North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Committee Minutes
December 9, 2024, 2:00 PM – 2:50 PM
Conference Call Number: 984-204-1487
Conference ID: 489 346 810#

Attendees:
Committee members present:

- Steve Troxler, Commissioner, NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
- David Smith, Deputy Commissioner of Agriculture
- Rick Long, NC Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
- Jeff Michael, Deputy Secretary, NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
- Shannon Deaton attended for Cameron Ingram, Executive Director, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
- Dr. Myron F. Floyd, Dean, College of Natural Resources
- Dewitt Hardee attended for Chester Lowder, Sentinel Landscape Partnership Liaison

Other Attendees: Joe Austin, Corey Hoilman, Chris Baillie, Mikey Fulk, Mark Pfanstiehl, Neil Oakley, Jon Lanier, Cameron Dawson, Allison Rodriguez, Anita Kennedy, Sabrina Shaffer, Evan Davis, Will Summers, Weston McCorkle, Marty Korenek

Reading of Ethics Reminder: Under the State Government Ethics Act, the chairman is required to remind all members of their duty to avoid conflicts of interest or appearances of conflicts of interest. If you have any conflict or appearance of conflict of interest with respect to any item on the agenda, please state this for the record and refrain from inappropriate participation on that item.

The minutes from the September 10, 2024, meeting were presented for approval. Rick Long made the motion, and Cameron Ingram seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Evan Davis presented for the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. He mentioned there are six open military projects at this time, all with Working Lands Trust, totaling nearly 3,000 acres. Five projects are MCIEAST projects, and the other project is an Air Force project. Farmland Preservation Division plans to add one more MCIEAST project in Q1 and intends to close a couple of the MCIEAST projects in late Q1 or early Q2. He provided an update on completed military easements since 2016, which includes preserving over 13,000 acres in six ENCSL counties. Davis also gave an update for the current MOU with the NCMAC and shared that to date $24,209.50 of the $267,339.60 for the year had been spent. Both subgrantees are expected to submit requests for payments shortly to move some more of these funds and continue their efforts in the ENCSL area. Davis announced that NCDA&CS had received a Natural Resource Conservation Service RCPP award for $12.5 million for the Lumber River

Basin, as well as announcing that Johnston Soil and Water Conservation District received an award for $15 million. Finally, Davis shared that NCDA&CS submitted a proposal to be a speaker at 2025 Southeast Land Conservation Conference from March 26-28 and has been accepted to present on farmland preservation efforts in North Carolina and the Southeast, and how NCDA&CS collaborates with federal partners and successfully leverages community partnerships and multi-level support.

Rick Long presented for the NC Department of Military Affairs. He spoke about transitioning to a new governor and the potential for change in agency head. They recently signed a new Intergovernmental Agreement with DOT. A new NFWF grant was approved, thanks was given to Chris Bailee for his work on that. There is also a new DOD SkillBridge program working with OSHR, the Department of Transportation and the Department of Commerce available. There will be an NCMAC Defense Summit on spouse resilience in Cary from April 28-30.

Jeff Michael presented for the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources, and spoke about the upcoming transition as well. He mentioned Misty Franklin with the National Heritage Foundation has worked on updating the working lands report, as well as working on a climate pollution reduction grant looking at conservation and restoration in four states, including a $10 million expansion of state parks, and lots of other exciting progress being made. He turned it over to Will Summers to present more about the North Carolina Land and Water Fund – in 2024 they awarded $45.4 million in grants with 13,750 acres protected, including 2,900 acres to be added to NC Wildlife Resources Commission game lands, 3,400 acres to NC State Parks and 5,900 acres in local parks and preserves. They have awarded $17.6 million on over 2,800 acres to protect the military mission near MCAS Cherry Point, Fort Liberty, Camp Lejune and Seymore Johnson Air Force Base. Additionally, the conservation tax credit is coming back and details are being worked out regarding the administrative code and how the program will be run at NCDNCR. At this time, it is not believed to be first-come, first-served, but instead if the request exceeds allotment it will be prorated. The question was asked about how the state credit will work with the federal tax credit, and it is believed that they will stand alone at this time.

