



**Emily and Richardson Preyer Buckridge Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, 7 December 2021, 10:00am-10:45pm**

Attendance

LAC Partner Organization Members	Present
Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Wendy Stanton	Yes
NC Natural Heritage Program, Michael Schafale	Yes
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, David Turner, William Ridgeway	Yes
NC Wildlife Resources Commission – Enforcement, Robert Wayne, Dylan Hanes	Yes
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, Jimmy Johnson	No
Tyrrell County Government, David Clegg	Yes
Tyrrell County Government, Nina Griswell	No
NC Division of Forest Resources	No
Tyrrell County Sheriff	No
Community Members	
Mike Clements	No
Others Present	
Woody Webster, DCM, Buckridge Site Manager	
Whitney Jenkins, DCM, Coastal Training Coordinator	

Due to Coronavirus restrictions, this meeting was done through the Webex remote meeting platform.

Mrs. Jenkins shared a brief overview of the operational side of the meeting platform, and remained in the meeting to ensure the technology side of things ran smoothly.

Reserve-wide Updates (Woody Webster)

The Reserve-wide Update was shared with committee members before the meeting via email. Staff noted that while many local advisory committees (LAC) added new members, the Buckridge LAC has one returning community member, Mike Clements, whose term is extended to 2026. Additionally, Wendy Stanton will take Howard Phillips’ place representing Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). Staff then shared that the long-worked on Rules Review has been approved, and new rules will go into effect February 1, 2022. For Buckridge, the additional of a Special Activity authorization is the main change. Also shared was the good potential numbers coming from federal and State budgets. As part of that, a Southern Sites Manager will be added to the Wilmington office. In February, Erik Alnes joined the Reserve as the Northern Sites Manager, and the Buckridge Site Manager has been assisting him on a number of projects as he gets acclimated. The Update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

Site Update (Woody Webster)

Property Updates

- The Primland Tract purchase is stalled, but should go through within the next six months. The Nature Conservancy tied another purchase to this project, believing it would save time. Unfortunately, it delayed things. The Division chose to not apply for access improvement funds until this land purchase is secured. As we progress, Staff will seek committee input on design for the water access at Grapevine Landing.
- Staff had to respond to questions about water management at Buckridge in February. Some citizens suggested that flooding concerns they had were the result of changes to water control structure management at Buckridge. However, there has been no change to the management of these structures for over four years, and staff suggested that record amounts of rainfall in February 2021 (9.3") might have had something to do with it.
- Roper Island's owners are looking to sell. The State declined to purchase what amounts to the hunting rights for the price the owners sought. Staff subsequently worked with their real estate agent to help any potential new owners understand requirements placed on the land by the Conservation Easement.
- Also at Roper Island, a legislator asked about expanding spoil disposal on the island for dredging of the Intracoastal Canal. Due to the number of funding sources involved with the purchase of the Conservation Easement, expanding spoil disposal there is cost prohibitive.
- DEQ Solid Waste asked some questions about a dump area near the Buckridge Road gate, on private property. This eventually led to the cleanup of an illegal dumping area. Staff welcomed this improvement, as staff and a volunteer dedicated hours to picking up debris scattered from that area onto Buckridge, including 5-10lbs of nails, screws, and associated hardware.
- Staff have undergone Federal Resource advisor disaster response training, so that a more informed response is available following a disaster such as a wildfire or a hurricane.
- Staff supported acquisition of 24 acres at Masonboro Island last year, and is beginning a new acquisition project in Kitty Hawk Woods of 17.93 acres. Staff also worked to resolve property line discrepancies at several reserve sites. There are differing records between state, county, and in-house resources. These discrepancies have been fully noted at four of the 10 Reserve sites thus far.

Invasive Controls

- Staff treated Eastern Road alligatorweed outbreaks with imazapyr. Unfortunately, the outbreak is spreading, but is doing so more slowly than untreated areas. Additional small outbreaks still become large in short amounts of time.
- The Division continued its cost-share agreement with Division of Water Resources for treatment of alligatorweed and *Phragmites* along the shoreline of the lower Alligator River and the Northwest Fork (up to the NC 94 bridge).

Hunting Statistics

- Last year five deer and 21 bear were harvested from Buckridge. During the November 2021 bear season, 18 bear were harvested. Mr. Turner added that in 2021, two male deer have been reported, and the bear gender breakdown for the November bear season was 12 male and six female.
- The Division was able to secure funding for \$12,000 worth of gravel in late spring, which was purchased directly from N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT). N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) staff applied the gravel to Buckridge roads during the last week of

September. The open roads are the best they've been during the entire game land agreement, rivaling the condition of the NCDOT-maintained Grapevine Landing Road.

