North Carolina Sentinel Landscapes Committee Minutes
September 12, 2023 1:00 p.m. – 1:28p.m.
Conference Call: 984-204-1487
Conference: 7030959173 #

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
- Cameron Ingram, Executive Director, NC Wildlife Resources Commission
- Dr. Myron F. Floyd, Dean, College of Natural Resources, NCSU
- Chester Lowder, Sentinel Landscape Partnership Liaison

Other Attendees: David Smith, Joe Austin, Corey Hoilman, Dr. Robert Bardon, Will Best, Jonathan Lanier, Janine McLawhorn, Dewitt Hardee, Evan Davis, Allison Rodriguez, Sarah Weavil, Phil Wallace, Joe Beckman, Bill Edwards, Steve Woodson, Rodney Woolard, Scott Shoulars, Anita Kennedy, Nancy Richardson, John Shaw, Dr. Richard Reich and Veronica Jamison.

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.

Minutes from the June 20, 2023, meeting were approved. Rick Long made the motion, and Chester Lowder seconded. It passed unanimously.

Evan Davis reported on current military contracts, with 1,146.63 total easement acres under contract with Working Land Trust. He reviewed the Military Partnership Agricultural Conservation Easements since July 2016 with all military partners. The number of acres conserved total 13,393.735 acres in six counties – Bertie, Hyde, Tyrrell, Washington, Jones, and Pamlico counties. He reviewed the MOU with NC MAC. Out of a total award of $750,000 to date, expenses through August 2023 equal over $419,141, leaving a balance of $330,859.

Rick Long gave his report for the NC Department of Military and Veterans Affairs. He informed the committee that Kelly Jackson is going to retire, and now there are three permanent positions available. He spoke about upcoming registrations for meetings at the end of September, and said there was nothing new to report on Camp Butner at this time.

Assistant Secretary Jeff Michael presented for the NC Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. He announced that Brian Strong is the new Deputy Director for Natural Resources.

He said he will know more about upcoming grant projects next Wednesday when hopefully the state budget is approved. He talked about a flood risk reduction grant that has the stated goal of reducing flood risks through the design, implementation, and preservation of nature-based infrastructure, and $15 million is available. Letter of interest forms are available on their website (nclwf.nc.gov) and the deadline is August 31st. He also gave an update on the NC Land and Water Fund. Approximately $80 million is anticipated to be available.

Cameron Ingram gave an update from the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. From June through August 2023, staff reported meeting with 17 private landowners within the NCSL focal area. These site visits resulted in management guidance being provided for 3,318 acres. This guidance targets the enhancement of habitat for various Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN).

The Commission has continued to partner with The Nature Conservancy on an Emergency Coastal Resilience Fund grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to complete 7,500 acres of hydrologic restoration on Angola Bay Game Land in Pender County. This project will enhance pocosin wetland habitat and provide community flood resilience benefits to downstream communities (Burgaw, Castle Hayne, and Wilmington).

Through a multi-year Competitive State and Tribal Wildlife Grant received in 2022, NCWRC and SCDNR are continuing efforts on Fort Liberty/Camp Mackall targeted at Sandhills Chub in collaboration with the Department of Defense and Coastal Carolina University (CCU). The Sandhills chub (Semotilus lumbee) is an imperiled headwater fish that is geographically restricted in the Sandhills ecoregion in North and South Carolina and a SGCN in both states. This project is focused on filling knowledge gaps to support future conservation efforts.

Bob Bardon with the College of Natural Resources at NC State said that a new extension specialist would be coming aboard the middle of July. He presented research of interest pertaining to climate change and wildfire risks, the effects of light pollution on bird populations, the release of the college's new guidebook to prescribed burning, and that the upcoming sustainable forestry conference would be upcoming on October 25th and 26th.

Chester Lowder presented the Sentinel Landscape Partnership report. He discussed partnership attendance at the climate resilience workshop in St. Louis, the land trust rally in Portland, OR, and an all-day REPI workshop.

Corey Hoilman spoke on the NC Sentinel Landscape Committee Annual Report for 2023. The report summarizes the activities conducted by the committee during its quarterly meetings as well as the contributions made during the prior year by each partner. It had been submitted to the General Assembly, and a handout was given to each committee member.

Steve Troxler asked if anyone had any other business items to discuss. He spoke on the North Carolina State Fair and how the department was working hard to get his office moved out there.

The meeting was adjourned at 1:28 pm. Jeff Michael made the motion, and Rick Long seconded.