



Local Advisory Committee Meeting
Kitty Hawk Woods Coastal Reserve

November 13, 2024 – 1:00 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, Lora Eddy	N
UNC Coastal Studies Institute, John McCord	N
Town of Kitty Hawk Administration, Melody Clopton	Y
NC Forest Service, John Cook	N
Town of Kitty Hawk Police, Det. Jason A. Rigler	Y
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Alex McPhail	N
Natural Heritage Program, Katherine Culatta	Y
NC Forest Service, Kyle Breslin	N
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Dr. James "Bo" Dame	Y
Tom Byers	Y
Jeff Pruitt	Y
Clifton Perry	N
Gary Perry	N
Paul Henriques	Y
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, NCCR, Northern Sites Manager	
Woody Webster, NCCR, Buckridge Manager	
Steve Jarvis, NCCR, Northern Sites Stewardship Assistant	

Reserve-wide Program Business

*** Please see appendix for complete Reserve-wide updates ***

Northern Sites Update (Erik Alnes)

Two interns worked in the northern sites this year. This summer, the Friends of the Reserve sponsored Haley Jenkins, from N.C. State University. She focused on replicating a 20-year-old water quality study in Kitty Hawk Woods, and helped with herpetology monitoring in Buxton Woods, general site maintenance of the northern sites, and developed and installed a new interpretive sign at Currituck Banks. This fall, Kaitlen Harmon worked with us as part of her Outer Banks Field Site semester at the Coastal Studies Institute. She completed the water quality study and drafted a report on change, and assisted staff with general site maintenance at the northern sites. If new internship opportunities arise, staff will notify the LAC to encourage applications. Staff appreciate these interns help!

In 2023, volunteers completed 37 hours of work at the northern sites. This year, through October 31st, we already have 45 hours reported. Currently, there are four active volunteers in Kitty Hawk Woods, one in Buxton Woods, and no volunteers in Currituck Banks. We thank our volunteers for their service and are always looking to add to our supportive volunteer base. To celebrate National Estuaries Week this year, another marsh cleanup occurred at the Kitty Hawk Woods. Staff, along with three volunteers, picked up three 42-gallon bags of trash, consisting of mostly buoys, bottles, and cans. The crew also picked up over 10 boards of treated lumber, lawn chairs, pool floaties, plastic containers, and a cable spool. It was a great way to celebrate and give back to our estuary.

Staff have been monitoring visitation since 2023 at the Currituck Banks Boardwalk and Kitty Hawk Woods Connector Trail; two of the most popular trails at each site. Currituck Banks has peak visitation from June through August and saw 51,035 visitors from October 2023 to October 2024. This is up 0.5% since 2023, indicating relatively uniform visitation from year to year. Kitty Hawk Woods has peak visitation from November through January and saw 3,923 visitors from October 2023 to October 2024. Comparing January through October, between 2023 and 2024, visitation increased 75%, but daily visitation remains generally low, averaging roughly 11 visitors per day.

There are currently 23 active research permits in the northern sites: eight at Currituck Banks, ten at Kitty Hawk Woods, and five at Buxton Woods. Researchers are from four federal and state agencies, and six universities, spanning from the University of Georgia to Chowan University.

Hunting at Currituck Banks and Kitty Hawk Woods is becoming more popular, as hunter authorizations are up 17.5% from 2023. Analyzing demographics, hunters are all Dare and Currituck County residents. Most are deer hunters, but there are four hunters that specifically target the invasive nutria.

