

**Minutes from the Joint Meeting of
The Cape Fear Arch Conservation Collaboration &
the Onslow Bight Conservation Forum
February 12, 2013**

Attendees:

Hervey McIver, TNC; Kim Fleming, MCI East; Dan Ryan, TNC; Michael Rice, Save the Cape; Toby Bronstein, Save the Cape; Chesley Ward, NCWRC; James Rader, Ducks Unlimited; Scott Pohlman, NCDENR; Genevieve Joseph, TNC; Jessie Birckhead, TNC; Sara Babin, TNC; John Carpenter, NCWRC; Rachelle Powell, USFS-Croatan NF; Jeff Hall, NCWRC; Rick Studenmund, TNC; Ken McDermond, South Atlantic LCC; John Hammond, USFWS; Jeff Tyndall, Marstel-Day; Tony Doster, RMS; Jim Slye, NCFS; Kemp Burdette, Cape Fear River Watch; Charles Bowden, NC AGR; Kim Shumate, NCFS; Tim Richards, Onslow County Planning; Melanie Doyle, NC Aquarium; Hope Sutton, NCCR & NERR; Carson Wood, CPCG; Tom Charles, USACE Locks and Dams; Norton Webster, EBX; Tom Hancock, BHI Conservancy; Suzanne Dorsey, BHI Conservancy; Andy Wood, CPCG; Justin Boner, TCF; Kevin Rose, VA Tech; J. Taylor Ryan, St. James Oyster Program; Dick Lefebure, St. James Plantation; James Sasser, NC State Parks; Rhodes Messick, No Port Southport; Woody Wilson, No Port Southport; Sara Ward, USFWS; John Ann Shearer, USFWS; Mamie Caison, Brunswick SWCD; Don Riley, NRCS; Bryan Hulka, Weyerhaeuser; Phil Prete, City of Wilmington; Tommy Hughes, NCWRC; Debbie Crane, TNC; Barbara Wilson, MCI East

1. Partnership Overviews

Presentations were made for both conservation partnerships focusing on background & history, mission, and organizational structure.

Onslow Bight Conservation Forum – Hervey McIver

Hervey presented a short powerpoint highlighting the following:

- The southeast Coastal Plain of NC, where both landscapes reside, is a biodiversity hotspot.
 - OBCF - Early discussions began around 2001 initiated by the Marine Corps which feared its installations were being encroached upon by development and pressure to manage for endangered species as habitat is lost off-base.
 - In 2003 a MOU was signed establishing the OBCF with initial membership of:
 - Federal partners: MCB Camp Lejeune, MCAS Cherry Point, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Forest Service (Croatan National Forest) & Natural Resources Conservation Service.
 - State partners: NC Dept. of Environment & Natural Resources, Wildlife Resources Commission & NC Dept. of Transportation
 - NGO partners: The Nature Conservancy, Coastal Land Trust, Coastal Fed & Endangered Species Coalition
- Since then four additional partners have joined: Ducks Unlimited, The Conservation Fund, MCAS New River, NC Forest Service & Coastal Plain Conservation Group
- The mission statement is *“to provide for open discussion among the participants concerning the long-term conservation and enhancement of biological diversity and ecosystem sustainability throughout the Onslow Bight Landscape compatible with the land use,*

conservation and management objectives of the participating organizations and agencies.” The emphasis is on providing a means for partners to develop collaborative projects. The OBCF is not an entity with one voice on issues, especially ones that involve advocacy. Individual partners may advocate as they wish.

