

Coastal Collaboration Meeting April 18, 2006

DO NOT FORWARD

Introduction and Welcome – Dan Bell

Agenda

Dan Bell

- Description of Camp Pretty Pond and Boiling Springs Lakes Preserve
- Lower Cape Fear Region is a Biological Hotspot (see TNC Biodiversity Hotspot map)
 - This region has the highest biodiversity on the East Coast
 - Ecological very relevant
 - However, there are no public lands found in this area.
- Partnership Objectives:
 - Work toward formal partnership
 - Develop operating structure and function
 - Organize and populate working groups, including conservation design
 - Engage local governments and decision makers
 - Seek private funding to support the collaboration and its initiatives
 - Other Objectives?
 - Mat Flint--Increase state investment/involvement in land protection
 - Camilla Herlevich—We need funding to support upland habitats, right now farmland trust fund is the only source
 - Richard LeBlonde—also need to identify the most vulnerable areas
 - Suzanne Dorsey—barrier islands need to be emphasized
 - Camilla Herlevich—we need a green vision or marketing plan
 - Scott Pohlman—there are working models to engage private landowners
 - Matt Flint—asked Mamie Caison to explain Voluntary Agricultural District:
 - Brunswick County recognized that agriculture was important part of the county structure (18,000 acres are currently part of the Vol. Agricultural District)
 - Agriculture is important to County Commissioners
 - We see it as another blanket of protection for agricultural folks. It is voluntary and has an easy in/out policy.
 - Mostly has been implemented away from the Rt. 17 corridor. Where taxes are increasing you will start seeing farmers selling land.

- Mamie indicated that if there was some way to make it enticing for farmers to look at conservation easements she would support that
 - Camilla observed that the program needs money for conservation and Mamie agreed that she can't promote conservations easements without financial support.
 - Dan emphasized the need to incorporate farms into any green plan
 - John Ann Shearer added that many of those farms have upland forests on them
 - Scott—I'm very encourages because county commissioners fees agriculture is very important
 - Camilla—It would be good to have the county commissioners follow up with the state legislators to put \$ into the farmland trust
 - Matt—Once a property is enrolled adjacent properties must acknowledge on a recorded document about regular farming activities like early morning equipment use and potentially unsavory smells.
 - Tommy Hughes—the idea might be transferable for fire management, when people buy next to fire managed property they might have to agree to allow for those practices to continue
- Mission statement
 - Dan- Onslow Bight Project put together a diverse group that we might replicated here.
 - Hervey McIver—what is missing from their program is biological conservation. That should be included in our mission statement
 - Dan—we don't want to get too specific in our language that we limit partnerships
 - Hervey McIver—How public do we want to be?
 - Camilla—I think we need to find a conservation vision and raise awareness for what's happening around here
 - John Ann—Let's put together some action verbs:
 - Protect
 - Advocate
 - Plan
 - Manage
 - Need to add something about connectivity

WORKING MISSION STATEMENT:

To develop a community conservation vision that provides protection and stewardship of the important natural resources and raises awareness of the

importance of conservation of these resources in our focus area TBD (Southeastern North Carolina and NE South Carolina).

- Dan Bell—Advocacy
 - How do incorporate those groups that are specifically prohibited from participating in advocacy?
 - Pete Benjamin—advocacy means bringing these issues to decision makers. At the end of the day we need this. Agencies need somebody at the table at the beginning of a development process so they can go forward considering conservation issues, not have to redress them at the end of a process. At the state level DOT there is an openness to try to understand conservation issues. We need environmental groups to be up front with them.
 - Dan—how important is it to get those advocacy groups involved at the beginning especially considering the conservation community isn't monolithic.
 - Mamie—The group here doesn't have enough local people. We have a commissioner that's assigned to the planning board and we should involve them
 - Tommy Hughes—that's a critical aspect, the most impact is achieved by having local input and conversations around local issues
 - Suzanne Dorsey—public awareness in this community is very low and needs to be addressed by environmental groups.

BREAK

- Dan will send out a draft mission statement
- Richard LeBlonde—should this group be proactive itself or should its mission be to support its constituent partners or both?
 - Camilla—the NC Center for Non Profits uses a matrix approach and determines which approach is best on regional/local/individual levels.
 - Will set this issue aside until we discuss strategy
- Core Geography
 - Maps Presented:
 - Natural heritage area maps with managed areas, permanently protect lands
 - Notice no federal lands except Sunny Point.
 - NC Wildlife Action Plan
 - Looking at this map several people suggested additional participants including somebody from Sunny Point, the Forest Service, and the NC State Parks

