



Zeke's Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, April 26, 2021 – 10 am
Meeting held by WebEx

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
Division of Parks and Recreation – FFRA, Jeff Owen	No
Division of Archives and History, Stephen Atkinson	No
NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher, Renee Weeks	No
Natural Heritage Program, Judith Ratcliffe	No
<u>Community Members</u>	
Devon Eulie	Yes
Stephen Rice	Yes
Angela Marshall	Yes
<u>Others Present</u>	
Bob Dillard, Member of the public	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager	
Elizabeth Colhoun, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship and Education Specialist	
Byron Toothman, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Research 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, NCCR Coastal Training Program Coordinator.

Special presentation on water quality monitoring at the Zeke's Island Reserve – Byron Toothman

A presentation highlighting water quality findings at the site was given by Research Associate, Byron Toothman. Storm signals, including extended periods of lower than normal salinity associated with storm events, can be readily detected in the System-wide Monitoring Program data. Otherwise a general trend toward higher salinity can be seen over the years, corresponding to increased ocean water input as a result of the deepening of the Cape Fear River shipping channel.

Reserve-wide Administrative Update – Hope Sutton

The Reserve-wide Update, which includes a range of Reserve activities and information 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. Applications will be reviewed and the list of applicants will be sent to the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality with comments. 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.

Dr. Eulie commented on the recent awards received by several Reserve staff, offering congratulations to Paula, Brandon, and Whitney.

Site Specific Update – Hope Sutton

- *General site conditions*
 - The site manager reported that conditions at the site over the winter appear to have been normal, despite the pandemic. Reserve staff have only been on site since the previous meeting in December to switch out research equipment and meet with students regarding the Spanish-language outreach project.
- *Spanish-language outreach project*
 - The reserve hosted a workshop on February 4th to invite partner agencies to work together to address the need for outreach targeted to Spanish-speaking and Hispanic community visitors. The group determined that enough shared interest existed to continue to work together on two projects: developing a series of short videos and creating Spanish language website content to support understanding of the resources in the area. The reserve staff is following up on these two ideas. Two students from UNCW Communications Department will begin work on video content and reserve staff will work on the website content in house with support from the participating partners. Translation of several of the Reserve's existing written materials: the site brochure, the Estuaries: Where Rivers Meet the Sea coloring book, and the Estuary Activity Book has also begun. These resources will be shared with the public later in 2021.
- *Outreach activities*
 - In addition to the Spanish language outreach project, the reserve has been working with a variety of partners on expanding the Terrapin Tally, a community science project designed to collect diamondback terrapin population data through repeated head count surveys. Although this project was cancelled in 2020 due to Covid-19 guidelines, it has been adapted to a fully remote format and is being conducted in line with the governor's executive orders and the Department of Environmental Quality's guidelines for the agencies under its purview. The Zeke's Island Reserve is one of ten new sites for this project in 2021. Virtual training was held on April 8 and 10, with approximately 300 people attending. Data collection sessions will occur from April 28-May 2 and May 12-16. The reserve is grateful for the partnership of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and several other agencies and organizations, including the Fort Fisher Recreation Area, in taking on this project and expanding understanding of diamondback terrapins in North Carolina.

Roundtable

- Ms. Marshall reported that a portion of the kayak launching area is a potential hazard. The part nearer the boat ramp appears to be a trail to the water, but it is deep mud and people are getting stuck while trying to launch. She suggested that a sign is needed to alert visitors to use the other part of the launching area where there is more solid bottom.

Public comments

- None

Action Items

- Reserve staff will contact committee members during the summer to establish a date for the fall meeting.
- Reserve staff will contact Wildlife Resources Commission staff regarding the potential hazard at the kayak launch area.

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.