North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Committee Minutes
March 3, 2020
1:30 p.m. – 2:38 p.m.
Hall of Fame Room, NCDA&CS, Raleigh, NC
Conference Call 712-775-7031 Access Code 597842

Attendees:
Committee members present:

- David Smith, Chief Deputy Commissioner, NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (NCDA&CS)
- Bob Bardon, Associate Dean, NC State University College of Natural Resources (CNR)
- Gordon Myers, Executive Director, NC Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC)
- Reid Wilson, Chief Deputy Commissioner, NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (NCDCNR)
- Ariel Aponte, Designee of NC Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (NCDMVA)
- Chester Lowder, NC Sentinel Landscapes Partnership Representative

Other Attendees: Mary Lou Addor, Tina Hlabse, Will Best, Jonathan Lanier, Laura Kilian, Janine McLawhorn, Dewitt Hardee, Evan Davis, Laura Brookshire, Mitch Peele, Phil Wallace, Joe Beckman, Rodney Woolard, Scott Shoulars, Stacy Sereno, and Veronica Jamison.

David Smith called the meeting to order at 1:34 p.m. Mr. Smith thanked everyone for attending and passed along regards from Commissioner of Agriculture Steve Troxler. Mr. Smith called on Veronica Jamison to conduct a roll call. A quorum was present.

Mr. Smith read the 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 a 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.

Mr. Smith requested a motion to approve the minutes from the December 5, 2019 meeting. Gordon Myers moved to approve the minutes for December 5, 2019. Chester Lowder seconded the motion. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Mr. Smith called on committee members to present their reports and updates.

Dewitt Hardee, NCDA&CS Farmland Preservation Director, gave an update on the 2016 United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP). NCDA&CS partnered with USDA-NRCS and the US Air Force to record five conservation easements in eastern North Carolina. This marks the first-ever easements to use funding from these three sources at the state and federal levels and a first for a streamlined approach to conservation restrictions. The five easements recorded by the Working Lands Trust include one in Hyde County and four in Tyrrell County.

All five easements are located beneath airspace critical to the mission of Seymour Johnson Air Force Base in Goldsboro. These easements protect Air Force training operations and reduce the potential of incompatible land uses.

Mr. Hardee provided an update on Farmland Preservation Division outreach. The division hosted a Farmland Preservation Forum on February 5, 2020, at the Southern Farm Show at the North Carolina State Fairground. Also, the division is hosting a series of Regional Farmland Preservation Workshops across the state. Two are completed, and four more are scheduled:

February 20 – Maxwell Regional Ag & Convention Center, 3114 Wayne Memorial Dr, Goldsboro, NC 27534
February 25 – Bob Martin Eastern Ag Center, 2900 NC-125, Williamston, NC 27892
March 5 – Iredell County Center, 444 Bristol Dr, Statesville, NC 28687
March 10 – Chatham County Ag Center, 1192 US-64 BUS, Pittsboro, NC 27312
March 17 – Owens Ag Center, 455 Caton Rd, Lumberton, NC 28360
April 1 – Virginia Boone Building, WNC Ag Center, 765 Boylston Hwy, Fletcher, NC 28732

The Workshops are free, but advanced registration is required. For more information and to register, go to www.ncadfp.org.

Mr. Hardee also reviewed ongoing conservation easement projects in the Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscape (ENSCL). There are still funds available through the 2017 Department of Defense (DOD) Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration (REPI) program.

Since the Sheppard Farm is not moving forward due to the landowner's decision, Marine Corps Installations East (MCIEAST) has identified Spring Creek Farms in Pamlico County as the first conservation easement to be completed using the approved NCDA&CS and US Navy easement template.

Most of the parcels for the 2018 USDA-NRCS RCPP submitted completed applications. The Alligator River application will be submitted this spring. Once eligibility is finalized, contracts and funding can be secured from USDA-NRCS.

Ariel Aponte provided an update from NCDMVA. There are several issues affecting military service members and veterans up for discussion in the North Carolina General Assembly. These include non-custodial agreements that protect the rights of deployed military service members, in-state tuition credits for military service members stationed in North Carolina, and tax exemptions for military retirees.

Mr. Aponte also reported on the upcoming North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) projects near military installations. The Slocum Road interchange near Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point is on schedule for completion in March 2020. The Havelock bypass construction is underway and will be completed in May 2024. Fayetteville's outer loop is on schedule and will be completed in 2024 or 2025.

Mr. Aponte provided updates about Fort Bragg. He is working with the NC State University College of Natural Resources on "Spaces Between the Bases" to create a plan to improve conservation efforts and reduce base encroachment.

Mr. Aponte spoke about DOD activities to combat the spread of coronavirus. He said that DOD is pulling back on training operations with South Korea, but exercise Cobra Gold in Thailand will continue. The military is executing plans to keep everyone safe.

