



Rachel Carson Reserve  
Local Advisory Committee Meeting  
December 6, 2021, 10am  
WebEx

**Attendance**

LAC Partner Organization Members	Present
Ben Fleming, N.C. Div. of Parks and Recreation	Yes
Ben Wunderly, N.C. Maritime Museum	Yes
Greg Piniak, NOAA's National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science	Yes
Town of Beaufort Administration	No
Paul Burdette, Town of Beaufort Police Department	Yes
Brenda Wichmann, N.C Natural Heritage Program	Yes
Sue Stuska, Cape Lookout National Seashore	No
Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership	No
NC Wildlife Resources Commission	No
Community Members	
Miriam Sutton	Yes
Susan Schmidt	Yes
Ann Carter	Yes
George Everett	Yes
John Fussell	Yes
Perry Barrow	No
Stan Rule	Yes
Dan Rittschof	No
Janina Mills	Yes
Jeff Benoit	Yes
Others Present	
Paula Gillikin, Reserve Central Sites Manager	
Grace Roskar, Reserve Natural Resources Resilience Specialist	

**Reserve-wide Administrative Update - Paula Gillikin**

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.

## **Rachel Carson Reserve Business – Paula Gillikin**

### *Special Activity Authorization*

- The purpose of the changes to the Reserve’s rules is to enhance the Reserve’s ability to balance ecosystem protection and compatible traditional uses through rule clarifications, including modifications and restrictions, and the addition of the special activity authorization which addresses a significant gap in the existing rules. Special activities are organized events, commercial activities, or other special activities or uses at reserve components that are not included in the primary uses of research, education, and compatible traditional uses. The rule describes the process to request a special activity authorization and the process the Division will use to review requests. This supports transparency between the applicants and reviewers. There is no cost to apply.

### *Resilience Planning Update (Grace Roskar)*

- The Rachel Carson Reserve Habitat Resilience Plan’s vision includes an understanding that habitats will change, and we are not trying to achieve static habitat locations. The focus is on maintaining a healthy estuarine environment to support the uses for which the site is protected. And very importantly, continuing to serve as a protective weather and flooding barrier for the Town of Beaufort. The plan actions focus on a 30-year timeframe but acknowledges potential impacts out to 2100. The plan will be updated every 5 years.
- To begin the project, Reserve staff synthesized all the relevant information that we could find about the Rachel Carson Reserve into what we call a “knowledge base” that is hosted on an engaging [ArcGIS online Hub site](#). Staff then analyzed habitat and shoreline change and came together as a project team to identify risks or threats in each area posed by different climate stressors and do a risk analysis to determine vulnerability scores of each area of the reserve. Based on those vulnerability scores, partners helped to identify resilience actions that could be implemented and evaluate the feasibility of such actions. Currently, the Reserve is working with engineering partners and the project team to develop plans for 2 shovel-ready projects and will then present those plans to the partners again for additional feedback.

### *Site Update*

- John Fussell continued to perform International Shorebird Surveys, which includes surveying several times twice per year pre-spring and in the fall. John also conducted the annual piping plover breeding survey at Bird Shoal which revealed no nesting piping plovers.
- The [Terrapin Tally](#) was expanded to several new sites this year, including the Rachel Carson Reserve. Surveying was conducted by trained volunteers during late April through mid-May.
- Damage to the boardwalk from Hurricane Florence was repaired in mid-November. The end of the boardwalk was permanently closed off due to stability safety concerns and the entrance to the boardwalk was officially changed to the eastern side. Pilings were removed where the end section of the boardwalk was broken off by the storm.
- Reserve and WRC staff and volunteers planted 50 small yaupon trees in the egret and heron rookery at Middle Marsh. This is a continued effort to restore the nesting habitat after several hurricanes significantly damaged the area and reduced nesting and resting habitat.

