



**Masonboro Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, April 16, 2024, 1:00 pm
New Hanover County Arboretum**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
NC Audubon, Lindsay Addison	Yes
New Hanover County Sheriff's Office, Corporal Joshua Sarvis	No
New Hanover County Planning Department, Dylan McDonnell	No
NC Coastal Land Trust, Jesica Blake; Mellissa Dionesotes	No
Division of Marine Fisheries, Chris Stewart ; Zach Harrison	Yes
Natural Heritage Program, Scott Pohlman	Yes
UNCW Center for Marine Science, Dr. Lynn Leonard	No
Town of Wrightsville Beach Administration	No
<u>Community Members and Community Organizations Members</u>	
Neal Andrew	Yes
Nevin Carr	No
Thomas Carter	No
Keni Rienks, Surfrider Foundation	No
Dr. Zachary Long	No
Masonboro.org, Richard Johnson	Yes
William Raney	Yes
Jud Watkins	Yes
Karen Dunn	No
Jordan Nason	Yes
<u>Others Present</u>	
Elizabeth Pinnix, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Southern Sites Manager Morgan Penrose, Stewardship & Research Specialist Byron Toothman, NCNERR Research staff Heather Wells, NCNERR Research staff Mariko Polk, NC Sea Grant	

Welcome

The southern sites manager welcomed the committee to the Spring 2024 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and led introductions.

Reserve-wide Administrative Update

The Reserve-wide Update was shared with committee members prior to the meeting. The update in its entirety is included as Appendix A.

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

- New members of the Local Advisory Committee are joining for the first time. The site manager welcomed those members and expressed appreciation for all members and their commitment to the reserve by serving on this committee.
- The 10th annual [Terrapin Tally](#), a community science event hosted in coordination with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC), will be taking place at Masonboro Island Reserve and nine other locations across the coast of NC. Data collection sessions are scheduled to take place April 25-28, May 9-12, and June 6-9. To learn more, visit the [website](#).

Mr. Andrews suggested Carolina Ocean Studies (COS) (Richard or Jake Celceski) should have a seat on the Local Advisory Committee due to their involvement with the Masonboro Island Explorers Program (ILX).

- The site manager confirmed they have had a seat on the committee in the past and they did not renew their application since that time. She added the reserve and COS communicate regularly and partner on education projects as well as reserve staff provide training and other informational resources (ongoing research, biological monitoring data, etc.) directly to their educators and staff.

Mr. Raney asked how many routes are available at Masonboro for the Terrapin Tally?

- The site manager replied that there are eight this year, with as many as 10 in the past. One route was excluded due to the route no longer being passable and the other was a private launch access that we were not able to keep.

Mr. Johnson asked if we are seeing a decline in terrapin populations through this project? He added that he has noticed seeing less over the years.

- The site manager explained it is difficult to say if we have seen a decline because there are many factors that go into understanding population trends. But many routes have seen a decline in sightings. However, declines could be caused by timing, weather, participant error, etc. She added it is important to continue to conduct the surveys and expand our reach and understanding for the future.

Site Specific Update

General Site Conditions

The site manager reported no major site condition changes and provided the following observations:

- Visitation to the site is beginning to pick up and research is taking place as normal.
- King tides and storms have occasionally altered the beach and dune system in addition to many areas that are experiencing overwash in the center portion of the island.
- In April 2024, Masonboro received four juvenile sea turtle strandings – Two were dead and two were live and taken to the Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Hospital in Topsail Island, NC for treatment. It is not abnormal this time of year for strandings, but these numbers are higher than normal for this island.

- During the closed commercial crabbing season, reserve staff, the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF), Marine Patrol, and the NC Coastal Federation (NCCF) set out to recover and dispose of abandoned and derelict fishing gear in our region. This took place from March 1 - 15.

Mr. Raney asked what was the cause of stranding for the sea turtles?

- The site manager responded with cold stunning.

Mr. Steward asked if Masonboro ever experienced any strandings of Atlantic Sturgeons?

- The site manager responded no. There has been in the past but none recently.

Ms. Addison informed the committee that there is a reporting website for sturgeons.