- The OBCF is led by a steering committee which meets quarterly. Meetings are open to all and have relevant presentations and partner updates. The committee must approve applicants who wish to become a partner. There are five subcommittees: Conservation Reserve Design, Red Cockaded Woodpecker, Working Lands, Coastal/Marine and Communications.
- In 2004 OBCF adopted a Conservation Design Plan which has since been modified and updated. This plan delineated the conservation landscape, defined conservation targets and identified threats and strategies to abate these threats. The landscape has expanded westward twice, initially to include large forested black bear habitats and then to include all of the Northeast Cape Fear River basin. In doing so we overlapped with the Cape Fear Arch. The plan also delineated conservation buffers around large core conservation areas and conservation corridor study areas within which we hope to connect core areas. The OBCF recently approved 9 coastal areas with significant estuarine and aquatic natural values. The conservation targets, threats and strategies of the OBCF are almost identical to those of the CFA.
- Accomplishments to date have included large amounts of land conservation (67,000 acres at \$96 million through fee simple or easement), a cooperative prescribed burn partnership (Onslow Bight Stewardship Alliance) and various collaborative land and stewardship grants.

Cape Fear Arch Dan Ryan:

This meeting was a long time coming. The Arch was established in 2006. We are very similar to the Onslow Bight. We have the same conservation targets and the same topography even similar mission statements. Unlike the Onslow Bight we did not have the military behind us. It was an area that had such important biodiversity coupled with booming development. A cohesive conservation partnership was needed.

History:

- 2006 first meeting as the Coastal Collaboration which resulted in an MOU driven by an informal group of interested parties.
- 2007 started to meet quarterly and established committee and secured funding for a full-time coordinator to lead the collaborative.
- 2008 Arch Coordinator hired and began work on Conservation Plan. The mission developed from the plan that emphasized community conservation, awareness, protection and stewardship. The Arch is up to 30 partners from the original 17. We allow anybody that is interested to join us. We are here to allow for communication and sharing. We have a varied partnership.
- 2009 the Arch conservation plan was completed. It outlines focus areas on the landscape, a web site was established and there was an emphasis on building the partnership.
- 2010 The Arch lost the full time coordinator and the collaborative was reorganized to an executive committee lead initiative and that's how the group organizes meetings and keeps on track. Currently the Arch meets quarterly; the real challenge is to continue the partnership as a viable entity with just volunteer support. The executive committee is

tasked with keeping it going. A charter, approved in 2011, directs the development and implementation of community conservation vision.

Map shows the extent of the Collaborative's geographic area, which includes South Carolina. When Onslow Bight expanded their boundary the Arch also expanded and that's what led to meeting collaboratively.

Goals from the MOU:

Identify and map high priority habitats and species in need of attention; establish a network of conservation lands and waterways, corridors and buffers & create popular recognition of the beauty significance and value.

2. Discussion about collaboration between groups

Suzanne Dorsey facilitated a discussion leading towards benefits and synergies that could result from cooperation among these conservation partnerships and members. The following attributes of the two conservation partnerships were raised and sometimes elaborated upon by participants.

Benefits partnerships provide:

Increased cooperation with other members

Increased awareness of resources and ability to cooperate and leverage for more

Networking and professional development opportunities

Understanding the broader perspective within which we all work

Inspiration

Resources partnerships provide:

Organizational committee structure including subcommittees

Individual members

Direction and guidance through conservation plans

Web page

Similarities of both partnerships:

Landscape, biological diversity & ecosystems

Mission and goals

Non-advocacy

Overlapping partner membership

Diverse partnership

Conservation plans – targets, threats & strategies

Geographic overlap

Differences between both partnerships:

Military/Federal government participation

Local government participation

Mandate from military

Land use and urban interface

Committee structures

Crossing state boundaries

Educational outreach

Threats to conservation

Opportunities to collaborate among the partnerships &/or members:

- Communication – Cooperate on messaging and perhaps creating one subcommittee serving both partnerships since many of the same people are involved.