## **Roundtable Discussion**

- Ben Fleming noted that Fort Macon was included in a DCM-coordinated coastal cleanup and there has been a lot of positive feedback. George Everett inquired about the disposition of abandoned vessels that were removed along the coast during the removal project. Paula Gillikin explained that the vessels were largely disposed of except for some recyclable materials. Interagency discussions are continuing about the possibility for North Carolina to learn more about fiberglass recycling. George commented that he is impressed with the outcome of the debris removal project and hope it has been widely publicized as a success.
- Miriam Sutton inquired about where the new rules changes can be found on the website. Paula Gillikin responded that the new rules go into effect on February 1st and she will share the website location. Stan Rule inquired if rules changes included anything related to hunting. Paula Gillikin explained that hunting wasn't addressed in the new rules, as the Reserve is currently working with the Wildlife Resources Commission on a hunting permit system for multiple Reserve sites. At Rachel Carson Reserve, hunting is not allowed at Town Marsh, Carrot Island, Horse Island or Bird Shoal; however, it continues to be allowed at Middle Marsh.
- Miriam Sutton inquired about how the special activity authorization rule will be implemented. Paula Gillikin explained that there will be an online information session for current commercial users that conduct special activities. These users, including ferries, will be asked to apply for an authorization and will need to be re-authorized each year. Jeff Benoit asked if there will be a citizens guide explaining the new rules. Paula responded that there is an outreach plan, including a press release and social media posts. Also, the Reserve will contact commercial users directly. Ben Wunderly inquired if the Maritime Museum would need to apply for educational activities. Paula responded that the Museum's partnership already covers their use of the site and their use isn't considered to be a "special activity."
- Susan Schmidt commented that with sea level rise and salt water intrusion, there are more dead trees along Taylors Creek and this is important to monitor. Jeff Benoit commented that it may be valuable to measure progress towards short and long-term habitat resilience plan goals. George Everett commented that research and focus on habitat resilience is necessary as "no action" doesn't make sense if a Rachel Carson Reserve is to exist in the future to protect Beaufort.
- Ann Carter described that Beaufort's Harbor Committee has been working with consultants on revamping of the downtown docks. The Reserve should be invited to be involved when the mooring field topic is explored.
- Miriam Sutton suggested it would be helpful to overlay storm surge maps (or wrack line locations) with locations of marine debris. This could be helpful to the Town for planning, as well.
- John Fussell is concerned that the lack of dog leashing at Bird Shoal is making the area "infamous" for this issue. For example, birders on eBird are reporting birds from Rachel Carson Reserve, but commenting on the problem of dogs off leash. The committee discussed this concern, and the bottom line is that Beaufort Police Department doesn't have the capacity to enforce this all the time. If the Pony Patrol volunteer program is implemented, that may help, as on-the-ground volunteers can educate visitors. Ben Fleming commented that even though there is enforcement at Fort Macon State Park, dogs off leash are still a problem especially on high visitation days.
- Ann Carter inquired about the impacts of the 3 days of excessive tides in November. Paula and Miriam explained impacts on the south side of the island to including temporary re-opening of Morse's Slue.

### **Public Comment**

- None

**Final comments, Action Items, and Wrap-up**

- Paula Gillikin will send out Reserve rule changes that will go in effect in February of 2022.

**Adjourn**

## N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Fall 2021 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

### Local Advisory Committee Membership

The Division and Reserve welcome the newly appointed and reappointed community members, community organizations, and partner organizations to the Reserve's Local Advisory Committees. Appointments were made following the application period held earlier this year. Thank you to all committee members for their service and participation.

### Coastal Reserve Rule Amendments

The amendments to the Coastal Reserve rules are in the final stage of the rule making process. As a reminder, these amendments satisfy the Legislative Periodic Review and Expiration of Existing Rules process requirements, and address priority updates to enhance clarity of existing rules and address issues and gaps to ensure effective management of the Coastal Reserve in accordance with Coastal Area Management Act. The Office of State Budget and Management approved the fiscal analysis for the rule amendments in April 2021. The public comment period for the amendments was held July 15 – September 13, 2021; one written comment letter was received during the comment period and no comments were provided at the August 26, 2021 public hearing. Changes were made to 2 rule sections (15A NCAC 070.0102 (1) and 15A NCAC 070.0202 (9)) following the public comment period. The Department adopted the rule amendments on October 1, 2021. Staff addressed technical changes requested by the Office of Administrative Hearings, and the Rules Review Commission will hear the updates to the Coastal Reserve rules at its November 18th meeting. The proposed effective date is February 1, 2022.

### Program Highlights

- The Division of Coastal Management has wrapped up its federally funded project to **remove Hurricane Florence debris and abandoned vessels** from public lands and waters along North Carolina's coast. In total, 1,254,280 pounds of debris and 24 vessels were removed from Brunswick through Carteret, including Craven and Pamlico Counties and 4 of the Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve sites managed by the Division (Zeke's Island, Masonboro Island, Permuda Island, and Rachel Carson). The debris included damaged shoreline infrastructure such as pilings, docks, and pieces of treated wood related to these structures. Funded by the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Emergency Watershed Protection program and matched with State funding (\$2,006,925 total), the Division contracted with the NC Coastal Federation to complete the debris and vessels removal, working closely with the Wildlife Resources Commission on the vessel removals given their authority over that activity. This project was part of the largest coordinated debris removal effort along North Carolina's coast in the State's history. Funds provided by other partners were focused primarily on removal of additional vessels. Debris and vessel removal is important activity to avoid resuspension and relocation of debris in future storms, maintain ecosystem functionality and aesthetic, and protect public safety.
- The Coastal Training Program and Division regulatory staff are offering a **Coastal Area Management Act Basics Webinar** on December 1. Participants will learn how DCM balances competing coastal pressures through development permitting under the rules of the Commission. This includes an overview of permits needed for coastal development; development rules for the oceanfront, inlet hazard areas, and estuarine shorelines; and development rules related to coastal habitats including wetlands and primary nursery areas. A question-and-answer session will follow the presentation. Registration is full, but a recording of the webinar will be available after the event given the high demand for the offering.