Cameron Ingram gave the report for the NC Wildlife Resource Commission, with the update of a new director, Kyle Briggs, who will transition to the role Jan. 1, 2025. They are in Year 3 of the America the Beautiful project and making good progress. As of October 25, there is a new Wildlife Action Plan, and coming in January there will be a new conservation tool that has been worked on by the SE Climate Adaptation staff with an interactive aquatics layer. There has also been an internal assessment of "missed opportunities" with military bases and the commission is looking for ways to improve these relations.

Dr. Myron Floyd gave an update for NC State University. They are holding a Forestry Landowner Outreach Summit in Duplin County on January 29 at the Cooperative Extension office. The link to sign up will be shared. There is also a landowner webinar on succession planning beginning January 22 and happening every Wednesday until February 19. Hosts include Purdue University, NC State University, North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, and Southern Rural Development Center. Finally, rapid response proposals related to Helene are being submitted to USDA to help landowners.

Dewitt Hardee was in attendance for Chester Lowder on behalf of the Sentinel Landscape Partnership. He mentioned that there was an additional RCPP grant awarded in the Sentinel Landscape area for $15 million, with $12 million of that for easement acquisition, and that was through partnership with Johnston Soil and Water Conservation, Working Lands Trust, and the Black Family Land Trust. He then turned it over to Chris Baillie to discuss the Partnership's recent efforts.

Chris Baillie gave an update on the ENCSL Partnership. He presented on upcoming meetings, partner updates and administrative items. Two meetings occurred since the last Sentinel Landscape Committee meeting – one in September and another in October to talk about the strategic plan, workgroup developments and a landowner outreach program proposal. Near-term partnership needs and what the coordinator position may look like moving forward were also mentioned. For partner updates, he said there is $100 million in funding available through IRA with a few projects being focused in North Carolina, including a Croatan National Forest initiative for $5 million: $2.5 million for fire recovery, doubling eligible fire acreage, $1 million for education and public engagement, and $1.5 million for training and capacity building. As previously mentioned, there were 15 USDA NRCS applications for the state of North Carolina and three were awarded, two of those being in the ENCSL area – the NCDA&CS award and the Johnston County award. During the Climate and Conservation Summit hosted by DOD and the US Fish and Wildlife Service, $1.9 million was earmarked for eight pilot ideas and five or six of those were chosen to be piloted in the ENCSL region. Full proposals are due in January for this program. Finally, the 2024 National Coastal Resilience Fund awarded three projects in the ENCSL area for a total of $3.9 million in funding. Working Lands Trust was highlighted as a great partner to the Sentinel Landscape partnership, and WLT Director Mikey Fulk was in attendance to acknowledge the compliment and thanked the partnership for being such a good partner for the land trust.

On the administrative front for the Partnership, Baillie mentioned that it would be good prior to the next meeting to have a morning work session for members to handle some of the administrative items. He targeted early- to mid-February for that meeting and discussions. Jeff Michael spoke up and reminded the group that with the transition to a new governor there may be new faces at the table, so it would be good to give those folks a chance to get up to speed. In the interim, from the Partnership's perspective they really need feedback on the coordinator/coordination team annual workplan, review and approval of the strategic plan (this would require a vote), and input on what kind of workgroups to stand up, with the current thoughts being Communication, Exploratory Legislative Priorities and Working Lands & Strategic Collaborations workgroups.

There was no representative from the NC Department of Transportation at this meeting.

Additional business items included filling current vacant ex-officio seats and voting on the strategic plan.

Evan Davis mentioned that Jimmy Johnson retires at the end of the year, has been a great partner to the ENCSL partnership, and will be missed. However, after thanking Davis for the kind words

Johnson told the committee that his retirement would be delayed thanks to a paperwork issue, so he would get to stick around a while longer.

David Smith asked if there was any further Sentinel Landscape Committee business items or public comments. Hearing none, Dewitt Hardee made the motion to adjourn, and Rick Long seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 2:50 pm.