



**Emily and Richardson Preyer Buckridge Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, 19 November 2024, 10:00am-11:30pm**

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, John Beardsley	Yes
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership, Jimmy Johnson	Yes
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	

Reserve-wide Updates (Woody Webster)

The Reserve-wide Update was shared with committee members before the meeting via email. Staff made note of the upcoming Discover the Reserve event for Kitty Hawk Woods and the promotion of Paula Gillikin to Stewardship Coordinator. The Update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

Site Update (Woody Webster)

Property Updates

- The NC Division of Water Resources (NCDWR) continues to treat certain riverside portions of Buckridge for alligatorweed and Phragmites through a 50% cost-share agreement. Last year’s invoice, received annually in January, came to \$1,042.03.
- Funds were sought December 2023 for construction of a public water access at Grapevine Landing at Buckridge. While that request was denied, in part due to pressing Departmental priorities, a second request was made this year. The Facilities Division will act as lead throughout the construction process and have ranked this project as the highest priority for the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ).

Staff presented the project to the Office of State Budget and Management on November 5, with an expected decision prior to year-end.

- This year again saw only a single commercial fishing boat working out of Buckridge on a regular basis. Other crabbers utilized the location sporadically.
- NC Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) staff reported a collapsing culvert last year at the entrance of Eastern Road at Buckridge. DCM purchased a replacement culvert and fill material for the repair, and WRC removed the old culvert and installed its replacement. Only re-installation of the beaver fencing at this location remains.

Hunting

- The 2023-24 season recorded a harvest of eight deer and 14 bear. The 2024-25 season has seen three deer and 15 bear harvested to date. Lt. Beardsley indicated the opening of bear season at Buckridge was very crowded this year, with an officer stationed on site. Staff noted similar patterns between deer harvest at Buxton Woods and Buckridge Reserve sites, and that there is no concern about overharvesting. WRC staff noted the differences between these two game lands, but also that one year of poor harvest numbers did have high levels of rainfall, potentially restricting access.
- The Division of Coastal Management (DCM) purchased \$14,000 of gravel this year, through an agreement with the NC Department of Transportation. WRC staff used this gravel to extend improvements to the road surface along southern Buckridge Road, while holding back a portion of gravel for post-season repairs.
- Staff noted an increase in gate lock theft at Buckridge, with three locks on interior gates missing this season so far. Two disappeared just prior to bear season, with a third WRC lock vanishing during the bear season.
- The game land agreement between DCM and WRC covering Buckridge and Buxton Woods has been sent to WRC for signature. A portion of the Woodley Tract and all of the Primland Tract, relatively recent acquisitions at Buckridge, were added to the agreement at the request of WRC.

Research Update

- The Reserve Research Coordinator and Buckridge Site Manager met with Susan Cohen and her team with the UNC Institute of the Environment in late July for a site visit. Staff plan to work with this team to help quantify current habitat conditions at Buckridge and compare them to previously mapped conditions from 1999. This work will also be the initial comprehensive condition assessment for some 11,000 acres that have been added to Buckridge since 1999. It's hoped that measures of shoreline erosion and habitat flux will benefit future restoration action at Buckridge and at nearby National Wildlife Refuges.
- Staff participated in a regional red-cockaded woodpecker meeting with multiple conservation agencies on September 20 at the Eastern 4-H Center. There were many discussions regarding the current status of the local population, and the level of management it requires. Subsequent to this meeting, the status of the red-cockaded woodpecker was downgraded from endangered to threatened, indicating improvement in overall species health.
- The Scuppernong Water Study's engineering report should be ready by this winter. Planned sharing of results will follow, beginning with steering committee members. The engagement committee staffed a booth at the Scuppernong River festival again this year and led a 90-minute presentation at last week's Sea Grant Coastal Conference in New Bern. Audubon staff were added to the river festival booth as a means to begin introducing the public to the multiple projects occurring simultaneously in the area.

