North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Committee Minutes
March 18th, 2024, 1:00 PM
Conference Call: 984-204-1487
Conference: 395202778#

Attendees:

Committee members present:

- Steve Troxler, Commissioner, NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
- Rick Long, Assistant Secretary, NC Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
- Jeff Michael, Deputy Secretary, NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
- Brian McRae, Deputy Director of Operations, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
- Dr. Bob Bardon for College of Natural Resources, NCSU
- Chester Lowder, Sentinel Landscape Partnership Liaison
- David Harris, State Roadside Environmental Engineer, NC Department of Transportation

Other Attendees: Joe Austin, Mitch Peele, Chris Baillie, Justin Boner, Mark Pfanstiehl, Mikey Fulk, Bill Edwards, Dewitt Hardee, Neil Oakley, Jon Lanier, David Smith, Commissioner Steve Troxler, Allison Rodriguez, Evan Davis
Online: David Myers, Janine McLawhorn, Denise Evans, Jamie Simon, Jason Rose, Lisa Shealy, Julius George, Bill Ross, Rodney Woolard, Jimmy Johnson, Michelle Lovejoy, Douglas Taggart, Tom Potter, Will Allen, Addie Thornton, Cheryl Tapanes, Anita Kennedy

Reading of Ethics Reminder: 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.

Approval of Previous Minutes: The minutes from December 11, 2023, were presented for approval. Dr. Bardon made the motion, and Jeff Michael seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

Evan Davis gave his program update for Farmland Preservation. He reviewed all current open contracts with military partners – Futral Farm in Onslow County, Boyd Farm in Washington County, and Jenkins Farm, Small Farm I and Small Farm II in Jones County. All of these open contracts are with Working Lands Trust as the grantee. Altogether, these easement projects cover 2,800 acres. Evan reviewed all military partnership projects since 2016 – 22 easements have been recorded with 13,119.715 acres preserved. Evan Davis shared a table showing the easement purchase funding summary that encompassed each project to date. The chart detailed NCDA&CS funding, partner funding from REPI and USDA, as well as landowner funding. Dollars were utilized at a 3-to-1 rate.

Rick Long gave a brief update for Military and Veterans Affairs. The agency is working to set up an information session for local communities around the military installation. North Carolina did not receive any grants last year, so they are meeting with funded groups to gain feedback on the process and a better understanding of the application. Regarding Operation Homefront, Long said there are 105 semifinalists and eight of those are from North Carolina. They will be holding a semifinalist event on April 19th to celebrate those semifinalists.

Jeff Michael gave his update for the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. NC Land and Water Fund received 113 applications with $103.6 million in requests for their 2024 grants. Will Summer gave an update for the group. The applications break down into 68 land acquisitions, 29 restorations, seven innovative stormwater and nine planning applications. Twenty-three of those applications are in the ENCSL counties with $3.6 million in requests for 5,188 acres. Funding decisions will be made in October. Governor Cooper issued an executive order setting forth goals for preservation and conservation of an additional 1 million acres by 2040 and the restoration of 1 million acres by 2040. Summer said this is encouraging to hear coming from Raleigh and should mobilize partnerships between state, federal and private entities in NC.

Brian McRae gave his update for NC Wildlife Resources.

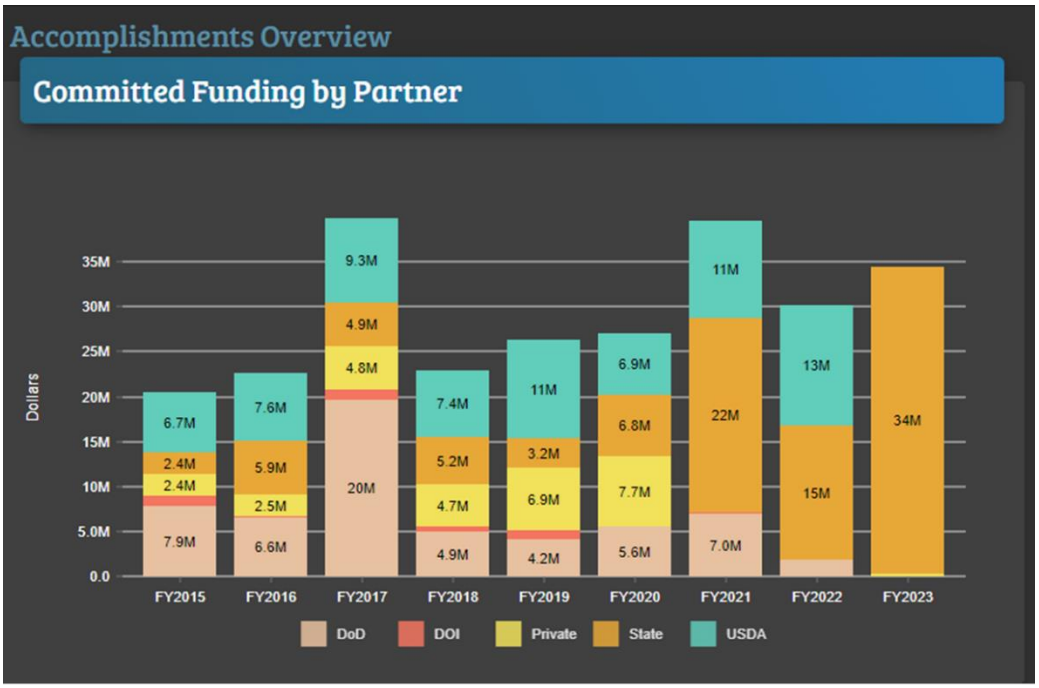
- RASP update – prescribed burning on 900 acres, reached out to 20+ private landowners, and provided technical guidance resulting in conservation of over 2,000 acres.

