



Local Advisory Committee Meeting  
Kitty Hawk Woods Coastal Reserve

May 24, 2022 -10:00  
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 CSI, John McCord	N
Town of Kitty Hawk Administration, Andy Stewart	N
NC Forest Service, John Cook	N
Town of Kitty Hawk Police, Joel Johnson	Y
NC Wildlife Resources Commission, Alex McPhail	Y
Natural Heritage Program, Misty Buchanan	N
NC Forest Service, Kayla Barnes	Y
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Dana Thomason	N
Jeff Pruitt	Y
Clifton Perry	N
Mayor Gary Perry	N
Paul Henriques	Y
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, NCCR, Northern Sites Manager	
Woody Webster, NCCR, Buckridge Manager	
Steve Jarvis, DCM, Northern Sites Assistant	

Reserve-wide Program Business

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

## Individual Reserve Business (Erik Alnes)

- *Site Stewards Update*

Site Stewards are trained volunteers that work under the guidance of the Site Manager, who provide observations and help maintain the stewardship of the site. In December of 2021, the Northern Sites Manager provided a training for patrons of the Kitty Hawk Woods Reserve. We have since expanded the program to all northern sites. A Reserve-wide training was held in May to train those interested in volunteering with the Reserve. 10 volunteers have gone through the training for Kitty Hawk Woods, and there has been good interaction so far with volunteer reporting. During the summer, the Site Manager will begin soliciting help for trail maintenance projects. If anyone in the community is interested in volunteering with our program, please have them email Erik Alnes and he will facilitate training and growing the volunteer program. FOR also provided funding for t-shirts to help our volunteers be visible in the field and promote the stewardship of the site.

- *Infrastructure Update*

A new roof was installed on the Guard Shack in front of Covered Bridge Road. After the roof was replaced, DCM staff power washed the shed, fixed fascia boards and rotting corners, replaced the decking, and painted the structure. We are happy to see the project complete and the guard shack fixed up!

Staff have also been working closely with the Town to get the fire access road installed from Otila Way to the cul-de-sac of S. Covered Bridge Road. A meeting was held with the Town, NCCR, Natural Heritage, local Fire Department, and the Town Engineer. The road has been marked and the area has been surveyed. Soon, we hope to develop a contract and scope of work with the town to begin construction.

- *Hunting Report*

This year, 109 individuals obtained authorization to hunt in Kitty Hawk Woods. To better understand this user group, the Northern Sites Manager conducted a 20% sample survey to understand where hunters were hunting, how successful hunts were, and provided an opportunity for feedback from the user group. The survey revealed 78% of those who obtained a permit hunted at least one day. Of those who hunted, most focused on hunting deer (77%), while others focused on small game (14%) and wood ducks (9%). Eckner street was the most utilized access point for hunters (50%). A third of survey participants hunted in the Amadas/Ridge area of the reserve (33%), and others hunted the harder to reach areas of the reserve including Meter Point and Thick Ridge (17%). Last, shotguns were the most popular weapon of hunters (93%), followed by bow (57%), and rifle (31%). This information will be used to assist in the Management Plan update.

- *Management Plan Update*

NCCR staff have been working to update the Kitty Hawk Woods Management Plan, which was written and approved in 1998. Staff have updated all parcel and trail maps to reflect current ownership and infrastructure on the site. Most of the updates are administrative, including updates

to the office location, updating the volunteer section to reflect the Site Stewards program, and updating tract acquisitions and acreages. One substantive change was reviewed with the LAC.

When the plan was written, the author used tract names to delineate what activities should occur, where trails were located, and where species of concern were located. The Northern Sites Manager re-mapped this language and used recent vegetation studies to create a mapping structure that provides a zoned approach to management of the site. Staff focused on key messages from the original plan to inform their delineation of these areas, including keeping the interior areas of the woods pristine, using resource inventories to protect sensitive areas, limiting the potential for user conflicts, and maintaining public use while restricting access to achieve the conservation goals of the Reserve. The new map delineates where recreation rarely occurs (marsh areas), where recreation heavily occurs west of the Birch Lane Trail (recreational areas), and places where there are no designated trail systems and findings of rare species to maintain large blocks of the interior woods east of Birch Lane (primitive areas). This new "Recommended Management Areas" map will help management, and future managers of the site balance user groups, achieve the conservation goals of the Reserve, and protect sensitive areas, while maintaining the central themes of the original management plan. Alnes opened the floor to discussion.

