

Agenda
North Carolina Sandhills Conservation Partnership
Steering Committee Meeting
1:00PM – 4:30PM Wednesday, December 4th, 2019
Weymouth Woods - Sandhills Nature Preserve

➤ Welcome and Introductions

➤ Steering Committee Attendance:

Present

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

Absent

Monica Stephenson	Fort Bragg/DPW
Susan James	USAEC
Sarah Crate	NCFS

John Hammond, Susan Miller, Caroline Krom, (USFWS), Nathan Shepard (NCNHP), Mike Martin, Miles Lance, Gabriella Garrison (NCWRC), Jesse Wimberley (SPBA), Chris Coxen (NWTF), Rex Badgett (NCDOT), Kerry Brust, Andy Van (SEI), Wendy Dunaway (FPWC), Carmella Stirrat, Rhonda Sturgill (TNC), Jacob Comer (Quail Forever), Rod Fleming, Stacy Huskins, Jackie Britcher (Fort Bragg ESB), Jan Goodsen (JCA), Mike Spisak (USFS), Barry Hull (Fort Bragg)

- State of the Seeps: Mapping and Assessing Condition of Sandhill Seep Communities – Ana Castillo, NCSCP
 - As part of the Biological Monitoring Plan, Ana revisited Sandhill Seep Element Occurrence records in the Natural Heritage Program database across the Sandhills. Most of these EO records had not been visited since the early 2000s, although there was an effort in 2010 to revisit records on Fort Bragg. Most of the field work for this project was done on the Sandhills Gameland, the Walthour-Moss Foundation, and other Partner lands as well as a private properties.
 - Many of these records were mapped in low accuracy, so much of the field work was focused on finding the natural communities and delineating

them using Avenza and GIS. Additionally, georeferenced photos were taken and converted to a photopoints shapefile. These new polygons more accurately represent where Seeps are found and the photopoints will help provide a baseline for future monitoring.

- Seeps can vary considerably depending on the amount of seepage they receive, their size, and overall vegetative structure and diversity. A Rapid Assessment Method modeled after NatureServe's Ecological Integrity Index framework. This method was used to assess the condition of individual Sandhill Seeps to provide an Ecological Integrity Index, or a score, that can be used to measure changes over time. The metrics were chosen to be specific and measurable, so that an ORISE Fellow or intern would be able to repeat these assessments in the future.
 - The results of this monitoring effort will be summarized in a comprehensive report with recommendations on how to add and improve upon this monitoring method. The new Sandhill Seep polygon shapefile and photopoints will be shared with the Natural Heritage program and are available to the Partnership to help inform their management decisions.
- Imperiled, Southern Hognose Snake Status and Management - Nathan Shepard, NC Natural Heritage Program
 - The Natural Heritage Program collects and maintains a GIS database of rare plant and animal occurrences for the State.
 - The Southern Hognose snake historical range coincides with that of Longleaf Pine range but its current extent is shrinking. It requires sandy soils (not found in wet areas), in pine-oak-scrub longleaf forests.
 - Its diet consists of mostly spadefoot toad but there is a need for more info on diet and home range. Notably, it does not rely on stump holes as it spends most of its time underground. S. Hognose exhibits diurnal behavior and low site fidelity, and is most active in the Spring and Fall. The best time to survey for S. Hognose is September- October on a >70 degree day, the sunnier the better.
 - As with many other species, it is threatened by habitat loss and especially by fragmentation and road development. High mortality has been observed, especially of males, as they are very slow crossers. It is also sensitive to ground disturbance. Due to their decline, they are considered G2 imperiled. Of the 84 Element Occurrence records in NC, 53% are historic.
 - A Species Status Assessment was conducted by the US Fish and Wildlife Service recently and it was decided not to list Southern Hognose as threatened or endangered. Nathan contends that the data supported listing as threatened as it is a very rare species throughout its range, with only 3 main populations. A consideration for this decision by the USFWS

was that the important populations remain on Public Lands but Nathan pointed out not all public lands are managed well/for Southern Hognose.

- In terms of restoration, S. Hognose needs good natural condition longleaf with a mosaic of natural communities, pyrophytic oaks are also desirable. A 3 year growing season fire interval is preferred but dormant season burns can be a great tool to improve habitat. Use caution with chemical treatments and limit ground disturbance.
- Nathan also pointed out the importance of encouraging future studies and young biologists by providing support whenever possible and submitting records to the Natural Heritage Program and Herp Mapper.

