

Reserve Program Update – Hope Sutton

Local Advisory Committee procedures document

As reported at the June meeting, the document detailing operational procedures for the Local Advisory Committee (LAC) is in review at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) Secretary's office. Once approved, the document will go into effect immediately and open positions will be announced so that interested parties can submit applications to be considered for appointment.

Staff changes

The Reserve's GIS Specialist position was abolished due to budget reductions and the Southern Sites Stewardship and Education Specialist is no longer a position in the southern office. The Stewardship Coordinator is again responsible for site management of the five southern sites.

Rules review process

As reported at the June meeting, a working draft of recommended updates for the Reserve's Rules of Use is under internal review. Draft language will next be refined in cooperation with N.C. Division of Coastal Management (DCM) policy analysts and provided to the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) for review. Local Advisory Committees (LAC) will review the draft rule language and public meetings will be held prior to beginning the formal rule making process.

Site Update – Hope Sutton

Visitor count project

Despite the absence of a statistical methodology for analyzing visitor count data, the site manager and interns began to collect data this summer as time allowed. Counts were conducted along the entire length of the Reserve around high tide on both weekends and weekdays. Hourly counts were done at the more heavily used areas of the north end on both weekends and weekdays. This effort will continue throughout the year.

Signage project

The Reserve's signage update project continues. "Welcome" signs have been received and will be installed as time allows and necessary permits are obtained. Informational signs are being manufactured, with text and design in draft stage. At Masonboro, six locations will have a single panel containing information about the site and the program. Six additional sites will have a double panel, one panel will contain the basic informational content and one panel will house changing and seasonal content. The next step in the signage project is to install boundary markers for areas of the Reserve that will not have the types of signage already discussed.

Species of Concern Monitoring

Marsh bird surveys have been submitted to the national secretive marsh bird database. American oystercatcher nesting was monitored on a 1.5 mile stretch. Nine pairs were documented, with nests in each territory, but no successful reproduction was recorded. Each nests located is marked and the number of eggs and geographic coordinates for the nest are

recorded. In nearly every case, eggs are no longer present at the next visit, typically two days after initial identification. It is unclear how much effect predation and disturbance each have on reproductive success. Both appear to be factors that reduce success, but further study is needed to fully understand the influence of each. The diamondback terrapin mark recapture study was discontinued for the season in June. Modifications to the crabpots resulted in a greatly reduced catch rate. This study will continue next season. The sea turtle nest monitoring and protection effort has continued, with daily patrols in July and nearly daily patrols into August. Hatching of nests and the subsequent excavations have begun. Twenty confirmed nests, where eggs were located, and another nine possible nests, where a body pit was located but eggs not found, were identified.

July Fourth

The Fourth was similar to last year, although the crowd appeared to be somewhat smaller. New Hanover County Sheriff's Department was on site all three days of the weekend. Most citations were written for underage drinking and boat safety violations. One person was trespassed off the island. Many small injuries were treated by on site emergency medical personnel. Two more serious injuries occurred on boats and were dealt with in cooperation with the U.S. Coast Guard. One person received a citation for transport of passengers without appropriate credentials. This type of illegal transport activity is recognized as a playing a large role in facilitating the event. More attention will be paid to this activity prior to and during next July 4. Masonboro.org volunteers were on site and carried all of the trash off the island during the weekend. The island was in good condition on July 5. Overall, the strategies put in place during the last two seasons appear to be beginning to address the impact on the Reserve property and the safety and liability concerns associated with this situation.

Member Roundtable and other comments

- Mr. Raney asked about the status of acquisitions. The North Carolina Coastal Land Trust has received several responses to the annual inquiry from owners who may have interest in donating their property. This will be followed up on in the coming months.
- Mr. Carpenter suggested that four meetings a year may be more than necessary. A decision was made to revisit this question at the November meeting, as several other members expressed a desire to continue the quarterly meeting schedule.
- Mr. Johnson asked about the timeline for submission of the draft rule language to the Secretary of DENR's office. There is no clear timeline on this as the draft language is still under review within the Division of Coastal Management and no timeline is prescribed. It is the intention of Reserve staff to provide additional information regarding proposed rule changes to the public prior to the public hearings required by the rule process.
- Mr. Johnson expressed concerns about red fox predation and stated that he felt that removing foxes should be a management priority. The effects of fox predation, how fox removal could be undertaken, and what course forward the Reserve is planning to take were discussed. Explanation was given regarding the complexities of handling multiple priorities with an inadequate budget and the difficulties of identifying external funding for this type of work. Also discussed was that because of the research focus of the Reserve, if predator removal is undertaken, it is most desirable to do so within the

scope of a complete study so that the effects of removal may be completely understood. Discussion among committee members centered on the fact that the impacts of this predator population are known and therefore removal is appropriate, as soon as a funding source can be identified.

Meeting Follow Up

- Last 2011 meeting is scheduled for November 7th.