North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Committee Minutes
December 9, 2025, 1:30 PM – 3:00 PM
Conference Call Number: 984-204-1487
Conference ID: 351157962#

Attendees:

Committee members present:

- Steve Troxler, Commissioner of Agriculture
- Rick Long, Installation Coordinator, NC Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
- Jeff Michael, Deputy Secretary, NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
- Shannon Deaton for Kyle Briggs, Executive Director, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
- Chester Lowder, Sentinel Landscape Partnership Liaison
- Dr. Chris Baillie, Interim Partnership Coordinator
- Jaime Simon, External Affairs and Communication, DoD REPI Program

Other Attendees: In Person: Evan Davis, Kelsey Pearce, Allison Rodriguez, Chris Baillie, Cameron Dawson, Dewitt Hardee, Mikey Fulk, Jon Lanier, Will Summer, Neil Oakley, Bill Ross, Sara Ward, Bailey Butler, Anne-Elisabeth Baker, Andy Cox, Reena Bhatia

Online: Corey Hoilman, Denise Evans, Joe Austin, Edward Davis, Addie Thornton, Brian Rubino, Erin Ananian-Gentile, Weston McCorkle, Guenevere Abernathy, Amanda Sand, Mark Pfanstiehl, Sarah Weavil, Lisa Shealy, Jaime Simon, Michelle Lovejoy, Kevin Johnson, Rhonda Murray, Reva Orr, Rodney Woolard, Trent Ensley, Edward Olive

The meeting was called to order at 1:35 PM.

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 16, 2025, meeting were presented for approval. Jeff Michael made the motion, and Rick Long seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Evan Davis presented for the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. Evan presented on current open contracts with military partners – two open contracts, one in Washington County and one in Onslow County. The project in Onslow County is moving toward the finish line, expected to close in late December or in early 2026. Next, he reported on completed easements with military partners to date, along with a table showing total contributions for those easements. He discussed the final report for the NCMAC project for the

2024-2025 year, and said his team was awaiting the renewal of the project for the next year. He expressed his appreciation to NCMAC for their support of this project to date.

Rick Long presented for the NC Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. The MOU for NCMAC has made it through their general counsel and will be signed in the coming days. NCMAC is concerned that they may get a shortened budget in the coming year so there may be some cuts in the future. He talked about the National Defense Authority Act bringing a little over $3.6 million for veterans' services in Salisbury. In other news, the US Army single four-star command will now be based at Fort Bragg, bringing opportunities and jobs to the state, and the Marine Corps and the Navy both turned 200 years old this year.

Jeff Michael presented for the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. Will Summers is the Director of the Division of Land and Water Stewardship, and also brought along Sarah Ward, who is the Director of the Atlantic Conservation Coalition. Two other team members in attendance, Policy Director Bailey Butler and Policy Analyst Anne Elizabeth Baker, are key architects in writing this grant for these four states.

Summer said they had awarded over $36 million in grants that will protect 9,300 acres – split between 6,250 acres added to game lands and 2,360 acres in local parks and preserves. Another note – the application form for the state tax credit is now live and can now be found by googling "NC Conservation Tax credit" – this is the first year in 10 years that this is back. They have been working with NC Wildlife Resources and Davis' team – the first application for the tax credit is in and it is for ag land.

Jeff Michael reminded attendees that this credit was authorized for two years; the goal is to get this authorized permanently, and he encouraged others to share with their constituents the importance of that.

Sara Ward presented for the Atlantic Conservation Coalition – it is the largest grant that DNCR has received in its history – and she said they are both administering and receiving some of those funds. The types of projects that they work on are Coastal Habitat Protection, Peatland Projects and Forest and Tree Projects. The high-level goals include reducing greenhouse gases, community benefits, maximizing funding and innovative policies and programs that are scalable. So far, in Year 1 she said they have accomplished finalizing the grant and obligating the funds quickly, achieving the sub-awards with the four states and had spent $6.6 million by the end of September. They have already acquired 4,000 acres of land in N.C. and Maryland, and have held 27 stakeholder and community engagement activities that have reached over 1,000 members. They are working with the Duke Nicholas Institute to launch a dashboard of accomplishments. This team is growing, and she said they are very excited about that – they have five branches including ACC Leadership, Implementation Support, Monitoring and Performance, Leveraging Impact and Policy Innovation, and Budget and Finance. Almost all of the projects are in the Sentinel Landscape areas, and they're very excited.

Shannon Deaton represented the NC Wildlife Resource Commission, sitting in for Kyle Briggs. Since the last meeting, she said three tracts have closed for a total of 731 acres in three ENCSL counties. Additionally, they were able to engage 12 landowners and have provided technical

guidance in Johnston, Sampson, Wilson counties across 825 acres to encourage landowner stewardship. They had conducted timber operations on 211 acres of the Bear Garden properties.

