



Local Advisory Committee Meeting
Buxton Woods Coastal Reserve

April 18, 2024
Fessenden Center
46830 NC-12, Buxton, NC 27920

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Cape Hatteras National Seashore, Mike Henry	N
UNC Coastal Studies Institute, John McCord	N
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, Anna Barbosa	Y
N.C. Natural Heritage Program, Scott Pohlman	N
Dare County Sheriff's Office, Doug Oberbeck	Y
Dare County Government, Danny Couch	N
N.C. Forest Service, Kyle Breslin	Y
N.C. Forest Service, John Cook	N
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Karen Lebing	Y
Russ Kiddy	N
Jacqueline Thomas	Y
Alyson Flynn	Y
Harvey Scarborough, Jr.	N
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, DCM, Northern Sites Manager	

Reserve-wide Update

Please see appendix for complete Reserve-wide updates

Site Updates (Erik Alnes)

- *Hunting Report*

N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) reported harvest of six bucks, zero button bucks, and zero does for the Buxton Woods Reserve this hunting season. During the season, there was some negative interaction between hunters and other users of the site, specifically horseback riders on trails designated for foot traffic only. Signage was updated to keep horses off the trails, and N.C. Coastal Reserve (NCCR) staff worked with WRC to brainstorm solutions for the future.

- *Site Misuse*

Site misuse has increased since winter of 2023. There was an increase in horses on trails designated for foot traffic only. This use is causing damage to the trails and wetlands, and increased visitor conflict. Staff installed additional signage to clarify where horses can ride, but signage is often shot or torn down. Staff met with WRC staff to identify solutions. WRC recommended a rule change preventing horses from accessing pedestrian trails, which the LAC supports. This change will give WRC enforcement power to prevent misuse. NCCR staff will work with WRC staff to get the rule in effect.

Barbosa (WRC) further explained the rule change. The next WRC Commission rule review is scheduled for July if the rule change request was submitted to be implemented for 2026. There is precedence for the rule, as there are several gamelands in the state with similar rules. Thomas asked if equestrian groups would be notified. Barbosa explained that it would be published in the WRC hunters digest, and the first year of its implementation would be mostly education through onsite communication and warnings.

There has also been an increase in social trails; trails coming off private property onto the reserve. One trail identified had three walkovers installed from private property onto the reserve trail system for horses. NCCR staff worked with the Dare County Sheriff's Office to have the landowner remove the walkovers and rehabilitate the disturbed area. NCCR staff thank the Sheriffs Office for their assistance.

Last, there has been an increase in dumping on the reserve. Additional "No Dumping" signage was installed at the site, but is often shot or torn down. A pile of yard waste was dumped at the Lookout Loop trailhead and set on fire. Luckily, an off duty NCCR staff member was at the site and suppressed the fire. Additional signage and monitoring were implemented at the site to prevent this illegal activity.

- *Fire Management Update*

NCCR staff met on site with N.C. Forest Service (NCFS) ranger from Dare County Ranger to familiarize him with the fire management plan and potential fire mitigation project areas. Staff also ensured NCFS had keys to gates for fire access. The LAC discussed opportunities for FireWise program outreach in communities surrounding Buxton Woods. NCCR staff continues to share plans with National Park Service (NPS) staff to identify areas of overlap between fire

management activities. Oberbeck noted that fuel loading around homes and increased dumping may be in part due to the few hours the dump on Hatteras is open. Alnes mentioned FireWise may be of assistance to communities, and would be open to working with NCFS and NPS if there was community interest. Thomas asked how to find information on the program, and Alnes pointed her to <https://www.nfpa.org/education-and-research/wildfire/firewise-usa>.

- *2024 N.C. Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship Update*

The Northern Sites will host an intern for ten weeks in the summer of 2024. Haley Jenkins, a senior from N.C. State University majoring in Sustainable Materials and Technology, with minors in Spanish and Business Administration, will begin working with the reserve in June. Staff are excited to have her onboard, and appreciate the support through the Friends of the Reserve (FOR) board to sponsor this paid internship.

- *Northern Sites Update*

There has been an increase in use of the Northern Sites. Trail counters that have been in place for a calendar year show an 80% increase trail use at the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve. Additionally, hunter authorizations, written for Kitty Hawk Woods and Currituck Banks Reserve hunters totaled 130 this year, which is up 40% from the 85 written in 2023.

There were eight research permits administered in 2023, including four for Buxton Woods Reserve. These studies include bat diversity, herpetology diversity, microhabitat differentiation in *Iudwigia*, and biodiversity of natural heritage sites for Buxton Woods. NCCR staff will continue the herpetology study through this spring with Braswell and Scarboro.

Staff have been working to update brochures for all Northern Sites. Updates include new maps and updating rare species found on the site. As of this meeting, the brochures were under final review, and should be sent to print in May. Staff hope to have new brochures by the end of summer.

Several projects have been ongoing at the Northern Sites, including the removal of seven abandoned structures in Kitty Hawk Woods. Work was nearly complete, and staff indicated they were rehabilitating the tract with 200 seedlings of water oak and live oak to be replanted in the disturbed area. A fence was also constructed around the cemetery on the site. Staff are excited to return this tract back to its natural state.

For 2023, volunteers logged 35 hours of work on the Northern Sites. Currently there are five active volunteers, including one that specifically helps in Buxton Woods. Staff also worked with a volunteer group from Appalachian State University over spring break, who assisted staff with repainting the Currituck Banks parking lot and trail maintenance at the site. Staff extend a huge thank you for all volunteer help, and hope to continue to work with them through 2024.

Member Roundtable

Karen Lebing shared the N.C. Bird Atlas work was still ongoing. This five-year project divided N.C. into blocks where volunteers and professionals can log what birds they are seeing where. Some of the priority tracts rest on the Buxton Woods Reserve.

Alyson Flynn gave an update from the Coastal Federation, who is focusing on policy and advocacy support for the cleanup of petroleum at nearby Buxton Beach.

Anna Barbosa gave an update from WRC, and noted they have several vacancies in the area they are looking to fill, including an officer position on Hatteras Island.

Kyle Breslin with the NCFS stated he was happy to get familiarized with Buxton Woods during the site visit and looks forward to working with staff to help implement pre-suppression fire management projects on the site.

Final Comments, Review of Action Items, and Wrap-up

- Alnes will follow up with NPS and NCFS regarding fire management work in Buxton Woods.
- Alnes will review language for the WRC rule change with his supervisor and submit it back to Barbosa, hopefully in time for the July meeting.
- Alnes will continue to work with Scarboro and Braswell to complete the herpetology study this spring.

Adjourn