

Sandhills Conservation Partnership
Meeting of the Reserve Design Working Group
January 9, 2001

Members of the working group in attendance:

Name	Affiliation
Dave Allen	NC Wildlife Resources Commission
Pete Campbell	US Fish & Wildlife Service
Margaret Fields	NC Chapter of The Nature Conservancy
John Finnegan	NC Natural Heritage Program
Sam Pearsall	The Nature Conservancy, NC Chapter
	Scott Pohlman
	NC Natural Heritage Program
Glenn Prillaman	Fort Bragg
Mike Schafale	NC Natural Heritage Program

Also attending:

Noelle Chambers and Craig Harper, from the Nicholas School of the Environment (Duke University)

Discussion of Reserve Design

The reserve design working group meeting provided a good discussion of what we are hoping to achieve with reserve design. We also discussed the process, using interactive GIS, and the potential sequence of tying in to other working group products.

The first topic of discussion was the boundary of our area of interest. Because of the proximity of the Uwharries and their associated natural heritage, it was noted that we need a boundary that keeps us focused on the Sandhills ecosystem. It has been proposed and accepted that we follow the outline of soil types to determine the Sandhills geographic extent. Margaret Fields has created a previous map outlining this area, and indicated that it will be available to the working group.

The group moved on to drawing lines on a map, or at least a discussion about drawing lines or boundaries on a map. The discussion was fruitful, as it is important to reach some kind of conceptual consensus on what the boundaries mean, how they should be drawn, and on what information they should be based.

The ideal would be drawing a polygon on a map that if protected, would maintain Sandhills ecosystem functions and processes, as well as the species present in the landscape. We would ideally base this reserve on complete knowledge of the area. And this polygon would not consider ownership. The fact that we don't have complete knowledge of the area notwithstanding, it was pointed out that the line could easily be drawn around the entire Sandhills physiographic region, so perhaps we need to focus on what we can do in terms of direct action, which brought the topic of ownership to prominence within the discussion.

The reserve design group will still move forward and make the case for a reserve design based on biological information we have at present, but considerations for information gaps, cadastral data, and areas to exclude (such as the town of Southern Pines) will be made.

Under the above framework, in order to make the initial reserve design, the following information will be needed: Element Occurrences with accompanying MAPC classifications; Natural Heritage sites; and land cover. This will be the first part of the biological information, and Natural Heritage Program will provide the EOs and Natural Heritage sites, while TNC and USFWS provide the land cover (1995 CCAP) and possibly the 2000 TM. As far as the cadastral data, landowner information is already available in digital form for several counties, and TNC will contract out the task of providing a seamless coverage for the portions of the counties that make up the Sandhills. The idea of using tract overlays with some size criterion, such as 500 acres, to identify significant landowners was also discussed. It was agreed that at the next meeting we will begin to examine possible boundaries on the base layer to indicate a potential reserve design. The GIS allows us to change the design easily, as we acquire more or better information.

Sam pointed out that in addition to this initial first guess at reserve design pointing out where to begin conservation efforts, we will identify where inventory work needs to be done. Mike Schafale brought information to the meeting regarding possible inventory and conservation analysis for the Sandhills region. In addition to the Sandhills counties being high on the NHP priority list for inventory, Mike presented the estimates for two different possible approaches to the conservation analysis. One, the “quick and dirty” approach, would be based on information that the Natural Heritage Program already has, would cost less (maybe \$10,000) and could be completed by the end of Spring. The other option involves helping the state museum digitize all their records for the Sandhills, which would take longer, (up to a year), and cost significantly more. The Natural Heritage Program naturally wants to be as thorough as possible in analysis, but the tradeoff is that making information available in a timely manner is potentially more significant, as the landscape of North Carolina and the Sandhills is rapidly changing. The Reserve Design working group did not endorse either approach at this meeting, delaying a decision until the next meeting because there was some anticipation that the GAP program is close to completion of a vegetation layer for the Sandhills.

Meeting Schedule

The Reserve Design Working Group will next meet February 20, from 10:00 am to 4:00 pm, and again March 6. We will meet in the TNC office.