

MEETING SUMMARY (and more)
North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership
Reserve Design Working Group Meeting
February, 23 2010 - 9 to 12:30pm
Weymouth Woods State Nature Preserve – Library

ATTENDEES

Sara DiBacco	USFWS/AEC-ORISE
Brenda Johnson	Sustainable Sandhills
Ryan Elting	The Nature Conservancy
Nick Haddad	Sandhills Ecological Institute & NC State
Jeff Marcus	Wildlife Resources Commission
Pete Campbell	USFWS
Brian Ball	Ft. Bragg – ESB
Scott Pohlman	NCDENR
Mike Schafale	NHP

WELCOME AND UPDATES

Sara reiterated that the purpose of today’s meeting was to finalize inputs for a Sandhills Appendix to the Green Growth Toolbox (GGT). She also mentioned that since the last meeting, several working group members had contributed time and effort towards completion of GGT-relevant action items. Specifically, the following action items (see Jan 2010 meeting summary) were resolved prior to this meeting:

- AI 3, AI 11, and previous actions discussed - Potential Upland Habitats
The data has been updated using 2008 aerial photography. There are now 100 polygons rated as high or medium potential, which is up from 96, but in acreage, it actually represents a loss of 7000 acres. Twenty additional polygons rated as low and two additional polygons rated as ‘blank’ represent a combined acreage increase of 705 acres. For the purpose of the GGT (and previously in the Natural Areas Suitability Surface), only the High and Medium Potential sites are considered. Ideally, this data set would be refined by on-the-ground survey efforts, but this additional effort and action will not be an immediate priority. Smoke awareness areas are indicated for each potential upland habitat polygon.
- AI 4 – RCW Foraging Habitats
All active, inactive, historic, unknown and not visited clusters are included because they represent either current habitat or potential habitat. These distinctions are not described within the appendix; it is simply communicated as RCW foraging habitat.
- AI 5 – Aquatic SNHA
The data set was edited to properly reflect the agreed upon buffering scheme, which follows the methods applied in the One NC Naturally tool.
- AI 7 – RCW Corridors
Any occupied area, which were also protected or managed lands, were removed.
- AI 8 – Conservation and Managed Lands Layer
Lands within this file were evaluated to determine whether a Smoke Awareness Area was warranted. Sara will initiate follow-up on those lands in Lee County that were not previously addressed.
- AI 9 – Safe Harbor Properties

Lands within this file were evaluated to determine whether a Smoke Awareness Area was warranted. Properties with land use indicated as 'conservation land' or 'private forest' were selected.

- AI 10 – SNHA and Rare Species Habitats
Lands within this file were evaluated to determine whether a Smoke Awareness Area was warranted based on the habitat contained within.

OVERVIEW OF MAP LAYERS IN THE SANDHILLS GGT APPENDIX

Discussion of Tier 1 and Tier 2 data categories

- The Tier 2 description should be modified to 'sustain' versus 'encourage placement of' working lands in these areas. Additionally, wording similar to the Tier 1 description about following conservation design principles should be included.

Review of data layers and assigned tiers

- The data as presented was generally agreed upon pending the discussion on guild data immediately following. Briefly, the results of the guild discussion were to keep Sparsely Settled Mixed Habitat as Tier 2 but to separate out some of the other guilds as Tier 1.

Presentation of individual and composite maps

- Brian noted that the Green Belt on Ft. Bragg, which is intended to serve as a RCW corridor, is not reflected in the RCW corridor data layer. Sara will get this data from Brian and incorporate it into the RCW corridor data layer. This topic also brought up discussion about audiences outside of the local or county land-use arena, such as the Army at Ft. Bragg, since anyone with interest will have access to the data and the appendix through the GGT website. Pete also mentioned that the RCW working group would be meeting soon to refine and update the corridor strategy; if necessary, Sara will update the existing data layer to reflect any changes the RCW working group makes.
- In response to the map showing the Tier 1 and 2 resources overlain on top of the Natural Areas Suitability Surface (NASS), Jeff brought up the idea of identifying what pieces of the GGT data NASS misses by overlaying it on top of the GGT data. The purpose of this exercise would be to better understand and communicate about its relationship to the GGT data layers. Sara will do this analysis. Scott also noted that he would like to, at some point, revisit the proposed corridor study areas, which were included in NASS but are omitted from the GGT data layers.

DISCUSSION OF LANDSCAPE/HABITAT INDICATOR GUILD DATA

Presentation of Steve Hall's findings

Review of background information

Discussion of options for using data

- EO ranks are assigned to guild core areas based on the % of guild members present. The fact that EO-rank C core areas will no longer be mapped reflects only an issue of time and money, not a diminishment of the importance of C-ranked core areas to conservation. Mike stated that, for example,

C-ranked core areas would be especially important if they captured habitat for rare species for which there are no known A or B ranked core areas.

- Sparsely Settled Mixed Habitats will definitely remain as a Tier 2 Resource; more general forest types will as well. Others will be moved to Tier 1. Sara will make this correction.

DISCUSSION OF SMOKE AWARENESS AREAS AND OTHER MINOR ITEMS

Review/discussion of smoke awareness area (SAA) components

- There is maybe less certainty about the need for SAAs around Potential Upland Habitats, but this is probably not enough of a concern to separate it out from the other known or expected future SAAs drawn for other areas.
- Also for now, the data will be shown as a single, composite shapefile representing all the SAAs derived from each of the appropriate, individual data sets.

Review/discussion of SNHA types

- Secondary areas will not be distinguished from the rest of the SNHA data set. These are important conservation areas that were drawn as ecological buffers for some primary areas.

Discussion about Rare Species Habitats and NHEO data

- Sara will work with John Finnegan to establish a mechanism for providing, at the request of users, the attribute information associated with this data set.
- In looking further at wetland community type EOs, Sara noted 2 polygons (1 floodplain pool and 1 upland pool (not upland depression as it was incorrectly written on the PowerPoint slide)), which might be important to consider for the Rare Species Habitat Layer. Sara will send these to Mike for review.

ESTABLISH DATE/TIME/LOCATION FOR NEXT MEETING

- The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, May, 4 at the same location (Weymouth Woods Library). On the agenda will be implementation: What information is missing but necessary for more effective implementation – learn from/ask the on-the-ground implementers? How can the Reserve Design Working Groups spur efforts to fill in these gaps/address implementers' issues? How can we reconnect with other working groups within the Partnership/encourage them to use the reserve design as a central resource/find out what is needed to do so more effectively?

PRESENTATION BY AND DISCUSSION WITH IAN BRECKHEIMER (UNC-CHAPEL HILL) AND COLLEAGUES