- From the [NC Wildlife Resource Commission](http://www.ncwildlife.com) website: To report a sturgeon call (844-788-7491) or email noaa.sturg911@noaa.gov.

Mr. Johnson asked if the blue crab fishery seasonal closure is the same time every year?

- The site manager and Mr. Steward confirmed that it is around the same time each year and updates on season closures and the fishery can be found through the NC Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF).

Mr. Steward stressed the importance of not removing or disturbing any fishing gear as this is against the law. Concerns of abandoned or derelict gear can be reported to the reserve if within the boundary or DMF.

Seasonal Activities

Temporary staffing

The site manager reported the stewardship team will have a temporary field technician until the end of the calendar year and two credit interns through UNC-Wilmington (Environmental Science and Biology) that will help to contribute to species monitoring activities and stewardship related tasks at all four of the southern sites with most of their time at Masonboro Island.

The site manager reported on the following upcoming routine activities taking place at Masonboro Island:

- Shorebird nesting surveys – from March through September, in partnership with Audubon NC, American oystercatchers will be monitored, and their nest and chicks documented.
- Sea turtle nest monitoring – from May through end of the year, in partnership with NC Wildlife Resources Commission, sea turtle nesting activity will be documented on Masonboro Island. Survey methods will be a combination of walking and ATV surveys. New protection cages will be used this year to test a new method of predator deterrent set-ups.
- [Seabeach amaranth](#) (federally protected plant species) surveys will be conducted by reserve staff through funding provided by the NC Botanical Gardens and US Fish and Wildlife Service. Additionally, a reintroduction project will be conducted on the north end of the island throughout the summer.
- Fourth of July – The reserve will continue to contract service with the New Hanover County Sheriff Department to provide additional on-site support if necessary, during the day on the fourth of July. Reserve staff will continue to promote safe visitation during the holiday weekend through press and social media, in addition to on-site signage encouraging responsible use and packing out everything you packed in.
- [Cape Fear Bird Observatory](#), a non-profit organization whose goal is research, education, and outreach focused on birds and their habitats in NC, is conducting research for the second year at Masonboro Island, Zeke's Island, and Bird Island Reserves. They will be trapping and tagging painted buntings (PABU) for the second year at these locations. Funding from the National Estuarine Research Reserve System's Science Collaborative expanded the Motus network and will provide education and outreach activities at reserve sites. This will include banding

demonstrations throughout the summer at reserve sites and deployment of tags that will allow movement tracking of PABU in their nesting environments.

- As a reminder there were 168 trapped and tagged PABU at Masonboro Island Reserv in 2023.

Mr. Raney asked if seabeach amaranth is an annual or perennial?

- The site manager confirmed it is an annual which makes it particularly tricky to plant and manage.

Multiple committee members offered suggestions for watering systems to support the seabeach amaranth project including backpack water and irrigation systems.

- The site manager thanked them for the offer and added the UNC Botanical Gardens will be leading the effort.

Mr. Pohlman looked up when the last documented occurrence of seabeach amaranth was on Masonboro Island and it was in 2004.

Mr. Johnson asked if dredging conducted by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) of the Intracoastal Waterway (ICWW) would constitute required monitoring for Seabeach amaranth.

- The site manager said no, that is not the case. The USACOE only monitors Seabeach amaranth in inlet areas where they have completed beach nourishment activities recently.

Mr. Andrews stressed the importance of avoiding any historical photos of the Fourth of July parties and instead focus on educational signs and encourage responsible use.

Mr. Johnson seconded the statement and added he does not think there will be a “party” anymore.

Based on the decrease in trash removed on the holiday (1,500lbs. in previous years to almost none, last year), he doesn’t think Masonboro.org will set up on the island in 2024.

- The site manager agreed and reiterated that we need to move away from the term “party” because this is not the case currently. We will continue moving forward promoting being a good steward and responsible user.

Mr. Raney asked what species are the Motus tower targeting? Is there a variety of species?

- The site manager stated there is a wide variety of species that could ping on the tower and tagging takes place all over the world, so our towers are picking up species on migratory paths from all over, including South America and Canada.

