



Local Advisory Committee Meeting  
Kitty Hawk Woods Coastal Reserve

April 26, 2024 – 1:00pm  
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	Y
UNC Coastal Studies Institute, John McCord	N
Town of Kitty Hawk Administration, Melody Clopton	Y
N.C. Forest Service, John Cook	N
Town of Kitty Hawk Police, Chief Michael E. Palkovics	Y
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission, Alex McPhail	N
Natural Heritage Program, Misty Buchanan	Y
N.C. Forest Service, Kyle Breslin	Y
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Dr. James “Bo” Dame	Y
Jeff Pruitt	Y
Clifton Perry	Y
Gary Perry	N
Paul Henriques	N
<u>Others Present</u>	
Erik Alnes, NCCR, Northern Sites Manager	
Woody Webster, NCCR, Buckridge Manager	
Steve Jarvis, NCCR, Northern Sites Stewardship Assistant	
Luke Halton, Public	

Reserve-wide Program Business

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

Individual Reserve Business (Erik Alnes)

- *Hunting Report*

During the 2023-2024 hunting season, staff issued 130 hunter authorizations for Kitty Hawk Woods and Currituck Banks Reserves. This is up 41% from 85 authorizations last season. After analyzing the change between the 2022-2023 season and the 2023-2024 season, most new authorizations (45) came from citizens living in Dare County's beach communities. The average year of birth rose from 1981 in 2022-2023, to 1984 in 2023-2024, indicating a slightly younger crowd hunting the Reserves. Hunters reported taking nine deer, 21 squirrel, two wood ducks, and four teal from the Northern Sites.

Jeff Pruitt stated that he believes the increase in permits is tied to an increase in the popularity of duck hunting. Bo Dame asked how many hunters actually get a permit. Mr. Pruitt stated he personally knew of ten younger guys who had gone duck hunting in the town this year. Clifton Perry felt that the deer hunters are "old guys" who are die-hard deer hunters. Steve Jarvis added that the duck harvest numbers are likely inaccurate, as there is much more hunting of the marsh islands than the reported numbers seem to reflect.

- *Hard Tract Structure Removal & Rehabilitation*

Contractors recently completed the demolition and removal of seven abandoned structures in Kitty Hawk Woods. The project included asbestos abatement, demolition, removal of debris and garbage on the site, and installing a fence around the historic cemetery on the parcel. The contractor did an excellent job minimizing the project footprint, and staff will rehabilitate the disturbed area through planting 200 hardwood trees with the help of volunteers. Staff are excited to have these structures removed, as break-ins, vandalism, and risks to public safety were common occurrences on the remote parcel.

Manager Clopton asked who the contractor for the demolition was. Staff indicated it is Mike Dunn. There was light discussion about spray paint and children interacting with construction equipment during the work period. Clifton Perry expressed gratitude for the fencing and protecting the historic graveyard on the Hard Tract and feels that it now has the proper respect. Bo Dame asked about how expensive the demolition work was and what the source of funding was, given asbestos concerns. Staff indicated it was state-funded, the bid was lower than expected, but a final figure wasn't at hand.

- *Reconnection of Fire Access Road Trail*

At the last meeting, staff updated the LAC on the completion of the Fire Access Road, connecting S. Covered Bridge Road to Otila Way. This project allowed fire apparatus to access the site, as well as two inholding properties, which were not accessible before. The footprint of the project took over an old trail. Citizens expressed interest in re-building a trail adjacent to the fire access road, and staff observed erosion of the berms of the road due to foot traffic. Staff reconnected a new trail that is accessible from the Ridge Road Trailhead.

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

This summer, the Friends of the Reserve (FOR) provided funding for a paid ten-week internship for the Northern Sites Office. Staff have hired Haley Jenkins, a Senior at N.C. State University,

who is studying Sustainable Materials and Technology with minors in Spanish Literature and Business Administration. Haley starts in June and will help with the stewardship of the three Northern Sites. Staff are excited to have Haley on board!

