



Rachel Carson Reserve  
 Local Advisory Committee Meeting  
 May 27, 2022, 3pm  
 101 Pivers Island Road, Beaufort with a WebEx option

**Attendance**

LAC Partner Organization Members	Present
Ben Fleming, N.C. Div. of Parks and Recreation	Yes
Ben Wunderly, N.C. Maritime Museum	No
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	Yes
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	Yes
Janina Mills	Yes
Jeff Benoit	No
Others Present	
Paula Gillikin, Reserve Central Sites Manager	
Robert Harper, Member of the public	
Capt. Monty Poling, Member of the public	

**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**

#### *Site update*

- This spring, onsite education programs returned after a hiatus due to COVID precautions. Onsite education programs served 14 workshop participants and 135 K-College students. Two debris cleanups were held in April where 475 pounds of debris was removed from the site. A total of approximately 160,705 pounds has been removed since 2007 by volunteers and through grant projects.
- The Site Stewards Program, first piloted at the Rachel Carson Reserve, was expanded to additional Reserve sites and a training was recently held. Survey 123 was used to generate a report form that can be accessed in the field on the volunteers' phones. Additional Rachel Carson Reserve Site Steward volunteers joined, including advisory committee member Susan Schmidt.
- Several bird surveys have been conducted this spring and will be conducted this summer. John Fussell conducted three International Shorebird Surveys. Staff and volunteers are currently conducting the tri-annual American oystercatcher surveys. Surveys will soon be conducted for breeding least tern, Wilsons plover, and piping plover. The oystercatcher, least tern, and piping plover surveys are part of coast-wide survey efforts coordinated by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission with support of N.C. Audubon.
- The Reserve's new rules became effective in February and Paula Gillikin shared the new rules signs that will be installed at the site. Two new rules include prohibiting abandoned vessels and a requirement for "special activities" to be authorized through an application process. If vessels are abandoned at the site, they will be deemed as litter and disposed of at the owner's expense.
- Wild horse numbers remain below 30 and below the minimum established range for the herd which is 28 to 32. Birth control has not been administered for three years in anticipation of older horses dying. However, additional deaths have occurred that cannot be explained (e.g. last year's newborn male foal).

#### *Dredging*

- Dredging of east Taylor's Creek, a county project, began in mid-March and ended this week. Dredged material was pumped through a pipe along the reserve's shoreline to Radio Island where it was de-watered and then transferred to the public beach. This was the first time dredge pipeline has been laid along the entire north side of the site, which posed public access challenges even though the dredge contractor provided access accommodations upon request of the Reserve. To help plan for future similar projects, committee members were asked to provide observations about how the pipe may or may not have affected access.

### **Roundtable Discussion**

- Brenda Wichmann described the N.C. Natural Heritage Program's new Rare Vascular Plants of NC iNaturalist project and suggested it may be beneficial to link to Reserve projects.
- Ann Carter reported that the pipe associated with recent dredging seemed to cause confusion for boaters as it drifted at times. She heard from a member of the public that they were worried to try and cross the pipe due to the potential for damaging their propeller or the pipe. She also

expressed concern that the monitoring/transport boat was operating on plane and causing wakes in the creek. Miriam Sutton agreed and added that the pipe was not well marked, and it caused research markers to fall over.

- The committee discussed the upcoming installation of a living shoreline at Carrot Island and the Rachel Carson Reserve habitat resilience plan. Greg Piniak offered that committee members and staff may glean ideas for the Carrot Island project by viewing the new NOAA living shoreline demonstration project which uses QuickReef units. Dan Rittschof cautioned that thin layer deposition has the potential to impact invertebrates due to toxins in the sediment. Susan Schmidt asked about how the Reserve is documenting shoreline change and Paula Gillikin explained data that the Reserve and partners have collected. Dan Rittschof noted that shoreline change has resulted in fiddler crab population shifts. Miriam added that a local citizen has data documenting his almost daily walks along Bird Shoal that show shoreline position.
- John Fussell described recent International Shorebird Survey efforts at Bird Shoal and reported that he did not have good counts for three of the four surveys.
- Stan Rule asked if use of drones at the site was addressed in the new rules. Paula Gillikin explained that a drone policy was being developed but was not included in the new rules.
- The committee discussed possible reasons for decline in wild horse numbers, including the need for a coyote study that could be conducted by a student. Dan Rittschof suggested a Duke student may be good for this.
- Janina Mills requested to have her email address updated in the committee list.

#### **Public Comment**

- Monty Poling remarked that the dredge pipe caused challenges with physical access to reserve, and he mostly stayed away from his typical access sites. He has concerns about the Reserve being able to enforce the new Special Activity Authorization rule, although he thinks the rule is a good idea. He commented that the Tiki cruises rafting up at the reserve's shoreline was not in line with the Reserve's mission.

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

- Miriam Sutton will get in touch with a contact who has shoreline position data.
- Paula Gillikin will send the Rachel Carson Site Stewards reporting link to the committee.
- Brenda Wichmann will send information on the rare plants project to the committee.
- Paula Gillikin will update Janina Mills email address.

