



**Emily and Richardson Preyer Buckridge Reserve  
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, 6 December 2023, 10:00am-12:05pm**

**Attendance**

<b>LAC Partner Organization Members</b>	<b>Present</b>
Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, Wendy Stanton	Yes
NC Natural Heritage Program, Michael Schafale	Yes
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, David Turner, William Ridgeway, Luke Fleshman	Yes
NC Wildlife Resources Commission – Enforcement, Brad Stoop	Yes
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, Jimmy Johnson	No
Tyrrell County Government, David Clegg	No
Tyrrell County Government, Nina Griswell	No
NC Division of Forest Resources	No
Tyrrell County Sheriff	No
<b>Community Members</b>	
Mike Clements	Yes
<b>Others Present</b>	
Woody Webster, DCM, Buckridge Site Manager	

**Reserve-wide Updates (Woody Webster)**

The Reserve-wide Update was shared with committee members before the meeting via email. Staff made note of the internship opportunity at the Northern Sites office for the upcoming summer. The Update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

**Site Update (Woody Webster)**

Property Updates

- The Facilities Division of the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) rated the Primland Tract water access project and recommended it highly for departmental funding. A funding decision for the project should come within 60 days. A potential VIP visit to the water access area either spring or fall 2024 may morph into a groundbreaking ceremony if funding is secured.
- Only one commercial fishing boat worked out of Buckridge this season, and it was absent mid-summer.
- NC Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) staff discovered a collapsing culvert at the entrance to Eastern Road. They marked the collapsed portion, and offered to install a replacement culvert if the Division of Coastal Management (DCM) could purchase materials. DCM has purchased fill and ordered a replacement culvert from Carolina Farms (Pipe Division). Installation is planned as soon as the culvert is delivered to the site.

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- A draft of the revised NC Natural Heritage Program (NHP) Dedication Letter was received yesterday. This revision will add the Primland Tract to the Nature Preserve Dedication at Buckridge.

### Invasive Controls

- Division of Water Resources continued their cost-share partnership with DCM for control of alligatorweed at Buckridge this year, spraying in the vicinity of Gum Neck Landing and the NW Fork of the Alligator River.
- Staff purchased a larger sprayer for in-house treatment of alligatorweed, deploying it at the end of the growing season. Rodeo™ was applied along portions of Eastern Road and Grapevine Landing canals. One volunteer assisted. Novel small outbreaks are still being discovered during monitoring, but known larger outbreaks are being effectively controlled in these locations.

### Hunting Statistics

- The 2023 season to date has recorded a harvest of five deer, but other harvest data is not readily available. The WRC reporting system was changed this year, and data is not as available for WRC staff to report. Last year (22-23 season) saw 10 deer and 21 bear harvested at Buckridge.
- Specialized roadside mulching equipment was utilized by WRC staff early 2023 to help control tree encroachment onto roads. Mr. Fleshman reported that 219 WRC staff hours were worked at Buckridge toward overall road maintenance. This includes the specialized mulching work, as well as routine mowing, grading, and gravel application.
- Gravel ordered by DCM this year was used to extend the open section of Buckridge Road by 2500 feet. WRC moved the interior gate to expand access for the newly graveled section. A new \$14,000 gravel order has been authorized for 2024 by DCM.

### Research Update

- The Scuppernon Water Study steering committee held a meeting May 2023, and a public input meeting October 2023. The public meeting had over 100 participants. Results from the public meeting are being compiled. A meeting to gather farmer-specific input regarding areas to investigate will likely occur this winter.
- Long-term vegetation change will be examined at Buckridge using new federal resilience funding. A researcher looked at vegetation change when Buckridge was first acquired, but no such formal examination has occurred since. The work will likely focus on Atlantic white cedar and low pocosin communities, but it's hoped funding will also examine shoreline erosion and an assessment of the 11,000 acres that have been added to Buckridge since the study 25 years ago. This work will be done to inform resilience planning at Buckridge and help understand whether forest stressors are primarily chronic or storm-induced.

