to Bird Island and surrounding areas is undergoing an upgrade to parking with nearly 65-70 parking spots with permeable pavement.

Ms. Hovermale mentioned that she notices many visitors driving down 40<sup>th</sup> and Bay Street, which dead ends at her home, trying to access Bird Island. She asked if there was a sign or way to change Google Map instructions for this to be resolved. The site manager said she would look into changing the address for Bird Island to be dead ending at Main Street. Additionally, we could look into designing a small sign at the end of 40<sup>th</sup> Street to inform people that this is a dead end and will not take them to Bird Island or the Kindred Spirit Mailbox.

### **Public comments**

- None

### **Action Items**

- Next meeting: **Wednesday, April 17 at 10am**
- The site manager will look into changing the directions for Bird Island Reserve online.
- Ms. Hovermale will research the funding opportunities with the Town of Sunset Beach in the interest of the Friends of the Reserve non-profit organization.