

**Agenda**  
**North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership**  
**Steering Committee Meeting**  
**2:30PM – 4:30PM Wednesday, March 28th, 2018**  
**Weymouth Woods - Sandhills Nature Preserve**

➤ Welcome and Introductions

Steering Committee Attendance:

Present

Jeff Marcus	TNC
Brady Beck	NCWRC
Jay Carter	SEI
David Heins	Fort Bragg/ED
Jesse Wimberly (Alternate for Nancy Talton)	SALT
John Hammond (Alternate for Pete Benjamin)	USFWS
Monica Stephenson	Fort Bragg/DPW

Absent:

Jimmy Dodson	NCDPR
Susan James	USAEC
Pete Edmonds - Chair	Ft. Bragg/DPTM
Sarah Crate	NCFS

Other Attendees

Kacy Cook (NCWRC), Ana Prinz, Kerry Brust, Andy Van Lanen (SEI), Rod Fleming (Ft. Bragg), Michele Wilcox (Ft. Bragg), Larisa Fitzgerald (ORISE Fellow/Ft Bragg), Jim Daugherty (RULAC), Barry Hull (ACUB), Debbie Crane, Brenda Wichmann, Chuck Peoples, Tiffany Hartung (TNC), Susan Miller, John Hammond (USFWS), Ryan Bollinger (Longleaf Alliance), Jackie Britcher (Ft. Bragg ESB), Rex Badgett (NCDOT), Ana Castillo (ORISE Fellow)

➤ Overview of Selected Species of Concern, Ana Castillo

- As a follow up to the spreadsheet TNC volunteer Lynn Richardson compiled, Ana will be presenting on 2-3 species of concern found in the Sandhills at our meetings.
- The spreadsheet with Lynn's research is available in the members section of the Partnership website.

➤ REPI Endgame Planning, Jeff Marcus and Barry Hull

- Jeff and Barry presented on the goals and plan of the REPI (Readiness and Environmental Protection Implementation) program, which provides funding for land acquisition in the Sandhills for buffering military training

and habitat protection. Together they identified and prioritized properties in the area that REPI funds can be used for. The military priorities are primarily based on the flight plan of the Army's new UAV, the Gray Eagle, which stretches from Camp Mackall to Fort Bragg and buffering the Fort Bragg border. Conservation priorities are focused on "the gap" and improving connectivity of the Sandhills Gameland blocks as well as other key areas such as McCormick Farm.

- This process identified 40,000 acres of property for REPI priority and 12,000 acres for habitat conservation. The estimated timeline to complete land acquisition under this program is 20 years. Parcels not suitable for conservation purposes but important for military operations may be protected using agricultural easements through the NC Department of Agriculture.

- Renewable Energy and North Carolina, Tiffany Hartung and Jesse Wimberley
  - The Nature Conservancy supports renewable energy and any policy that promotes it as a strategy to combat climate change. Solar in particular is well suited for the Sandhills and is experiencing constant growth in rural counties where land is less expensive.
  - Solar energy production is important from a conservation standpoint because in North Carolina, most land is privately owned. Over the next 15 years, a 50% transition of farming assets is predicted from an aging population selling land. Solar energy can provide revenue to incentive landowners to hold the land versus selling it. Solar, farmland, and conservation can co-exist.
  - TNC and the WRC are both in the process of working with solar energy companies to develop BMPs for solar farm establishment to encourage them to incorporate more conservation measures into their industry. The WRC and USFWS are working to develop guidelines for making solar farms pollinator and wildlife friendly.

Break

- Working Group Reports and Discussion (30 mins)
  - **Resource Management** (Brady Beck)  
No update
  - **RCW Recovery** (Kerry Brust)  
**DOD's Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI)**
    - Fort Bragg and TNC requested input from the RCW Recovery WG regarding land acquisition priorities and capacity in support of ongoing RCW Recovery efforts and population connectivity within the Sandhills, and continuance of DOD's Readiness in Environmental Protection

Integration (REPI) Program. A meeting was held on 16 February 2018 and outcomes from that meeting were to be integrated into an adaptive land protection strategy: **refer to REPI End Game Planning Presentation on 28 March 2018.**

### **RCW Monitoring**

- The 2018 Sandhills RCW Demographic Monitoring effort on federal, state and private lands will be comparable to recent years by all Partners involved in data collection.
- Sandhills Ecological Institute (SEI) has begun analyzing banding and recapture data in order to evaluate RCW color band material changes and related injuries since the Sandhills RCW Research Project was initiated by NCSU in 1979. Discontinuation of many celluloid color bands (size XB) and the integration of new plastic materials ~ 2000 have been challenging for those who monitor the species, but more significantly have potential to cause leg and toe injuries leading to a reduction of fitness and/or premature mortality of affected individuals. The study aims to provide guidance to banders throughout the Southeast incorporating the new plastics into banding schemes. Preliminary results will be shared with Will McDearman, the USFWS RCW Recovery Coordinator, to be followed by manuscript submission for publication.
  
