



Local Advisory Committee Meeting
Currituck Banks Coastal Reserve

April 30, 2021 - 1030
Virtual via WebEx with a call-in option

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Currituck County Planning Department, Jennie Turner	Y
Currituck County Sheriff's Office, Terrence Sutton	N
Currituck National Wildlife Refuge, Mike Hoff	N
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Jarrett Culbreath	N
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, OBX Center for Wildlife, Sharon Meade	N
The Nature Conservancy, Aaron McCall	Y
APNEP, Jimmy Johnson	Y
NHP, Nathan Shepard	Y
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Brett Harrison	N
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, DCM, Northern Sites Manager	
Rebecca Ellin, DCM, Reserve Program Manager	
Christy Simmons, DCM, PIO	
Cat Bowler, Audubon Society	
Ken Elliot, Public	

Reserve-wide Program Business (Rebecca Ellin)

The Reserve-wide Update was shared with committee members before the meeting via email. Ms. Ellin reviewed highlights from the document, which is included in its entirety in Appendix A.

Currituck Banks Reserve Business (Erik Alnes)

- *Currituck Sound Marsh Resilience Project – Cat Bowler*

Cat Bowler reviewed the Currituck Sound Marsh Resilience Project. In 2019, a marsh vulnerability study was conducted to assess areas of marsh that would benefit from restoration. Through stakeholder engagement and assessment tools, the group identified 3 main areas to focus restoration efforts. The group will work on completing 60% of engineering designs by September of 2021, including the use of coir logs and Christmas trees to protect marsh from high wave energy. They will continue working on baseline monitoring, working with ECSU's drone monitoring program, and conduct secretive marsh bird surveys. Also, they will continue to seek additional funding for permitting, implementation, and monitoring of this project.

- *Thorny Olive Management*

The Currituck Banks Reserve has a population of invasive olive that is encroaching the trail leading from the cattle guard to the beach. Reserve staff cut back some of the olive and used a hack and squirt method to apply glyphosate to the plants. This will continuously be monitored. Further treatment will be assessed this fall and winter.

- *Hunting Update*

124 hunters registered to hunt in Currituck Banks and Kitty Hawk Woods Coastal Reserves this season. Of the 7 hunters that voluntarily reported, no reports were submitted for Currituck Banks Reserve.

- *Currituck Banks Reserve Boardwalk Project Update*

Reserve staff have been working closely with NC DEQ's Facilities Team to begin work on this project, funded by the Division of Coastal Management's Public Access Program. The project will re-surface the boardwalk and replace any pilings of concern. It is scheduled to go out to bid in October 2021 and should be completed by spring of 2022. The Reserve will be receiving grant funding from NOAA to update the interpretive signs along the boardwalk.

- *NC Coastal Federation's Abandoned Vessel Removal Project*

An abandoned vessel in Ship's Bay, within the Currituck Banks Reserve boundary, is included to be removed in this project. Approximately 30 vessels are expected to be removed from Dare and Currituck Counties. The ADV removal is expected to begin in early-mid May. When the tentative schedule is set with the contractor, NCCF will share information with local media outlets. The Reserve will also be updating the County and citizens through our social media platforms

Roundtable Discussion (Staff response in italics)

- Nathan Shepard thought Cat's presentation was very informative and appreciated her taking the time to share her information.

- Jimmy Johnson stated that APNEP is working closely with the Currituck Sound Coalition and the wetland subgroup in conjunction with Cat Bowler's project. Also, he mentioned the CHPP amendment with wetlands is one of the top 5 priority areas, and the anticipated completion date of the amendment to the CHPP is the fall of 2021.
- Aaron McCall shared that The Nature Conservancy has been managing invasive olive species on their properties through hack and squirt techniques as well as manual removal in the winter.
- Jennie Turner inquired if the revised rules addressed the issue of parking at Currituck Banks Reserve. *Rebecca Ellin said the new rules included language to address the parking issue.* Turner offered the County's support to provide outreach to the public. This includes the use of SAFE Corolla, a tool to alert individuals signed up for notifications through Currituck Alerts.

Public Comments

- Ken Elliot stated that he was contemplating filling out the LAC member application. He also shared that he was very interested in learning more about living shorelines through the training discussed in the Reserve-wide Update. Last, he shared that he has observed an increase in milfoil SAV throughout the Currituck sound.

Final comments, Action Items, and Wrap-up

- Erik Alnes will communicate with Jennie Turner regarding dune access along the Reserve boundary and the possible utilization of Currituck Alerts for public outreach.
- Reserve staff will follow-up with Cat Bowler regarding the Marsh Resilience Project.
- Reserve staff will provide updates to the LAC, County, and public regarding the timeline of the boardwalk project and ADV removal in the Currituck Banks Reserve.
- Erik Alnes will send Jennie Turner the findings from the UNCW access study summary.

Adjourn

Appendix A

N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Spring 2021 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

COVID-19 Update

Below is a summary of how the Reserve is working during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Staff continue to telework and all offices remain closed to visitors.
- All Reserve sites are open to visitors. The Reserve will continue to closely monitor state and local COVID-19 guidelines and directives and encourage Reserve visitors to comply with these measures to protect themselves and their communities; current guidelines and directives are located [here](#).
- All in-person trainings and public programming remain canceled; education and training staff are conducting virtual programming as well as assisting partners with virtual meeting support.
- Research and stewardship work is continuing at the sites, although activities are more limited as they must meet social distancing requirements.