- Emphasize southeast NC (and perhaps adjoining SC) as the “brand” landscape for conservation and less the 2 individual, delineated partnership landscapes.
- Grant writing – e.g. NAWCA Southeast Wetlands Initiative grant
- Coordination – e.g. make sure we don’t both talk to the same landowner
- Work on issues related to the lower Northeast Cape Fear, shared by both landscapes
- Ecosystems in common
 - Fire programs are a good example of collaboration that already exists
 - What about invasive species?
- Renewed focus on Longleaf
 - NC Longleaf Coalition and Longleaf Alliance
 - Federal emphasis and funding
 - Statewide focus could include Sandhills
- Education – both internal among partners and external to stakeholder & public audiences
- Conservation design and working lands committees could meet

Conclusions:

The two partnerships are distinct and have served their memberships well. They should remain distinct but look for opportunities to work together. Annual joint meetings like today’s may be useful and more definitively have subcommittees strategically cooperate when and where feasible, especially in the arenas of planning, communication, education and funding. Finally the groups should continue to be a voice for the environment and continue to focus on accomplishing tasks that will protect the resources of these geographic areas.

1. NRDAR request for proposal – Scott Pohlman and Sara Ward

The Natural Resources Damage Assessment and Restoration (NRDAR) is an initiative based on federal statutes to address significant environmental damage with the goal of “making the public whole” by assessing the extent of the damage and compensating the public for that loss. Trustees for the sites where NRDAR activities are underway in NC include NOAA, US FWS and NC DENR. The focus is on replacing resource values through, for example, habitat restoration.

The Kerr McGee Chemical Tronox Site, a former creosote wood treating facility on the Cape Fear across from Wilmington, is a contaminated site where NRDAR activities were prompted by the responsibly party’s bankruptcy filing. A \$900,000 damage award has been received which will fund off-site restoration or mitigation projects. Additional damage awards may increase this amount in the future. A draft restoration plan will be released for public comment soon. Priority will be placed on restoration projects that are in close proximity to the Tronox site, address similar habitat functions, are cost effective and relatively quick to implement, and have a high likelihood of success. Scott and Sara reported several potential project sites under consideration that would help the Cape Fear River and/or its tributaries. The primary focus will be on projects that benefit benthos, injury to benthic invertebrates was assessed as the basis for claim development in the case.

Discussion elaborated upon several questions. In addition to primary restoration, land acquisition or preservation is a project possibility, particularly in circumstances where there is a

threat of land use conversion. Balance is attempted between project distance from the site and the ecosystem service (habitat) similarity to the injured resource. Using the funds to help leverage additional funding sources would likely help a proposal. A few questions centered on specific locations as possible projects. Scott and Sara may be contacted with further questions.

2. Analysis of Comparative Communities to Future Growth in Eastern NC - Jeffrey Tyndall

<http://planiteast.org/modules/evolvecms/upload/Comparative%20Communities%20Analysis.pdf>

Jeff Tyndall, a planner with Marstal-Day, participated in a Marine Corps funded project which looked at 6 southern US regions where the military has a footprint and growth has been rapidly occurring in recent decades. The project objective was to discern best practices in managing growth that complement existing and future military training needs and improve overall quality of life. The region consists of the 9 counties comprising the Plan It East initiative. These counties - Pender, Onslow, Carteret, Pamlico, Craven, Jones, Lenoir, Wayne and Duplin - largely overlap with the Onslow Bight landscape.

The project assumed demographic trends & models indicating an average annual population increase of 6,000 new residents, reaching a total of 1.6 million people or 500,000 above the present in 50 years. This region presently is still relatively undeveloped for the US Atlantic seaboard. Human activity and growth drive much of the threats to continued military training as well as conservation and ecological threats. Jeff described the “development cycle” of reinforcing sprawling growth through new infrastructure, especially new roads. Since more densely populated lands and incompatible uses infringe upon military training, the Dept. of Defense is interested in smart planning to guide growth.

The project looked at past growth patterns in 6 communities that are comparable to the Plan It East region but are ahead on the growth curve. It looked for growth patterns and planning strategies that either improved quality of life and military training measures or led to worsening conditions. The studied regions are centered around Pensacola FL, Jacksonville FL, Beaufort SC, Myrtle Beach SC, Norfolk VA and Wilmington NC.