### Member Roundtable

- Mrs. Stanton asked which chemicals different agencies were utilizing for alligatorweed control. Mr. Turner indicated that it depends on the setting, as a choice within an impoundment is different than along a canal. Imazapyr or glyphosate are widely used for above water applications during the growing season, but ProcellaCOR™ is very effective just below the water surface. ProcellaCOR™ is a bit more expensive, and still requires separate certification given its regulatory status.
- Mr. Schafale offered that he would very much like to consult with researchers on the vegetation change work at Buckridge. He has seen firsthand the effects of sea level rise at Buckridge and has concerns with how uncontrolled, invasive Phragmites might hamper the transition between natural communities.

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- Various members asked about a recent bear population study, but Mr. Turner indicated Buckridge wasn't one of the study locations.
- Staff asked Mr. Turner about recent ghost forest research at the Palmetto Peartree property. Mr. Turner and Mr. Ridgeway indicated that they rarely see the results of research on game land properties and are usually only consulted when a researcher first asks permission to access. Additional interaction with researchers occurs through their Research Director.
- Captain Stoop indicated there are few law enforcement officers available in the area at this time. While he investigated an ATV report at night behind a locked gate, no one was apprehended. There have been reports of conflicts between hunters and a local landowner on Post Office Road, but nothing substantial upon investigation. Staff asked that WRC enforcement keep a record of such conflicts, so that if management changes become necessary, frequency and severity of the issue is documented.

### **Public Comments**

No members of the public in attendance.

### **Review of Action Items**

Staff will continue development of the water access plan at Grapevine Landing, and will be in touch with pertinent LAC members regarding resilience research development.

## Appendix A: Reserve-wide Administrative Update:

### N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Fall 2023 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

#### Local Advisory Committee Membership

Thank you for your continued service to the reserve's Local Advisory Committees! A special thank you to members whose terms are expiring at the end of this year and did not reapply to serve – the reserve, as well as the division and department, are very appreciative of your service and input. Recommendations regarding community member/organization applications submitted earlier this year are in review for terms beginning in 2024.

#### Program Highlights

- This year the Coastal Training Program offered **workshops and partner engagement meetings** for decision-makers throughout coastal North Carolina. Multiple events served 533 professionals including real estate agents, local government staff, federal and state agency staff, and land use planners delivering science-based information to protect and manage NC's coastal resources.
- Students and educators gained **in-the-field experiences** at the Rachel Carson and Masonboro Island Reserves this year. Over 50 students participated in summer camps in partnership with the N.C. Maritime Museum and over 40 educators received free continuing education credits through the Teachers on the Estuary and Coastal Explorations programs. Students from Carteret, Onslow, and Craven Counties traversed the Rachel Carson Reserve and the Masonboro Island Explorers program hosted fifth grade students from New Hanover County in partnership with Masonboro.org and Carolina Ocean Studies.
- The reserve continues celebrating the [Year of the Trail](#) in 2023, as designated by the N.C. General Assembly. Guided hikes at the Kitty Hawk Woods and Bald Head Woods Reserves and events at the Currituck Banks and Bird Island Reserves provide opportunities for community members and partners to come together to experience these protected places while staff highlight the habitats and programs that occur at the sites. Thank you to the partners who helped make these a success! Additionally, interpretive signs were installed along trails at the Masonboro Island and Bird Island Reserves and along the Currituck Banks Reserve boardwalk highlighting the unique features of the sites, flora and fauna, ecological processes, and research conducted at the sites.
- The reserve's **Site Stewards Volunteer Program** significantly enhanced the program's capacity in managing the Currituck Banks, Kitty Hawk Woods, Buxton Woods, Rachel Carson, Masonboro Island, and Bird Island Reserves this year. Since January 2023, over 100 volunteers have logged more than 650 hours of stewardship work at reserve sites. Site Stewards observe and record data such as site condition, marine debris, infrastructure damage, and species observed in the field and report findings back to reserve staff. Thank you, volunteers!
- The **Scuppernong Water Study Engagement** Team, comprised of the Coastal Reserve, Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, The Nature Conservancy, and NC Sea Grant, hosted a public meeting in October to gather local knowledge on flooding to inform the development of the Scuppernong Regional Water Management Study and model funded by the Division of Water Resources; the engagement for the study is supported by NOAA Digital Coast Connects funding. Also included in the public meeting was an asset mapping exercise for Washington County and the Town of Creswell in conjunction with the division's Resilient Coastal Communities Program – these communities are just starting in Phase 1 & 2 of the program. This was done in partnership with SWCA Environmental Consultants, who has been paired with these communities by RCCP. Over 100 community members attended the meeting.
- The reserve introduced its "**Discover the NC Coastal Reserve**" tour last month which 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. The tour kicked off in June with a soft launch at our Currituck Banks Reserve with a successful grand reopening and dedication of the refurbished boardwalk (watch a [short video](#) of the event). Local Advisory Committee members will be invited to the site-based events so stay tuned for upcoming event information.

