

NCSCP Steering Committee Meeting Summary
June 15, 2016
Weymouth Woods - Sandhills Nature Preserve

Steering Committee Attendance:

Present

Barry Hull	(Alternate for Jon Chase)	Fort Bragg/DPTM
Brady Beck		NCWRC
Susan Miller	(Alternate for Pete Benjamin)	USFWS
Jay Carter		SEI
Jeff Marcus		TNC
Jesse Wimberley	(Alternate for Nancy Talton)	SALT
Jimmy Dodson	(Alternate for Jon Blanchard)	NCPARKS

Absent

Dave Heins		Fort Bragg/DPW
		NCFS
Susan James		USAEC
Jon Blanchard		NCDPR

Other Attendees

Scott Pohlman, Jim Dougherty (Ft. Bragg), John Hammond (USFWS), Brooke Massa (NCWRC), Chuck Roe, Nate Shepard (NCWRC), Kacy Cook (NCWRC), Janet Gray (Ft. Bragg), Jackie Britcher (Fort Bragg), Caroline Krom (USFWS), Kerry Brust (SEI), Rex Badgett (NC DOT), Gabriella Garrison (NCWRC), Stephanie Wagner (SALT), Alan Shultz (Ft. Bragg), Jessie Schillaci, Michelle Wilcox, Myers Shaiyen (NCWRC)

Notes

RULAC Joint Land Use Study: (Jim Dougherty)

- A grant has been awarded to complete a new Joint Land Use Study; the last one was completed 8 years ago.
- It will review land use within 5 miles of Fort Bragg and will take into consideration: endangered species, natural values of working farms and forests, water issues, fracking, airspace needs, longleaf pine losses, and climate change adaptability.
- RULAC plans to have 8 meetings with all 8 counties that are covered by the footprint of this study.
- The study will take 2 years to complete.
- Jim encouraged people to attend RULAC meetings to help with the process.
- Part of the study will be to determine how the last land-use study was used for development decisions (i.e., its effectiveness).

Future DOT Projects: (Rex Badgett)

- The main projects are to widen NC 211 between Raeford and Aberdeen and to widen SR 1305 from Plank Road to US 401.

- Construction on NC 211 would begin in 2025 and on SR 1305 in 2020.
- The western connector for US 1 is moving forward. The Moore County Board of Commissioners just voted on the location, which will be in the Drowning Creek watershed, an important area for connecting RCW's in SOPI to the Game Lands.

Longleaf Upland Surveys: (Scott Pohlman)

- Scott Pohlman and Allison Weekely have been surveying areas identified on satellite images as potential longleaf habitat under a contract with The Nature Conservancy.
- Scott and Allison also revisited natural area candidate sites that were previously identified as potentially having rare species or significant natural habitats.
- They reviewed 31 potential areas and 13 natural area candidate sites.
- They found five new occurrences of *Carex austrodeflexa* and one new occurrence of Pine Barrens tree frog.
- Additionally, there were a few new natural areas found, as well as extensions for already existing ones.
- A significant amount of pine straw raking was observed during surveys.

Upland Depressional Wetlands Final Update: (Matthew Moskwik)

- The status of several species of concern was assessed across the Sandhills; several have shown declines.
- In the winter of 2015/16 an assessment of habitat conditions for ephemeral wetlands on Fort Bragg and the Game Lands was conducted. This data can be used as a baseline for any future assessments.
- Overall, there is good connectivity between wetlands on Fort Bragg and the Game Lands, although not all corridors are protected.
- Most wetlands have sufficient forested habitat in the uplands.
- The number of wetlands within 10km appears to be significantly related to the number of species of concern and extirpation rate of a wetland.
- Recommendations include: continue appropriate management techniques, protect corridors that are currently unprotected, increase the number of wetlands across the landscape by creating new or restoring old ones, and consider the connectivity of a wetland before reintroducing species.
- Additionally, 4 wetlands that were visited on Fort Bragg are in need of management. They are in the process of being choked by trees that are moving into the basin.

Carolina Bay Survey Results: (Matthew Moskwik & Felicia Speizer)

- Surveys for amphibians were completed in several (5) of The Nature Conservancy bays during the winter of 2015/16.
- Gopher frogs appear to be extirpated from all and ornate chorus frogs only occur at one bay.
- Southern chorus frogs and tiger, Mabee's, and dwarf salamanders are still found in most of the bays.

- Recommendations include continuing appropriate management, purchasing upland habitat around bays, routine monitoring, and surveys for other rare species such as plants.