Key Findings:

- Increased cost of living moved service and retail workers out.
- Fiscal sustainability of local governments was affected by sprawl.
- Large private land holdings gave way to large-scale development.
- Community decision makers need to be proactive when planning new tourism destinations and selecting sites for commercial and residential development.
- Transportation improvements promote patterns of sprawl and growth within smaller towns located on the fringes.
- Focusing development in the most appropriate areas can protect environmentally sensitive lands, working farmlands and forests.
- Creating a unified vision for the region is critical to prioritizing key projects and focusing.
- The six study regions averaged 29% loss of profitable farmland.

Key recommendations:

- Cooperative opportunities can incentivize growth in some areas.
- Establish land use visioning processes with stakeholders, coordinate public transportation and encourage public private partnerships.
- There are roles for conservation/preservation organizations to work with development forces to guide outcomes.
- Regional water resources are very important everywhere and will become more critical.
- “Grow by choice not by chance.”
- Anticipate the geographic displacement of service industry workers following a rise in property values.
- Seek cooperative partnerships that address issues such as resource sustainability, land conservation and provisioning public services.
- Collaboratively adopt compatible land use practices that maintain the viability of military and conservation missions.
- Work together to preserve existing farmland.
- Utilize "smart growth" visioning to ensure compatible land use and sustainable development.
- Quantify large private land holdings and consider future land use alternatives if sold.

Strategies:

- Prepare accurate assessments of water resources and plan for future water crises.
- Anticipate school enrollment changes associated with change to service workforce.
- Identify all major private landholdings and consider the impact of selling them to development.
- Quantify the expected rise in non-native residents.
- Look for opportunities to link public transportation with housing employment centers and retail areas.
- Prepare for growth in the healthcare and social service industries.

Follow up discussions identified future growth in all areas can be viewed by the conservation community as an opportunity as well as a threat. Engaging with other stakeholders is critical to mitigating future impacts to conservation targets. Jeff responded to questions that loss of working forests were trending similar to farms, changes in forest markets (e.g. wood biofuel chips) were not looked at and no consideration was given to the saltwater intrusion threat.

3. Recovery and Sustainment Program (RASP) Overview – David O’Neill and Suzanne Sessine

David and Suzanne with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) presented on RASP which will provide funding on qualifying state and private lands for red-cockaded woodpecker habitat management. NFWF is a granting organization that awards on average \$120 million each year for projects on conservation priority lands, cooperating with government and private funding sources. NFWF will soon manage \$2.5 billion from the BP settlement mitigating impacts from the Gulf of Mexico oil spill. NFWF created the long leaf stewardship fund 2 years

ago in partnership with the Southern Company to promote longleaf pine habitat restoration, initially near the Gulf coast. Additional federal partners were brought in and the geographic scope has expanded north to NC and west to Texas. (Working with partners TNC received 2 awards in 2012 for the Onslow Bight and Sandhills. TNC is submitting a 2013 proposal for the Cape Fear Arch.) NFWF will soon enter into a partnership with International Paper which will provide \$7.5 million towards projects in the coastal Carolinas and LA/TX.

RASP is a new initiative where the Navy has provided about \$6 million to support RCW habitat restoration, enhancement and perpetual maintenance on properties near Camp Lejeune. New woodpecker clusters which are created through natural growth or translocation on qualifying lands would be counted towards the overall Camp Lejeune recovery goal. A request for pre-proposals will be forthcoming as early as late March to state agencies, land trusts and private companies and individuals with potential lands. Applicants of qualified pre-proposals will be asked to submit a full proposal which includes a land management plan and details of the real estate transactional reports. Lands which are put under a RASP contract must be placed in permanent conservation status and permanently managed for RCW's. Inquiries should be directed to NFWF, not the Marine Corps.

