

MEETING SUMMARY

North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership
Reserve Design Working Group Meeting
January 4, 2011 – 1 - 4pm
NC State – David Clark Labs

ATTENDEES

Sara DiBacco	USFWS/AEC-ORISE	Scott Pohlman	NHP
Brenda Johnson	Sustainable Sandhills	Mike Schafale	NHP
Ryan Elting	The Nature Conservancy	Laura Gadd	NHP
Nick Haddad	SEI & NC State	Pete Campbell	USFWS
Jeff Marcus	WRC		

RESULTING ACTION ITEMS

- 1) **Send Scott comments on the draft RDWG plan by Feb 11th then he will craft an Executive Summary. (EVERYONE, SCOTT)**
- 2) **Create a large Reserve Design poster to show at the March Steering Committee meeting. (SARA)**
- 3) **Work with partners at WRC, DFR, and others to share information about the Reserve Design and solicit information on identified potential areas by June 2011. (JEFF, SARA, PETE, RYAN, others?)**
- 4) **Work with the Land Protection Working Group to select a pilot site for creating site-specific reserve designs. (RYAN, SCOTT, PETE, SARA)**
- 5) **Find out status of DWQ stream mapping. (SCOTT)**

NOTES

DISCUSSION ABOUT STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING OUTCOMES

Sara described the outcomes of a Steering Committee work session held in November 2010 to address results of the NCSCP review. Improving communication was a major topic of discussion and resulted in the creation of a Working Group Reporting Template. Other action items and an associated timeline were created by the Steering Committee.

Nick added that a major theme of the Steering Committee work session was to update the vision of the NCSCP, i.e. what is the NCSCP going to do in the next 10 years? How can the NCSCP engage more? He also noted that it was not clear whether the new and improved role of the Steering Committee would be to direct working groups' actions or to support working groups' self-directed actions. Regardless, he sees the "re-visioning" process that the NCSCP is going through as an opportunity for the Reserve Design Working Group to do the 'next best thing' on their list of priorities within the scope of available time and money.

Pete mentioned that there may be different roles for different groups. He also noted that the lack of some type of Research Working Group was noted in the review and discussed at the Steering Committee work session. Mike remembered that when that working group was initially formed, its role and goals were not well-defined and the group did not persist. As an alternative to creating a standalone Research Working Group, Mike suggested that each individual group take on responsibility for identifying what research is needed for them to make better decisions.

There was some discussion about the question of whether the Steering Committee endorses what the Reserve Design Working Group is doing. Getting the Steering Committee up to speed with each working group via the working group template should help to answer this question. Also, groups could request a more formal endorsement of their proposed actions through the working group template.

**DISCUSSION ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION/WORKING MORE CLOSELY WITH LAND PROTECTION AND OTHER WORKING GROUPS
(ALSO INCLUDED ARE RELEVANT NOTES FROM THE MAY 2010 MEETING)**

GENERAL

Nick proposed three overarching questions that might guide the work of the Reserve Design Working Group (also, **see #1 from May 2010 notes below**):

1. What places are we missing?
2. What does a successfully protected/conserved/functional Sandhills ecosystem look like?
3. What future challenges, e.g. urban growth, water use, do we need to incorporate because they affect what the reserve design looks like?

In response to how much land needs to be conserved (and a possible concern that local governments might have pause when shown a map that includes a significant amount of land in “Tier II”), one of our goals should be to have habitat-specific management recommendations, (e.g. for RCW partitions, here is what we would look for; for riparian buffers, this is what conservation would look like). We might also note that there is not an interest in these lands being under public ownership.

REFINING THE DESIGN – THREATS

Mike suggested that since no place is free from threats, spending time and effort on developing various threat analyses may not be worthwhile. Pete suggested that being able to fall back on defensible threat analyses might help the case for conservation, especially with respect to the goals of the Green Growth Toolbox and communicating with local land use planners and officials. Ryan noted that efforts to develop threats analyses internally are hampered because of uncertainty with our ability to create a process that is defensible.

REFINING THE DESIGN – BUFFERING AND CONNECTIVITY

As a potential alternative to threat analysis, Mike suggested the possibility of creating individualized, highly specific ‘reserve designs’ for each high quality site on the landscape, i.e. thinking about each site independently, creating specialized buffers based on site specific characteristics, management needs, etc. Right now we have some “automated” buffers, but it is not satisfactory. Because this would be a time-consuming task, and would require a couple of different skill sets, including knowledge of smoke management, we would need to start where the need is greatest. Prioritizing which sites should go through such a procedure could be dictated by working with the Land Protection Group to understand where current opportunities for acquisition/protection exist. This same process of refining the Reserve Design by focusing on smaller reserves could also be used to work in connectivity to other existing natural areas. This might be a new way that the Reserve Design provides

value to the NCSCP. Pete noted that this bottom-up approach, building from individual site reserve design, would help produce a defensible, finite plan that we could explain.

Action Item: Work with the Land Protection Working Group to select a pilot site for creating site-specific reserve designs.

REFINING THE DESIGN – RESTORATION AREAS

In terms of land protection, having possible restoration areas identified may be helpful for enhancing connectivity. In terms of private lands, Scott noted that there are pots of money available specifically for restoration, and the Reserve Design group could help put together a list of where efforts could get the most “bang for the buck.” We could help target outreach from these program coordinators, e.g. Vilma, Laura, by providing them with a list of restoration areas with landowners identified. We should talk with them to see if that would be something useful.