Ms. Culatta asked whether there were separate areas for hunters. Mr. Alnes indicated there are not, but signs are posted to help all users know hunters are potentially in the area, and recommends wearing blaze orange. Mr. Pruitt added that most hunters avoid trails as well. He added that there has been an increase in duck hunting along the "half-mile ponds" in the interior of Kitty Hawk Woods, since they are currently more open following storm damage to trees in that area. Mr. Henriques asked whether written permission is required for hunters, and Mr. Alnes confirmed it is. Mr. Henriques shared that he thinks he sees fewer hunters than in the past. Mr. Pruitt stated that many older hunters have joined mainland hunt clubs, whereas in the past Kitty Hawk Woods was more of an after-work opportunity. Ms. Culatta asked whether there is a fee charged to hunters. Mr. Alnes indicated there is not. Dr. Dame asked whether hunters are reporting their harvests. Mr. Alnes

said there has been good reporting so far this year. Dr. Dame wondered if the development of additional lots nearby might lead to an increase in harvest, as more deer are forced into the huntable areas of Kitty Hawk Woods. Mr. Alnes indicated there may be some harvest numbers he can share to see if a trend is indicated.

In January of 2024, staff developed a tool to document and analyze misuse at all 10 coastal reserve sites. This better helps managers understand “hot” areas of misuse to target monitoring and education, assists in documenting misuse to better understand trends, organize work planning, and inform management decisions through resolution documentation. Since January 2024, 50 instances of misuse have been documented by managers. The highest instances of misuse at the northern sites have been at the Buxton Woods. The most common instances of misuse have been disallowed uses (i.e. infrastructure built on site and interruptions with research), littering and dumping, vandalism, visitor use conflicts, alteration of natural character, abandoned and derelict vessels, and unlawful fires. Staff thank local law enforcement partners for their assistance in resolving some of these misuses.

Individual Reserve Business (Erik Alnes)

- *Hard Tract Replanting*

In early 2024, derelict structures were removed from the Hard Tract. To re-naturalize the area, volunteers along with staff planted 200 water oak and live oak seedlings in the disturbed area. The planting occurred late, in late April, and staff were uncertain of survival. Staff have inspected the site since the planting and estimate over 50% survival, which is surprising and promising. Staff will conduct a stocking computation in the Spring of 2025 to assess seedling survival and inform management if additional planting is necessary.

- *Water Quality Report*

A water quality study was conducted from 2002 to 2005 which analyzed water temperature, salinity, pH, and dissolved oxygen at Bob Perry boat ramp. With the help of interns, the data was digitized, and the study was replicated at several sites in Kitty Hawk Woods, including Bob Perry boat ramp. The median salinity has appeared to increase, from 2 parts per thousand (ppt) historically to 6.25ppt. There appears to be greater salinity variability, ranging from 0-14.4ppt, when historically it ranged from 0-5ppt. Water temperatures have also significantly increased. Comparing only data from our study period (June through October), mean water temperatures jumped from 68° historically to 78°.

- *Discover the Reserve Event*

The N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve hosted its third stop on the “Discover the N.C. Coastal Reserve” tour in May at the Rachel Carson Reserve. The “Discover the N.C. Coastal Reserve” tour is a multi-year campaign to raise awareness of the N.C. Coastal Reserve program, and the role the 10 reserves play in protecting the State’s coastal resources, now and into the future. The campaign, which runs through 2026 will involve invited guests visiting sites throughout the coast to learn more about the ecosystems they protect and the critical work happening at the site. On December 6th, the tour is coming to the Kitty Hawk Woods. During the event, we will hear from keynote speakers, including Department of Environmental Quality

leadership, take a guided hike of the Connector and Birch Lane Trails, and enjoy a guided boat tour of the Reserve's marsh island with Marine Patrol. We hope to see our LAC members and volunteers there to celebrate the Reserve. LAC members were reminded to RSVP.

Member Roundtable

Ms. Clopton shared that the town has applied for an NC Trail grant to fund the agreed connection between Birch Lane and Sandy Run Park.