WORKING GROUP UPDATES

Resource Management Working Group – Chris Jordan (Brady Beck provided update)

- NCWRC has written down rules for prescribed burning.

Communications Working Group – Debbie Crane (Jeff Marcus provided update)

- Bringing Nature Home book signing and talk at 2pm at the Pinehurst Fair Barn.
- The Wildlife Society will be having a field trip to the Moss Foundation as part of its international conference on October 18.
- Fire in the Pines Festival in Wilmington will take place on Oct 8.
- Both Weymouth and Carver's Creek State Parks have had their 100 year celebrations.

RCW Working Group – Kerry Brust

- A draft of RCW habitat maintenance position paper is being worked on and will be complete in September.
- The number of breeding groups of RCWs in the Sandhills is currently at 684, which is higher than in 2003 when the numbers were at 486.
- The translocated birds in Pinewild have created 12 groups, and 9 of those groups have had fledglings. The Pinewild population could serve as a 'connector' population between the Southern Pines and Game Lands populations.
- The troubles of RCWs in highly developed landscapes include competition from European starlings, red-bellied woodpeckers, and red-headed woodpeckers.
- Restrictor plates have been used to lower competition, but they need to be maintained.

Land Protection Working Group – Jeff Marcus

- Since early December, 4 new properties have been purchased for conservation. One new conservation easement has been placed on the Haskell II tract.
- The Godwin tract was transferred from TNC to WRC.
- There was a property swap between TNC and McCormick Farms. The Arrowhead tract (inholding in Carver's Creek) was given to NC parks for part of the Lafayette Preserve.
- Several partners are looking at purchasing the Whitehall Plantation as a conservation center for the Sandhills. There will be a meeting about the purchase on July 18.

Reserve Design Working Group – Matthew Moskwik

- A meeting was held in early February about how to move conservation forward in the Sandhills.
- A conservation research needs assessment was begun to understand significant information gaps to effectively managing longleaf pine ecosystems.
- Responses have been received and the data is currently being summarized and will be shared with the steering committee in September.

PARTNER UPDATES

SALT – Jesse Wimberley, highlights included:

- All meetings of the prescribed burn association have been full. They've had to turn people away.
- A prescribed burn was recently done to expose landowners to how to properly conduct a burn.
- The Pilot did a newspaper article about the April 30th fire training for local landowners. A video filmed by Brady Beck on the burn day was shown.
- 6 new burn bosses were certified.

NC Parks – Jimmy Dodson, highlights included:

- Carver's Creek has now burned around 2,000 acres this year. One longstanding ranger at Weymouth is retiring and the second one is going on long-term leave.
- The number of acres burned statewide is on track to be similar to last year.
- A state-wide bond passed, so several locations will receive updates.

SEI - Kerry Brust, highlights included:

- A new RCW biologist has been hired.

TNC – Jeff Marcus, highlights included:

- They are a little behind on burning for the season.
- TNC has hired a 4-person fire crew and an intern through August.
- TNC has been awarded \$300,000 from NFWF for a burn academy and habitat management projects.
- TNC is hiring a new land steward for the NC coast.
- New research on the Bachman's sparrow suggests that a low shrub component is necessary for successful pairing.

Ft. Bragg – Barry Hull, highlights included:

- A large partnership announcement will happen on July 6.
- Burning on Fort Bragg surpassed the 40,000 acre mark.
- Velpar is no longer in use on Fort Bragg and burning will no longer take place after June 30. The removal of Velpar is the result of unintentional effects when used. Prescribed burning will be used for hardwood control instead.

WRC - Brady Beck, highlights included:

- There have been some modifications to prescribed burn guidelines for the Game Lands, although nothing major.
- About 14,000 acres have been burned to date, which is slightly behind schedule (goal was 20,000 acres).
- Lincoln's replacement has been hired.

- Restoration of a pond on Block O is ongoing, with trees being removed from the basin and uplands being thinned.
- There will be a mini Green Growth Toolbox training on July 8 at Spring Lake.

REGIONAL PARTNER UPDATES

RLUAC:

- See earlier agenda topic.

Other News and Points of Discussion

- John Chase's replacement has been chosen.
- Nov 1-4 Longleaf Alliance meeting in Savannah, GA.
- The governor and house budget restore funding to the Natural Heritage Program; however, the senate budget does not restore funding.
- A significant discussion took place between John Hammond and Dave Heins about changes in management on Fort Bragg. John expressed concern about recent announcements that Fort Bragg is moving toward a more holistic approach to management. More will be discussed at the next NCSCP meeting in September.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:30 PM