Questions and discussions:

- Cape Fear Arch projects would be considered along with those from the Onslow Bight.
- Funds could be used for strategic acquisition but only in exceptional situations.
- Initial contracts with recipients would be for 5 years and subsequently for longer terms.
- NFWF realizes that many projects may take decades before the older-growth habitat develops. It would like to see some new RCW clusters arise soon in some of the initial projects.

4. Partner Updates

The Nature Conservancy –

- Hervey McIver reported TNC should soon have its Onslow Bight NFWF Long leaf Stewardship grant contract. TNC closed on the Corbett tract in the fall and is working on a couple of other acquisition projects in Onslow and Pender Counties.
- Dan Ryan reported that TNC will submit a proposal to NFWF for a Longleaf Stewardship Grant and as part of the protocols for the Cape Fear Arch, proposal needs to get approval from MOU signatories. Suzanne Dorsey moved to support the proposal. The motion passed with no dissent.
- Debbie Crane reported the Land for Tomorrow lobby day will be held on March 27 in Raleigh, stay informed by visiting the web: <http://www.landfortomorrow.net/>
- Sara Babin encouraged people to attend the Fire in the Lakes Festival in Boiling Spring Lakes on March 23 and participate in activities including the 7K trail run through the Half Hell Swamp.
- Rick Studenmund reported that TNC received a Longleaf Stewardship Grant in the Sandhills. He also applauded this joint meeting and commented how much NC was in the lead with range-wide longleaf pine conservation efforts with the NC Longleaf Coalition and partnerships like ours.

Natural Heritage Program - Scott Pohlman reported that NHP and WRC are partnering to work with local governments on the Green Growth Toolbox, and the town of Navassa is the first town that will adopt recommendations based on the effort. The Town Planning Board has passed a Natural Resource Conservation Overlay focusing on rare species and rare habitats for the Town.

Wildlife Resources Commission –

- John Carpenter reported he will be surveying birds of the Cape Fear River to get an inventory and perhaps identify areas of concentration and possible focus land acquisition to these areas.
- Tommy Hughes reported the WRC internal reorganization is complete and he can now begin hiring several positions. Chesley Ward has been hired as the management biologist for the southern Coastal Plain and Casey Philips the new forester for the mid- Coastal Plain. In addition WRC will be hiring 10 to 12 technicians. Check the WRC website for details.
- Jeff Hall reported WRC will be conducting amphibian surveys, especially gopher frogs or ornate chorus frogs, that night and others during the coming few weeks. Jeff is helping coordinate the NC Partners for Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) and NC Herpetological Society meeting April 19-21 at the NC Zoo.
- Chesley Ward reported good prescribed burning so far this year.

Croatan National Forest - Rachele Powell report the forest has resumed burning after this summer's wildfire. She will organize an OB RCW subcommittee soon to discuss monitoring.

City of Wilmington - Phil Prete reported a successful third burn of 30 acres in an urban environment (Haliburton Park) without incident or complaint. Wilmington is hiring an urban forester/arborist.

Brunswick County Soil and Water Conservation - Mamie Caison reported on budgeting work and that the Senior Alliance from Southport might be interested in the CFA.

US Fish & Wildlife Service –

- John Ann Shearer reported on Partners for Fish and Wildlife which has several programs in our landscapes. Prescribed burning on private lands is a commonly funded practice.
- John Hammond reported that Bill Rogers, recent co-chair of the OBCF who is on medical leave, was a significant force behind implementing RASP. He also said Camp Lejeune was conducting its Integrated Natural Resource Management Plan (INRMP) and exemptions are being sought to critical habitat designations for loggerhead turtles.

NC State Parks - James Sasser reported on efforts to deal with a huge infestation of hydrilla in Lake Waccamaw. Conversion to longleaf pine is occurring at some parks including Lake Waccamaw. Parks will be monitoring RCWs and had a good meeting with WRC last week. Parks is coming out of a self-imposed burn ban and should be able to start burning again soon.

The Conservation Fund - Justin Boner reported the hiring of Bill Holman as new director for the NC office.