Mr. Pruitt relayed difficulty dealing with a landowner on Covered Bridge Road regarding a disabled individual he helped view the Covered Bridge. He listed several additional issues, including the numerous signs deterring access, a frequently closed gate, and the lack of handicapped parking. Mr. Alnes detailed the protections in the Nature Preserve Dedication, as well as the history of negotiated access, and how it is tied to the multi-use path and parking at David Paul Pruitt Park. Mr. Pruitt wondered why the trail system doesn't adhere to Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. Staff indicated there are some trails, like the Currituck Banks Boardwalk, that meet ADA standards, but some cannot by their nature. Mr. Pruitt then suggested the landowner may be monitoring the road electronically, as his response was far too quick to stumble upon Mr. Pruitt's presence. Mr. Henriques echoed difficulties with the owners along Covered Bridge Road experienced by both he and his daughter. Ms. Clopton asked if the issue is getting worked on now. Mr. Alnes indicated that it is, though it's early. Mrs. Clopton indicated the recent blowup started with a Facebook post.

Dr. Dame discussed the prothonotary warbler project which includes Kitty Hawk Woods, with two dozen nest boxes locally. These warblers are unique in that they are cavity nesters, and Kitty Hawk Woods isn't typical habitat for them, though they are productive in the cypress swamp of Kitty Hawk Woods. He also shared that results from class field studies of the waterbodies of the Reserve indicate a shift from freshwater fish species to brackish species. Mr. Alnes indicated that intern water quality research may have additional data he'd find useful, and Dr. Dame agreed that he'd like to see it. Dr. Dame also indicated bats have been found using the warbler boxes his class installed.

Mr. Byers indicated surprise at the amount of work and projects that are going on.

Ms. Culatta shared recent staffing changes with the Natural Heritage Program, and that she will take Misty Buchanan's seat representing the agency at the Kitty Hawk Woods LAC. She also mentioned funding awarded to Nags Head Woods awarded through the North Carolina Land and Water Fund for the protection of additional property.

Mr. Henriques asked about volunteer numbers. He thought there were more/ different volunteers. Mr. Alnes indicated that to be considered as volunteers, they should be reporting their work to staff, and that volunteer hours can be used as match. Mr. Henriques continued that he felt there may need to be additional notice of volunteer opportunities. He also indicated they'd like to rake the trails. Mr. Alnes indicated that we do not rake our trails, as it is natural mulch that helps maintain the trail beds. He did share that removal of sticks and pinecones is acceptable. Mr. Byers asked what to do with his bucket of pinecones, and Mr. Alnes indicated there's no need to collect and remove them, it would be best to simply kick them off to the side of the trail. Mr. Henriques indicated he's happy to help monitor trail conditions, and happy to report chainsaw needs to staff. Ms. Clopton indicated as part of the town's recreation committee, Mr. Henriques has helped draft a plan for trails around the town hall. She wondered if in the future a connection to Reserve trails would be possible. Staff indicated that there are rare species on the Reserve in that area which require protection.

Mr. Byers then asked if there might be a way to increase information available along the kayak trail by using QR codes. Mr. Pruitt also mentioned that sort of project might be a good fit for an Eagle Scout. Mr. Byers indicated signage at the Bob Perry Ramp might be positive too. Mr. Pruitt then discussed the history of paddling and motorboat use in that section of Kitty Hawk. He favors additional sharing with the public the transition of habitats along the waterway.

Detective Rigler discussed hunter parking along the roads. Some confusion between legal hunters and abandoned vehicles has occurred involving the police department. Mr. Alnes suggested a parking placard for hunters such as is used at Currituck Banks currently. Town officials were supportive of this. The detective continued that he'd love to be able to share cleanup events and other volunteer activities occurring at the Reserve on social media. Staff agreed to share, and to put him in contact with the Reserve Communications Specialist.

Public Comment

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

- Staff will share salinity data for the internal swales to Bo Dame.
- Staff will organize a field day soon to augment volunteer support.
- Staff will develop a parking notice for hunters in Kitty Hawk Woods and share this plan with Town Police to resolve the parking confusion.
- Staff will get Detective Rigler in touch with the Reserve's Communications Specialist to foster social media interaction.

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.