

**NCSCP Steering Committee Meeting Summary
June 10, 2013
Weymouth Woods - Sandhills Nature Preserve**

Steering Committee Attendance:

Present

Mike Lynch	Chair	Fort Bragg/DPTM
Dave Heins		Fort Bragg/DPW
Phil Doerr		SEI
Ryan Elting		TNC
Brady Beck		NCWRC
Pete Benjamin		USFWS
Candace Williams		SALT
Scott Pohlman (Alternate for Linda Pearsall)		NCDENR/OPCA
Mark Bost		NCFS

Absent

Brian Strong	NC Parks
-	AEC

Other Attendees

Ryan Bollinger (USFWS ORISE), Neville Handel (TNC ORISE), Susan Miller (USFWS), Gretchen Coll (TNC), Jeff Marcus (NCWRC), Scott Hartley (NC Parks), Jim Dougherty (RLUAC)

Notes

NCWRC Game Land Management Plan Update: (Jeff Marcus and Brady Beck)

- Sandhills Game Lands developing new management plan which will paint a picture for desired future conditions.
 - Public hearings and input from the WRC's conservation partners.
 - Seeking input on a draft plan, or taking suggestions prior to drafting a plan.
 - Public meeting for SGL is July 18 at Henson Lake in Rockingham.
 - Room to connect the management plans to overall partnership goals, and there is a risk that if the partners don't show up at these meetings, other use values that might have negative impacts could dominate the discussion.
 - Holding a steering committee meeting to discuss the partnership stance/strategies prior to the completion of the plan was proposed.
 - Need to look at the language in the transfer documents from the Army to the State to see what kind of restrictions were put on land use, as this could be a good stopgap for some harmful activities that might be proposed.
- Action Item: A doodle poll will be sent out for a late July/Early August conservation partner meeting hosted by WRC

Monitoring Plan Update: (Ryan Bollinger)

- Update to draft monitoring plan:
 - A draft of the biological monitoring plan was handed out to SC members.
 - Looking for input on how people feel about it and if it looks good.
 - July 2013 would be the start date for the plan, and the first reporting date would be at the end of 2014. All monitoring and reporting would be carried out by the partners (most of which is already happening, but could be expanded), and go through the partnership coordinator.
 - Discussion of Bachman's monitoring presented as an example of the kind of work being done.
 - Some regional data collection efforts (such as America's Longleaf efforts) could be helpful for us in the Sandhills, though the data may need to be scaled down and manipulated to make it relevant. Figuring out what our priorities are and compiling that data ASAP is important so as not to miss any changes that might happen in the short term.
 - Clarification of some temporal discrepancies will be done before it's emailed to steering committee and working group chairs.
 - Question of whether we can do all of the work described in the plan, as it does add some to what we are already doing. For the first year or two, yes, as we already have most of the data.
 - The work highlights that we need a permanent partnership coordinator driving the ship.
 - Thank you Ryan Bollinger for all of your work on this plan!

Strategic Conservation Plan Update: (Ryan Bollinger)

- An Acknowledgements page and Executive summary have been added to the ??

WORKING GROUP UPDATES

- Resource Management Working Group – Neville Handel
 - Longleaf 101 (Longleaf Alliance intensive training) held at Weymouth Woods in May.
 - TNC has burned 4200 acres total this season: 1200 TNC led, 3000 assisted, 300 acres of longleaf planted.
 - Next meeting will be a tour of TNC's Calloway Forest and will highlight restoration and management activities and lessons learned.
- Communications Working Group - Susan Miller
 - The NCSCP display board is finally done, and it is now available for anyone in the Partnership to use!
 - 40th anniversary of the Endangered Species Act and RCW recovery celebration at Weymouth Woods was on May 17th
 - The second Partnership media event of 2013 will be in October. It will be a restoration tour – showing the gamut of longleaf restoration from clearing to mature forest.
- Land Protection Working Group – Ryan Elting
 - The LPWG met on May 30 and reviewed and discussed the Reserve Design Working Group's recent "mini-site design" work. The "mini-site designs" are GIS layers that identify habitat connectors and smoke buffers, which if developed inappropriately,

would impair the effective management of the Sandhills Conservation Reserve. There was a general consensus among the LPWG that the ongoing Land Protection priorities of the NCSCP are well reflected in the parcels and areas identified by the “mini-site designs”, but that the information is perhaps more useful for informing the County and Municipal governments in their land use planning efforts than guiding the efforts of the Partnership. Some omissions were noted and it was agreed that the layers need to be updated periodically to remain useful. Scott Pohlman is working on populating the attribute tables for these layers to clearly explain the significance of individual buffer and connector areas, in hopes of them being incorporated into the Green Growth Toolbox and used to plan for appropriate uses in these areas.

