



**Zeke's Island Reserve  
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes  
Thursday, April 10, 2024, 10:00 am  
Virtual via Teams**

**Attendance**

<b><u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u></b>	<b><u>Present</u></b>
Division of Parks and Recreation, Ft. Fisher Recreation Area, Jeff Owen	No
Division of Archives and History, Stephen Atkinson	No
NC Aquarium at Fort Fisher, Renee Weeks	Yes
Natural Heritage Program, Judith Ratcliffe	No
<b><u>Community Members</u></b>	
Stephen Rice	No
Angela Marshall	No
Jack Housenger	No
Bob Dillard	No
Georgia Busch	Yes
<b><u>Others Present</u></b>	
Elizabeth Pinnix, DCM/NCNERR Southern Sites Manager Morgan Penrose, DCM/NCNERR Stewardship Specialist	

**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 reminder from the Reserve-wide update:

- This is the first meeting for new members to the Local Advisory Committee and we appreciate the interest and commitment to the reserve.
- The 10th annual Terrapin Tally, a community science event hosted in coordination with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC), will be taking place at Zeke's Island Reserve. Data collection sessions are scheduled to take place April 25-28, May 9-12, and June 6-9. To learn more, visit the [website](#).

Ms. Busch mentioned the marine debris crews working through the NC Coastal Federation are currently in Brunswick County and if the reserve has any need for a crew at Zeke's Island, to let them know.

## **Site Specific Update**

### *General site conditions*

The site manager reported the following:

- Reserve staff have conducted multiple site visits since the fall meeting. No significant change in conditions.
- 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.

Ms. Busch informed the committee that the NCCF staff in the northeast office have begun analyzing the data regarding the number of pots removed from the waters during this effort and it should be available soon.

Ms. Weeks reported the NC Aquarium staff have visited the basin side of the site recently and will be taking field trips to the site soon. She added nothing unusual had been reported about the site.

### *Upcoming projects and activities*

The site manager reported on the following:

- The Zeke's Island Reserve Chronolog will be installed next week. This project aims to engage the public to participate in community science and gather photos of a given area over time. These photos are available to the public [online](#) and provide a timelapse video that researchers and managers can use to study change over time.
  - The reserve's storm resilient research structure project was delayed due to fund dispersal timing. The work is now proposed to take place late fall 2024 through winter 2025. The goal of this project is to create storm resilient structures and platforms for the reserve's System Wide Monitoring Program (SWMP). The funding for this project was provided by the NERRS Procurement, Acquisition, and Construction (PAC) grants. Ms. Busch asked who the reserve was targeting to take bids for this project and offered to provide contacts for contractors that the NCCF has successfully worked with in the past. The site manager thanked her for the offer and added that she was not aware of the specifics of the bidding process but would reach out if needed.
- The reserve is in the process of updating site brochures. No major changes were made to the content, but updates include the additions of coyotes to the animal list and trail systems to the site map (the Fort Fisher Basin Trail and kayak paddle routes). Additionally, we have requested Spanish-translated versions that will be available on our website and in-person at the Fort Fisher State Recreation Area and at outreach activities.
- The Army Corps of Engineers (USACOE) is in the planning and assessment phase for the Wilmington Harbor Project to deepen the port's channel. Reserve staff participate in the USACOE meetings and will provide updates as new information applicable to Zeke's Island Reserve is presented.
  - In coordination with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC), we will conduct surveys in later April 2024 for eastern black rail presence at Zeke's Island Reserve. The surveys are in response to ongoing efforts in eastern NC to better understand species presence and distribution. Proposed habitat alterations, including prescribed burning, have been proposed and completed in our region.

The site manager asked Mr. Owen prior to the meeting about the plan for prescribed marsh burning by NC State Parks. Mr. Owen replied that the plan is in the early stages, and nothing will happen until fall 2024 at the earliest.

The site manager will continue to check in for updates on the plan.

**Roundtable**

The site manager asked attendees if there were conflicts in the scheduled timeframe for the fall LAC meeting (November 4 – 22). There were no comments on the timeframe. The site manager asked attendees to provide feedback on the format of the meetings and preference for in-person vs. virtual meetings. Both Ms. Busch and Ms. Weeks stated they are flexible and will do what is best for the committee.

**Public comments**

None.

**Action Items**

Follow up with date for fall 2024 meeting and request feedback on meeting format preferences.  
Send the committee derelict crab pot removal data once received from NCCF.

## 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 10<sup>th</sup> 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.