Coastal Plain Conservation Group - Andy Wood reported receiving a FWS grant to support maintaining artificial populations of one of the 2 critically endangered and endemic ramshorn snails at the Watha fish hatchery and NCSU Vet school.

Baldhead Island Conservancy - Tom Hancock reported its focus on environmental services off island. BHIC is working with St. James Plantation to make some connections and is working with USGS to do work on and off the island. It will soon be hiring 15 summer interns.

Army Corps of Engineers - Tom Charles who helps manage the Cape Fear Locks and Dams reported on completion of the fish ladder at L&D no. 1 and construction underway for a new fishing pier. New partnerships are being developed.

NC Coastal Reserve Program - Hope Sutton reported on the effort to recruit and train a volunteer force to monitor visitor use of the reserves, especially those such as Masonboro Island which are heavily used for recreation. The program is gearing up with seasonal staff and has a project to remove red foxes from a preserve. Hope reported that nutria have been found on Masonboro island.

NC Aquarium - Melanie Doyle reported receiving 8 cold stunned turtles and may be acquiring bald eagles from a rehab center. The new marine mammal exhibit will open in early March with an interactive exhibit with lots of technology and an animatronic dolphin. The Aquarium will host the little ripple big waves family friendly program focused on climate change the 1st Friday and Saturday of April.

Onslow Co. Planning -Tim Richards reported new subdivisions have slowed down.

NC Forest Service –

- Kim Shumate reported the joint award with SC & VA of a grant focused on longleaf education, private landowner outreach, GIS mapping and prioritization and expansion of available seedlings, esp. in VA. The Longleaf Alliance will offer its Longleaf 101 course which provides a broad education about the tree and its management in Southern Pines on May 8-10. The next NC Longleaf Coalition meeting will take place at Jones Lake State park on March 19.
- Jim Syle reported that the NCFS recently burned 1,300 acres in the CFA and 800+ acres in the Onslow Bight. The helicopter used for burning has been down but should be operational at end of Feb. NCFS has done 338 water quality projects covering over 16,000 acres in the OB and CFA regions thus far this fiscal year and has done 287 management plans covering 13,000 acres, 2/3's of which are in our regions.

Cape Fear River Watch - Kemp Burdette reported excitement over the partnership with Lock & Dam #1 setting up an educational exhibit/program. He received NOAA funding for shad spawning habitat enhancement above the dam. Funding is in place to sonic tag 20 new striped bass – see River Watch website to watch the fish move.

RMS - Tony Doster reported the availability of \$400,000 for the SFI Conservation and Community Partnerships Grant Program. (<http://www.sfiprogram.org/conservation-and->

research/conservation-community-partnerships-grant-program/2013-grant-rfp/). The Sustainable Forestry committee has about \$20,000 in funds. RMS is cooperating with NCFS forests to help prescribed burning and with the Natural Heritage Program to protect certain natural areas in Richmond County.

Cape Fear Museum - Jameson McDermitt reported a museum staff development trip at Jones Lake State Park & Bladen Lakes State Forest was initiated after the previous CFA meeting at the same place. The museum is sponsoring a free public Star Party on Friday April 5th from 7-10 pm where one goal is to educate people about light pollution.

Ducks Unlimited - James Rader reported that DU does much work through partners (WRC & others) in both NC and SC, helping with grants, and is looking for additional restoration and acquisition projects. DU is involved in many projects on Federal lands along the coast and recently finished a project at Pea Island. He reported that much funding for restoration projects is coming for Hurricane Sandy relief and we should promote suitable projects in NC.

Marine Corps Installations East - Barbara Wilson reported working on the off shore wind energy proposals. One site off Wilmington is in the EIS process and how turbines would be seen from shore is available at the Bureau of Energy Management's website. Another initiative will seek to better understand groundwater resources and issues in Onslow Co.

5. Closing

Meeting adjourned 2:45 and was followed by an optional tour of the Watha Fish Hatchery.