

**NCSCP Steering Committee Meeting Summary**  
**March 12, 2014**  
**Weymouth Woods - Sandhills Nature Preserve**

Steering Committee Attendance:

Present

Jon Chase	Chair	Fort Bragg/DPTM
Jay Carter	(Alternate for Phil Doerr)	SEI
Neville Handel	(Alternate)	TNC
Brady Beck		NCWRC
Susan Miller	(Alternate for Pete Benjamin)	USFWS
Nancy Talton		SALT
Scott Pohlman		NCDENR/OPCA
Jon Blanchard	(Alternate for Brian Strong)	NC Parks

Absent

Dave Heins	Fort Bragg/DPW
Mark Bost	NCFS
-	AEC

Other Attendees

Tracy Rush (SWMA), Dan Ryan (TNC), Ryan Bollinger (USFWS ORISE), Jeff Marcus (NCWRC), Jim Dougherty (RLUAC), Jesse Schillaci (Ft. Bragg ESB), Barry Hull (SALT), Rod Fleming (Ft. Bragg), Kerry Brust (SEI), Victoria Vasquez (Sustainable Sandhills).

**Notes**

**Sandhills Weed Management Area: (Tracy Rush)**

- Tracy Rush gave a presentation on the accomplishments of the SWMA over the past 5 years. Nearly 65,000 acres have been surveyed. 7,786 invasive plant locations have been mapped, 56 species found, and 954 plant locations treated. Landowner contacts and relationships were discussed. The presentation finished with a discussion of the uncertain future of the SWMA due to funding issues. The SWMA currently only has 3.5 months of funding for work.
- A discussion of how to fund the great work Tracy and the SWMA has been doing over the last 5 years ensued.
- Tracy recommended the Partnership outreaching to landowners to help with provisioning, burning, and management activities.
- Tracy will provide Ryan Bollinger GIS data for the known invasive sites.
- Scott Pohlman requested best practices information for invasive plant treatments based on Tracy's experience in the field.
- SWMA needs 85K to run full time plus 50K for 2, 6 month crews and a year round coordinator
- Partners discussed NRCS Cost Share opportunities
- Brady Beck will make contacts up WRC chain of command to investigate funding
- Resolution to start up an email conversation to discuss funding match opportunities

## **TNC/NCSCP Grant Updates: (Dan Ryan)**

- Dan Ryan gave a presentation updating the steering committee on the status of grants and grant applications across TNC's longleaf whole system, to include NCSCP, Cape Fear ARCH, and Onslow Bight. TNC is finishing its 2012 NFWF grant cycle this year in the Sandhills and applied in February for a 2014 NFWF grant to continue the longleaf restoration and management activities. Dan discussed the Onslow Bight conservation focus area, highlighting 2012 NFWF grants and a 2014 grant application. The Cape Fear Arch Longleaf Initiative was also highlighted,
- TNC's Prescribed fire program has demonstrated a need for doubling prescribed fire capacity and contractual resources. This is currently being met by NFWF Longleaf Stewardship Fun, but Dan is making pitch to demonstrate future funding shortfalls without increasing ops budgets.

## **WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

### **Resource Management Working Group – Neville Handel**

- TNC finished planting LLP seedlings at the Jim Fields Memorial Preserve. This has been a two year project with approximately 300 acres of loblolly removed and then planted with LLP seedlings via contractor and TNC volunteers.
- TNC fire contractor ASIS has completed 3 prescribed fires on TNC lands under the NFWF grant for 374 acres with 2 of those fires being on active restoration sites.
- TNC has completed 6 prescribed fires to date on TNC lands for 791 acres under the NFWF grant.
- TNC has assisted partners at several NC State Parks and on the WRC Sandhills Gamelands on 5 prescribed fires for 871 acres.
- TNC Fire Staff taught S-131 Advanced Wildland Firefighter to 18 staff from NC State Parks, ASIS, and TNC on 3/11/14.

