

**Agenda**  
**North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership**  
**Steering Committee Meeting**  
**1:00PM – 4:30PM Wednesday, June 19th, 2019**  
**Weymouth Woods - Sandhills Nature Preserve**

➤ Welcome and Introductions

➤ Steering Committee Attendance:

Present

Jeff Marcus	TNC
Gabriella Garrison	NCWRC
Jay Carter	SEI
David Heins	Fort Bragg/ED
John Hammond	USFWS
Sean Gough	NCDPR
Sarah Crate	NCFS
Pete Edmonds - Chair	Ft. Bragg/DPTM
Jesse Wimberley	SALT

Absent

Monica Stephenson	Fort Bragg/DPW
Susan James	USAEC

Other attendees:

Nathan Tarr (NCSU), Barry Hull (Fort Bragg), Nathan Shepard (NCNHP), Jackie Britcher, Jessie Schillaci (Fort Bragg ESB), Susan Miller (USFWS), Mike Martin, Tim Mcfayden (NCWRC), Kerry Brust (SEI), Rex Badgett (NCDOT), Holly Vigil (Guest), Stephen Towery (TNC), Ana Castillo (ORISE Fellow)

➤ “Diverse Effects of Biomass Production on Landscape and Wildlife Habitat Amount in North Carolina”, Nathan Tarr - North Carolina Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit

- Nathan presented results from a study originally focused on how the landscape in the Southeast might change in response to demand for renewable fuels using economic forest, vegetation, and habitat models. They modeled landscape changes from 2010-2050 under five different scenarios of woody biomass production for wood pellets and liquid biofuels. The biomass sources of interest included conventional forestry, purpose grown feedstocks, and conversion of lands on marginal soils.
- Their study looked at the impacts on 16 focal species including Eastern Tiger Salamander, RCWs, Gopher Frog, and Brown-headed nuthatch. Overall they found variable species responses under the different scenarios with no clear winners or losers across the board. For example, suitable habitat for

Prothonotary warblers would decrease while habitat for yellow-breasted chat which favors regenerating, thinned forests would increase. Species with more specific habitat requirements such as those that inhabit bottomland hardwood forests were found to be at greater risk for decline as a result of bio-energy demand.

- In terms of land-change, they found that meeting demand for biomass from conventional forests resulted in an increase in total forested land compared to the baseline scenario. However, the increase in forest came from intensively managed forest which do not support as much biodiversity as bottomland hardwood and open pine forest such as longleaf.

**Reference: “Projected Gains and Losses of Wildlife Habitat from Bioenergy Induced Landscape Change”.** Aug. 1,2016. *Global Change Biology Bioenergy*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gcbb.12383>

- National Wild Turkey Federation has a new forester serving the Sandhills - Tana Santilli based in Carthage. She will serve 7 Sandhills Counties to help private landowners get costshare through the NRCS program EQUIP. Her focus is on longleaf pine establishment and management and performing project checks to verify work is being accomplished.
  - In 2018, EQUIP allocated \$625,000 and 37 contracts for longleaf pine establishment as well as \$584,000 for management. Overall, 1.1 million dollars are allocated for the whole EQUIP programs for North Carolina.
  - NWTf has 8,200 members state wide and provide technical assistant including with prescribed burning (over 1k acres).
- Steering Committee Updates related to RCW
  - The Steering Community as well as representatives from the Natural Heritage Program, SEI, NC Parks, NCWRC, TNC, and USFWS met the previous week to discuss the ongoing status review of RCW's. The Species Status Assessment (SSA) and 5 year review are underway and will be used to inform any decision made regarding the level of listing of RCW.
  - Recently, USFWS Region 4 Office sent out a letter to agencies that manage land with RCW's requesting information on their management plans for the foreseeable future with the understanding that it may be used to inform their decision on the status of RCWs. Many voiced concern against using this information to make status decisions in place of existing data and science on the population. There is concern that a change in status (downlisting or delisting) would impact funding availability and ultimately be detrimental to RCW populations as they require active management.
  - Another topic of discussion was the intense level of monitoring being conducted in the Sandhills compared to other areas across the range. The dataset collected from the Sandhills greatly benefits all recovery efforts but also demands a great level of resources and time.

- Within USFWS – Sandhills Office there was also a discussion to make some changes to the Safe Harbor program, automating some processes such as the permitting letters for tree removal on a property. The intent of this change is free up some of Susan’s time to work on higher level priorities but there is still some uncertainty of how this would work. USFWS would reach out to Partners for input before any changes were to occur.