- The Wildlife Commission has temporarily put a hold on all land protection projects in response to the NC Senate budget bill that would cut \$9M from annual appropriations to WRC. It is believed that this cut is intended to force the Commission to begin spending down its endowment, ultimately forcing it to compete for annual appropriations from the legislature. It is unclear whether this will affect the scheduled transfer of the Thomas Tract to WRC in October as the full cost of the transfer is covered by a 2012 NHTF award.
- As of Friday, the NC House budget bill calls for a cap of \$4M annually on land acquisition through the Trust Funds. This is still a moving target.
- The Governor’s budget bill proposed removing the dedicated source of funding for NHTF and PARTF, and cutting the annual budgets for the NHTF, PARTF, and CWMTF to the point that land acquisition would be largely unfunded after debt payments and operations costs.
- SALT recently protected the Steel Bridge Tract (18.64 acres) adjacent to Harrington in north Moore County at the confluence of the Deep River and Governor’s Creek.
- TNC will be acquiring the 100 acre Five Points Tract in Hoke County, on June 21st. The tract is composed of young upland plantation longleaf which will require understory restoration and prescribed fire, and mixed pine hardwood bottomlands. Along with the neighboring Bass restoration Tract, Five Points makes up a protected corridor between McCain Forest and the Blue Farm that will be managed for future RCW habitat.
- TNC is working with McCormick Farms to swap a narrow swath (~15 ac) along the boundary of TNC’s Lafayette tract, allowing McCormick Farms to maintain the existing wildlife fence on Lafayette that separates the properties, in exchange for the Arrowhead tract (~15 ac) inholding in Carver’s Creek State Park. Both Lafayette and the Arrowhead Tracts are intended to be transferred to State Parks when funding is available.
- The 106 acre Brown Tract appraised at \$10k per acre or \$1,061,000. The property is one half of a potential RCW corridor between NE Bragg Training Area and Overhills that includes RCW foraging habitat for adjacent groups on Fort Bragg. TNC has notified the landowners of the appraised value, but has not made an offer, awaiting approval to pursue using Fort Bragg CA Funds. The Brown Tract makes up ½ of a potential forested corridor between NE Fort Bragg and the NTA, but the owners of the second property, across Hwy 210 from Brown, are not currently interested in selling.
- Campbell University owns, and is interested in selling, a 20 acre property in Spring Lake, including RCW foraging habitat for neighboring Fort Bragg clusters with a (Recovery Standard) habitat deficit. Fort Bragg and TNC are in contact with Campbell U and are discussing conservation options.
- The TNC/Fort Bragg Cooperative Agreement was recently awarded \$500k, from our FY’13 Readiness and Environmental Protection Initiative Program request, for protection of the 420 acre Loblolly Group tract (acquired in August 2012), the 262 acre Thomas

Tract (acquired in February 2013) and the 100 acre Five Points Tract scheduled to close later in the month. This covers approximately 16% of the cost of these tracts. The remainder of the cost was covered by existing CA funds, and will be leveraged by \$708k from the NHTF, and \$325K from the Environmental Enhancement Grant Program administered by the NC Attorney General's Office. That \$1,033,000 will be used again to further the CA.