- **Communications** (Debbie Crane)
  - The Millionth Longleaf celebration took place earlier this day, with the family of the late Julian Johnson, Senator Richard Burr. This event highlighted the great work members of the Partnership continue to achieve.
  - The Party for the Pine is on April 21<sup>st</sup> and they are looking for volunteers.
  - The NC Prescribed Fire Council is working on selecting a new logo and will be looking for input to decide in May.
  
- **Land Protection** (Jeff Marcus)
  - Since the last meeting, the following projects have closed:
  - TNC purchased ~70 ac Connell tract in Hoke Co on Dec 13 2017
  - TNC purchased ~121 ac conservation easement on Baker tract in Hoke Co, Dec 15, 2017
  - SALT received a 30 ac private donation of a conservation easement on the Dykstra tract along the Little River in eastern Moore Co
  - SALT acquired 25 ac easement with the Civil War Preservation Trust on the West tract at the Harnett/Cumberland co line, near the eastern side of the counties.
  - WRC accepted transfer of 184ac from the NC Department of Transportation in Scotland County off Hill Creek Road.

- **Reserve Design** (Ana Castillo)
  - The Reserve Design has been updated with most recent Natural Heritage Program data.
  - The South Atlantic Landscape Conservation Cooperative (LCC) has released an updated version of the Conservation Blueprint v2.2. The Blueprint is a data-driven plan that uses the current condition of ecosystem specific indicators to identify shared conservation priorities. Longleaf pine falls under the “Pine and Prairie” ecosystem and uses pine and prairie amphibians, birds, and amount of regularly burned habitat as ecosystem indicators. This is a living plan so input from land managers in the Sandhills is especially valuable for continuing to improve the Blueprint.
  - Map viewer can be found at:  
<http://blueprint.southatlanticlcc.org/v2.2/index.html>

- Partner Updates

NCDOT– Rex

- There is talk of widening 15-501 South for some sections, preliminary plans are still being scored and include some flexibility in design

NCFS –

No update

AEC –

No Update

USFWS – John Hammond

- The RCW species status assessment process is wrapping up, the team met for last time recently and the document is out for peer review. Representatives from affected regions are meeting in Atlanta to come up with results.

Longleaf Alliance –

- A longleaf 101 class will be held soon.
- They are mapping longleaf stands throughout the Sandhills.

SALT –

- No updates

NC Parks –

- No update

SEI–

- Dr. Clyde Sorenson (NC State) will serve on the board.

TNC – Brenda Weichmann

- There is potential to host a joint meeting with the Greater Uwharrie Conservation Partnership joint meeting? Possible fall joint meeting, lots of work on piedmont longleaf,

Ft. Bragg DPTM-

- No update

Ft. Bragg ESB –

- No update

WRC – Brady Beck and Kacy Cook

- The burn crew has completed 4,100 acres to date
- Poor amphibian breeding due to not being wet enough. They did find 4 gopher frog masses, 270 tiger salamander egg masses, 2 of which were in new restored wetlands
- WRC is working with City of Aberdeen which is planning a new development with open space and a community farm, are looking to minimize tree clearing etc

RLUAC: Jim Daugherty

- RLUAC is close to end of a joint land use study funded by DOD. They have draft recommendations presented in previous meeting and hope to finish by August/September. Meetings are open for anyone to attend and comment.

Sustainable Sandhills:

- No update

Ft bragg: close to signing x? and up to 13-14k acres,25% of target goal, increase in wildfire,  
**Longleaf Alliance**: nc longleaf coalition honor roll 5 nominations, review committee lead by sarah  
crate presenting award at onslight bight next week  
-need nominations for private land owners w/ fm plan and using fire, se wide  
12<sup>th</sup> biennial conference in Alexandria, La invite , abstracts due Friday

- Next Meeting: June 20

➤ Adjourn 4:27 pm