- The Coastal Training Program will host NOAA Office for Coastal Management's **Nature-Based Solutions for Coastal Hazards 101 training** on January 11, 2022. This virtual course is a starting point in preparing coastal managers and planners to plan and implement green (natural) infrastructure projects to reduce impacts to coastal hazards in their community. Registration is required and more details are located on the Reserve's website.
- The Reserve received funding from NOAA's National Estuarine Research Reserve System to **update and improve its on-site research and select public access infrastructure**. Federal funds in the amount of \$277,100 are matched by Division of Coastal Management Public Access Grant Funds for the Currituck Banks Reserve boardwalk refurbishment, and will be used to design and construct storm-resilient research platforms to support the Reserve's implementation of the System-wide Monitoring Program including water quality monitoring platforms and marsh vegetation platforms to protect salt marsh habitat. The funding will also be used to develop and install interpretive signage at existing trails at the Currituck Banks and Masonboro Island Reserves. The funding was recently awarded, and design work is underway.

### Student and Grant Opportunities

- NOAA released the funding opportunity for the second cohort of the **Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Fellowship** and applications are due December 10, 2021. This program offers graduate students admitted to or enrolled in a Master's or Ph.D. program the opportunity to conduct estuarine research within a National Estuarine Research Reserve. The NC Coastal Reserve & National Estuarine Research Reserve will host one fellow beginning in 2022 to conduct research on a key reserve management question within one of the four National Estuarine Research Reserve sites, which include the Currituck Banks, Rachel Carson, Masonboro Island, and Zeke's Island Reserves. Each 2-year project will employ the tenets of collaborative research, including engaging end-users, incorporating multi-disciplinary perspectives, and ensuring outcomes are applicable to local management needs and decision-making. The Reserve's current Davidson Fellow, Marae Lindquist, a PhD student at UNCW, is studying the impacts of sea level rise on wintering populations of marsh sparrows at multiple reserve sites. More information about the fellowship is available [here](#).
- The application period for the **2022 Coastal Research Fellowship** hosted by the Coastal Reserve and NC Sea Grant is coming soon. The fellowship funds a North Carolina-based graduate student for one year to conduct research at one or more of the Coastal Reserve sites on identified focus areas. More details will be provided on the Reserve's website.
- The Friends of the Reserve (FOR) is requesting applications for the **2022 NC Coastal Reserve Undergraduate Internship Award**. This internship encourages promising and talented students from traditionally underserved and underrepresented populations to pursue study and careers in coastal and estuarine science by gaining professional experience working with the Coastal Reserve for the summer. More details are available on FOR's website [here](#) and the deadline for submitting applications is February 6, 2022.
- The **NERRS Science Collaborative** has two funding opportunities open to address identified management needs of the reserves within the National Estuarine Research Reserve System. [Collaborative research project](#) pre-proposals are due December 7, 2021, and [science transfer grant](#) proposals are due February 24, 2022. More details are available on the NERRS Science Collaborative website.

### Staffing News

Dr. Brandon Puckett, Reserve Research Coordinator, received a 2021 Pelican Award from the NC Coastal Federation in an awards program on August 7, 2021. Brandon was recognized in the "Coastwide Winners" category, receiving an award for "Leadership and Expert Scientific Research Advancing Coastal Restoration. Brandon's doctoral research at North Carolina State University and subsequent work at the Reserve, helped build the foundation for hundreds of acres of new oyster sanctuary in Pamlico

Sound, a better understanding of marsh resiliency, and has helped to advance water quality protection efforts in the state. Additionally, Brandon helped bring national perspectives and understanding to the statewide Oyster Steering Committee’s “North Carolina Oyster Restoration and Protection Strategy: A Blueprint for Action.”

Federal Budget

- The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget\* for fiscal years 19, 20, 21, and 22 as it relates to the Coastal Reserve. The FY2022 budget is currently in a continuing resolution until December 3, 2021. 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	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2019	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2020	FY2021 Enacted (Consolidated Appropriations Act)	FY2022 President’s Request	FY2022 Senate Mark	FY2022 House Mark
NERRS Operations	\$27M	\$27.5 M	\$28.5 M	\$42.5M	\$34M	\$30.5M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$1.9M	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$10M	\$6.5M	\$4M
CZM Grants	\$75.5M	\$77 M	\$78.5 M	\$108.5M	\$88.5M	\$82.5M

- The [Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act](#) that Congress recently passed includes \$77M for the NERRS for habitat restoration to be spent over five years. The Act states that equal amounts of funding shall be provided in Fiscal Years 22-26, approximately \$15.4M annually for the NERRS. Details on how the funds will be allocated are not yet available.

\* 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.