

**NCSCP Steering Committee Meeting Summary  
September 18, 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
John Hammond (Alternate for Pete Benjamin)		USFWS
Harry Huberth		SALT
Linda Pearsall		NCDENR/OPCA
Mark Bost		NCFS
Brian Strong		NC Parks

Absent

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Other Attendees

Ryan Bollinger (USFWS ORISE), Neville Handel (TNC ORISE), Susan Miller (USFWS), Gretchen Coll (TNC), Jeff Marcus (NCWRC), Jim Dougherty (RLUAC), Laura Fogo (USFWS), Pete Campbell (USFWS), Jesse Schillaci (Ft. Bragg ESB), Jackie Britcher (Ft. Bragg ESB), Barry Hull (SALT), Jon Chase (Fort Bragg/DPTM), Nancy Talton (SALT), Jay Carter (SEI), Rod Fleming (Ft. Bragg), Tom Hancock (Methodist University), Will McDearmon (USFWS), Steve Anchor (SEI), and Candace Williams .

**Notes**

**Proposed RCW Translocations for Fall/Winter: (Steve Anchor)**

- Translocations over the last year to bolster sub-populations on Moore County Safe Harbor properties have been going well. Birds from Ft. Bragg were brought to join solitary males or pairs that were translocated into newly available habitats. Some of them have successfully bred (3 of 6 seen), whereas others have not been seen since translocation. One of the pairs that was moved together did the best out of all of the translocations and they have stayed together to this point after successfully breeding.
- Also a new active cavity tree has been discovered near MOOR 3 (SE of the translocation efforts), but it is believed that the bird using this tree is not one of the translocated birds. Susan Miller is working to secure access to the property.
- Potential 2014 translocation sites have been scouted out and will be finalized soon, including private lands and conservation lands.
- WRC will put in cavities and will monitor for natural recruitment from surrounding areas.

**Working Groups Annual Reporting Updates: (Ryan Bollinger)**

- All working group quarterly updates have been simplified and consolidated onto one page for easier reading
- We are also finishing a new standardized working group Annual reporting template which will help the groups highlight accomplishments and re-focus efforts on an annual basis.
  - Based on State Fiscal Year (July-June)
  - Template similar to previous quarterly reports
  - Working with each WG Chair to put together a 2013 report
- This, along with the regular quarterly reports, will also make it easier for the communications working group to put together the annual “State of the Sandhills” report.

### **ELECTION OF A NEW CHAIR**

- Mike Lynch recommended to the Steering Committee Jon Chase as the new SC Chair. John holds Mike's old position as Chief of the Training Division at Ft. Bragg. Jon will have Dave Heins and Ryan Elting to assist him during the transition.
- Ryan Elting met with Jon the prior week to discuss TNC's Cooperative Agreement and the relationship with Ft. Bragg. He looks forward to working with Jon.
- Jon introduced himself and discussed his background and commitment to making Ft. Bragg a sustainable training base for soldiers.
- All are in favor, and the motion passes.
- Jon is now the new Chair of the Steering Committee.

### **WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

#### **Resource Management Working Group** – Neville Handel

- NCSCP Resource Manager's Working Group meeting will be held at TNC's Calloway Forest from 10 am-2 pm on Thursday October 3rd, 2013. The purpose of the tour is to share our lessons learned over ten years of stewardship at Calloway, and we will be visiting a variety of sites. Highlights include thinning of mature longleaf among RCW clusters, restoration of plantations, plantings, and prescribed fire (both good and bad).
- TNC has assisted with late-growing season burns with WRC and NC State Parks totaling approximately 900 acres towards the NFWF program.
- TNC is currently hiring our NFWF funded fire crew for the upcoming fire season.

#### **Communications Working Group** - Susan Miller

- Carvers Creek State Park is now officially open
- The NCS State Parks PIO Charlie Peak did an incredible job with getting media coverage for Carvers Creek State Park opening. Media hits included two stories in the Raleigh News and Observer and a story and an editorial in the Fayetteville Observer.

#### **RCW Working Group** – Jay Carter

- Initiation of the 2013 nesting season region-wide was significantly late compared to recent years, influenced by cool, wet spring.

- Have yet to compile data on nesting effort, but within FB and SGL A-Block there were more potential breeding groups (PBG) which did not attempt to nest compared to recent years. This may be due to the fact that we're nearing carrying capacity in these areas and the birds are spending more time defending territory and less time focused on breeding efforts.

#### SANDHILLS EAST (Primary Core Recovery)

Western Fort Bragg – 2013 SEI documented 2 budded groups (556 and 558) which offset the loss of 2 groups (FB 35, 553)

McCain Tract (NC Department of Agriculture) Reactivated long-term abandoned cluster MCCA 5 thru habitat enhancement and insert cavity provisioning; solitary male group status.

Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve – 4 active clusters / 3 PBGs – # helpers (group size) increasing

Calloway Tract (TNC) – PBGs stable at 7 in 2013 – # helpers (group size) increasing; many floaters documented

Southern Pines Pinehurst (SOPI) and Moore County private Lands (MOOR)

- SOPI and private lands remaining stable at est. 48 - 50 PBG (w/ Johnson, Creed)
- SOPI E05 (Paint Hill Farm) new recruitment cluster scheduled to be installed Fall 2013
- Walthour Moss Foundation – extensive habitat enhancement thru prescribed burning and mid-story removal by TNC; RCW groups responding well.
- Western MOOR County Corridor # PBG increased from 1 in 2012 to 4 in 2013 (details in intrapopulation translocation presentation)

“Pioneer” cavity tree associated with cluster MOOR 3 detected May 2013 on private tract between SANDHILLS EAST – WEST, ideal location for EAST /WEST connection via western “Gap”. Group status likely solitary male, bird ID remains to be verified.

#### SANDHILLS WEST (Essential Support)

SGL- A Block – 2 budded groups in 2013; fledgling success and productivity elevated compared to other SGL blocks and other monitored subpopulations within Sandhills.

Camp Mackall – increased from 11 PBG in 2012 to 14 in 2013.

BLUE Tract – 8 active clusters in 2013; PBG # needs to be verified.

#### **Land Protection Working Group** – Ryan Elting

- TNC acquired the 100 acre Five Points Tract in Hoke County, on June 21<sup>st</sup>. The tract is composed of young upland plantation longleaf pine requiring understory restoration and prescribed burning, as well as mixed pine and hardwood bottomlands. Together, Five Points and the neighboring Bass Tract make up a protected corridor between McCain Forest and the Blue Farm that will be restored and managed for connectivity and future RCW habitat.
- TNC and WRC are working with the State Property Office to complete the transfer the 262 acre Thomas inholding in Moore County into the Sandhills Game Lands in October. TNC received National Fish & Wildlife Foundation funds to restore longleaf pine and native understory to 50 acres of former agricultural lands and is working with WRC to allow for the completion of this work following the transfer.

- In October, TNC will swap a narrow swath (~15 ac) along the boundary of TNC's Lafayette tract, with McCormick Farms, 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. State Parks passed on an opportunity to submit a NHTF request earlier this month, but will work with PARTF and the new CWMTF to transfer the property into the Park in subsequent funding rounds.
- Fort Bragg's FY'14 REPI Requests of \$1.25M was submitted to the Army Environmental Command in July. The request included the Cumberland County, Brown and Brazell tracts (106 acres and 45 acres respectively). The Brown tract contains 70 acres of intact longleaf pine forest adjacent to Fort Bragg's Northeast Training Area that serves as foraging habitat for neighboring RCW groups, and requires only prescribed fire management. TNC made an offer to purchase at fair market value and is awaiting a response from the landowners. TNC is still working with the owners of the Brazell property (the second half of this potential corridor, located across Hwy 210) to gain permission to hire an appraisal and make an offer to purchase. The two properties would form a corridor between the installation and the Mutzberg ACUB tract that would be restored and managed for longleaf pine forest connectivity and future RCW habitat. The announcement of REPI Request results is not expected until February of 2014.

**Reserve Design Working Group** – Ryan Bollinger

- We are finalizing our recently completed individualized, specific 'reserve designs' which include identifying smoke buffers and wildlife connectors specific to our conservation lands and biological targets between and around private and conservation lands and will be sharing this GIS dataset with Ft. Bragg Regional Alliance in their phase II of the Regional Sustainable Growth Management strategy.
- We hope to continue ground-truthing potential uplands habitat areas work sometime in the fall/winter. We would appreciate help with this work. Please contact a member of the reserve design working group if you can help.

**PARTNER UPDATES**

NCFS- Mark Bost, highlights include:

- No update

AEC- highlights include:

- No update

Natural Heritage- Linda Pearsall, highlights include:

- Elimination of the Conservation Tax (Dec. 21) credit impacts us, and there is talk about bringing it back as early as next year. Clean Water and Natural Heritage trust funds were combined, and the new Clean Water TF will take on many of the old Natural Heritage TF tasks.
- Heritage was able to hold onto money through FY '14.
- The new secretary seems to be pretty good (pro-land conservation and breaking down internal barriers).

USFWS – John Hammond, highlights included:

- Long-eared bat may become a listed species in the next few years, which may affect the Sandhills due to small populations (historical).