➤ Break

➤ Working Group Reports and Discussion

- **Resource Management** (Brady Beck)
No Update

- **RCW Recovery** (Kerry Brust)



Sandhills East West
update 2019.pdf

- Translocation: 34 total juvenile donors to 16 safe harbor clusters (8 properties). RCW recruitment to 14-16 recipients. In 2019, 9 of 34 translocated birds remain as breeders.
 - 2020 objectives: coordinate with SOPI to stabilize and create RCW groups (Pinehurst Golf Courses, Weymouth Woods SP)
 - Expect results for Poecivirus testing in Sandhills RCWs in Spring 2020. Elongated bills have also been seen in other bird species recently.
- **Communications** (Debbie Crane)
 - The Partnership will be celebrating its 20 year anniversary – committee will be working to plan an event and outreach for the occasion.
 - The Longleaf Alliance is planning a visit with regional partners working in Longleaf conservation in DC to celebrate 20 years of working on longleaf conservation.
 - ALRI is planning an event in March to commemorate 10 year progress into 8 million acre goal.
 - The Longleaf Alliance is hosting their biannual meeting in Wilmington, NC

Land Protection
See report.

(Jeff Marcus)

- **Reserve Design**

(Ana Castillo)

- A meeting was held with a working group to reviewed landowners in Uwharrie corridor, to help determine the best way to complete landowner outreach. The next meeting will focus on determine how to roll out the outreach effort and refine strategy.
- There has been an ongoing discussion on how to improve collaboration between the Partnership and GUCP. Given the Uwharrie National Forest's commitment to longleaf restoration, it makes sense to expand the LIT to include the UNF as we work on bridging these two landscapes. This would potentially allow access to new sources of funding from new federal partners.

➤ Partner Updates

NWTF-

- Due to budgetary constraints, Tana's Santill's positon has been terminated and Chris Coxen will be taking on more of her responsibilities.
- There is a new study being conducted by a PhD student from NC State working with Chris Moorman, and includes areas in Moore county.

NCDOT-

- No updates

NCFS-

No updates

USFS- No Updates

AEC-

- No Update

USFWS-

- No Update

Longleaf Alliance -

- No updates

SALT -

- No updates

SEI-

- No updates

TNC – Jeff Marcus

- There was a meeting to discuss the NFWF grant and it was decided to include funding for the shared burn crew, chemicals for State Parks, mechanical removal on Bonnie Doone and RCW cavity maintenance.
- Mark Anderson from TN Massachusetts will be giving a talk on Climate Resilience Science in Southern Pines on February 6th.
- Carmella Stirrat, is the new Stewardship Manger and Burn Boss and is joining us from TNC Colorado.

Ft. Bragg DPTM –

- The NC Sentinel Landscapes: Spaces Between Bases first meeting coming up focusing on limiting incomptable land use around military bases.
- Fort Bragg is working on closing fire breaks to create larger burn blocks.
- They reported more wildfires last year than ever, with 502 wildfire incidents.
-

Ft. Bragg ESB –

- No Updates

RULAC – Pete Campbell

- RULAC is working on a new strategic plan to provide recommendations on how to engage with municipalities and communities around Fort Bragg with hopes that they will include JLUS recommendations in their master plans.

Rex – NCDOT

- No updates.

PBA - Jesse Wimberley

- There is excitement around the new biofuels market and Enviva is working with landowners to facilitate the process. Potential to be a “game changer” especially in areas in the corridor.

USFS – Mike Spisak

- Montgomery County wants to see heavy development around the UNF including changing zoning along Lake Tillery.
- The USFS is hiring new wildlife biologist in New Bern GS-11, serving UNF and the Croatan.

SEI-

- No Updates

Quail Forever – Jacob Comer

- Jacob works out of Bladen County as a Farm Bill biologist helping landowners enroll in the cost share program, the Sandhills is the western edge of his work area.

FPW- Wendy Dunaway

- Restoration work is continuing on Boonie Doone including a small burn to be conducted by John Ward and some chemical application and mechanical clearing.

NHP- Nate Shepard

- In the process of hiring a new State Botanist.
- The Natural Heritage Database is updated quarterly

WRC – Mike Martin and Brady Beck

- It was not a great year for Southern hognose hatchlings.
- There was wind storm that killed trees in an area. They are gearing up for the next burn season.

RLUAC –

- No Updates

Sustainable Sandhills –

- No Updates

Prescribed Burn Association –

- No Updates

NC Natural Heritage Program –

- No Updates

NC Parks –

- No Updates

➤ Next Meeting: March 18th, 2020

➤ Adjourn