

**NCSCP Steering Committee Meeting Summary
September 14, 2016
Weymouth Woods - Sandhills Nature Preserve**

Steering Committee Attendance:

Present

Pete Edmunds	Chair	Fort Bragg/DPTM
Dave Heins		Fort Bragg/DPW
Brady Beck		NCWRC
Susan Miller	(Alternate for Pete Benjamin)	USFWS
Jon Blanchard		NCDPR
Jay Carter	(Alternate for Phil Doerr)	SEI
Jeff Marcus		TNC
Jesse Wimberley	(Alternate for Nancy Talton)	SALT

Absent

Mark Bost		NCFS
Susan James		USAEC

Other Attendees

Barry Hull (Fort Bragg), Gabriella Garrison (NCWRC), Jimmy Dodson (NC Parks), Darias Sturdivant (NCDOT), Jim Doherty (Fort Bragg), Michelle (Fort Bragg), Janet Gray (Fort Bragg), Kelsey Gaddy (Fort Bragg), Chad Rogers (NWTF), Rex Badgett (NCDOT), Mike Norris (TNC), Andy (SEI), Kerry Brust (SEI), Jackie Britcher (Fort Bragg), Paul Rogow (TNC)

Notes

New NCSCP Chair: (Susan Miller)

- Pete Edmunds was introduced to the partnership

American Forest Foundation Grants: (Susan Miller)

- Grants are being made available to landowners to manage forests in such a way that it precludes the listing of additional Federal threatened and endangered species.
- A RFP is forthcoming in the spring of 2017.

DOT Proposed Road Projects: (Darias Sturdivant)

- We are in Division 8 of NCDOT.
- Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPO) were created in 1962 by the Federal Highway Act. They are designated by the Federal Census as urban in nature and having a population of 50,000 or more. They are required for the planning of new road-related projects.
- Rural Planning Organizations (RPO) are responsible for coordinating the process of developing Comprehensive Transportation Plans (CTP) for the region. Currently, Moore and Scotland County are in the process of developing a CTP.

- Current projects in our area include improvements on US 15-501, which include adding medians to handle additional traffic.
- There are no current plans for a bypass for US 1. Instead improvements will be made on the route to help handle additional traffic.
- Improvements are also slated for NC 73.
- The 211 widening project between Aberdeen and Raeford is slated to begin in the spring of 2019.
- Improvements on NC 5 do not include widening, but include adding turn lanes in key locations.
- A western connector is still under consideration. It would provide a bypass for Highway 211 traffic. Right now, this is only a concept, and there are no concrete plans.
- Jesse Wimberley suggested that improvements to the traffic circle could be made that would alleviate traffic and would render the bypass unnecessary.

Conservation Needs Assessment: (Matthew Moskwik)

- A survey of land managers and stakeholders was conducted for the Sandhills. The survey was sent to 42 individuals and consisted of 5 questions.
- The aim was to document information gaps that if addressed would help to effectively implement species and habitat restoration.
- 23 surveys were returned with 42 ideas.
- The Reserve Design Working Group summarized the ideas into 8 research and 6 planning topics.
- There was significant discussion after the presentation about what should be done with the resulting data.
- Several wanted to look at the raw data, so Matthew will send it out for review.
- There may be some interest in holding a research symposium in the Sandhills that would highlight research currently taking place in the Sandhills, as well as presentations that address some of the topics mentioned in the needs assessment.

NFWF Longleaf Pine Prioritization: (Matthew Moskwik)

- NFWF and the Longleaf Alliance requested that the Partnership identify between 150,000 and 200,000 acres for longleaf pine restoration.
- The Reserve Design Working Group identified 2 tiers of longleaf pine restoration in the Sandhills.
- The first tier was delineated from already existing ACUB regions. These regions were expanded with tier 1 habitats from the Reserve Design Working Group Plan, high priority habitats identified in the South Atlantic LCC's Conservation Blueprint 2.0, and already existing protected lands.
- The second tier consisted of corridors between the NC Sandhills and the Carolina Sandhills National Wildlife Refuge, Bladen Lakes State Forest, and the Uwharrie National Forest. These corridors were identified using a the South Atlantic LCC's Conservation Blueprint 2.0 and a recent longleaf pine resiliency and connectivity analysis by The Nature Conservancy.
- Within each tier, the number of already existing acres of longleaf pine and urban areas were removed, yielding 177,381 acres in tier 1 and 277,406 acres in tier 2.

Red-cockaded Woodpecker Working Group: (Jay Carter)

- The working group has met twice this year to discuss RCW issues in the Sandhills. They discussed three issues: management of RCW foraging partitions across several ownerships, silviculture affecting RCW nesting and foraging habitat, and management of safe harbor properties supporting RCW groups.
- The Recovery Standard requires at least 120 acres of quality habitat for a RCW group.
- There is significant overlap of RCW foraging partitions on Camp Mackall, private lands, and the Game Lands. A similar pattern is observed with Fort Bragg clusters. Several (~99) have foraging partitions that fall outside of the base. There are also 10 RCW foraging partitions that mostly occur outside of Fort Bragg, but portions of the partitions occur on Fort Bragg.
- Jay suggested that we need to better coordinate our management efforts, so we do not simultaneously impact RCWs.
- As the forest has aged, the size of foraging partitions has decreased. Thus, the amount of timber available for removal at any one time decreases as the partition size shrinks. For partitions of less than 75 acres, any removal of pine greater than 10 inches in diameter breast height may trigger incidental take.
- Any thinning that takes place should retain the majority of old pines on the landscape.
- Clusters are managed differently from foraging habitat. Clusters have a higher average basal area.
- Conduct pre-harvest foraging habitat analyses for partitions with active RCW clusters in order to determine appropriate pine basal area removal.
- Two types of silviculture management are consistent with ecosystem management: group and single tree selection. Two-aged management may not meet ecosystem management guidelines.
- USFWS should work with landowners to assure compliance of Safe Harbor Agreements, Section 7 Biological Opinions, and management plans.
- TSI work needs to be expanded to more Safe Harbor properties.
- Additionally, we need to increase RCW outreach efforts.

WORKING GROUP UPDATES

Resource Management Working Group –

- . No activity

Communications Working Group – Jeff Marcus

- Fire in the Pines Festival will occur in Wilmington in Oct.

Land Protection Working Group – Jeff Marcus

- The Martin's tract has closed since the last meeting.
- Several (~7) properties were recommended for funding by CWMTF. Two were not recommended.

Reserve Design Working Group – Matthew Moskwik

- Potential upland longleaf pine surveys will be conducted this fall.
- A report is currently being written for the ephemeral wetland monitoring that took place last winter.
- Currently, analyses are underway to understand the state of blackwater streams in the Sandhills.

PARTNER UPDATES

USFWS

- Red Wolf decision came out this last Monday.

NC Parks

- One long-term ranger position at Weymouth has retired. The other is on maternity leave.
- Carver's Creek is increasing the number of acres of longleaf that are in maintenance class.

SEI

- A new woodpecker biologist has been hired.

TNC

- Interviews for seasonal fire crew and an ORISE fellow are underway.

Ft. Bragg DPTM

- The charter is being rewritten. The draft may be available in late October. It will encompass two main goals: military readiness and habitat management. It will last for 5 years.

REGIONAL PARTNER UPDATES

RLUAC

- RLUAC has recently received a grant to update the land-use plan for the areas around Fort Bragg. Members of the review group will attend the December meeting to gather information during this review process.

Other News and Points of Discussion

- Jesse Wimberley provided a video that promotes fire on private lands. It was developed from Sandhills Prescribed Burn Association meetings.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:20 PM