Deaton said the Wildlife Action Plan's 10-year revision was submitted in late September, they have done a cursory review, and expect to hear back in February. She said they were able to spotlight some success stories and have been working to update the conservation mapping tool.

Dr. Myron Floyd of NC State University was not present.

Chester Lowder presented on behalf of the Sentinel Landscape Partnership. He noted the constant air traffic over his farm in Stanly County, and said that brings to mind why these relationships matter, across agencies and with private landowners. A hybrid partnership meeting was held in late September, and the November meeting was moved to December and would be held the following day with a hybrid option. The SERPAS meeting in Pinehurst was moved to April 28-29, and the works of the partnership will be highlighted. He mentioned two lunch and learn events, and that NCDA&CS's Weston McCorkle spoke at the Joint Military Affairs Commission.

Jeremy Goodwin of the NC Department of Transportation was not present.

Chris Baillie presented for the Eastern NC Sentinel Landscape as the Coordinator. He discussed some near-term efforts currently underway, including the draft of a decision memo for NRCS to request increased funding, given that WRE and ALE are both severely underfunded in N.C. They are doing funding analyses on how N.C. is leveraging funding across the landscape. He said they have received formal approval to add capacity in 2026, adding a position housed at Legacy Works, but it will be situated in the Sandhills region to be sure there is opportunity within the landscape. He said they plan to submit that job description at the next committee meeting.

Andy Fox with the N.C. State Coastal Dynamics Design Lab presented for the partner spotlight. Fox is a professor at N.C. State. The lab is a six-person unit, all members trained as architects and planners. The university only funds one of those positions, but he said they have primarily worked since 2017 after Hurricane Matthew at the coast all the way to the mountains post-Tropical Storm Fred and Hurricane Helene. Most of their research happens in a linear fashion — they see a need, they fix an issue. They come in and do an analysis to figure out the suite of things that can build resilience for a community. Fox said there is a lot of financial design involved, work at no cost to community partners to attract lots of resources for matching funds. He said the best example of what they've done is in Pollocksville in Jones County – at the time of Hurricane Florence, there were 216 residents there, and their lab was able to help them attract $2 million in grants and match in 12 months following the hurricane. They develop floodprints – different project types, guided through community engagement – and had over 60 participants in their community meetings. They have also done work in Goldsboro, the biggest community they've serviced, breaking the town's area into sub-watersheds to quantify and prioritize projects. One of the things that came out of that project, Fox said, was looking at the wastewater treatment plant in the city and how it is shared with Seymour Johnson AFB. It was very close to topping out. They went door to door with city and housing authority staff to discuss needs with

residents. To date, they have brought $34 million in to partners, with a 32-times return on investment for these implementation dollars.

Fox said that future opportunities to benefit ENCSL partners includes integrating staff and family programming, addressing acute and chronic climate threats, and looking beyond the fenceline – enhancing collaboration with military installation readiness reviews, and assisting communities as they recover from floods to build long term resilience.

Jaime Simon presented for US DoD REPI Program. She said they were playing catch up from the federal shutdown, getting back into things. The current focus is the REPI budget, with Simon saying they have support on both sides of the aisle. She said they were looking at $158 million for FY26 for projects. They had met with all of the headquarters at the services to talk about projects, 62 in all this year, and she expects their next call to have an update on what will be funded in N.C. The federal landscape FCC call will take place very soon, including discussion of the 2026 goals, revising the Sentinel Landscape MOU, and waiting on Fish and Wildlife signature, among other topics. She said the designation cycle is shifting from November to mid-January, adding 1-3 new landscapes in the coming year. Per the MOU, a 2026 strategic plan will be discussed and will have gotten the principals' approval.

The business item to be voted on was the nomination and approval of military installation ex-officio seats and members. Per N.C.G.S. 106-747(d), it was proposed to add representatives from military installations to the ENSL committee. Individuals from Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and Marine Corps Installations East had been identified as logical candidates who have agreed to serve if nominated. A motion to appoint members from military installations to ex-officio seats was made by Shannon Deaton and seconded by Rick Long. The motion was approved unanimously.

A motion made by Chester Lowder to fill the seats with Denise Evans, Community Planner, 4th Civil Engineer Squadron, at Seymour Johnson AFB; and Marty Korenek, Government and External Affairs, with MCIEAST. It was added that for future discussions, Fort Bragg is allowed to select someone. It was noted that the Coast Guard in Elizabeth City is not a DoD base but a Department of Homeland Security base, and that they could become included if they are accepted as a DoD installation. Lowder reported that the Coast Guard has been recognized as part of the defense community as a part of the Sentinel Landscape.

A motion to close nominations was made by Jeff Michael, seconded by Shannon Deaton. The motion unanimously passed.

No additional business items were presented.

Commissioner Troxler asked if there were any further Sentinel Landscape Committee business items or public comments. Hearing none, Lowder made the motion to adjourn, and Long seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 3:00 PM.