Member Roundtable

- Mr. Turner asked what chemicals and concentrations NCDWR uses for Buckridge. Staff indicated that a mixture of imazapyr and glyphosate is typical but are unaware of the mixture's strength. Staff indicated they will reach out to NCDWR and pass the information to Mr. Turner. Mrs. Stanton indicated that a recent contractor's use of ProcellaCOR™ is very effective in Refuge canals.
- Mr. Turner shared that use of e-bikes on game lands are illegal, and Lt. Beardsley echoed that information. WRC language prohibits anything motorized, and they include e-bikes in that category.
- Mr. Turner admitted that WRC game land numbers, as shown during the meeting, can be inaccurate. Some respondents incorrectly identify their location, and the system itself has misplaced reports he personally entered.
- Mr. Schafale asked to be included in future discussion with the UNC research group, especially since NCNHP will soon be launching a peatland survey and would be very interested in the researchers' planned methodology.
- Mr. Schafale also shared that NC Natural Heritage Program has recently hired additional staff, including a new field biologist for this area, and a new pollinator biologist for the entire state.
- Mr. Ridgeway described plans to post boundary signs at the corner of the New Lake Game Land at Davis Canal Road while trying to avoid antagonizing nearby private property owners. Mr. Turner shared that he believes WRC owns half of Davis Canal Road, but is unable to maintain it currently.
- Mr. Ridgeway suggested that staff investigate a self-regulating agreement with commercial fishermen in the future at Grapevine Landing. An association of commercial fishermen govern the slips and fees at WRC's Manns Harbor location. He also offered that there are grants that would support commercial fishing access infrastructure, and Mr. Johnson shared that living shoreline funding could be available through recent federal funds the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership has been given. Mr. Ridgeway further agreed to share agreements between such fishermen associations and WRC with staff.
- Mr. Ridgeway said that while he's been short-staffed recently, they have been able to hire new positions, but two current staff members would soon be retiring.
- Mr. Turner asked Mr. Clegg about upcoming activities with the planned Alligator River Bridge replacement at Highway 64. Mr. Clegg shared what he knows of the planned alignment changes, and that the county hopes to have some input on the final land use along the bridge's western landfall. Under the current schedule, construction should begin in 2025.
- Mr. Johnson stated that he would be retiring at the end of this year. Staff inquired about his replacement, and he indicated that it is uncertain whether his position will remain local or be moved to Raleigh. He also stated he would remain in the area after retirement, and available for input.
- Lt. Beardsley stated that new officers would soon be hired for Washington County and a portion of Hyde County, but it's uncertain when a replacement officer for Tyrrell County would become available. WRC hopes to recruit locally, but their specialized training school takes time. He also stated that Brandon Wilkins is the new area sergeant and will likely attend subsequent LAC meetings.
- Mr. Clegg shared that the Scuppernon Study group's efforts have been good so far, though unfortunately confusion over the number of projects and entities operating in this area remain. He also shared that while the county may not comment on every project that comes through, agencies should not mistake that for a lack of interest. He stated that they would very much like to remain in the loop, especially since so many projects moving forward will have a "generational impact."

Public Comments

No members of the public in attendance.

Review of Action Items

Staff will contact NCDWR on behalf of WRC's alligatorweed control efforts. LAC will be informed if funding is awarded for the water access plan at Grapevine Landing, and will be in touch with pertinent LAC members regarding research progress.

Appendix A: Reserve-wide Administrative Update:

N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Fall 2024 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

Program Highlights

- Reserve **summer camps** were another success this summer. Rising first through tenth graders learned about estuaries and experienced estuarine habitats and plants and animals through hands-on experiences at the Rachel Carson Reserve and in the laboratory to increase understanding and appreciation of coastal resources. Favorite activities include the reserve field trip and squid dissection. Camps are conducted in partnership with the NC Maritime Museum in Beaufort.
- Two thousand two hundred seventy-two students have participated in **field trips** to the Rachel Carson and Masonboro Island Reserves so far this year. Students from Carteret, Onslow, and Craven Counties traversed the Rachel Carson Reserve and the Masonboro Island Explorers program is hosting fifth grade students from nearby counties at the Masonboro Island Reserve in partnership with Masonboro.org and Carolina Ocean Studies.
- The Coastal Training Program offered **workshops and partner engagement meetings** for decision-makers throughout coastal North Carolina this year. Thirteen events served 591 professionals including real estate agents, local government staff, federal and state agency staff, and land use planners delivering science-based information and technical assistance to protect and manage NC's coastal resources.
- The reserve hosted a **Research Symposium** May 8-9, 2024 in Beaufort to highlight work conducted across the reserve sites and gather input on research priorities to inform future work and partnerships. The event kicked off with a field trip to the Rachel Carson Reserve and poster reception with 11 posters at the NC Maritime Museum on May 8 followed by research presentations and breakout group discussions on May 9 focused on water quality, coastal and estuarine ecosystem protection, and coastal habitat resilience. Approximately 65 researchers, students, and resource managers attended. A summary of the symposium will be released shortly.
- The reserve hosted its third stop on the "**Discover the NC Coastal Reserve**" tour at the Rachel Carson Reserve May 17, 2024. The tour 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. Planning is underway for the fourth tour stop at the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve. Explore the [Discover the NC Coastal Reserve's Virtual Passport](#) and enjoy short videos from the tour events. Local Advisory Committee members will be invited to the site-based events so stay tuned for upcoming event information.
- The reserve celebrated **National Estuaries Week** September 21-28, 2024 by hosting and participating in a variety of activities in tribute to NC's estuaries; thank you to all who came out to help us celebrate estuaries!
 - A *bioblitz* was held at Masonboro Island, Kitty Hawk Woods, and Rachel Carson Reserves to encourage visitors to photograph flora and fauna at the sites and upload them to iNaturalist. Documentation of species at reserve sites contributes to natural occurrence records and provides baseline data for existing species.
 - On September 28, reserve staff hosted a booth at the *Olde Beaufort Farmers Market* in Beaufort and also hosted a booth at *Femme in STEM at the NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher*. *Femme in STEM* showcases the variety of STEM fields, provides an opportunity to interact with STEM professionals, and celebrates women in working in these fields.
 - The reserve hosted a *marsh cleanup* with volunteers in Kitty Hawk Bay, part of the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve.

