

VI. LAND ACQUISITION AND BOUNDARY EXPANSION PLAN

A. NCNERR Land Acquisition and Boundary Expansion Objectives

- **Objective 4.2:** Boundary expansion and acquisition will be completed to effectively protect Reserve core and buffer areas.

B. Activities in Support of NCNERR Land Acquisition Objectives

Land acquisition and boundary expansion objectives are presented in bold, italic text with the objective number that refers to Figure 1 in parentheses. Objective activities are presented beneath each objective.

1. Boundary expansion and acquisition will be completed to effectively protect Reserve core and buffer areas (4.2)

Complete legal and geographic data collection and review for Reserve sites

The North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve (NCNERR) will complete its review of legal and geographic information for all properties within the Reserve. A full set of deeds and easements will be compiled for each site. County Tax, State Property Office, and Reserve records will be evaluated for accuracy and consistency. Properties surrounding the sites will be evaluated as appropriate to help better protect the habitats within the NCNERR.

Take steps to obtain properties or solidify relationships with neighbors and inholding property owners

The Reserve recently purchased the largest of 13 remaining privately owned properties on Masonboro Island in New Hanover County. Acquisition of this tract added 23.3 acres to the Masonboro Island component of the NCNERR in 2008. Funding for the preservation effort came from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Estuarine Research Reserve System. The only remaining acquisitions within the four components are the 12 properties totally approximately 17 acres on Masonboro Island proper plus any adjacent spoil areas in private ownership. Inclusion of these parcels in the NCNERR will eliminate the threat of development on the island, thereby keeping the ecosystem intact for research and education. No change in current management is anticipated as a result of the acquisitions.

Past discussions with the owners of these remaining properties have indicated that donation of the properties is unlikely. Condemnation is a legal option, but is unpopular with the public and requires that the property owner be paid fair market value. At this time, the approach to further acquisition is to continue contact with individual landowners, both directly and through conservation partners, to pursue potential donation or sale of property or property rights to the NCNERR. This effort is supported by the North Carolina Coastal Land Trust, which absorbed the former Society for Masonboro Island and continues to assist in acquisition efforts through annual landowner contacts.

Expand boundaries to parcels that meet National Estuarine Research Reserve System definitions for core and buffer areas as appropriate

The four land and water areas comprising the NCNERR represent the most tangible and enduring aspects of the program. Permanently preserved, undisturbed examples of various estuarine types are crucial to the underlying concept of the Reserve. Thus, a well-conceived acquisition and boundary plan is essential to ensure proper environmental protection and to anticipate user demands and potential impacts from surrounding activities.

Opportunities to expand current component boundaries to incorporate additional acreage and resources may occur and will be pursued as possible. The Zeke's Island component could be expanded to incorporate the Smith Island marshes and connect the component to the Bald Head Woods Coastal Reserve; the Rachel Carson component could be expanded to include the North River Marshes or Sand Dollar Island. Each of these potential expansions has benefits and challenges. Site managers and the Reserve Manager will continue to explore which options may be of most benefit to the NCNERR.