

**Meeting Minutes**  
**North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership**  
**Steering Committee Meeting**  
**1:00PM – 3:00 PM Wednesday, June 24th, 2020**

**CONFERENCE CALL**

➤ **Welcome and Introductions**

Present

|                      |                         |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Jeff Marcus          | TNC                     |
| Brady Beck           | NCWRC                   |
| Kerry Brust          | SEI                     |
| David Heins          | Fort Bragg/ED           |
| Pete Benjamin        | USFWS                   |
| Pete Edmonds - Chair | Ft. Bragg/DPTM          |
| Crystal Cockman      | Three Rivers Land Trust |
| Brian Yeich          |                         |

Absent

|                   |                |
|-------------------|----------------|
| Monica Stephenson | Fort Bragg/DPW |
| Susan James       | USAEC          |



Other Attendees

Scott Pohlman (NCNHP), Rhonda Sturgill , Carmella Stirrat (TNC), Susan Miller, John Hammond, Caroline Krom (USFWS), Mike Spisak Chris Stewart (USFS), Marian McPhaul (Little 9 Conservancy), Madalyn Baldwin (Southeastern Conservation Trust), Kerry Brust, Anna Prinz (SEI), Ana Castillo (ORISE Fellow), Brady Beck, Kacy Cook (NCWRC), Jon Blanchard (NCSP), Brian Yeich (NCFS), Crystal Cockman (Three Rivers Land Trust), Barry Hull (Fort Bragg), Jacob Comer (Quail Forever), Jesse Woodsman (), Alan Schultz Jessie Schillachi, Jackie Britchard (Fort Bragg), Madelyn Walden (NCSU), Jay Carter, Jeanette Sabos (JCA), Jeff Walters (VT), Rex Badgett (NCDOT), Melvin Whitehall (Whitehall LLC), Jesse Wimberley (PBA)

- **State of the Sandhills Report: Results of Biological Monitoring of Longleaf Habitats – Ana Castillo, The Nature Conservancy**
- Ana presented a review of the monitoring projects completed by the ORISE Fellows since 2014 as part of the monitoring plan. The first Conservation Target monitoring project focused on Longleaf Pine Mosaic. Several efforts were made towards documenting known longleaf pine stands and its condition on the landscape. The first project focused on on-the ground surveys on protect lands such as the Sandhills Gameland and Calloway Forest. A remote sensing model was also developed to estimate forest conditions on the ground across the longleaf range in NC.
  - The next Conservation Target monitored was the Upland Depressional Wetlands. This study used a long-term dataset of species and breeding events of herpetofauna in

wetlands in the Sandhill Gameland and Fort Bragg. They found that that more isolated wetlands were and the less forested the habitat was, the less species richness and breeding events there was. Given the declining trends of many at risk species associated with these habitats, this is perhaps the greatest area of opportunity for restoration in the Sandhills.