- Additionally, last year's hunting season had less road damage overall, which helped extend the scope of roadwork possible this year. Staff are speaking to NCWRC about potentially moving one of the temporary gates on Eastern Road back and extending the distance hunters can drive.
- There is some increase in turkey hunter interest, but only one was harvested spring 2021.

Research Update

- NOAA has installed a seasonal tide gauge at Grapevine Landing, which should be deployed until March. It is hoped that it will begin to fill some regional water level data gaps.
- Staff helped NC Bird Atlas workers select and access several locations in and around Buckridge for multiple visits.

Member Roundtable

- Staff opened the member roundtable by asking about their various drone policies, given that the Reserve are working through that process. Mrs. Stanton stated that they are prohibited at the Refuge, but there have been some instances where their use in surveys and compliance documents are allowable. NCWRC staff indicated that there is nothing written down, but the internal policy is that they cannot be used without a special activity permit. When Mr. Clegg was asked whether there are any county ordinances addressing drones, he replied that there are not, but that the county itself has used drones associated with utilities work and Soil and Water Conservation projects.
- Mr. Turner asked what level of increased interest was exhibited by turkey hunters. Staff explained it was a few conversations, not many. Given the potential interest, Mr. Turner asked whether it might be possible to open the Buckridge gates during turkey season. The timeframe should begin about a week before the season begins, so late March to mid-May. Staff stated that they would present it to the Reserve Program Manager, given that it is a significant change in policy, and could have a marked impact on road conditions. Mr. Ridgeway indicated the demand may not be there yet, but it's worth further discussion. Mr. Clegg indicated the county would support action that helps hunter access.
- Mr. Hanes stated that there has been no unusual enforcement issues this year. Bear season was patrolled, and several enforcement checks were performed during deer season. The deer hunters are a regular group. He indicated he had issued a ticket for littering, but that was all.
- Mr. Schafale said he hadn't visited this year, but had been waiting on the dedication. Staff indicated his assistance for an upcoming project in Kitty Hawk Woods will be helpful. Mr. Schafale asked if our treatment of *Phragmites* included stands along the roads. Staff stated that it is currently beyond the Reserve's equipment capacity. Staff would like to treat those areas, but a tractor and agricultural sprayer would be needed to address the issue adequately.
- Mr. Ridgeway shared that staff are working the roads, even today, which is unusual timing. However, the dry condition due to the drought made it possible. The current plan is to use the last of the NCWRC gravel for the year to extend the roadwork along Eastern Road to several hundred yards beyond the temporary gate.
- Mrs. Stanton asked to be informed of any conservation projects their partnership might benefit.
- Mr. Turner closed by sharing a complement from a hunter on current excellent road conditions.

Mr. Turner volunteered that current virus restrictions caused the suspension of most of the travelling weighing teams this bear season, so while there are preliminary harvest numbers, size data on harvested bears is lacking. He went on to thank Mr. Webster for his support of the local NCWRC staff who have worked so diligently on road improvements at Buckridge.

Mr. Clegg asked Mr. Turner what an ideal bear harvest number might be. Mr. Turner went on to explain that there are many factors involved, therefore it is a difficult question. One year's harvest may be hampered by bad weather, while another by access issues. NCWRC staff look at overall harvest trends to see whether a problem might be developing, rather than a single data point. The NCWRC learned some hard lessons when Van Swamp game land was opened, and an initial overharvest of bear resulted in years of subsequent low bear numbers. Many regional game lands are now restricted to a three-day season, like Buckridge, to help ensure sustainable bear harvest levels. As such, the trends for area game lands indicate a sustainable harvest level has been achieved.

Staff asked about the status of Sunday hunting on public lands. Mr. Turner indicated that landowner consent was one main point, and then lands are ranked based on things like access, hunting pressure, stress on wildlife populations, etc. He added that currently, NCWRC is not recommending an expansion of bear hunting to Sundays on coastal game lands.

Public Comments

No members of the public in attendance.

Review of Action Items

The question of gate opening during turkey season will be discussed soon, starting with the Reserve Program Manager. After acquisition of the Primland Tract in next six months, staff will reach out to the LAC for input on the design of a water access at Grapevine Landing.

Appendix A: Reserve-wide Administrative Update

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 07O. 0102 (1) and 15A NCAC 07O. 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

November 15, 2021

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.