- FY'14 REPI Requests are due to the Army Environmental Command on July 3rd. SALT and TNC are working with Fort Bragg to determine protection priorities. Projects need to have a high probability of execution in 2013-2014, and highly leveraged projects working with State partners rank highly.
- Reserve Design Working Group – Ryan Bollinger
 - RDWG finished individualized “reserve designs” work and is finalizing the connectors and buffers data layers. Data layers were shared at the recent Land Protection WG meeting.
 - The Reserve Design WG commenced the ground-truthing of potential uplands habitats by pairing with Bahman's survey work being carried out. Please contact a member of the RD working group if you can help.
- RCW Working Group – Phil Doerr & Susan Miller
 - Translocation of birds to Western Moore County is still being monitored, looking promising at this early stage. 1 PBG initially has now grown to 4 PBG (at least one has 2 banded nestlings, and other has 3 banded nestlings). 4 of the 6 translocated birds have been seen this spring, but the other 2 have not been detected.

PARTNER UPDATES

- NCFS- Mark Bost, highlights include:
 - Kim Shumate Livingston took a new position within the Dept. of Agriculture working on the CREP program.
 - Struggling with funding cost share assistance programs for longleaf restoration and site prep. Cogongrass patch was found in Stanley County. Will be aggressively treated to try and contain it.
- AEC- highlights include:
 - There is no one representing them currently and it is unlikely that anyone will be filling that role soon. They have to come to Bragg at least once a year for ACUB review, so we need to keep them engaged in the Partnership.
- Natural Heritage- Scott Pohlman, highlights include:
 - The House budget is brutal to NCNHP, and they appreciate all of the support from the partners. The conservation tax credit program is also going to be worked out in committee, and this has huge implications for easements.
 - Now is a good time to try and get a greater level of protection on the McCain tract. The RCW populations out there will limit some of what could happen, but we need to be proactive. Mike Lynch will be on a conference call and will bring up McCain protection.
- USFWS - Pete Benjamin, highlights included:
 - No hiring right now or for the foreseeable future. OK this year, but next year could be a more noticeable impact.
 - Congrats to Susan for 20 years!
- SALT – Candace Williams, highlights included:

- McDonald farm (off of Bethesda) easement is being amended to allow the eastern part to be sold to state parks, and the western part to be sold to the town of Aberdeen (staying in conservation).
- Matthews tract is yet to close, as the attorney general keeps requesting more documents.
- NC Parks –, highlights included:
- SEI - Phil Doerr, highlights included:
 - Everyone is in the field right now, not much to add. Fiscal situation is keeping them treading water.
- TNC – Ryan Elting, highlights included:
 - Ft. Bragg cooperative agreement funding will be used to fund the SWMA again this year. It does not matter how it is billed as long as the work gets done. Most likely the SWMA work will not be funded again in FY' 14. The way we ask for funding and what we ask for is going to be very important going forward, so we really need to put the threat into a greater context.
 - Sequestration is a 10 year process, so we need to be aware of this reality going forward.
- Ft. Bragg DPTM- Mike Lynch:
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- Ft. Bragg DPW – Dave Heins highlights included:
 - Bragg is not getting close to their burning goals this year due to budget constraints and overtime limits. We need to address this soon or it will become a big problem for habitat on the installation.
- WRC - Brady Beck, highlights included:
 - A little behind on burning due to the wet weather and loss of 2 positions, but if the weather improves and they get some volunteers they can catch up.
 - Wetland restoration and creation projects are underway.

REGIONAL PARTNER UPDATES

- Ft. Bragg Regional Alliance: Susan Miller
 - Attending the association of defense communities conference, asked to go early – they will be receiving the defense community of the year award. They are having to cut back from 4 people to 2 to reduce costs
- RLUAC: Jim Dougherty
 - Susan presented Outreach Plan at recent meeting and did a great job. The 2004 law regarding cell phone towers and sub divisions within 5 miles of any installations in NC was amended to get rid of certified mail requirements, and it can now be done over email
- Sustainable Sandhills: Dave Heins
 - Focused on slow food/local food initiatives. They are trying to get more local food into the installation and into the community restaurants. Bragg is meeting with “Feed the Forces:” tomorrow to help support local farmers keep farmland in production.

Other News and Points of Discussion

- Review and approval of the last meeting's minutes.
- Thank you Scott Hartley for your service in the Sandhills and to the Partnership!
- Joint meeting between NC Longleaf Coalition and NC Prescribed Fire Council August 27-28.
There will be a field trip on August 28th at the Orton Plantation
- The next NCSCP Steering Committee meeting will be September 18th here at Weymouth Woods.

Meeting Adjourned at 3:40 PM