Mr. Johnson asked what the tall tower structures were on the north end of the island in the dunes and how many years they would be there.

- The site manager explained they are temporary research structures with cameras at the top of each. These are capturing photos daily and help to construct an evolution of beach slope over time to see how the island is naturally changing. It is proposed to be installed for two years at this time.

Mr. Nason commented that the photos are housed on a website called CORMP that the public can access.

- [Coastal Ocean Research and Monitoring Program \(CORMP\) website](#)
 - [Masonboro weather station North](#)
 - [Masonboro weather station South](#)
 - [Wave Buoy](#)

New and ongoing projects

Storm resilient research infrastructure

At a previous meeting, a project was discussed regarding the installation of new storm-resistant research platforms; walkway structures to allow for ongoing marsh monitoring activities; and interpretive signage at the Currituck Banks Reserve and Masonboro Island Reserve from National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERRS) Land Acquisition and Construction Funds. Due to a delay in fund dispersion, the bidding process was not completed, and it is now slated to take place in the Fall 2024/Winter 2025. Additionally, the walkway structures are no longer in the plan for the Masonboro Island marsh monitoring site based on cost.

Resilience at the reserve

At the Fall 2023 meeting, resilience planning was discussed which included creating resilience plans for all four NERR sites (Masonboro Island, Rachel Carson, Currituck Banks, and Zeke's Island). The Rachel Carson plan is complete, and the focus is currently on Masonboro Island. The goal is to work with stakeholders and experts to identify areas and habitats that are at risk or vulnerable due to environmental and anthropogenic pressures and develop shovel-ready projects to address these areas. These plans will provide the framework for future resilience projects and help to identify gaps in understanding for future research. The reserve will keep the Masonboro Island LAC updated as the project progresses.

Mr. Johnson asked how much did the Rachel Carson plan involve assessing human impact?

- The site manager responded that the focus was not on human impacts but for the Masonboro Island plan, we will be taking that into account. It is impossible to fully assess resilience when anthropogenic impacts are not considered.

Mr. Johnson further asked about how we would study human impacts (i.e. what types of parameters or studies).

- The site manager clarified that the goal of the plan is not to study human impacts on the site, but rather to understand the ecosystem resilience and will consider human impacts as one of those stressors.

Mr. Raney asked if this plan would identify specific things we can implement to aid in resilience of the site?

- The site manager said yes and provided an example of the living shoreline project taking place at the Rachel Carson Reserve. That project was identified in the resilience plan as a priority area for restoration.

Mr. Raney suggested we identify when to let nature take its course and when to intervene in the planning process.

- The site manager agreed.

There were no objections regarding the new meeting location of the New Hanover County Arboretum. The Fall meeting will be held during November 4-22.

- The Coastal Resources Commission meeting on the 13 and 14 were the only scheduling conflict listed.

Roundtable

Prior to the meeting, Mr. Johnson informed reserve staff of a remaining \$10-20K that was awarded to Masonboro.org from the state of NC to support the Masonboro Island Explorers Program, whose goal is to provide education to K-12 students at Masonboro Island Reserve. Mr. Johnson added the organization has attempted to expand the program into Pender County but there have been limitations

including bussing and scheduling. He requested the reserve find a way to use these funds to support this activity. Mr. Johnson added these funds will expire at the end of the calendar year.

- The site manager stated this was the first time hearing this information and the reserve does not have the capacity at this time to take on a new education program, especially with the short timeframe before funds expire. There were no plans made regarding this or further conversation within the meeting timeframe.

Mr. Raney commented that the meeting minutes are done well, and other committee members seconded this comment.

Mr. Johnson asked for specifics regarding the reserve annual budget.

- Mr. Pohlman, Ms. Wells, and Mr. Toothman all agreed that has remained very similar to its current budget for the past ten years.

Mr. Johnson mentioned the Masonboro.org annual fundraiser at Bradley Creek Marina on May 16th at 6pm and encouraged all to attend. There would be a \$10 donation to attend the event.

Public comments

None

Action Items

Send out Fall meeting date.

Links to resources discussed throughout the meeting can be found within the minutes under the specific topic.

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 10th 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.