- There are eight agreements and 491 acres enrolled in the Tax Deferment Program for this tax year.
- There were 2,500 acres of prescribed burns, and $5 million in IRA funds will be used to combat sea level rise as well as other climate threats.
- Evan Davis asked if the deferment in their program shows up the same way as PUV does on a tax card.

Dr. Myron Floyd gave an update for the NC State College of Natural Resources. Some new publications that may be of interest included Developing Successful Tree Ordinances and Landowner Assistance for NC PUV and VAD. There are three more heirs property workshops scheduled through July. The workshop on May 8 will be in Robeson County, which is in the landscape area. Other workshops include those around the Prescribed Fire Associations and Present Use Valuation for forestry. There is a lot of effort around increasing prescribed fire on the ground, and a lot of work being done with associations across the state and some tribes to educate about those options.

Chester Lowder gave his update of the Eastern NC Sentinel Landscape Partnership.

- He said they are nearing completion of the Sentinel Landscapes data call, in which they collect information on dollars committed, acres protected through acquisition or easement, and acres of working lands enrolled in some form of cost-share programming. They had a banner year for state funding, with more than $34 million dollars committed, 10,824 acres protected through acquisition or easement, and 130,142 acres enrolled by our state partners or by NGO partners using funding awarded by a state program. The Department of Defense, Department of Interior, and USDA funding and acreage will be added by those departments shortly, which will provide a full picture of the amazing accomplishments of the ENCSL in 2023.



DoD, DOI, USDA to be added to 2023

- Importantly, Lowder said they are aware that rolling up accomplishments into dollars and acres only captures a portion of the transformative work of ENCSL partners. They will be establishing an ENCSL External Stakeholder Communications Workgroup in the very near term. One of its functions will be to even more effectively highlight the diversity work that partners are pursuing across the landscape via multiple modes of communications, such as newsletters and GIS story maps.
- Since the last NC Sentinel Landscape Committee meeting, partners have submitted proposals under numerous different funding opportunities to support projects that advance ENCSL priorities. These funding opportunities include NFWF Longleaf Stewardship Fund, NOAA's Climate Ready Workforce, NOAA's Climate Resilience Regional Challenge, NC Land and Water Fund, and OSD's Office of Local Defense and Community Cooperation's Installation Resilience Program.
- Partners are currently working to develop proposals to numerous open funding calls, including NFWF's America the Beautiful Challenge and National Coastal Resilience Fund, EPA's Carbon Pollution Reduction Program, USDA USFS's Forest Legacy Program, and a REPI-Land and Water Conservation Fund Partnership program: The Readiness and

Recreation Initiative. They are also awaiting the release of USDA NRCS's Regional Conservation Partnership Program Notice of Funding Opportunity.

- Numerous partners have represented their organizations and the ENCSL at recent convenings of the regional partnerships with which they collaborate, including the SERPPAS Principals Meeting and the Defense Community Workshop hosted by University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government.
- The ENCSL Program Review kicked off in earnest in January and has made demonstrable progress towards decision-making on key focus areas. Chris Baillie will be giving an update on that process as the next agenda item.

David Harris gave a brief update from the NC Department of Transportation. He said they are continuing to look at project lists and how they could be of benefit to this committee, and they hope to provide GIS information that could be helpful.

