North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Committee Minutes
June 11, 2024, 1:00 PM – 1:42 PM
Conference Call: 984-204-1487
Conference: 7030959173 #

Attendees:
Committee members present:

- Steve Troxler, Commissioner, NC Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
- Secretary Grier Martin, NC Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
- Jeff Michael, Deputy Secretary, NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
- Dr. Myron F. Floyd, Dean, College of Natural Resources, NCSU
- Chester Lowder, Sentinel Landscape Partnership Liaison
- David Harris. State Roadside Environmental Engineer, NCDOT

Other Attendees: David Smith, Doug Taggart, Joe Austin, Corey Hoilman, Robert Bardon, Jonathan Lanier, Janine McLawhorn, Dewitt Hardee, Evan Davis, Allison Rodriguez, Mark Pfanstiehl, Steve Woodson, Scott Shoulars, Anita Kenndy, Nancy Richardson, Mikey Fulk, Hannah Bodenhamer, Richard Reich, Cameron Dawson, and Veronica Jamison.

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 for the March 18, 2024, meeting were presented for approval. Bob Bardon made the motion, and Jeff Michaels seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Evan Davis presented for the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services. He said that the six current open military contracts with Working Lands Trust total nearly 3,000 acres, five of which are MCIEAST projects and the other project is an Air Force-partnered easement. He reviewed the 23 recorded military partnership agricultural conservation easements since July 2016. Twenty Air Force easements and three MCIEAST easements have been recorded in six ENCSL counties, preserving over 13,000 acres. Davis reviewed the easement purchase funding summary for completed military partnership agricultural conservation easements. The total to date of state, REPI and USDA funds plus the amount of landowner donation toward easement purchase value is $28,309,105.57. He reviewed the pre-proposal submitted on April 4 to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's America the Beautiful Challenge 2024 requesting $2 million in grant funding, and the upcoming Johnston County submission to the Natural Resource Conservation Service for an Air Force-focused RCPP proposal that will ask for $12 million.

Secretary Grier Martin reported on the ongoing efforts to avoid losing over 100 jobs in Wayne County connected to a potential F-15 training area closing with the Air Force. He said he is working with senators and congressmen to help prevent the closure of this training area.

Jeff Michael stated he is between cycles at this time. In September he said he will definitely have more to report on. He said work continues to preserve natural land through the Land and Water Fund. He said over half a million acres have been preserved by the program to date.

Commissioner Steve Troxler stated it will be a new day for conservation, working landscapes, and farmland preservation once the new state conservation tax credit passes. He stated the bill would likely pass the following day with the potential 9:30 House vote.

Dr. Bob Bardon said he had nothing to report.

Chester Lowder reported there is the possibility of some new developments in upcoming events and plans that he said Chris Baillie may be able to speak on.

David Harris said he had nothing to report on, but also said there are several ongoing projects that would be discussed at a later date.

Chris Baillie reported on the ENCSL program review and gave an update on the governance structure, strategic planning, and the coordination capacity and resourcing. He showed the current partnership committee seats, and presented what it would look like to add additional ex-officio seats for installation points of contact and representatives from the NC Department of Environmental Quality, NC A&T University, the Association of County Commissioners, and NGOs that represent owners of working lands. He reviewed the status of the ENCSL Strategic Plan review by individual section. He stated the first three sections need only some vetting and refinements, but a full buildout is needed for the final two sections – Goals, Strategies, and Actions, and Metrics, Communications, and Funding – both of which had been the product of the three regional planning processes.

Baillie spoke on the last planning meeting he had at Fort Liberty on May 29. He stated the next meeting on June 21 in Newport would be focused on MCIEAST. He also gave a program review and timeline for the upcoming year with potential target dates to strategic plan of completion.

Cameron Dawson provided a brief legislative update. Senate Bill 355, the 2024 Farm Act, has language that would reenact the conservation tax credit that was repealed in 2013. Section 15 would reenact the tax credit for certain real property donations and modify the purposes for which donated land will qualify for the credit. The credit would be available to both individuals and corporations, and the amount of the credit and the caps are the same – 25% of the fair market value of the property, capped at $250,000 for individuals and $500,000 for corporations. Under the credit as reenacted and modified by this section, the credit would be allowed only for land donated for the following six purposes: (i) Farmland preservation; (ii) Fish and wildlife conservation; (iii) As a buffer to limit land use activities that would restrict or interfere with military training, testing, or operation on a military installation or training area; (iv) Floodplain protection; (v) Historic landscape conservation; and (vi) Public trails or access to public trails This section would be effective for tax years beginning on or after January 1, 2024.

Dawson said that Section 17 would add two voting members to the Sentinel Landscapes Committee, namely the Secretary of Transportation or the Secretary's designee and a representative of the North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Partnership. This section would also add two nonvoting ex officio members, namely the Eastern North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Coordinator and a representative from the United States Department of Defense Readiness and Environmental Protection Integration Program. This section would also make the Commissioner of Agriculture or the Commissioner's designee the permanent chair of the Sentinel Landscapes Committee.

David Smith spoke on the Farm Act, saying if it passes it is going to have a definite impact on state conservation programs. He asked if there was anything else to report, and hearing nothing from the group entertained a motion to dismiss. Grier Martin made the motion and was seconded by Bob Bardon. The meeting adjourned at 1:42 PM.