- Blackwater Streams were the next conservation target and data from the EPA and USGS combined with land cover data were used to look at pollution and water quality in the Sandhills. Common issues observed were declining flows, decreased oxygen, increased nutrients (N,P), and increased turbidity and conductance. Land protection and forest management are the best tools to protect water quality and biodiversity in these systems.
- A Rapid Assessment Method (RAM) was developed to assess the condition of Sandhill Seeps, a natural wetland community with is biodiversity. This RAM uses key ecological attributes such as canopy cover, midstory, and groundcover as well as landscape context and size to score the condition of seeps. Seep records from the Natural Heritage program database were revisited and seeps were delineated to improve the accuracy of the Element Occurrence records. Photopoints were also established and combined with the RAM results, will be used as a baseline assessment for seep condition monitoring.
- USFWS Automated Lot review project:
  - USFWS reviews a lot of request from private landowners to certify their property to allow for development without infringing on the ESA act. In an effort to expedite this process, they are working on an automated process to facilitate these request and free up staff time for projects of greater urgency and potentially greater conservation benefit.
  - They have designed a decision tree for land owners to help guide them through the process and receive the verification they need. If a landowner is not removing any mature pine trees, they will be able to self-certify through the website. If they are removing trees, they will receive further guidance and be recommended having an environmental consultant survey their property before removing any trees.
- Update on new ORISE hiring and Longleaf Ecosystems Occurrence project – Jeff Marcus, The Nature Conservancy
  - Interviews are completed for the new ORISE Fellow and a decision will be made shortly.
  - Part of the funding for this position comes from the Longleaf Alliance to help complete the surveys for the Longleaf Element Occurrence project. The new Fellow will be lead, but are asking for help from Partners, especially in their respective work areas.
- Uwharrie Longleaf conservation and grant opportunities - Chris Stewart
  - Mike Spisak has been promoted and Chris Stewart is filing his position in the interim.
  - The Steering Committee has agreed to include the corridor to Uwharrie NF and parts of the forest in Sandhills LIT.
  - Conversations are ongoing with NRCS and plan for applying for the Joint Chiefs grant in the Fall.
  - Uwharrie NF was able to some burning this winter and after being stalled by the pandemic, are resuming burning operations.

- They are working on a proposal for AmeriCorps to bring a crew to do restoration work and provide training for them. If you have ideas for projects for them, let them know.
- Cost-share Challenge Project- Chris Coxen, National Wild Turkey Federation
  - Chris and Mike Spisak have been working on a test model to capture and use funds from USFS working in the corridor and engaging landowners. NWTf or another NGO as appropriate, would work with program staff to develop demonstration areas for longleaf restoration. The NGO partner would assist USFS with that work, provide consulting forester, private landowner technical assistance, enroll in PUV, cost share, etc.
  - The timeframe would be a 3 year agreement with a maximum of 60k, and potential matching funds from Enviva.
- Little 9 Conservancy Land Protection Project – Marian McPhaul
  - The land trust is leading an effort to conserve an area next to the Elks Club to keep as open space for wildlife and recreation. The Elks Club is in a transitional sale and but they are hopeful to work with the new owners to put a conservation easement on the property.
- Working Group Reports and Discussion
  - **Resource Management** (Brady Beck)
    - No update
  - **RCW Recovery** (Kerry Brust)
    -   
RCW WG Report\_24  
June 2020.docx
  - **Communications** (Debbie Crane)
    - No update
  - **Land Protection** (Jeff Marcus)
    - Southeastern Conservation Trust is a receipt of a donated property, Pine Forest totaling 1,650 acres, adjacent to West Pine Middle Schools. The land trust is working with NC State and a forestry consulting company to manage it.
    -   
Land Protection  
Work Group update
  - **Reserve Design** (Ana Castillo)
    - No update
- Partner Updates
  - Longleaf Alliance –
    - Biannual meeting is going virtual with a full calendar of talks and social opportunities!
  - SEI –

- No updates

NCWRC – Brady Beck, Kacy Cook

- WRC has burned 6,400 acres, and plans to burn another 2,750 by the end of the season
- Getting ready to release Carolina gopher frog metamorphs in partnership with NC zoo and NC Aquarium into Block T pond
- Brady has printed NCSCP 20 year anniversary stickers, let him know if you want one!

Fort Bragg –

- No updates

Fort Bragg ESB

- No updates

USFWS –

- No news on RCW

TNC –

- No updates

NC Parks –

- Will be hiring prescribed burn crew, Andrew slack is contact.

Three Rivers –

- No Updates

NCFS –

- No updates

USFS –

- No updates

DOT –

- No updates

PBA –

- No updates

NCDOT –

- No updates

NCFS –

No updates

USFS – No Updates

AEC –

- No Update

USFWS –

- No Update

SEI –

- No updates

NCFS –

- No updates

➤ Next Meeting: Conference call in September 16<sup>th</sup>

➤ Adjourn