Chris Baille (ENCSL Coordinator) providing an update on the program review. Baille presented the timeline of the ENCSL Program Review process today, starting with the Dec. 2023 presentation to the NC Sentinel Landscape Committee.

- Baille detailed ENCSL Program Review Q&A and open discussion sessions held in early January, in which partners were able to ask questions and provide recommendations for the ENCSL Program Review. One recommendation from these meetings was to make governance structure and strategic planning the initial focus of the Program Review.
- Two workgroups, an ENCSL Governance Structure workgroup and an ENCSL Strategic Planning workgroup, were established to develop recommendations for the full partnership to react to during the Kickoff ENCSL Program Review convening.
- Baille discussed the recommendations proposed by each workgroup to the full ENCSL Partnership in the Program Review Kickoff convening (1/31).
    - The Strategic Planning workgroup proposed a bifurcated approach to completing the strategic plan. To complete the high-level components of the Plan, the governance body that is established will work with the ENCSL coordinator and Will Allen (LegacyWorks Group) to vet, refine, and, where necessary, develop these components into a full draft of Sections 1-3. The full partnership will then be solicited for their comments and vetting via a full draft shared on Basecamp. After a set comment period allowing time for partners to contribute their

feedback, the ENCSL governance body will be convened to address and reconcile any suggestions and finalize Sections 1-3 of the plan. To develop Sections 5 and 6, three regional planning processes, with geographies aligning with the three represented military branches in the ENCSL: US Marine Corps, US Air Force, and US Army, will be conducted. The goals for each region will largely be driven by the outside-the-fence-line needs of the branch-specific installation or installations (i.e., MCIEAST, Seymour Johnson Air Force Base, Fort Liberty). In the regional convenings, the installations and their regional partners will work to identify strategies and actions that advance the outlined goals through efforts that align with and advance partners' respective organizational missions.

    - The Governance Structure workgroup proposed the creation of an ENCSL Advisory Committee. This body would have seats for the ENCSL Committee, Anchor Installation POCs, the SLP-FCC, the NC County Commissioners Association, and the NC Department of Military and Veterans Affairs.
- Baille noted that while the strategic planning process recommended by the workgroup was widely accepted and required only a few additional clarifications by the ENCSL Strategic Planning workgroup, there were a number of concerns about the ENCSL Governance Structure workgroup's initial recommendation. Namely, partners felt that this approach did little to simplify the organizational structure of the ENCSL and that having a single seat for the ENCSL Committee was insufficient to ensure adequate representation of agricultural, wildlife, and natural resource interests. As such, the Governance Structure workgroup developed a new proposed solution to present to the Partnership during the 2/28 ENCSL Program Review convening.
- The approach proposed by the Governance Structure workgroup that was presented to the workgroup on 2/28 was to pursue the expansion of the ENCSL Committee to include ex-officio membership that would broaden the representation of interests and have that expanded ENCSL Committee serve as the governing body of the ENCSL. Proposed ex-officio members included anchor installation POCs, a SLP-FCC representative, and a number of additional proposed seats. The additional proposed seats included NCDEQ, NC A&T, Association of County Commissioners, and an NGO representing working land owners.

- Chris said that this proposed alternative governance structure was widely embraced by the Partnership and that formally presenting the proposed approach to the ENCSL Committee was the Partnership-endorsed next step.
- Chris then asked if the Committee would be willing to consider the proposal to expand the ENCSL Committee to serve as the ENCSL governance body, which would require amending the statutory language that established the ENCSL Committee to allow the inclusion of federal agency representatives.
- Discussion:
    - Commissioner Troxler said the he and Evan have had a lot of conversations about this, and that they like this alternative structure as we are a large part of this.
    - To add federal members it may take some legislative work, additional members that are within the state would be able to be added to the committee with little issue.
- Commissioner Troxler requested a vote on the issue. Chester Lowder made a motion to move forward, and Rick Long seconded the motion.
- Chester Lowder asked how to include private landowners in this. One addition he had considered was the NC Foundation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts.
- The motion was amended to include a representative from the NC Foundation of Soil and Water Conservation Districts to the ex-officio seats. It was seconded by Rick Long, and the motion passed unanimously.
- Commissioner Troxler entertained a motion to approved the alternative recommendation for the Governance Body. The motion was made by Chester Lowder, and seconded by Rick Long. It passed unanimously.

Additional Business – None.

Any Public Comments – None.

Commissioner Troxler asked if there was further additional business, and hearing none he asked for a motion to adjourn. Jeff Michael made the motion, Dr. Bardon seconded, and the meeting was adjourned at 1:53 PM.