

Cape Fear Arch Conservation Collaborative
February 5, 2008 Minutes
Halyburton Park, Wilmington, NC

Attending: Janice Allen, NC Coastal Land Trust; Jenna Begier, NC Wildlife Resources Commission; Pete Benjamin, USFWS; Mamie Caison, Brunswick SWCD; Lisa Creasman, Conservation Trust for NC; Suzanne Dorsey, Bald Head Island Conservancy; Molly Ellwood, NC Wildlife Resources Commission; Andy Fairbanks, Halyburton Park; Mike Giles, NC Coastal Federation Cape Fear Coastkeeper; Dru Harrison, New Hanover SWCD; Chris Helms, NC State Parks – Lake Waccamaw; Camilla Herlevich, NC Coastal Land Trust, Kristen Rose, NC Coastal Land Trust; Phil Prete, City of Wilmington; Shawn Ralston, New Hanover Planning Dept.; Dan Ryan, The Nature Conservancy; Tracy Skrabal, NC Coastal Federation; Hope Sutton, DENR Coastal Management; Penny Tysinger, Cape Fear COG; Andy Wood, Audubon NC.

INTRODUCTIONS

Andy Fairbanks, the Director of the Halyburton Park, provided the group with an introduction to the history and ecology of the park. The park, opened in 2004, consists of 58 acres of longleaf pine savannah, small depression ponds and vernal pools. The park also offers trails, education programs, and a community building for public use.

ISSUES

Dan Ryan, The Nature Conservancy (TNC), provided an update on the proposed I-74 corridor connecting Charlotte and southeast Brunswick County.

- TNC participated in the Brunswick County Comprehensive Transportation Plan (CTP) steering committee attempting to include information about the biological significance of the area and ensure all of the information and alternatives were considered.
- The corridor is currently not included in NCDOT's Transportation Improvement Plan, which projects 6 years out.
- The Brunswick County Board of Commissioners recently refused to endorse the plan. Mamie Caison, who attended the meeting, said the refusal was based in part on concerns that the CTP's recommendations were not included in the proposed plan and that the biological issues associated with Boiling Springs Lakes were not addressed. After an as yet scheduled meeting between DOT and Brunswick County staff and commissioners, DOT staff will again present a draft of the plan and ask the board of commissioners to endorse it.
- TNC did oppose the plan and provide official comments. Dan provided a copy of the letter to the group. If you would like a copy please contact Dan directly at dryan@tnc.org.
- TNC has received a \$250K Z. Smith Reynolds grant, which TNC will match with \$50K. TNC is working with SELC to develop a scope of work for the grant.

- Suzanne Dorsey stated that the Bald Head Island Community is concerned about the proposal and willing to provide whatever support they can to the protecting the Green Swamp.
- There was discussion about the CTP process and concern that the process did not fulfill its intended purpose. Pete Benjamin serves on a committee that addresses transportation issues in the state (Interagency Leadership Team) and he will be providing feedback to the team about the Brunswick process. Thus far all that's been provided are the plan's maps – it's critical to also have the documentation used to develop the proposed route and the data used to produce the maps. The Brunswick County was the first county to employ this comprehensive approach to long-range planning
- SELC is working on letter to the NCDOT regarding the CTP process.

Characterization of Project/Issue: This is a Joint Project of some of the Arch partners, not a Collaborative Project of all the Arch partners

Potential Next Steps for TNC, SECL, BHIC and others involved:

- Develop a fact sheet on the ecological values of the Green Swamp
- Request an update on the project from a DOT rep?
- Will TNC provide the ILT/Pete Benjamin with comments on the CTP process?

Proposed NC International Port – Dan Ryan, TNC, provided an update on the status of the proposed NC International Port (NCIP):

- There's a new contact for the CFA – Bill Bennett (VP for Planning and Development). Dan has a meeting scheduled with Mr. Bennett in the near future.
- The NCIP will be developing a pro forma business plan that will address economic impacts, construction cost estimates, revenue projections, trends for next 30 years and predictions about the port's ability to attract business.
- A reconnaissance study by the US Army Corps of Engineers is required that will address feasibility & impacts of deepening the Cape Fear River shipping channel. Funding for this study is currently lacking.
- Suzanne Dorsey said that the residents of Bald Head Island are lobbying hard to shift the shipping lane to Caswell Beach.
- Tracy Skrabal shared concerns that discussions about the port are already becoming very specific rather than addressing issues regarding the basic economic viability of the port, all of the related infrastructure needs, and the long-term cumulative impacts.
- Mike Giles stated that the economic and environmental analysis were being scaled back and shifted from a private entity to the public. He also added that it is the public perception that the port is going to be built.
- Suzanne Dorsey added that other ports in the region are expanding their capacity in response to the proposal and potential impacts to their business.
- Pete Benjamin said that the Arch's conservation plan is a critical piece to supply to the port study process. It will create a compelling basis for sitting at the table with those analyzing the cost/benefit information. USFWS/Pete will be providing input on the Corps of Engineers study.