#### **Adjourn**

## N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve Spring 2022 Local Advisory Committee Meetings Reserve-wide Update

### Coastal Reserve Rule Amendments

Coastal Reserve rule amendments adopted by the Department in October 2021 and approved by the Rules Review Commission in November 2021 became effective February 1, 2022. 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 the Coastal Area Management Act. The updated rules are available on the Reserve's website [here](#).

### Program Highlights

- A virtual training for Reserve **Site Stewards** volunteers at the Currituck Banks, Kitty Hawk Woods, Buxton Woods, Rachel Carson, and Masonboro Island Reserves will be held May 11 at 6pm. Site stewards observe and record data in the field and report findings back to the site manager. Information collected may be related to general site conditions, marine debris items, visitor issues, infrastructure damage, and species found at the site. [Registration](#) is required.
- **Student field trips** to the Rachel Carson Reserve resumed this spring. The Masonboro Island Explorers program resumed trips to the Masonboro Island Reserve in Fall 2021 and spring trips for New Hanover County 5<sup>th</sup> graders are underway.
- Registration for **Summer Science School**, in partnership with the NC Maritime Museum in Beaufort, is open. Reserve education staff will lead programs for students ranging from Preschool to 10th grade including Preschool Storytime and Crafts, Seashore Life I & II, and Coastal Adventures. Learn more [here](#).
- The **2022 Terrapin Tally**, a partnership with the Reserve and Wildlife Resources Commission, is underway. This citizen science project helps address questions about the population status and condition of the diamondback terrapin within the state by taking a snapshot of the population via kayak surveys at specified times and prescribed routes. 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. Virtual training sessions were held April 7 and 9 and data collection sessions will be held April 28-May 1, May 4-7, and May 13-15.
- **Earth Day related clean-ups** took place at the Rachel Carson Reserve. The Reserve and Town of Beaufort partnered on a community cleanup of the Beaufort waterfront and shoreline of the Rachel Carson Reserve on April 23. Division of Marine Fisheries employees used Community Service Leave to conduct a clean-up of the Rachel Carson Reserve on April 26. DMF employees have partnered with the Reserve on an annual clean-up for the past several years, resulting in thousands of pounds of debris removed.
- The Council of State approved the **donation of the Whitlock Marsh tract** (330 acres) to the State from the NC Coastal Land Trust at its April meeting. The tract is an inholding at the Masonboro Island Reserve and will be added to the site.
- The Coastal Training Program hosted NOAA Office for Coastal Management's virtual training titled **Fostering Behavior Change in Coastal Communities: An Introduction to Community Based Social Marketing** on April 13. Participants become familiar with a five-step approach that has been used in coastal projects to influence the way people interact with their environment.
- The Coastal Training Program and Division staff delivered **Living on a Barrier Island – A virtual workshop for real estate professionals** on March 2. Participants learned about the ecology and geology of barrier islands, the rules and policies that govern development on barrier

islands, updates to the National Flood Insurance Program, and native plantings for the coastal landscape. Real estate professionals received four elective continuing education credits from the N.C. Real Estate Commission.

Staffing News

- Brandon Puckett, Reserve Research Coordinator, started a new job in April with NOAA’s National Centers for Coastal Ocean Science at the NOAA Beaufort Lab, focused on coastal resilience and restoration-related research. We thank Brandon for his applied work on diverse coastal management topics at local, regional, and national levels during his tenure with the Division, and look forward to collaborating with him on mutually beneficial projects moving forward. We wish Brandon the best of luck in this new endeavor.
- Welcome to Elizabeth Pinnix (Colhoun), the Reserve’s new Southern Sites Manager. Elizabeth joined the Division in April and is responsible for site management at the four southern reserve sites (Masonboro Island, Zeke’s Island, Bald Head Woods, and Bird Island Reserves), working with communities and volunteers at each site, and conducting direct resource management and public access projects. Elizabeth has a Master’s degree in Marine Biology from Nova Southeastern University in Florida and a Bachelor of Science degree in Oceanography/Biology from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Elizabeth worked as a temporary employee with the Reserve in the role of Stewardship and Education Specialist at the southern sites since 2017. The creation of this position adds permanent capacity to the Reserve program, which was included in the Governor’s budget and the General Assembly’s Appropriations Act of 2021.
- Hope Sutton will continue to serve as the Stewardship Coordinator for the Reserve, coordinating the stewardship program which includes leading program-wide initiatives, policies, and activities across the ten reserve sites in collaboration with the four site managers, connecting stewardship initiatives of the National Estuarine Research Reserve System to our work here in NC, connecting with a variety of state and regional partners, and supporting Elizabeth in her management of the southern sites.

Federal Budget

- The budget table below is a summary of the current status of the federal budget\* for fiscal years 2019-2023 as it relates to the Coastal Reserve. Congressional marks from the House and Senate for FY2023 are not yet available. 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)	Final Omnibus Appropriations FY2022	FY2023 President’s Request
NERRS Operations	\$27M	\$27.5 M	\$28.5 M	\$29.7M	\$28.5M
NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, & Construction (PAC)	\$1.9M	\$4.5M	\$4.5M	\$6.5M	\$4.5M
CZM Grants	\$75.5M	\$77 M	\$78.5 M	\$79M	\$78.5M

- 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 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.