### **Communications Working Group – Ryan Bollinger**

- The CWG is planning to meet March or April to discuss and finalize details for an inaugural State of the Sandhills Report. We need to make a decision about the State of the Sandhills Annual report.
- We've got copy for the report. It has been edited by the partners and all pictures needed are in hand. Now we just need to get it laid out and posted on the Partnership web site. We know that we don't have the money to get it printed. We need to see if we can pay for the online publication. To do it right, we need to have a graphic designer produce it. Debbie priced out a design for an online publication. It ranges from \$500 to \$825.
- Jon Chase recommended investigating whether design can be completed using resources at Ft. Bragg. Need to have CWG strike up a conversation.

### **RCW Working Group – Jay Carter**

- Regional RCW population monitoring to document nesting and fledging success within Sandhills East and Sandhills West is scheduled for the Spring 2014. Monitoring effort will be comparable to past years on Fort Bragg (FB), Camp Mackall (CM), Sandhills Game Land (SGL), and associated

state and private lands. The 2013 monitoring activities documented an estimated record 659 potential breeding groups (PBG) in the region, an increase of 20 PBG from 2012 (639).

- Of special interest will be results of 2013 intra-population translocation from FB to western Moore County (MOOR) Safe Harbor Properties. Two juvenile RCW pairs were donated to clusters MOOR 01 (McKean) and MOOR E03 (Auman) in December 2013. Preliminary observations in January and February 2014 revealed that the juvenile male and female brought to cluster MOOR E03 are roosting in the cluster. No birds were observed within MOOR 1 post-translocation. An additional recruitment cluster was installed within abandoned cluster MOOR 5 (Martin) in February 2014, a Safe Harbor Property on Hoffman Road south of MOOR E03.
- SEI conducted a preliminary survey of the Pinewild Golf Club, a 2,050 acre Safe Harbor Property in February 2014, which is located strategically between MOOR groups and the Southern Pines Pinehurst (SOPI) Significant Support Population. Several areas were found that had suitable RCW nesting and foraging habitat; we anticipate installing 2-3 recruitment clusters in the fall 2014 or spring 2015 with Pinewild management approval.

#### **Land Protection Working Group** – Neville Handel

- SALT has been asked to accept The Conservation Fund (TCF) conservation easement on the upland portion of the Hoke Community Forest. This 511 acre tract is a former International Paper tract located 2 miles south of Fort Bragg and one mile north of Raeford city limits
  - SALT is currently working on the acquisition of the 373 acre Sea Board Timber Tract tract in northern Moore County as part of our cooperative agreement with ACUB.
- TNC recently transferred the 262 acre Thomas inholding in Moore County into the Sandhills Game Lands.
- TNC accepted the donation of the 115 acre Studenmund Farm in Richmond and Scotland Counties by the end of 2013.
  - TNC is awaiting return of the contract for the 83 acre Gozzi Tract in Hoke County, located in the Partnership's Gap focus area.
  - TNC is swapping a narrow swath (15.2 ac) of land along the boundary of TNC's Lafayette tract, including a wildlife fence, for the 15.2 acre McCormick Farms "Arrowhead Tract".
  - The NC DOT is working with McCormick Farms to potentially swap the 112 acre Marshbanks Tract, acquired by DOT in 2006 for RCW mitigation, for a 91 acre parcel of McCormick Farms.
  - TNC is under contract for the 0.75 acre McFadyen Tract at Goose Pond Bay in Robeson County. The 25 acre Dunn Tract (was to be acquired with TNC and NAWCA funds) is on hold due to the landowner's change of heart.
  - TNC and WRC are working together to acquire the 1218 acre Sassafras Timber lands and the 336 acre Catherine Gibson Farm in Scotland County. These properties will become part of the Sandhills Game Lands, and they will help bridge the gap between Blocks B and C.

- TNC has gotten approval to use Army CA funds to purchase a permanent Conservation Easement on the 108 acre McDonald property buffering Camp Mackall and sharing borders with Sandhills Game Lands and TNC's Studenmund CE.
- WRC is pursuing the 450 acre James Sisters tracts in Scotland County to add to Sandhills Game Lands.