The Resource Management Working Group could have some input here as well. Given the assumption that everything in the unprotected uplands layer probably needs management, Jeff suggested identifying landowners associated with any areas in the ‘unprotected resource layer’ that has the conserved areas, stream buffers, and floodplains masked out, then bringing this list to the Resource Management Working Group to ask if that is something useful for them to help guide future on-the-ground work. If the layer is too large, we can offer to refine. It would also be helpful to ask if there is another way of filtering this layer that might help make their jobs easier. The resource management group could also take the map and show where money has already been invested.

REFINING THE DESIGN – POTENTIAL AREAS

The potential areas are current as of 2008 photography.

There was discussion to establish some basic protocol for eliciting information about potential areas from other working group members or other partners in general with the aim of increasing our understanding and certainty about the value of the potential areas and what they might mean to our conservation efforts. Brenda suggested collecting data from partners first, then as a group, the Reserve Design Working Group could make some kind of determination about whether to keep them, throw them out, represent them in some other way on the Reserve Design, etc. Mike came up with the following questions to ask partners:

1. Is there native ground cover over much of the uplands (at natural or reduced density but not largely absent)?
2. Is there longleaf pine present of much of the uplands?
3. Has there been widespread soil disturbance (bedding, etc.)?
4. Are there any small patches rare communities present (sandhill seeps, rock outcrops, small depression communities)?

Also, for a better understanding of how certain the characterization we ask for is, we might also ask:

5. What type of survey effort was used to assess or to provide information on this property (e.g. survey from vehicle, how much walked, etc.)?

Jeff noted that as previously planned (see #2 and 3 from relevant notes below), our immediate next actions should be to get out to partners on the ground, go over the Reserve Design with them, ask them these questions about the potential areas, and end with discussion of what else we could help them with, i.e. begin our work to share the value of the Reserve Design with our internal partners.

Action Item – Done by June 2011 (see #2 and 3 from relevant notes below)

Jeff will address WRC. Pete will address DFR. Susan Miller (?) will address Safe Harbor landowners (for potential area info only). Ryan & Mike will address potential areas around TNC properties (for potential area info only).

Nick pointed out, and Pete concurred, that some of the maps with just Tier I are not comprehensive enough, but adding Tier II is too big (Pete seemed to think that the RCW partitions are too much). Perhaps we could work to find the medium map to take out to the broader public.

MEETING CLOSE

A new meeting date was not set. All members will try to attend the Steering Committee meeting in March if possible. Dates will be March 15 – 17 or 22 – 24.

Action Item - Provide input on the draft RDWG plan that can be downloaded from the NCSCP website – members only section. Send to Scott by Feb11th. Noted that some of the plan will need to be updated with the work the reserve design working group has done to get the map ready for use as part of Green Growth Toolbox. When the comments are in, Scott will work on crafting an Executive Summary by the end of February.

Action Item – Find out status of DWQ stream mapping. Scott will contact DWQ

RELEVANT NOTES FROM THE MAY 2010 RDWG MEETING

1. Identify priorities for conservation action – Ryan and Sara will have the lead on the initial analysis described under **Overview** that will be used to identify:
 - a. The key places that are missed – To paraphrase Nick, the natural role for the RDWG is to provide resources which help justify why conservation actors are going after certain tracts, but another potentially very important role, is to promote those areas which may be a high priority biologically but fall outside of traditional focus areas, e.g. outside of ACUB priority areas (→ could eventually be targets for other partners or partners yet identified especially when acquisition is an improbable option).
 - b. The key places that are within areas targeted for conservation action – Ryan suggested the RDWG work with TNC to pinpoint tracts within ACUB priority areas with the highest conservation value (→

in locations where existing resources for acquisition are already dedicated, it makes sense for the RDWG to help select the most biologically valuable tracts).

2. Promote awareness among other NCSCP partners about how the conservation data and conservation maps produced by the RDWG can be used in their work within their own organizations – Jeff and Sara will do so with WRC. Ryan and Sara will do so with SALT. Sara will speak with Mark Bost about the opportunity to do so with DFR and then Scott will take the lead. **It is also possible that we could provide these meetings in cooperation with GUCP so that the desired effect is similarly achieved for both partnerships (Scott noted that Scott Maynard with DFR would be a good person to have at such a meeting).**
 - a. The question of who should deliver the message was raised and it was decided that having both an internal partner (i.e. one employed by the respective organization) and an external partner present the data and discuss how it can be used would be best.
 - b. This could be an opportunity for the RDWG to also solicit information from on-the-ground partners. For example, determinations about the biological value of sites within the Potential Areas data set need to be made. If we provided this file with landowner attributes identified, we could ask that partners familiar with any of the landowners approach them about having a biologist survey their land. This could then lead into a discussion about available conservation options. The approach is somewhat similar to GUCP in which they have a field biologist assigned to interact with selected private landowners by surveying their properties for priority species.
 - i. If NCSCP partners could find some money to do something similar, this would be ideal.
3. Continue to ask partners how the resources the RDWG creates can be more effective.
 - a. This is something that can be done in conjunction with Action Item 2, promoting awareness. As part of the discussion, we can ask this particular question and let the audience know that this is our goal.
4. Schedule some field visits.
 - a. This could be for the RDWG itself or to invite other partners to see examples of particular management strategies that are being used in some places.
 - b. This could be done for the purposes of determining the value of some Potential Areas (see 2b).
 - c. This could also be used to visit sites on the landscape that require improvements to management in order to be beneficial for wildlife and habitat conservation, e.g. McCain, maybe other Dept of Ag properties too (Cameron-Morrison, Samarkand – Laura Fogo may be working here already).
 - d. **This could be done to increase understanding of, and even enthusiasm for, some underappreciated habitats.**