Student Internships

- The reserve had a fantastic group of interns this summer in Manteo, Beaufort, and Wilmington. The students worked on a range of stewardship and education projects including monitoring wildlife use of the Carrot Island living shoreline, counting live and dead oysters in the field and in drone photos and comparing accuracy of counts, leading student summer camp activities, developing interpretive signage, and monitoring fish, turtle, and shorebird populations. These invaluable experiences give the students hands-on experience in research, education and stewardship fields and help inform their future career paths. Thank you to Friends of the Reserve, the N.C. Internship Program, and UNCW for their support and partnership for the internships.
- Student opportunities for summer 2025 in our Manteo, Beaufort, and Wilmington offices will be announced soon on our website.

Research Fellowship Updates

- **2024 NC Coastal Research Fellow**
Grace Loonam, a MS student at East Carolina University is the 2024 North Carolina Coastal Research Fellow. Grace's research will investigate changes in habitat complexity and community assembly in restored versus natural oyster reefs at the Rachel Carson 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.
- **NOAA Margaret A. Davidson Fellow 2024-2026 Fellow**
Mina Surprenant, a PhD student at the University of North Carolina Wilmington is the 2024-2026 Davidson fellow at the NC Reserve. Mina will evaluate salt marsh responses to sea-level rise at the Masonboro Island and Zeke's Island Reserves by integrating drone technology data with computational models to help predict how marshes adapt to changing sea levels. 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.

Staffing News and Accolades

- **Paula Gillikin** was recently promoted to serve as the reserve's Stewardship Coordinator. Paula has worked with the reserve's stewardship team for the past 17 years, serving the past 12 years as the Central Sites Manager for the Rachel Carson and Permuda Island Reserves. She has a Bachelor's degree in Biology and Environmental Science from UNC Wilmington and a Master's degree in Animals and Public Policy from Tufts University. Paula has also served in leadership roles for the state's work on marine debris and abandoned and derelict vessels. She will continue working from our Beaufort office. Congratulations Paula!
- **Kerryanne Newman** joined the reserve research team this summer and is working on research and monitoring projects at the reserve sites and supporting GIS needs for the program. She recently completed her master's degree in marine biology at the College of Charleston and works at our Beaufort office.
- The reserve's recently released film "Secrets of the Estuary" took home two National Estuarine Research Reserve Association FilmFest awards - the Egret Award for Best Scenery and the Tidal Award for Estuary Ambassador! Watch the film [here](#) and congratulations to reserve filmmakers Communications Specialist **Jillian Daly** and Research Coordinator **Justin Ridge**.
- The Carrot Island Living Shoreline Team received a Department of Environmental Quality Team Achievement Award for its work across divisions to complete the living shoreline at the Rachel Carson Reserve in partnership with Carteret County and Moffatt & Nichol. Division of Coastal Management team members include **reserve staff Paula Gillikin, Justin Ridge, Abby**

Williams, and Rebecca Ellin, and regulatory staff Gregg Bodnar and Wayne Hall. Their teamwork ensured the project was completed on time, met all requirements, and will serve as a model for future resilience strategies in NC.

Federal Budget

- The budget table below is a summary of the status of the federal budget* for fiscal years 2020-2025 as it relates to the NC Reserve. Congress has not passed the FY2025 federal budget, and the federal government is operating under a continuing resolution based on FY2024 allocations until December 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 Enacted	FY2025 President's Request	FY2025 House Mark	FY2025 Senate Mark
NERRS Operations	\$27.5M	\$28.5M	\$29.7M	\$32.5M	\$33.3M	\$32.5M	\$32.5M	\$34M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$6.5M	\$8.5M	\$8.5M	\$3M	\$10M	\$8.5M
CZM Grants	\$77M	\$78.5 M	\$79M	\$81.5M	\$81.5M	\$81.5M	\$80M	\$83M

* 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.