



Local Advisory Committee Meeting
Kitty Hawk Woods Coastal Reserve

December 14, 2023 - 2:00 p.m.
Kitty Hawk Town Hall
101 Veterans Memorial Dr, Kitty Hawk, NC 27949

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
The Nature Conservancy, Aaron McCall	Y
UNC Coastal Studies Institute (CSI), John McCord	N
Town of Kitty Hawk Administration, Melody Clopton	Y
NC Forest Service, John Cook	N
Town of Kitty Hawk Police, James Helms	Y
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Alex McPhail	N
Natural Heritage Program, Misty Buchanan	N
Town of Kitty Hawk Police, Mike Palkivics	Y
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Dana Thomason	N
Jeff Pruitt	Y
Clifton Perry	Y
Gary Perry	N
Paul Henriques	Y
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, NCCR, Northern Sites Manager	
Steve Jarvis, NCCR, Northern Sites Stewardship Assistance	
Woody Webster, NCCR, Buckridge Manager	
Paula Gillikin, NCCR, Central Sites Manager	
Mike Tally, Kitty Hawk Fire Department	

Reserve-wide Updates

Please see appendix for complete Reserve-wide updates

Site Updates (Erik Alnes)

- *Infrastructure Updates*

In line with recommendations from the N.C. Department of Transportation (DOT) bridge inspection report, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) facilities staff hired a contractor to replace the failing roof on the Covered Bridge. Work was completed in five days in October and included the removal of shake shingles and nails, replacing with new shingles.

Plans are also moving forward with the removal of the abandoned structures on the Hard Tract. On December 11, a mandatory pre-construction meeting was held, and several contractors toured the site with staff. The project will be open to bid through January, and the State hopes to hire a contractor by February 2024, with work commencing in late February to early March. Rehabilitation of the site will include re-grading and planting of native hardwood species. N.C. Coastal Reserve (NCCR) staff have purchased trees and hope to complete planting by the end of March.

- Mr. McCall asked about the footprint of the Hard Tract structure removal. Staff responded that it would be roughly 0.25 acres with a quarter-mile dirt road used for access from the Dominion right-of-way.
- Mr. Perry added that there were two access roads in that area, and staff indicated this was one of the existing roadbeds that would need work to be used by the demolition contractor.
- Lieutenant Helms asked if the contractor would come from the Eckner street access, and staff affirmed.

- *Visitor Use Study*

To better understand how and when visitors access the Reserve, what activities visitors engage in on the site, and how visitors perceive access and trail conditions on the Reserve property, staff conducted a Visitor Use Study from April to May of 2023. Results of this study were sent to LAC members and were briefly reviewed by Mr. Alnes. Data not included in the report were the physical trail counter numbers that have been collected by staff throughout the year. Mr. Alnes reviewed the seasonality of visitation between different Reserve sites, and overall numbers of visitors by trailhead. The most popular trailhead is the Connector Trail, with the trail counter being triggered 10-20 times per day, increasing seasonally as cooler weather moved in. The physical data mirrored qualitative data, including feedback supporting parking and facilities.

- *Recent Community Events*

Staff reviewed the community events that the NCCR had been involved in since the previous LAC meeting. First, to celebrate the Year of the Trail, staff held a Howl-oween hike on Halloween eve. Over 40 individuals registered for the event in four days, and staff had to cap registration. Roughly 20 participants showed up for a guided evening hike along the Connector and Birch lane trails, learning about the flora, fauna, and rare ecosystems the Reserve protects. Due to the significant interest in this event, staff plan to hold similar events in the future. Second, staff highlighted an estuary cleanup that occurred on the Reserve marsh parcels in Kitty Hawk Bay. Staff and a volunteer filled up a 19-foot skiff with derelict crab pots, bottles, buoys, fiberglass, and other litter, in celebration of National Estuaries Week. Last, staff highlighted middle school education and outreach

that was conducted in Currituck County middle schools. Mr. Alnes offered to participate in similar outreach events in Dare County schools.

- Town Manager Clopton offered to advertise any future events through the Town's email lists.
- *2024 N.C. Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship*

To encourage promising and talented students from traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations to pursue study and careers centered in coastal and estuarine sciences, the N.C. Coastal Reserve and the Friends of the Reserve created a funded summer internship program. The N.C. Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship will assist with stewardship activities at the northern sites (Currituck Banks, Kitty Hawk Woods, and Buxton Woods Reserves), working out of the Manteo office in the summer of 2024.

The award will consist of a travel/housing stipend of \$1500 and a paid summer internship consisting of 30 hours/week for 10 weeks at \$15.00/hour. Staff encouraged LAC members to share the opportunity with candidates that may be interested in working with the Reserve. Applications for the 2024 are due January 19, 2024 (11:59 pm). Further information can be found on the Friends of the Reserve website (for-nc.org/intern).

- *Reconnection of Fire Access Road Trail*

Staff reviewed the recently constructed Fire Access Road connecting from Otila Way to S. Covered Bridge Road. It was noted that the footprint of the project overtook a small hiking path that connected trails from Ridge Road to S. Covered Bridge Road. Staff met with Mr. Henriques and identified suitable high ground to reconnect the old trail, adjacent to the Fire Access Road. Staff plan to reconnect the trail after hunting season concludes.

Member Roundtable

Mr. McCall praised the program for good work all around. Mr. Henriques stated he had no comments from himself or the Recreation Committee. Several other members also had nothing to add.

Mr. Pruitt voiced that he is glad the Hard Tract structures will soon be demolished and was thankful for the fire access road's completion. Mr. Jarvis echoed his anticipation regarding the building demolition, stating it is a regular safety concern and litter magnet.

Mr. Perry then asked whether the Reserve could be used for commercial reasons. Staff indicated any commercial use would require a Special Activity Authorization. Mr. Perry indicated that there are rumors of people guiding hunts within the Reserve, which he didn't think was right, and thought commercial uses were not allowed. Staff indicated every hunter must be given written permission from the Site Manager to hunt, but Mr. Pruitt pointed out enforcement of that requirement is minimal. Several members of current and prior town government talked about local ordinances that had been previously used to address hunting concerns elsewhere in town. Mr. Perry then questioned whether the small size of yearling deer he's seen this year is indicative of herd health. Mr. McCall weighed in, stating that sometimes we experience two ruts in a year, and that can result in a younger cohort associated with the later rut. However, it can also be indicative of overpopulation. Mr. McCall mentioned working with a

deer herd health group out of Georgia that do a physical assessment of four to five deer per location and judge health via multiple parameters, such as kidney fat and parasite counts. He'd be happy to work with others to get such an area assessment done if deemed necessary. Mr. Pruitt remembered Dr. Dame getting some hunter cooperation years ago, but that was a jawbone study, with less overall health data results.

Mr. Perry then asked how many hunters there are. Staff indicated there are 106 permitted currently. Mr. Jarvis indicated most hunters use Kitty Hawk Woods as a secondary location, not as a primary hunting destination.

Public Comment

- No public participation.

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

- Mr. Alnes will continue to update the LAC when events are scheduled for the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve, and work with the Town to advertise.

Adjourn