➤ Break

➤ Working Group Reports and Discussion

- **Resource Management** (Tim McFayden)
  - WRC is up to 14,076 acres with the burn crew for the year and hopes to burn 2k more acres in this season. They began using a drone with a firing system for burning which is available for statewide use.
  - A fatality was reported at Fort Jackson in South Carolina during a prescribed burn operation and the incident is currently under investigation.

- **RCW Recovery** (Kerry Brust)



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- Kerry reported still banding young with 1 double brood on Fort Bragg although there were a lot of nest failures on the western section of the station. Calloway Forest also gained another group and Block A of the Sandhills Gamelands continues to be a big source for the expanding population.
- They also plan to sample RCWs with the long billed deformation for a virus when possible.

- **Communications** (Debbie Crane)  
No Updates

- **Land Protection** (Jeff Marcus)



Land Protection Work Group update

- **Reserve Design** (Ana Castillo)

- The next Sandhills – Uwharrie Corridor meting will take place on August 1<sup>st</sup> to discuss potential widening of the selected corridor area and target species in this area.

➤ Partner Updates

NCDOT–

- No updates

NCFS – Sarah Crate

- The NC Prescribed Fire Council Meeting will take place in Swansboro, NC August 14-15.
- Please submit Burner of Year and Illustris Palustris nominations to the NC Longleaf Coalition.
- Hosted 2 Woods for Wildlife workshops with 120 attendees for the benefit of at risk species. This program will continue for the next 2 years.
- Launch of “Forest-Her”- a series of woman centered programming for women who own woodlands in NC, opportunities forthcoming including a workshop in Pittsboro August 8<sup>th</sup>.
- Quail Forever is launching a chapter in NC with a focus on pine savanna management for the benefit of quail. Jacob Comer will begin his position August 1<sup>st</sup>.

USFS – No Updates

AEC –

- No Update

USFWS –

- The 5 year review for Tarr River Spiny Mussel and Michaux sumac will be open for comment soon. The Carolina Madtom and Neuse River Waterdog have also been proposed for listing as Endangered and Threatened respectively.
- Sarah McCrae is now an Endangered Species Listing Biologist with the Regional Office.

Longleaf Alliance –

- No updates

SALT –

- No updates

SEI –

- No updates

TNC – Jeff Marcus

- In the process of hiring new Sandhills Stewardship and Fire Manager who is RXB2 qualified and has experience with Partnerships with the hopes of having them onboard by the Fall.
- Jeff has been providing input on a longleaf priority mapping effort to inform decision making taking into consideration factors such as climate resiliency.

- Ana has been revisiting Sandhill Seep records in the Sandhills and mapping new ones such as the ones on the Walther-Moss Foundation.

#### Ft. Bragg DPTM –

- No Updates

#### Ft. Bragg ESB –

- No Updates

#### WRC – Mike Martin

- They are wrapping up work on gopher frog telemetry for metamorphs and observed good movement for at least 1 individual. Mike also plans on doing some surveying on Fort Bragg for Pine Barrens Tree Frog.

#### RLUAC –

- No Updates

#### Sustainable Sandhills –

- No Updates

#### Prescribed Burn Association – Jesse Wimberley

- They hosted an Advanced Growing Season Burn Workshop at Camp Millstone and had attendance from 6 states and managed to burn 90 acres.
- Another Duff Management workshop will be held August 1<sup>st</sup> at the Weymouth Center and a Burner Certification workshop will be held in Carthage.

#### NC Natural Heritage Program – Nathan Shepard

- The NHP starting charging private consultants for access to data.
- Surveys for Venus Fly Traps are underway on the coast.

#### NC Parks – Sean

- At Carvers Creek SP, they rebuilt dam for millpond, opened up the Sandhills Section to the public, and performed 70 acres of TSI.
- At Weymouth, they observed Edwards' Hairstreak butterfly for the first time. In the fall, a 2<sup>nd</sup> season crew will come in to do natural resource management including hopefully installing some artificial cavities.
- At Hanging Rock SP, they are hosting a 1 day fire festival November 2<sup>nd</sup> from 10-2pm and would be happy to have volunteers.
- There is also some RCW management work being done in the Dismal Swamp area including working with the Refuge across state lines to Virginia.

➤ Next Meeting: September 19, 2019