



**Masonboro Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, April 19, 2021, 3 pm
Meeting held by WebEx**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
NC Audubon, Walker Golder	No
New Hanover County Sheriff's Office, Sergeant Steve Schmidlin	No
New Hanover County Planning Department, Dylan McDonnell	No
NC Coastal Land Trust, Jesica Blake	Yes
Division of Marine Fisheries	No
Division of Parks and Recreation – Carolina Beach State Park, Chris Helms	Yes
Natural Heritage Program, Judith Ratcliffe	Yes
UNCW Center for Marine Science, Martin Posey	No
Town of Wrightsville Beach Administration	No
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Neal Andrew	Yes
Thomas Carter	Yes
Dr. Lynn Leonard	No
Dr. Zachary Long	Yes
Masonboro.org, Tom Hackler, Richard Johnson	Yes
Haywood Newkirk	No
William Raney	Yes
Pat Rittenmeyer	No
Sam Romano	No
Surfrider, Cape Fear	No
Ted Wilgis	No
Martin Willard	No
<u>Others Present</u>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator & Southern Sites Manager	
Elizabeth Colhoun, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Specialist	
Whitney Jenkins, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Coastal Training Program Coordinator	

Welcome – Hope Sutton

The site manager welcomed the committee to the Spring 2021 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and called roll. A brief introduction to the web meeting platform was provided by Whitney Jenkins, the Reserve's Coastal training Program Coordinator.

Reserve-wide Administrative Update – Hope Sutton

The Reserve-wide Update, which now includes a range of reserve activities was shared with committee members prior to the meeting. Members had no comments or questions about the updates. The update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

The site manager provided some reminders from the Reserve-wide update:

- Local Advisory Committee member application period open until May 5. We will review applications and send the list of applicants to the Secretary with comments. We are hopeful that the appointments will be made in time for new members to join the fall meetings.
- The Reserve's new Northern Sites Manager, Erik Alnes, started work in February.

Site Update and Old Business – Hope Sutton

- *General site conditions*
 - The site manager reported that conditions and activities at the site during the winter were typical of the season, although, anecdotally, visitation appears to be increasing compared to historic rates. It is no longer uncommon to see visitors on the site any day that there is nice weather, whereas in the past, Reserve staff would rarely see visitors during the week during the winter.
 - Research activities have continued largely uninterrupted, although the Research Creek station is still deployed on a temporary structure.
 - There is some new research infrastructure on the site in the center section of the island. The Reserve's Margaret A. Davidson fellow, Marae Lindquist, has installed a cellular-based telemetry system on the island. This system includes a network of receivers and a sensor station that send these data to the internet via cellular signal. This makes it possible to track animals wearing transmitters continuously while they are in range of the receivers. Marae's work focusses on Saltmarsh and Seaside sparrows during their wintering period. Learn more about this work through a NC Coastal Land Trust Little Lunch Lecture with Marae at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dbyOSE-GFIE>
- *Seasonal activities*
 - **Seasonal staff** – The reserve is still not working directly with volunteers and will not be working with interns working for credit during the summer season due to social distancing guidelines that limit the number of people on vessels. However, there are several seasonal staff working on activities at the Masonboro Island Reserve, including a shorebird technician, a general field technician, the Friends of the Reserve internship award recipient, and an intern through the Department's STEP internship (Student Training Experience Program). The first two began in March while the others will begin in May.
 - **Shorebirds** – In 2021, the reserve will continue monitoring reproductive successful of American oystercatchers (AMOY), as well as documenting nesting Wilson's plovers and the small least tern colony in the Johns Creek area. The reserve will also continue to work with

Audubon staff to band adult and fledgling AMOY to support regional conservation efforts, including a tracking project using similar transmitters but a different receiver technology. Predation management was not conducted during the winter months due to a variety of administrative and logistic challenges.

- **Diamondback Terrapins** – The annual Terrapin Tally was adapted to meet Covid-19 guidance. The project has expanded to ten additional sites, including Bird Island, Bald Head Island, Fort Fisher Recreation Area, Zeke’s Island, Carolina Beach State Park, Lea-Hutaff Island, Hammocks Beach State Park, Calico Creek, Rachel Carson, and Cape Lookout National Seashore. Working cooperatively with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC), reserve staff reworked the training to be conducted virtually and met with various partners throughout the winter to prepare for this expansion. Training was conducted on April 8 and 10 and over 300 people participated. Data collection will take place April 20-May 2 and May 12-16. The Reserve will also be working with Dr. Amanda Williard to place transmitters on approximately 15 female terrapins that are currently captive and are being returned to the marsh in the area near the telemetry network. This project will expand the utility of the telemetry network and provide insight into nesting behaviors of turtles inhabiting the Masonboro Island Reserve.
- *Sediment placement activities*
 - The Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) completed the Intracoastal Waterway maintenance project that placed material on the ocean beach on Masonboro Island between the Upper Johns Creek area and the south end of the island during the winter. The project originally included placement of approximately 135,000 cubic yards of beach quality sand along a 3000’ linear reach of the beach. One-third of the original material was able to be placed in 2020 and approximately another 50-60,000 cubic yards were placed during 2021. The reserve continues to work with a group of researchers from UNCW to conduct pre- and post- placement monitoring activities to provide for better understanding of the potential benefits and concerns associated with this activity. The project was completed by March 15 per agreement between the Corps, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the WRC, and the reserve. The Corps has since requested permission to repeat this activity as the need for maintenance of these areas is ongoing. The reserve and DCM will continue to use a case-by-case approach to assessing and providing permission for these placement projects.
- *Marine debris project*
 - The reserve continued to work collaboratively with the NC Coastal Federation (NCCF) to complete a marine debris removal project along the coast that has included several of the reserve sites, including the Masonboro Island Reserve. During the winter, the focus of the removal shifted to abandoned and derelict vessels (ADVs). These efforts are utilizing funds from both the NC General Assembly through the Wildlife Resources Commission and marine debris grants obtained for the larger marine debris removal project that has been underway statewide, including the project utilizing Emergency Watershed Protection program funds. The WRC is the agency that has the authority to address ADVs in N.C. As this is a new authority, they have needed to create the framework for handling all aspects of this process within correct legal and financial parameters. The reserve has continued to coordinate closely with the WRC and the NCCF to complete these efforts and several vessels were removed during the first few months of 2021. Several more vessels are planned for removal in the coming months. The reserve understands the concerns of the public regarding the presence of these vessels and the response time. All parties involved in removal appreciate

the patience and understanding of the public as well as local offers of support for removal efforts.

- *Pandemic friendly public outreach*
 - Since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic, the reserve has not held any in person outreach activities. These conditions are currently continuing given uncertainty related to vaccines and increasing case rates in NC. Electronic outreach communications have continued, but staff have also looked for new ways to connect with our visitor and volunteer communities remotely. In addition to the story maps that were discussed at the fall meeting, the Terrapin Tally expansion and adaptation has helped fill this need. In addition, participation in the Reserve's iNaturalist project is another way that staff have been engaging with the community remotely. A social media campaign is being conducted as a celebration of Earth Day to encourage visitors to all of the Reserve sites to use this application to document plants and animals they see during their visits.

Roundtable

- No comments

Public comments

- None

Action Items

- Reserve staff will contact committee members during the summer to establish a date for the fall meeting.

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.