- McCall noted that in the recreational areas, it may be beneficial to write in and delineate the use of existing trails or trail improvement projects that could double as fire breaks.
- Pruitt stated it would be beneficial to include language that makes it clear Kitty Hawk Park is not a hunting access, as no weapons are allowed at the Town Park.
- Johnson stated that when he or other officers see hunters accessing from Eckner Street, they ensure to stop and talk with hunters to educate them regarding the authorization needed to hunt in Kitty Hawk Woods.

- *Trail Projects*

- Walkovers

Erik J. and Paul H. have donated time, lumber, and labor to install walkways along the depressions in the causeway. These walkways will replace the boards and logs that are currently in place now, which will improve the ecology of the site by allowing the swales to flow together, as well as increase the access and safety of trail users. The project will be completed with the help of the Site Stewards. This is a great community project that we are excited to see come to fruition.

- Social Trails

With increases in population surrounding the woods, staff have noticed more and more undesignated "social" trails cut into our woods from adjoining private property. These trails cause confusion for those not familiar with the site, encourages trespassing through private properties, and breaks the rules that protect the Reserve (i.e. cutting vegetation). Staff will be closing these trails by covering them up and signing them accordingly, in hopes that they re-naturalize.

- Sandy Run Phase II

The Coastal Reserve is interested in completing phase II of the Connector Trail project. This would include building a boardwalk from Birch Lane Trail to Sandy Run Park. The State would be happy to provide a letter of support to the Town to apply for grants and walk the project area out to map the potential route.

○ Requested Loop Trail

Henriques requested to install a loop trail on the southern side of the offshoot of the Ridge Road Trail. This is currently a dead-end trail, and the proposed area was walked with the Site Manager and Henriques. This proposal was opened for discussion by the LAC members.

McPhail noted that if people hunt with firearms in the area (which they do), he would be hesitant to put another trail in. It only takes one mistake for someone to get shot.

McCall suggested installing laser counters on the trails to get a better understanding of how much use the trails currently have before putting more trails in. If this is an area that gets a lot of traffic, there may be interest in putting another trail in to diffuse some of the crowding that may occur on the trail.

Pruitt stated that if there was minor use of that area, although it would cut into a large block that is used by hunters, it may be worth considering.

Staff will look into the use of laser counters on the trail to better understand the user groups on the site before installing any new trails.

Member Roundtable (Staff response in italics)

- Aaron McCall noted that TNC deals with a lot of the same social trail issues on his site. He recommended looking at the signs they post in Nags Head Woods and suggested updating the proposed signage to make it more clear to users why these trails are closed.
- Kayla Barnes suggested including fire management maps in the management plan that outlines where parking is available, access for fire personnel, and potential fire breaks. *Erik Alnes will follow up with Kayla Barnes as he develops fire management recommendations.*
- Joel Johnson was happy with the relationship between the Reserve and the Town of Kitty Hawk Police Department. *Erik Alnes praised the department, and thanked them for their assistance with graffiti issues, visitor conflicts, and the removal of the encampment in the Woods.*
- Jeff Pruitt thanked the Reserve Staff for their assistance in removing the ADV's that were in the sound and marshes of Kitty Hawk Bay. He also said he will bring up Sandy Run Phase II at the next Town Council Meeting to see if the Town would like to pursue grants for the project.
- Dana Thomason noted that she will inform people of the Site Stewards program through her connections at the aquarium and will direct them to contact the Northern Sites Manager if they are interested in volunteering with the site.
- Paul Henriques noted that he had an inquiry from an Eagle Scout regarding projects in the Woods. Paul will likely reach out to the individual and have him help build the walkovers. Paul also expressed interest in creating a "high-5" trail that would parallel the Birch Lane Trail. Although he explained there is limited use of that trail, he thinks it would benefit users. *Erik Alnes stated that NCCR would likely not install a trail like that in a low use area but would be interested in pursuing Sandy Run Phase II to augment access and use.* Paul said he would bring up Sandy Run Phase II at

the next Recreation Committee Meeting. Last, Paul inquired about the use of E-bikes and assisted bikes in the Reserve. *Erik Alnes noted that current rules do not allow motorized vehicles in the Reserve but would research the assisted bikes brought up by Henriques.*

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

- Alnes will investigate ordering laser counters to install on the trails, to better understand the use of the trails and inform future management decisions.
- Alnes will schedule a meeting with Kayla Barnes to discuss fire management options to include in the management plan update.

#### Adjourn