North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Committee Minutes
February 25, 2025, 1:30 PM – 2:31 PM
Conference Call Number: 984-204-1487
Conference ID: 750 221 389#

Attendees:
Committee members present:

- 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 Kyle Briggs, Executive Director, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
- Dr. Myron F. Floyd, Dean, College of Natural Resources
- Chester Lowder, Sentinel Landscape Partnership Liaison
- Jeremy Goodwin, State Roadside Environmental Engineer, NC Department of Transportation

Other Attendees: Corey Hoilman, Chris Baillie, Mikey Fulk, Neil Oakley, Jon Lanier, Cameron Dawson, Allison Rodriguez, Anita Kennedy, Sabrina Shaffer, Will Summers, Bill Edwards, Dewitt Hardee, Steve Woodson, Tristan Reynolds, Christian Vose, Will Robinson
Online: Carmen Lombardo, Denise Evans, Jaime Simon, Gwen Abernathy, Kevin Johnson, Lisa Shealy, Addie L. Thornton

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.

Evan is taking parental leave through April 9, and hopes were expressed that he enjoys his time away.

The minutes from the December 9, 2024, meeting were presented for approval. Rick Long made the motion, and Cameron Ingram seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Corey Hoilman 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. He provided an update on completed military easements since 2016, which includes preserving over 13,000 acres in six ENCSL counties. The total spent on all of these projects for easement purchase is just over $28 million. Hoilman also gave an update for the

current MOU with the NCMAC and shared that to date $73,472.68 of the $267,339.60 for the year had been spent.

David Smith asked if we should be worried about our federal partnerships moving forward, and those funds being at risk. Rick Long stated that for now they had been advised to continue on with business as usual. Jamie Simon made comments that the REPI program has put forth what an 8% reduction in funding would look like, but said the new Assistant Director is familiar with the program which is encouraging.

Rick Long presented for the NC Department of Military Affairs. He discussed trying to get meetings scheduled at the installations to discuss how to set up a new program. For the Military Child of the Year event, the semifinalist event will be held soon and there will be an event on April 25 to celebrate the 11 participants from NC. He said they are working with NC DHHS to figure out the best way to get adequate military childcare benefits. He said they are also working to give the incoming secretary, Jocelyn Mitnaul Mallette, a view of all the installations in NC. Chris Baillie gave a shoutout to Military and Veterans Affairs for their efforts in standing up new programs in NC, some that are similar to those the VA already has.

Jeff Michael presented for the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. He highlighted the work of Will Summers and his group with the NC Land and Water Fund. He said he wanted to highlight two projects that just closed in ENCSL counties: NC Coastal Land Trust's Hoggard's Mill tract in Bertie County and the Weyerhaeuser tract in Carteret County. The deadline for their next application cycle is March 1, he said they look forward to reviewing new applications, and especially those in the Sentinel Landscape. He said they have a new secretary as well, Pam Cashwell, who is no stranger to state government. He said that they are excited to have her, and that she already understands a lot of the work they do.

Shannon Deaton gave the report for the NC Wildlife Resource Commission. Similar to Land and Water, she said they are working with the community and private landowners and trying to meet with them to discuss tax breaks and work on wildlife conservation plans. They have talked with 11 landowners since the last meeting. Two wildlife habitat conservation agreements were put in place in 2024, and they are actively trying to find new interested landowners. She said they are working with the Department of Defense and at least one other group to protect a chub species that is unique to this area. They have also been working with Harnett County with their Green-growth Toolbox to actively working on updating their Wildlife Action Plans which must be updated every 10 years. There will be future endeavors in US Congress for funding. America the Beautiful funds were released the previous Friday, and they have been told they were not part of the funding freeze so year two funds are a go. Personnel-wise, Deaton said they have a new director, Kyle Briggs, who has been with NCWRC for most of his career. He has moved up through the ranks and has been the agency's deputy director for almost a decade, leading to a smooth transition. The division chief for inland fisheries, Christian Waters, was moved into the deputy position in the last few weeks.

No one presented for NC State University.

Chester Lowder presented on behalf of the Sentinel Landscape Partnership. He thanked Dewitt Hardee for standing in for him last meeting, and Steve Woodson for helping to set up the Landscape meeting at the NC Farm Bureau main office in January. Chester also mentioned Chris Baillie and all of his work.

Chris Baillie highlighted a few closings with the NCLWF that had been mentioned earlier. The A-P NBS Accelerator Pilot proposal was suggested to rescope the project – funding availability may be reduced so they want to front load things for the FY25 budget. The Nature Conservancy submitted a proposal to the Longleaf Landscape Stewardship Fund for $2.6 million that would increase knowledge in the communities about prescribed burns, help conduct some prescribed burns, see longleaf habitats enhanced, and longleaf pines planted. They have worked on the resubmission of some FEMA projects along with military installations.

Baillie discussed ENCSL administrative items – on subcommittees, there was discussion about what would be the best use of people's time, and it was settled on two that the committee would like to submit for approval – the Policy and Appropriations Subcommittee and the Communications Subcommittee. A motion to establish those two subcommittees by Chester Lowder and seconded by Jeff Michael. The motion was approved unanimously. Baillie said he will move forward with contacting those interested in serving on those committees.

Baille said the strategic plan has gone through a few revisions and is in the final version, so he would like to provide that for review prior to the next committee meeting, and then will call for a vote and formally adopt the plan prior to the meeting. Feedback to Baillie will need to be submitted no later than two weeks prior to the meeting. At the last Partnership meeting, there was a recommendation to send the Stein Administration a memo detailing the purpose of this group, and highlighting the accomplishments that have taken place thus far.

Shannon Deaton added there is a proposed SERPAS principals meeting that will be hosted in Raleigh on April 24 and 25, and since there is usually a statement from the governor during that conference it would be good to go ahead and get some information on the group in front of him. David Smith asked Deaton if she could draft a letter with the appropriate talking points.

Jeremy Goodwin presented for the NC Department of Transportation. He said he has only recently taken over for David Harris, and having been on the job for about three weeks he's just getting caught up.

No additional business items were presented today.

Will Robinson with the Nature Conservancy said he wanted to thank DNCR and the Department of Agriculture for their work in these spaces, and asked others to please put in good words for the REPI programs as they could. He said Rep. Murphy was leading a bill (HB 1083) that would have an impact on Sentinel Landscapes. It would provide an exclusion from capital gains if you sell the land for REPI purposes, and Robinson said it has good bipartisan support. Senator Budd is leading the efforts on the Senate side.

David Smith mentioned that as farmers are in dire need and times are hard, they are more willing to sell out both land-wise and equipment-wise, and there is very little incentive any longer for the developer to even offer the best price. Chester Lowder gave personal anecdotes as well.

Mikey Fulk gave her thanks to all the partners for their hard work and the partnerships that have been developed. She said that Working Lands Trust is working very closely with the NC Foundation for Soil and Water, and is now even working with Soil and Water districts at the county level.

David Smith asked if there were any further Sentinel Landscape Committee business items or public comments. Hearing none, Chester Lowder made the motion to adjourn, and Cameron Ingram seconded. The motion passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 2:31 PM.