- *Northern Sites Update*

Staff have been monitoring visitation using trail counters in Kitty Hawk Woods and Currituck Banks Reserves. Kitty Hawk Woods saw an estimated total of nearly 5,000 visitors, with the Connector Trailhead being most popular. Similar to hunter authorizations, daily visitation of the Connector Trailhead increased by 80%, rising from 14 per day in 2023 to 33 per day in 2024 (data compared January - March). Currituck Banks saw an estimated total of over 95,000 visitors, with visitation peaking mid-summer. Staff will continue to monitor visitation through 2024. Bo Dame shared that while doing fieldwork along northern sections of the Birch Lane trail, he rarely sees visitors, and nowhere near the numbers being counted at the south end.

Research has been ongoing in the Northern Sites, and there are currently eight research permits administered for different projects. In Kitty Hawk Woods, permits have been administered for a biodiversity inventory, arthropod diversity associated with cavity nesting birds, timber tracking with DNA, and biodiversity of interdune ponds and maritime forest habitats. Staff plan to continue their ongoing herpetology study in Buxton Woods this spring, and reassess their permanent submerged aquatic vegetation study transects this fall at the Currituck Banks Reserve. Mr. Pruitt voiced concern for vegetation changes, especially south of the Bob Perry boat ramp. Areas previously in herbaceous wetland vegetation have become mudflats. Uncertain whether it's caused by salinity changes or something else, he indicated that much of the shoreline of Kitty Hawk was seeing similar changes. Bo Dame admitted that he hasn't recently been in that area but has observed that the Ridge Road swamp is more open now, and there seems to be a change in the aquatic species they've sampled south of the Soundside Trail. While only an annual sampling event, they've seen fewer mud minnows and redfin pickerel (freshwater species), and an increase in killifish (estuarine/saltier species). He wondered if the population change was indicative of additional connectivity between the wetlands and the sound. Mr. Pruitt wished for data stretching back to the 1970s, noting that while he could tie some forest habitat changes to individual storms, other damages, even to invasive *Phragmites* near his house, weren't so connected. Clifton Perry indicated Dare County did have someone (last name Perry) that collected salinity information in the 1980s-90s, especially near Moor Shore. He also indicated that cattails and cornstalk marsh (*Arundo donax*) was gone, replaced by needlepoint marsh (*Juncus roemerianus*). While asking who was responsible for studying this, he indicated that replanting areas of newly occurring mudflats should be done. Staff indicated this was all good information for the upcoming Reserve Research Symposium. Lora Eddy indicated that an intern with The Nature Conservancy sampled canal salinity levels in the past. Bo Dame asked about the condition of the marshes adjacent to Kitty Hawk Landing. Mr. Pruitt indicated that only *Juncus* is surviving there, and erosion has cut another opening that boats now use for access. Bo Dame indicated that there is ongoing submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) work by a researcher Joe Luczkovich from East Carolina University (ECU) than may be helpful.

Staff are close to completing updates for the Northern Sites' brochures. Major updates included remapping trail systems and including newly acquired parcels on boundary maps, as well as updating rare and unusual fauna that has been observed on the sites. Staff hope to order the brochures soon, and hope to bring them to the next LAC meeting to share with members.

Volunteerism fell slightly this year, with only 35 hours reported from the five active Northern Site Stewards. One new volunteer has been trained since the last LAC meeting. Staff will continue to seek new volunteers, and ask for assistance during group projects like the rehabilitation of the Hard Tract. Staff hosted a volunteer group from Appalachian State University for one day at the Currituck Banks Reserve, where they helped re-paint the parking lot and trim the boardwalk and maritime forest trail. Staff thank all volunteers for their assistance with site maintenance, and thank The Nature Conservancy for sharing the group from Appalachian State University.

### Member Roundtable

Lora Eddy shared recent work at Nags Head Woods with the Carolinas Butterfly Monitoring Program, and the opportunity to spread that citizen science effort.

Jeff Pruitt expressed gratitude for the continued opportunity to work on the LAC, with Clifton Perry expressing a similar sentiment.

Melody Clopton shared that the town recently had a successful volunteer litter cleanup and said perhaps one done with the Reserve could be arranged in the future. She also shared that they hope to apply for some trail grant money, possibly to connect Sandy Run with the Birch Lane Trail. She asked if the state is still supportive of that effort, and staff indicated they are. She further shared they've received funding toward a multiuse path from near Walmart to the Kill Devil Hills line, and that trails near the Town Hall are still being planned.