**Reserve Design Working Group** – Scott Pohlman

- The RDWG held a meeting in Raleigh on January 7. At the meeting we finalized much of the plan and set a course for its completion. We expect to have a final draft of the Plan to present at the next steering committee meeting. In addition to the meeting, the RDWG held a potential uplands habitats surveying field trip on February 11, which was cut short due to a snow event. A group of 9 hardy members carried out despite the adverse weather, with some help from a few WRC folks and TNC fire crew members. We hope to hold another round of field surveys this Friday barring a good prescribed fire day.

**PARTNER UPDATES**

NCFS- highlights include:

- No update

AEC- highlights include:

- No update

Natural Heritage- Scott Pohlman, highlights include:

- Natural Heritage Program has recently lost staff. Folks are learning what the new boss supports and doesn't and learning to do more with less.
- Prescribed Fire Council is promoting use of prescribed fire and benefits to the public this month. Harris Lake Longleaf Festival is being held April 12.

USFWS – Susan Miller, highlights included:

- Dan River Coal ash spill is a big issue right now. 2 USFWS biologists are there sampling for water quality issues, etc.
- Red Wolves are having trouble due to hunting. USFWS is working on how to move forward with their protection
- SALCC is currently meeting to discuss landscape level priorities

SALT – Nancy Talton, highlights included:

- SALT is holding an open house event on April 12<sup>th</sup> at one of their properties.

NC Parks – Jon Blanchard, highlights included:

- Billy Harkness is the new Superintendent at Weymouth Woods State Park.
- NC Parks is posting a statewide invasive species coordinator/ management biologist position based out of Raleigh

SEI- Jay Carter, highlights included:

- No updates

TNC – Neville Handel, highlights included:

- Ryan Elting recently left his post with TNC and is taking a new position on Whidbey Island in Washington State. TNC has opened the position, and in the meantime, staff are divvying up responsibilities to fill the gap.

Ft. Bragg DPTM- Jon Chase:

- Hiring a Wildlife Biologist with Range Control. Hoping to fill the position shortly.
- Floyd Hudson is the new director and has been briefed on Partnership activities.
- Jon will be remaining as the Chair of the Partnership.

Ft. Bragg ESB – Jesse S. highlights included:

- Bachmans Sparrow survey program has been funded. An NC State masters student has been funded for at least 2 years
- Brian Ball is leading effort on wetland restoration for St. Francis Satyr habitat. Hoping to release new population into the restored area this summer

WRC - Brady Beck, highlights included:

- Sandhills Management Plan's comment period is over, maybe open still for public comment. Final draft is expected by mid-summer after comments have been incorporated
- Pee Dee River Management Plan is just starting up. There will be a public hearing for the plan.
- Bill Parsons retired in February and Brady now holds Bills old position. WRC will be back filling an assistant forester position soon.
- Town of Aberdeen is updating its Land Use Plan. A meeting was held last week where Jeff Marcus and Ryan Bollinger presented GGT and conducted a productive Charette using conservation data.
- The Moore County Land Use plan implementation process has begun.
- Bachmans sparrow surveys will begin in a few weeks.

**REGIONAL PARTNER UPDATES**

Ft. Bragg Regional Alliance: Jon Chase

- Ft. Bragg Regional Alliance has finished a final report for Part Two of the Regional Sustainable Growth Management Strategy for the Fort Bragg Region

RLUAC: Jim Dougherty

- Many Telecom tower reviews are occurring within the 5 mile Ft. Bragg /Camp MacKall buffer. Concerned over potential over flight area conflicts.
- Proposals are picking up for new developments as well
- UAV Update at last RLUAC meeting has picked up lots of press

Sustainable Sandhills: Susan Miller

- Food composting program is being made more efficient. Energy savings education partnership with Methodist University.

**Other News and Points of Discussion**

- Susan provided an update on Nick Haddad's health status regarding an unfortunate head injury while on Sabbatical in California in early February. He is making slow progress, but there are still hopes for him to make a full recovery.
- Review and approval of the last meeting's minutes.
- The next NCSCP Steering Committee meeting will be Wednesday, June 18 at 1PM here at Weymouth Woods.

- NCSCP Champion of the Sandhills Award was presented by Susan Miler to Ryan Elting for his great work over the past 8 years and dedication to land protection and longleaf pine restoration in the Sandhills.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:30 PM