- The reserve is planning a **Research Symposium** for March 20-21, 2024 to highlight work conducted across reserve sites with posters and presentations from researchers including students, faculty, partner agencies, and staff. This will also be an opportunity for the research community to network and provide input on future research priorities.

### Research Fellowship Updates

- **2023 NC Coastal Research Fellow Announced**

Juan Zuluaga, a PhD student at University of North Carolina Wilmington is the 2023 North Carolina Coastal Research Fellow. Juan's research will look at how birds regulate their temperature through behaviors to cope with heat in the summer at the Bird Island 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. Learn more about this year's fellow and project [here](#).

- **NOAA Margaret A. Davidson Fellows**

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.

- Marae West, NC's first Davidson fellow, completed her fellowship this fall. Click [here](#) to learn more about Marae and her work on the impacts of sea level rise on wintering populations of saltmarsh and seaside sparrows at four reserve sites (Rachel Carson, Masonboro Island, Zeke's Island, and Bird Island Reserves). Congratulations to Marae!
- Daniel Bowling, a PhD student at North Carolina State University, is in the second year of his two-year fellowship and is continuing his work to assess the effectiveness of using remote sensing to monitor intertidal oyster habitat and develop a model to support future coast-wide population assessments and for Reserve sites to be able to quickly detect and respond to changes in habitat health. Daniel's fellowship will wrap up in 2024.
- NOAA is recruiting for the **2024-2026 Davidson fellow cohort**. More information on the fellowship, application process, and NC management needs is available [here](#). Applications are due **December 4, 2023**.

### Staffing News

- Abby Williams joined the Division in September as the Reserve's Resilience Specialist. Abby will develop resilience plans, secure funding for, and implement projects on the ground at the national reserve sites to increase habitat resilience to ensure the sites continue to provide ecological services and protective services to the communities where they are located. Abby comes to us from the Division of Marine Fisheries where she served as the Cultch Planting Biologist and is working at our Beaufort office. This is a new time-limited position that is funded by capacity building funding provided by NOAA to the reserve through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

### Upcoming Student Opportunities

Application periods for Summer 2024 student opportunities in the Northern Sites and Beaufort offices are currently open.

- Three **State of NC Internship** opportunities are available at the Beaufort office for summer 2024. Applications are due **January 8, 2024**, and more details will be available on the reserve’s website. The opportunities are focused on summer educational programming, training and stewardship, and research.
- The Friends of the Reserve (FOR) is requesting applications for the **2024 NC Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship**. 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. The 2024 intern will work with staff on stewardship activities at the northern sites (Currituck Banks, Kitty Hawk Woods, and Buxton Woods Reserves) and will be based out of the Northern Sites Office at the National Park Service headquarters in Manteo. More details are available on FOR’s website [here](#) and the deadline for submitting applications is **January 19, 2024**. 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.

Federal Budget

- The budget table below is a summary of the status of the federal budget\* for fiscal years 2020-2024 as it relates to the N.C. Reserve. Congress has not passed the FY2024 federal budget, and the federal government is operating under a continuing resolution based on FY2023 allocations until January 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 President’s Request	FY2024 House Mark	FY2024 Senate Chair Mark
NERRS Operations	\$27.5M	\$28.5M	\$29.7M	\$32.5M	\$32.5M	\$29.7M	\$33.3M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$6.5M	\$8.5M	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$8.5M
CZM Grants	\$77M	\$78.5 M	\$79M	\$81.5M	\$78.5M	TBD	TBD

\* 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.