Local Advisory Committee Member Application Period – April 5-May 5, 2021

Community members are needed to serve on local advisory committees for each of the Coastal Reserve's ten sites. Community members with knowledge and experience of relevant topical areas and an interest in serving as a local advisory committee member are encouraged to consider applying. More information about the application period and how to apply is located on the Reserve's website [here](#).

Periodic Rules Review

The Rules Review Commission approved a readoption timeline of November 30, 2021 for Coastal Reserve rules (15A NCAC 07O) as part of the Legislative Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process (G.S. 150B-21.3A). The required fiscal analysis for the proposed rule amendments is under review.

N.C. NERR Federal Program Evaluation

NOAA conducts periodic evaluations of coastal management programs and National Estuarine Research Reserves as required by the federal Coastal Zone Management Act. The virtual site visit for NOAA's evaluation of the N.C. coastal management program and N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve took place the week of October 5, 2020 with a public meeting for both programs held on October 7. Final findings were provided by NOAA to the Department of Environmental Quality in March 2021; NOAA concluded that the department is adhering to the programmatic requirements of the federal Coastal Zone Management Act in implementing both of the programs. The findings include a number of accomplishments and four recommendations, with no required actions.

Program Highlights

- **Hurricane Florence Marine Debris and Vessel Clean-Up:** The Division of Coastal Management received \$1,873,764 from the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Emergency Watershed Protection program, matched by \$543,120 in State funds to remove debris and abandoned vessels resulting from Hurricane Florence along North Carolina's coastline from Brunswick through Carteret, including Craven and Pamlico Counties. Four Reserve sites (Zeke's Island, Masonboro Island, Permuda Island, and Rachel Carson) benefited from the project with a total of 4 vessels and 371,460 pounds of debris being removed by N.C. Coastal Federation contractors. The total for all removals along the coast to date is 7 vessels and 691,260 pounds of debris.

- **Spring Virtual Field Trips:** Education Coordinator Lori Davis is bringing the Rachel Carson Reserve to the classroom with virtual field trips to the site in lieu of in-person trips as a result of the pandemic. Fifteen classes are scheduled to learn about estuaries and see sand, mud, salt marsh cordgrass, fiddler crabs and pickleweed virtually.
- **Living shorelines training for marine construction professionals:** To increase the knowledge of living shoreline construction practices among marine contractors, engineers, environmental consultants, and regulators, the Reserve, North Carolina Coastal Federation, and North Carolina Sea Grant are partnering to offer a new training course. This course will focus on living shoreline design for typical structures in residential settings along North Carolina's estuarine shorelines. The training combines three online classroom sessions with on-the-ground field training. The online classroom sessions will be held April-May 2021 with field trips in May or June as COVID-safety guidelines and directives allow.
- **7th Annual Terrapin Tally:** The Terrapin Tally is a citizen science project conducted in partnership with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission to measure the status of diamondback terrapin populations. Volunteers work in pairs to conduct headcount surveys on specific kayak routes to document diamondback terrapin sightings. This volunteer opportunity is compatible with current COVID-19 safety guidance and Governor Cooper's executive orders and can be completed by members of the same household or while maintaining appropriate social distancing in an outdoor setting. For the 7th season of the Terrapin Tally, the project is expanding to include numerous federal, state, and local partners with the addition of ten sites, spanning the coast from Carteret to Brunswick County. The 2021 Terrapin Tally will be conducted April 28-May 16 and sites include Cape Lookout National Seashore, Rachel Carson Reserve, Pine Knoll Shores, Hammocks Beach State Park, Lea Hutaff Island, Masonboro Island Reserve, Carolina Beach State Park, Ft. Fisher State Recreation Area, Zeke's Island Reserve, Bald Head Island, and Bird Island Reserve.
- **iNaturalist:** Help us document plants and animals on the Reserve sites using the free app, iNaturalist, and start submitting your pictures while visiting the Reserve sites. You can explore other locations and see what others have found while visiting, as well.

Friends of the Reserve –N.C. Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship Award and New Website

Friends of the Reserve, or 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.

FOR is sponsoring a new **N.C. Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship Award** to encourage promising and talented students from traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations to pursue study and careers in coastal and estuarine science. **Juanita Gonzalez** was selected as the first Internship Award recipient and will be working with Reserve staff at the Masonboro Island Reserve this summer. Juanita is a sophomore at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, double majoring in environmental studies and biology. Thank you to Friends of the Reserve for its support of this award program, and congratulations and welcome to Juanita!

FOR also [recently launched a new website](#) with assistance from the National Estuarine Research Reserve Association; explore the website to learn more about the organization and its work.

Staffing News

Erik Alnes joined the Reserve in February as the Northern Sites Manager. Erik comes to us from the NC Forest Service where he worked for the past 2 years as the Currituck County Ranger. Prior to that, Erik worked for the US Forest Service on the Lewis and Clark Hotshot Crew in Montana. He has a Bachelor's degree in Resource Conservation from The University of Montana and a Master's degree in Resource Conservation, specializing in Natural Resources Policy, also from The University of Montana. Welcome to Erik!

Federal Budget

The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget* for fiscal years 17, 18, 19, 20, and 21 as it relates to the Coastal Reserve.

Federal Budget Lines	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2017	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2018	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2019	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2020	FY2021 Enacted (Consolidated Appropriations Act)
NERRS Operations	\$23.5 M	\$25 M	\$27M	\$27.5 M	\$28.5 M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$1.7M	\$1.7M	\$1.9M	\$4.5M	\$4.5M
CZM Grants	\$70 M	\$75 M	\$75.5M	\$77 M	\$78.5 M

- 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.

* 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.