Misty Buchanan announced two new positions being advertised by the N.C. Natural Heritage Program (NCNHP). One is the first pollinator biologist for their program, and the other is for a northeast Coastal Plains biologist. There is upcoming NCNHP work with Albemarle Pamlico National Estuary Partnership on peatlands surveys.

Bo Dame asked whether some of the NCNHP listed species still occur near the Hard Tract, and staff reported they had been confirmed recently. Bo then reported that his annual field visit will have five students this year and there would also be an ECU graduate student joining them who has an interest in arthropods and cavity nesting birds. He shared that some sampling takes place at night, so the town officials and police department would be notified in case of reports of numerous flashlights in the woods. Bo applauded the current trail conditions, and how well they are being maintained. He also voiced support for the creative solutions to passage on wetter parts of the trails.

Chief of Police had nothing to report. Staff asked about recent e-bike or dirt bike traffic along the powerline easement, and if the Chief knew where it was coming from. They agreed to work together to address.

### Public Comment

One member of the public, Luke Halton, was present. He represents 'The OBX Way' a 501(c)(3) that researches and documents hiking, biking, and paddle trails locally. He said it was great to meet the LAC,

and his group's purpose was to help know where to go trail-wise, and where not to go. He shared an unsafe paddling trail experience near Oregon Inlet, and reiterated the group's focus of safety. He also invited those in attendance to their Manteo location, the Outer Banks Trail Center, where they wish to further the goal of responsible recreation.

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

- Staff will work with TNC staff and interns this summer to attempt to assess water salinity questions brought up by the LAC.
- Staff will attempt to locate historic records of water quality studies from ECU and the Town of Kitty Hawk.



## **N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Spring 2024 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update**

### Local Advisory Committee Membership

Welcome to our newly appointed and reappointed community members/organizations of the Local Advisory Committees! Updated committee membership is available on the reserve website [here](#). To all members, thank you for your service to the reserve's Local Advisory Committees.

### Program Highlights

- Spring **student field trips** to the Rachel Carson Reserve and Masonboro Island Reserve via the Island Explorer Program are starting, and **summer camps** at the Rachel Carson Reserve will start in June in partnership with the NC Maritime Museum.
- The Coastal Reserve and NC Wildlife Resources Commission are gearing up for the 10<sup>th</sup> annual **2024 Terrapin Tally** to help better understand the overall population status and condition of the diamondback terrapin within the state. This citizen science project takes a snapshot of the diamondback terrapin population numbers in a given area by conducting kayak surveys at specified times and prescribed routes. Terrapin Tally paddling routes are available at 11 locations including: Cape Lookout National Seashore, Rachel Carson Reserve, Calico Creek, Hammocks Beach State Park, Lea Hutaff Island, Masonboro Island Reserve, Carolina Beach State Park, Fort Fisher State Recreation Area, Zeke's Island Reserve, Bald Head Island, and Bird Island Reserve. Data collection will occur during established windows April- June. More information is available [here](#).
- The reserve is hosting its third stop on the “**Discover the NC Coastal Reserve**” tour at the Rachel Carson Reserve in April. 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. Two events were hosted in 2023, enjoy these short videos from the first tour stop at the [Currituck Banks Reserve](#) in June and the second tour stop at the [Bird Island Reserve](#) in December. Local Advisory Committee members will be invited to the site-based events so stay tuned for upcoming event information.
- The reserve is hosting a **Research Symposium** May 8-9, 2024 to highlight work conducted across reserve sites with posters and presentations from researchers including students, faculty, partner agencies, and staff. This will also be an opportunity for the research community to network and provide input on future research priorities.

### Student Internships

Several interns and seasonal staff will be working with the reserve in Manteo, Beaufort, and Wilmington this summer. Thank you to Friends of the Reserve, the N.C. Internship Program, and UNCW for their support and partnership for the internships. Students will work on a range of stewardship and education projects. Stay tuned to the reserve's website and social media to meet the interns and staff once they start in May.

### 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 N.C. Reserve. 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	<i>FY2025 President's Request</i>
NERRS Operations	\$27.5M	\$28.5M	\$29.7M	\$32.5M	\$33.3M	\$32.5M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$6.5M	\$8.5M	\$8.5M	\$3M
CZM Grants	\$77M	\$78.5 M	\$79M	\$81.5M	\$81.5M	\$81.5M

\* 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.