



**Bird Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Monday, November 18, 2024, 10:00 am
Town of Sunset Beach - Town Hall**

Attendance

<u>LAC Partner Organization Members</u>	<u>Present</u>
NC Coastal Land Trust – Jessica Blake, Mellissa Dionesotes	Yes
NC Coastal Federation – Lauren Kolodij	Yes
Bird Island Preservation Society - Bill Ducker	No
Sunset Beach Police Department	No
Town of Sunset Beach Administration – Lisa Anglin	No
Natural Heritage Program – Scott Pohlman	Yes
<u>Community Members and Community Organization Members</u>	
Noelle Kehrberg	Yes
<u>Others Present</u>	
Elizabeth Pinnix, NCNERR Southern Sites Manager Morgan Penrose, NCNERR Stewardship Specialist Anna Poston, NCNERR Biological Technician Kim Matvey, Bird Island Stewards Katie Hovermale, Past LAC member, FOR Board President, Bird Island Stewards	

Welcome

The southern sites manager welcomed the committee to the Fall 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. *Members had no questions or comments.*

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

- The Stewardship Coordinator position that has been vacant since August 2022 was recently filled by Paula Gillikin, the former Central Sites Manager in Beaufort.

- In June 2024, an email update was sent to all special activity authorized users to inform them of two new changes:
 1. Beginning in 2025, Special Activity Authorization (SAA) applications are required to report participant numbers from the authorized activity they have applied for in the previous calendar year.
 2. Additionally, we informed applicants of a policy that states visitors at reserve sites may only keep five sand dollars each. This policy is specific to dead sand dollars, as live collection is not permitted. This policy was created as the result of complaints and natural resource pressure at the Rachel Carson Reserve but has been adopted across all applicable reserve sites and began implementation in June 2024. The goal of this policy is to ensure all visitors have the opportunity to view and collect, if desired, dead sand dollars and to ensure that sand dollars continue to contribute to the site's natural character and function.

Ms. Hovermale asked if there was a fee associated with the Special Activity Authorization. The site manager responded that there is not a fee associated.

The committee was overall supportive of the sand dollar policy and will be looking forward to the findings from the surveys conducted at the Rachel Carson Reserve.

Site Specific Update

General Site Conditions

- Reserve staff have conducted multiple site visits since the spring meeting. No significant change in conditions. Staff conducted inventory of the kayak trail along Bonaparte Creek. Due to the loss of many of the markings and limited access to the trail, we will be removing this as a marked paddle trail. However, it will remain listed on our website as a paddle route option. Trail maintenance will be conducted in coordination with the stewards following the fall 2024 LAC meeting.
- Earlier in 2024, site managers across the ten reserve sites implemented a new internal reporting tool to better track and document examples of misuse at the sites. Since January 2024, 50 total cases of misuse have been documented across the sites. The highest documentation of misuse occurred at Masonboro Island (19) and Buxton Woods (12) Reserves.
 - The most common types of misuse at Bird Island included littering/dumping including trash left on the site. All incidents have been resolved.
 - Examples from other reserve sites include non-permitted infrastructure and fireworks. Documented cases of misuse across all reserve sites include visitor use conflicts (between hunters and recreators), inappropriate visitor behavior, tampering with water quality structures, stranded vessels, encroachment, and crab pots in designated crab spawning areas.

Seasonal Activities

- Public field trips
 - The Bird Island Stewards hosted public field trips to Bird Island during the summer months from May 29 - September 11. A total of 196 volunteer hours were contributed throughout the season and 257 individuals participated in the field trips.
- Terrapin Tally Results
 - The Terrapin Tally community science project completed its tenth year of data collection during the spring. This collaboration project with the NC Wildlife Resources Commission

aims at collecting diamondback terrapin sighting data in the state to better understand population trends and identify management efforts.

- Collectively, there were eight days with a total of 99 data collection sessions paddled over the span of 10 sites ranging from Sunset Beach to Cape Lookout. This resulted in over 300 diamondback terrapin sightings recorded. Three terrapins were sighted at Bird Island during the event and four were documented in 2023.
 - For more information about the Terrapin Tally and to participate, please visit the [website](#). Training for the 2025 season will be held in April 2025.
- Ms. Hovermale asked if we could inquire about installing a kayak launch at the end of Main Street to access Bird Island more easily. The town manager was not in attendance, but the site manager stated there is a new kayak launch going in at the east end of the island at a new town park. Main Street would not be suitable for this use with the parking configuration. Ms. Kehrberg added she believed that option would be a nightmare for parking in that location.
 - Ms. Kehrberg stated she will promote the Terrapin Tally paddling event in the community. She has seen terrapins stuck in derelict crab pots while participating. The site manager informed the committee that the reserve would be hosting a training event in the winter to train people how to spot abandoned and derelict crab pots so these can be recovered and disposed of during the closed crab fishing season on the first of March. Ms. Kolodij informed the committee that the NC Coastal Federation began this derelict crab pot removal effort in 2003. Thousands of derelict and abandoned crab pots have been removed from our coast and encouraged everyone to visit their [website](#) to learn more.

New and Ongoing Projects

- *Motus tower* –
 - The motus tower was installed in spring 2024 with construction support from volunteers, reserve staff, [Cape Fear Bird Observatory](#) (CFBO) members, and students from UNCW. The tower has been active since then and has 25 total detections to date. CFBO has conducted research activities over the summer to band painted buntings in the area and a few of those were detected by the tower. Other notable detections include an American kestrel that was originally tagged in New Hampshire and a piping plover from August 2024 that was originally tagged in Nova Scotia in July 2024. This individual pinged on the Masonboro Island and Bird Island towers on the same day!
 - We are planning to install educational signage along the trail to explain the purpose and importance of the motus tower (pending funding).
 - Additionally, a collaborative grant awarded to the Cape Fear Bird Observatory has resulted in a Motus collective website that can be found [here](#). This educational resource will be maintained by the NERRS to document future species detections.

Ms. Kehrberg asked what the difference was between the motus detection website, and this new one created by CFBO. She also asked about the maintenance of the tower.

- The new collective website will host detailed information about local detections as well as link to the different towers in the NERRS. The original motus website is used to view detections from the global motus tower network. Tower maintenance is minimal and consists mainly of ensuring connection points are not rusting or need to be tightened.

Roundtable

Ms. Kolodij reminded the committee of the funds held by the NC Coastal Federation, as a part of the Bird Island Preservation Society to support Bird Island Reserve-related activities. There is \$50,000 available and she requested a separate meeting with partners to budget and manage these funds.

Public comments

Ms. Hovermale commented that the Reserve's non-profit organization, the Friends of the Reserve (FOR), will be making new brochures for outreach and social events. And FOR is looking for board members - applications will be open in early 2025. The board is looking for individuals that are savvy in social media and communication.

Action Items

N/A