Reid Wilson provided a report for NCDNCR. The Clean Water Management Trust Fund received five military-related easements, totaling $2.4 million in grant funds. In total, there are 145 grant applications, and once a budget is passed, they will be able to determine how many projects will be funded.

Mr. Wilson spoke about NCDNCR preparing for the potential effects of coronavirus. NCDNCR is preparing virtual private networks and other technology so that most staff in Raleigh will be able to work from home. The department will coordinate with the plans outlined by the Governor.

Mr. Myers gave a report for NCWRC. He reviewed NCWRC's plans for teleworking and protocols for essential employees. NCWRC looks to ensure the health and safety of employees and fellow citizens.

Staff from NCWRC participated in the workshops held in the ENCSL by the Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation. Interested landowners were informed about Wildlife Conservation Lands Program, Wildlife Incentive Program, forester training, and other tools and programs.

Mr. Myers provided an update on the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Recovery and Sustainment Program Partnership (RASP). During the fall and winter, 615 acres of longleaf were planted, 440 acres of timber sold, 2.5 miles of road upgrades, and 870 acres of prescribed burns.

Green Growth Toolbox Projects included $10,000 cost-share to the Town of Aberdeen and Carteret County. There are Green Growth Toolbox workshops planned for Pinehurst, Hope Mills, Fuquay-Varina, Southern Pines, and Carthage.

Bob Bardon provided a report for NC State University CNR. He spoke on the measures the university is taking for the coronavirus. NC State is suspending all international travel, and with spring break scheduled for next week, there is concern about students traveling home or to other locations, then returning to campus.

Dr. Bardon spoke about the coordinated approach to the "Spaces Between the Bases" project and the North Carolina Strategic Plan for Sustaining Military Readiness. There are partnerships between different conservation partners, including the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, North Carolina Sentinel Landscape Partnership, NC State University CNR, and other interested parties. With the university, there are coordinated efforts for undergraduate military outreach, online military and veterans' admissions, and distance learning outreach.

Chester Lowder reported for the NC Sentinel Landscape Partnership. There is a Southeast Regional Partnership for Planning and Sustainability (SERPPAS) meeting being held in Atlanta,

GA, and Mr. Lowder will be traveling to it after this meeting. The 15th anniversary of SERPPAS will be held on May 11-13, 2020, in Beaufort, NC. The Sentinel Landscapes Coordinators meeting will be at Camp Ripley on June 1-4, 2020, and the Sustaining Military Readiness Conference will be held in San Antonio, Texas, on August 9-13, 2020.

Mr. Lowder stated the next NC Sentinel Landscape Partnership quarterly meeting would be March 23, 2–5 p.m. at the North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation building. The tentative future dates in 2020 are as follows: June 17, August 27, and November 12. The Partnership is working with Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, Marine Corps Installations East, and Fort Bragg to schedule field trips on the installations.

Mr. Lowder announced the 2020 NC Sentinel Landscape Partnership Coordinating Committee call dates: March 13, April 10, May 8, June 12, July 10, August 14, September 11, October 9, November 13, and December 11.

Mary Lou Addor reviewed the template landowner recognition letter that was initially drafted by Phil Wallace of the North Carolina Forest Service. Dr. Addor proposed that the Committee consider the letter and vote to accept the document as a tool for landowner recognition. Mr. Wilson moved to approve the letter, and Mr. Aponte seconded. The motion was approved unanimously.

Mr. Lowder said he was retiring from the NC Farm Bureau Federation, but will still work with the NC Sentinel Landscape Partnership. Some of his duties will go to Stacey Sereno. He introduced her to the Committee. Ms. Sereno talked about her background as an attorney, and previous work experience with the United States House of Representative Agriculture Committee and the South Dakota Department of Agriculture. Mr. Lowder said she would make a great addition to the NC Farm Bureau Federation and Sentinel Landscape program.

Evan Davis, NCDA&CS Farmland Preservation Assistant Director, provided a Partnership funding update. Through the NC Attorney General's Office Environmental Enhancement Grant (EEG) Program, NCDA&CS was awarded $46,292 for the Wooten Farm Easement. The Wooten Farm is located in a priority zone for the Air Force in Tyrrell County. The DOD REPI Challenge pre-proposal was submitted on January 24, 2020, and was selected to submit a full proposal. An application to the USDA-NRCS RCPP of $8,506,494 was submitted on December 3, 2019.

Mr. Smith asked if there was any more business business before the Committee or public comments.

Mr. Hardee asked Will Best, NC Department of Commerce, if a template for the Joint Land-Use Study was approved for Seymour Johnson Air Force Base and the Dare County Range. Mr. Best stated that it is under development.

Mr. Smith asked for additional comments. There were none. Mr. Smith then entertained a motion of adjournment. Mr. Aponte moved the motion, and Dr. Bardon seconded the motion. The meeting adjourned at 2:38 p.m.