



**Zeke's Island Reserve
Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, December 8, 2021 – 10:30 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	yes
Natural Heritage Program, Judith Ratcliffe	yes
<u>Community Members</u>	
Devon Eulie	no
Stephen Rice	yes
Angela Marshall	no
Jack Housenger	no
<u>Others Present</u>	
Hope Sutton, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship Coordinator/Southern Sites Manager	
Elizabeth Colhoun, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Stewardship and Education Specialist	
Whitney Jenkins, DCM/NCCR & NCNERR Coastal Training Program Coordinator	

Welcome – Hope Sutton

The site manager welcomed the committee to the Fall 2021 meeting, reviewed the agenda, and led introductions. Two items were added to the agenda since it was sent out: an update about implementation of recently adopted rules and an update about permit hunts.

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:

- The Margaret A. Davidson Graduate Fellowship funding opportunity application period is currently open with the deadline of December 10. This will be the second cohort for this NERRS-specific fellowship program. Reserve staff have been meeting with prospective applicants and look forward to a strong group of applications to review.
- The Friends of the Reserve will again be funding an undergraduate internship award for the summer of 2022. This internship is focused on increasing diversity and providing opportunities to underrepresented populations. The 2022 intern will be working out of the Beaufort office. Deadline for application is February 6.

The site manager also shared the following news item that occurred after the Reserve-wide update was sent out.

- *New staff position approved - southern sites manager*
 - With the passage of the State budget, a Southern Sites Manager position has been funded. Reserve staff are working to define the job description and post the opening. When filled, the current Stewardship Coordinator and Southern Sites Manager will become the full-time Stewardship Coordinator for the program, allowing more time for activities that span the full network of sites, including resilience, accessibility, GIS, and a variety of administrative tasks such as updates of management plans and MOUs, pursuing grant funding for special projects, and policy work.

- *Rules implementation and special activity authorization*
 - The reserve's readopted and updated rules will become effective on February 1. Local Advisory Committees have been involved with several steps throughout this process and the final rule language will be provided to committee members and the public via the website on January 31, 2022. The purpose of changes approved through the required periodic rules review 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.
 - Starting February 1, 2022, written authorization will be required for organized events, commercial activities, and other special activities or uses within the boundaries of any Reserve component not included in the primary uses of research, education, and compatible traditional uses. The rule lays out the process and conditions around special activity authorizations. The new special activity rule will help address requests received by the Reserve for special activities such as organized eco-tour trips. The rule describes the process to request a special activity authorization and also the process the division will use to review requests. This supports transparency between the applicants and reviewers. There is no fee to apply for a special activity authorization.
 - The reserve will be holding a webinar at 6 pm on February 22, 2022 to introduce the new rules and the special activity authorization process to known commercial users of the sites, including transport providers and ecotour companies.
 - Other changes that were included and previously reviewed by Local Advisory Committee members include: defining traditional uses as fishing, hunting, navigation, and recreation as it is referenced in the purposes of the program; defining camping at Masonboro as being allowed for 2 consecutive nights; and strengthening and clarifying rules related to littering and vehicles.
 - Other actions staff are taking to inform the public about the updated rules include: updating website, sign, and brochure language; doing website hot topic and social media posts; and sending out a press release shortly before the effective date.

Site Specific Update – Hope Sutton

- *General site conditions*
 - The site manager reported that conditions at the site over the summer appear to have been normal, if busier than previous years. Reserve staff have primarily been on site to switch out research equipment.
 - Ms. Weeks reported that the Aquarium resumed summer camps but limited the number of participants for safety purposes. Activities included crabbing and other hands-on lessons near the boat ramp. She noted that the area was busy but that the number of visitors did not seem greatly increased from previous years.

- *Spanish-language outreach project*
 - The Reserve has continued to pursue the project to address the need for outreach targeted to Spanish-speaking and Hispanic community visitors. Due to other priorities, the timeline has been delayed, but a short video was produced to introduce potential visitors to the area's public

resources. The site manager will share the link with LAC members in a follow-up email. Also underdevelopment is an interactive map that will be hosted through the reserve's website and will connect visitors with information about the various public locations and entities in the Zeke's Island/Fort Fisher/Federal Point area. The new timeline has these materials ready for public sharing in the spring of 2022.

- *Permit hunts*
 - The Reserve has been in conversations with Wildlife Resources Commission staff regarding the implementation of permit hunts on several of the sites, including the Zeke's Island Reserve. Due to the additional step of needing to adopt a new rule to acknowledge the authority of the WRC to administer these hunts on the Reserve sites, the earliest permit hunts will begin in August 2023. Reserve staff and WRC staff will continue to work through details regarding the types of animals that may be hunted, the types of firearms that will be allowed, areas of the site that may not be available for hunting, and any changes to the dates and durations for hunts. Local Advisory Committees will be asked to provide input on preliminary maps and permit hunt details at the spring meeting. In the interim, reserve staff will also begin to work on the site and boundary posting activities that will be required to support permit hunts.

Roundtable

- Mr. Rice inquired about whether the Reserve would be participating in a study about PFAS contamination in the Cape Fear River focused on crabs and fish. He also noted that he has seen an increase in the number of commercial crab pots in the area and that the operations appear to be larger than the historic small vessels crabbing in the area. He also inquired about the results of the 2021 Terrapin Tally project.

Public comments

- None

Action Items

- Reserve staff will contact committee members during the winter to establish a date for the spring meeting.
- Reserve staff will contact Wildlife Resources Commission staff regarding the potential hazard at the kayak launch area.
- Reserve staff will send Terrapin Tally information to LAC members.
- Reserve staff will contact the Division of Marine Fisheries to learn more about how regulations in Diamondback Terrapin Management Areas are being enforced.

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 5th 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.