- Pete Campbell brought up NC Sandhills NWR Proposal using new Urban Refuge format. Moss is still interested in doing this, so we need to find the core land. Upchurch tract could be the ideal land, and requested that partners (esp. WRC, TNC, and the Army) support the idea. Then we could probably build this refuge based on a number of easements. Heritage Trust Fund paid for Upchurch, so this may cloud things regarding that tract, also would need a champion legislator.

SALT – Harry Huberth, highlights included:

- Candace stepped down as ED last month.
- SALT is building up the board before beginning the ED search.
- The McDonald tract is moving along well. Be sure to check out the new Moore County land use plan.
- Harry is now Chairman of Voluntary Ag. District, and it may be something the NCSCP might want to put some energy into.

NC Parks – Brian Strong, highlights included:

- Lost their dedicated funding sources (deed stamps) in the last year, but they did get \$24 million appropriated to them.
- Board was cut from 15 to 9.
- New local biologist (Jimmy Dodson) has been doing a lot of work in the Sandhills.
- Working with SALT to try and get a lot of lands transferred into SP as well.

SEI - Jay Carter, highlights included:

- Winding down summer RCW monitoring work.

TNC – Ryan Elting, highlights included:

- TNC halfway through NFWF grant and is putting in a proposal to extend this work through 2016. Ryan Elting will be reaching out to partners to seek input and support for this.
- TNC is having an internal transition to the whole system concept, making all programs in the state line up with like programs in other states (i.e. longleaf pine whole system). This is changing some of the responsibilities for the landscape managers/program directors, but it should not change responsibilities in Sandhills.
- NAWCA grant will allow TNC to protect all of Goose Pond Bay and do restoration on 4 bays. SWMA has been funded again for next year.

Ft. Bragg DPTM- Mike Lynch:

- Nancy Natoli passed yesterday.
- Mike will be meeting with the Lt. Governor on September 23 to push for the continuation of land protection in the Sandhills, and why it is important to the Army. There will also be another TV segment about Ft. Bragg and the Partnership.
- Mike will be retiring October 31 at a formal ceremony to which we will all be invited. He wants us to continue the work we have done and to work with the decision makers to make sure they know about (and don't forget about) what we have done and will continue to do.

Ft. Bragg DPW – Dave Heins highlights included:

- No update

WRC - Brady Beck, highlights included:

- Public input meeting for Game Lands management plans in Rockingham in August was pretty positive. Online comments have been more mixed, with some opposition to burning up oaks (deer-related).
- Partners are encouraged to send in online comments to support our position, as it is useful to have these as part of the public record to justify action WRC takes.
- Sending in a formal NCSCP position/letter of support would be really helpful, as we are a recognized and respected player in the area and it will carry some weight. Susan Miller and Phil Doerr will draft a letter of support in the next few weeks. The Army/Ft. Bragg will do so as well.
- 18,000 acres burned this year.
- Two wetland restoration projects are underway for Gopher Frogs and other amphibians. Two 11 month positions (fire and timber) are being hired soon. Good publicity on UNC TV from prescribed fire coverage. Bachman's work is being used to help contact private landowners to do good management on private lands. Bachman's status assessment results will be presented at next SC meeting.

### **REGIONAL PARTNER UPDATES**

#### Ft. Bragg Regional Alliance: Ryan Bollinger

- Ft. Bragg Regional Alliance has initiated Part Two of the Regional Sustainable Growth Management Strategy for the Fort Bragg Region in August with a consultant team out of Charlotte NC (Land Design)
- NCSCP as well as regional partners including Sustainable Sandhills and RLUAC are members of the advisory committee, providing data and recommendations. In the process of updating the data used in the land use model that will project out growth to 2040 using different land use scenarios.
- End goal is to identify a preferred sustainable growth scenario and help provide policy recommendations to achieve the scenario.
- Next meeting will be in October (no date set). Ryan Bollinger will update NCSCP on next steps to make sure we are well represented in the process and our voice is heard.

#### RLUAC: Jim Dougherty

- Zoning changes within 5 miles of a military installation used to have a certified mail notification requirement, but this has been revised to eliminate the certified mail part, which makes everything much easier for everyone. Telecom tower shapefile will be updated and shared, making air travel/training safer.

#### Sustainable Sandhills: Dave Heins

- Food composting program is being made more efficient. Energy savings education partnership with Methodist University.

### **Other News and Points of Discussion**

- Review and approval of the last meeting's minutes.
- The next NCSCP Steering Committee meeting will be December 11<sup>th</sup> here at Weymouth Woods.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:00 PM