

**NCSCP Steering Committee Meeting Summary  
December 7, 2016  
Weymouth Woods - Sandhills Nature Preserve**

Steering Committee Attendance:

Present

Pete Edmonds	Chair	Fort Bragg/DPTM
Dave Heins		Fort Bragg/DPW
Brady Beck		NCWRC
Pete Benjamin		USFWS
Jay Carter		SEI
Jeff Marcus		TNC
Nancy Talton		SALT
Sarah Crate		NCFS
Jimmy Dodson		NCDPR

Absent

Susan James		USAEC
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Other Attendees

Mike Lynch, Pete Campbell, Rick Studenmund, Fred Annand, Scott Belfit, Katie Martin, Jackie Britcher, Tad Davis, Barry Hull, Stephanie Wager, Sharon Ross, Janet Grey, Michelle Wilcox, Caroline Krom, Rhonda Sturgill, Alan Shultz, Brooke Massa, Ryan Bollinger, Brian Ball, Rod Fleming, Jesse Wimberley, Jason Winter, Jake Epley, Gabriella Garrison, Rex Badgett, Jim Dougherty

Notes

**History of the Sandhills Conflict: (Fred Annand/Scott Belfit)**

- In the 1990s several DOD installations were being impacted by endangered species restrictions. Conflict arose in the Sandhills over the ESA listing of Red-cockaded Woodpecker. Woodpecker numbers were declining and army officers were concerned that restrictions would make it difficult to adequately prepare troops for deployments.
- In the 90's The Nature Conservancy entered into a cooperative agreement with the DOD to help Fort Bragg meet its goals, as well as move conservation forward in the Sandhills. The agreement provided funding to TNC to help with land acquisition, which would help buffer Fort Bragg from development, as well as help provide additional habitat for the red-cockaded woodpecker. The partnership started with a short list of critical properties for RCW conservation – the first being the Rosy tract.

**Partnerships: (Pete Campbell/Mike Lynch)**

- Mike Lynch reiterated Scott's point about the ugliness of the conflict. Fort Bragg was sending soldiers to other bases to get trained, because of training restrictions on the base. It took several years before the Fish and Wildlife Service and Army were able to reach an agreement

that allowed for training within RCW foraging areas, but also required Fort Bragg to help with landscape conservation and restoration.

- The partnership began with 3 initial organizations: DOD, TNC, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife. Today, it has over 20 member organizations. The process of growing the partnership was not easy. It consisted of a lot of hard work. Currently, there are over a dozen longleaf species that are at-risk, therefore the partnership needs to proactively conserve habitat to prepare for the next potential listing.
- The safe harbor program was piloted in the Sandhills. Additionally, the Sandhills' partnership helped provide incentives to private landowners for managing their properties for RCWs. Pete Campbell reiterated that the partnership was established and grew on trust. The partnership was formalized in 2000 to increase efficiency, and it received an award from the Secretary of the Interior for collective work and cooperation.

#### **Army Policy: (Tad Davis)**

- Each of the partners plays an important role, because of the constituencies that they represent. The partnership's mission is even more important today, given the rapid development that is taking place in the Sandhills.
- Sustainable Fort Bragg was established in 2002. Now it has become Sustainable Sandhills.
- The establishment of REPI provided funding for the conservation of landscapes. 437,000 acres have been protected under this program in the U.S. Funding for the program has steadily grown, and it is currently a line item in the federal budget. A significant amount of the REPI funding has been matched by partner organizations, providing an incentive to maintain strong partnerships. It is important that we continue to communicate with our leaders to make sure that this program is maintained.
- The Sandhills partnership model has been utilized at other military bases around the country, such as at Fort Benning, GA.

#### **Why it Matters: (Pete Benjamin/Jay Carter)**

- The key to success of any partnership is finding common interests and solving small problems before they become larger ones. The role of this partnership is to preserve military training, our local culture, and the beauty of the longleaf pine ecosystem. This partnership will help us tackle new problems that present themselves today and into the future.
- In the mid-1970's there was no concern for longleaf pine across the Southeast. Many scientists were also not concerned, believing that longleaf pine ecosystems were biodiversity deserts. Botanical work showed that longleaf pine ecosystems held some of the highest floristic diversity in the temperate world. Looking forward, we are fortunate to have an old forest in the Sandhills. The challenge is to maintain a viable old-growth forest that supports a healthy population of RCWs, while hosting other anthropogenic activities.
- Challenges are going to present themselves. The key to the partnership is collaboration and communication.

### **Partnership Update from Fort Bragg Training (Pete Edmonds/Barry Hull)**

- SALT is currently closing on a property in north Moore County. On the northern Bragg boundary the Wilmington tract has been purchased by a developer and will be divided into 15 acre parcels.
- Current objectives for Fort Bragg include widening the 'gap', as well as buffering the northern Bragg boundary and connecting Fort Bragg to the Moss Foundation property.
- Barry Hull's recommendation is to bring in additional money from the Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape Program to help buffer the northern boundary of Fort Bragg.
- Some individuals in the audience expressed concern about the overall cost of buffering the northern boundary, because land prices can run 10x greater than in less developed parts of Richmond and Scotland counties.
- Fort Bragg is creating and implementing a 2040 plan for a maneuver trail network on the base.

### **WORKING GROUP UPDATES**

#### **Resource Management Working Group** – Chris Jordan

- . Chris will be stepping down as the committee chair.

#### **Communications Working Group** – Debbie Crane

- No report received.

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

- This year saw slight increases in populations on public lands and slight decreases on private lands. Declines continue in the Southern Pines area. Growth is slowing on public lands, probably because populations are reaching their carrying capacities.

#### **Land Protection Working Group** – Jeff Marcus

- A good year for land acquisition in the Sandhills.

#### **Reserve Design Working Group** – Matthew Moskwik

- This past year the group has completed upland longleaf surveys, a conservation research needs assessment, and a prioritization longleaf restoration map for the Sandhills.
- Future work will continue the above projects as well as attempt to build a model for the Sandhills that identifies and assesses the condition of longleaf pine across the landscape.

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

- SEI has helped move woodpeckers from Fort Bragg to various private land sites.
- FWS is getting new leadership at the executive level of both federal and state governments.
- Pete Edmonds suggested creating a landowner advisory committee to understand the concerns of private landowners.
- Jesse Wimberley – the prescribed burn association is gaining traction and popularity. The western connector is still being considered as a project.
- Carver's Creek and Weymouth Woods are meeting their burn goals.

- SALT is closing out a NFWF grant and working on the next one. SALT also received \$800,000 from the Clean Water Fund to continue conservation in the Deep River area.
- TNC hired a new ORISE fellow – Rhonda Sturgill. TNC has also hired a shared burn crew with the Wildlife Resources Commission.
- Fort Bragg is removing coyotes to help increase deer populations on the base. A 2-year quail study is currently underway. Fort Bragg will begin its burn season soon.
- The proposal to widen 401 has been denied funding.
- RULAC has been funded for a 4<sup>th</sup> assessment. Climate change adaptability will be included in the new study.
- The Greater Uwharrie Conservation Partnership will be meeting on December 14, 2016.
- The NC Forest Service has hired a new longleaf pine coordinator. The nursery was hit hard by Hurricane Matthew.
- The Longleaf Alliance held a conference in Savannah, GA in early November. All presentations were recorded and should be placed on their website within the next few months.
- The NC Wildlife Resources Commission will be submitting funding for Usher, Godwin II, and Womble tracts. Party in the Pines will take place during Earth Day (April 22) in 2017 at the Weymouth Center.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:20 PM