- Molly Ellwood, permit coordinator for the Wildlife Resources Commission, said the agency biologists go to all of the Corps of Engineers meetings and review all permits proposals.
- Andy Wood discussed the need to look at cumulative impacts.

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Potential Next Steps for TNC, BHIC, Coastal Federation, Audubon and others involved:

- Some of the Arch participants may decide to independently pursue grant(s) to support additional ecological studies on the cumulative impacts and threats from the proposed port.
- Potential studies could include information on the value of ecological services, ecotourism, etc to provide to the larger cost/benefit study that will be conducted.

Janice Allen provided the group with an update on the conservation planning effort

The planning team has developed maps with a set of “no regret” sites that are proposed to be the most significant ecological sites and therefore should be conserved. The team will be holding meetings across the Arch region, soliciting feedback from local partners on the data included in the plan, the sites selected as no regret and other related information.

The planning team did propose to the full CFA group that the Arch region be expanded to include the Waccamaw and Pee Dee Rivers – they are a part of the geological feature that was used to help determine the current boundaries of the Arch. The CFA group approved the inclusion of these river systems into the Arch boundary.

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Lisa Creasman briefly discussed a grant the Conservation Trust for NC has received from the Conservation Fund to work with the Wildlife Resource Commission on promoting the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP). One specific component of the grant is to provide funding to conservation collaboratives around the state, including the Arch, to ensure that SWAP priorities are integrated into the regional collaborative plans. Lisa also referenced DENR’s statewide conservation assessments, and the work of Steve Hall with NHP on indicator guilds (which will be incorporated into the statewide assessments). The DENR maps and the WRC SWAP are closely aligned and discussions are underway to potentially have the DENR maps be used in association with the SWAP. Information on how to access the DENR conservation assessments follows:

The new One NC Naturally Conservation Planning Tool is now available online at <http://www.onencnaturally.org> under Features. Access maps and data, download an overview brochure, or use the online map viewer.

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PROCESS & ARCH ADMINISTRATION

Camilla Herlevich introduced Kristen Rose, the new Cape Fear Arch Coordinator. Kristen will start with the NC Coastal Land Trust May 19th with an early focus on building additional partnerships in the Arch Collaboration and developing outreach and educational materials.

Camilla Herlevich led a discussion on the development of draft protocols for the Cape Fear Arch Conservation Collaborative. The group discussed how the members would handle projects, communication, fundraising and staff/grants administration collectively and independently. Camilla incorporated the comments of the group into the attached draft of the protocols.

Potential Next Steps:

- The Arch Collaborative members will need to vote to approve the protocols at a future meeting.

NEW BUSINESS & PRESENTATIONS

Dan Ryan discussed establishing a “landowner council” in the region. The Landowners Council will be a representation of private landowners within the Southeast Coastal Plain. Currently there is no infrastructure in place for this area that provides a direct line of communication between landowners themselves or between landowners and agency/conservation organization. The primary objectives behind assembling this group are: link landowners and land managers to federal management money (esp. Farm Bill) for conservation-oriented activities, conduct outreach/ education to forestry consultants and land managers, highlight conservation forestry and restoration practices, facilitate cooperative prescribed burning with partners/ landowners, improve relationships between conservation organizations and the community, creating a more amenable environment for collaboration and potentially cultivate a private landowner representative for the Cape Fear Arch Conservation Collaborative. Mamie Caison suggested that county voluntary agriculture district boards would be a good resource for involved landowners.

Suzanne Dorsey initiated a discussion on Climate Change with a presentation provided in part by Tancred Miller with DENR’s coastal management division. Suzanne discussed that impacts from climate change - sea level rise and water quantity and quality issues – are the most pressing in coastal NC. She discussed the need to build public understanding of climate change and its impacts. She also stressed the importance of providing the public with some viable options and ways to be involved with the issues so that a sense of powerlessness doesn’t develop. There are a number of studies and modeling efforts underway to look at predictions for sea level rise and how to plan for the provision of basic resources (water) in the resulting circumstances.

The discussion culminated with an agreement to integrate the consideration of sea level rise impacts into a future iteration of the CFA conservation plan (since the current plan is so far along).

Proposed next steps:

- Create a subcommittee that informs the CFP on climate change issues and develops a pathway for integrating climate change impact information into the CFA conservation plan.

Additional comments/next steps:

- Camilla Herlevich and Hope Sutton will develop a job description for the CFA steering committee.
- Mike Giles will invite a COE representative to serve on the CFA. Molly Ellwood also has contacts with the COE.
- Penny Tysinger can add anyone who's interested to the "CAMA-gram" or "Interested Parties" email lists to get updates on coastal activities. If you're interested please contact Penny at ptysinger@capefearcog.org.
- Mamie Caison shared that the SWCD's are having rain barrel sales – please contact her if you're interested (mamie.caison@nc.nacdnet.net).

The group decided to schedule future Cape Fear Arch meetings quarterly, on the third Tuesday. The next meeting will be held 5/20 at Waccamaw State Park. We will hook up a conference telephone, although the acoustics may be problematic. The meeting will begin with committee meetings for the first half, then a convening of the full group for additional meeting topics.

Future meetings will be held 8/19 and 11/18.