- NC Coastal Habitat Protection Plan tries to designate strategic habitat areas
 - Audubon: Important Birding Areas as determined by habitat areas.
 - Ecoregional Priorities of The Nature Conservancy
 - Other focus Areas
- Dan—so based on this does anybody have a suggestion for the core geography?
 - Richard—All of Waccamaw drainage, all of the coast, then follows rivers: Cape Fear & Black River, as far up as estuarine features which should take you up to Bladen County and Pender. Have all this as a core area. It also has recreational potential in terms of canoe trips.
 - Dan—all of New Hanover, Brunswick & Pender Counties and SC all of the Waccamaw drainage but not the Pee Dee (In SC the Pee Dee is treated as a tributary of an estuary) Then also in SC, all of their coastal configurations.
 - Scott—Presented small, medium, and large boundary options
 - Camilla—the advantage of the small boundary is it encompasses all three iconic coastal areas. The advantage of the medium is that it takes advantage of connectivity. The large boundary includes all of TNC's areas of concern
 - Dan—we need to consider the feasibility of managing a large area. There is a lot happening in the smaller area and less in many parts of the larger boundary area. (Richard concurred) Should we start with the smaller vision and then work our way up?
 - Tommy Hughes—we might determine emphasis by identifying the greatest threats
 - John Ann—when you can demonstrate successes then you garner support for more difficult areas to protect, she supported the medium area
 - Dan—what about smaller organizations; if we choose the medium boundary then we may need many more organizations
 - Tommy—one advantage to a larger area is that when you show you're part of a larger focus area you score higher points and thus more money.
 - Camilla—even the smaller boundary will be big enough to gain lots of points with a NAWCA grant
 - Mamie—what about a phased approach?
 - Hervey—Having all those partners in the Onslow Bight partnership is limiting in some ways, there can be sub compartments of the organization that targets issues like raising awareness.
 - Matt—NRC Wetland Reserve Program

- Discussed his meeting with SC TNC and the use of the farm bill to fill in gaps in preserved areas. Mitigation money is used to conserve land. NRCS could allow private people to sell a conservation easement. This program could be cultivated in NC but we need to take some steps. What we need to do is define a focal area and define conservation objectives and work with staff and management for enrollment guidelines. We would want to propose that a portion of the state money be set aside for the Waccamaw River locations under “special projects.”
- Dan—would it be helpful if the organizations involved in the area defined the conservation areas? If so then those of us involved need to meet before September.
- Marilyn Meares—Columbus County government wanted help with a cleanout of Waccamaw. 15ft wide areas for canoes. When you get below Rt. 90 it will be wider than 15’. Right now Columbus is in the process of applying for permits to remove only fallen trees. This cleanout was initiated by local people.
 - Richard—what’s the rationale for cutting in large areas? Boating
 - Suzanne—fish habitat will be impacted
 - Tommy—this has been done before; our waterfowl people would be interested because of ducks etc.
 - Hervey—one thing I’ve seen with contractors recovering from hurricanes is that you need to emphasize that they don’t cut more than you need. Don’t use large trucks and heavy equipment which will damage coastlines.
 - Andy Wood—This was done on Burgaw Creek where they removed “snags” which is critical habitat for water snakes. The final arbiter is the person with the chain saw. A good model can be found in the Lumber River
 - Matt—make your method of payment by linear feet not by amount of material removed.

LUNCH

- Mamie—Brunswick County Tomorrow, on web page Brunsco.net under planning it is worth it to review it. We might help Brunswick Co. meet their goals. On the web:
http://www.brunswickcountync.gov/Portals/0/bcfiles/Brunswick_Tomorrow_Final.pdf

- Dan— How can we include South Carolina [Waccamaw/ Winyah Bay] in this group
 - Richard—what is your objective?
 - Dan--Larger view
 - Camilla—also to reach a more funding sources by going across state lines
 - Fritz Rohde—what about the Winyah Bay task force.
 - Dan—we want to engage them but not step on their toes
 - Mamie—maybe we need to go closer, what about Conway?
 - Hervey—what advantages do they get?
 - Conservation in SC
 - Funding
 - Dan—if we meet in SC can NC State agencies participate?
 - Yes but its another level of bureaucracy
 - Camilla—NC & SC are facing the same issues—buyers etc. We could learn from them in terms of advocacy
 - Richard—the more this group becomes an advocacy group the more difficult it is for state agencies to participate

NC Port

- Andy Wood—the river islands adjacent to and opposite of the port site what will the impact be?
 - Will dredge material still be available for dredge islands?
 - Importance of battery Island (10% of N. American white ibis population)
- Fritz--valuable bottom will be destroyed with dredging
- Dan—Background info:
 - Closed last week for \$30 million
 - Operational in 8-10 years
 - Sunny Point appears to support proposal
 - No municipality has gone against it.
 - Construction costs will exceed \$1 billion and they are looking for a private partner
 - 4,000 feet of river frontage
 - Estimated 250,000 containers/year with 25% leaving the port by truck
 - Road construction (another linking issue between NC & SC)
 - DOT has asked Brunswick Co. to revisit transportation needs
 - Railroads: 75% of the containers will move by rail
 - State has offered to fed government to buy the federal rail line from Sunny Point to Navassa. It will require upgrades to stream and road beds.
 - River: 9.5 mile channel dredged to 52 feet
 - Unload 5 ships simultaneously

- Sewer system
 - Influx of population even when construction starts
- Hervey—should somebody from this group be involved with that review?
- Pete Benjamin—state and federal agencies can get more involved with these plans. If it's a toll road then they lose a strong relationship with DOT because it gets turned over to turnpike authority. There's no working relationship with turnpike authority.
- Richard—is there any possibility for getting mitigation impacts for this?
- Dan—BASE (Brunswick Alliance for a Sound Economy) which is a coalition of builders, realtors and developers have pushed for a tolls to build I- 74 web site: <http://www.wilmingtonareabuilders.com/base.asp>
- Richard—don't assume the RR through BSL won't be used again it is state owned. It is important to understand the full impact of the dredging especially in changes of tidal amplitude.
 - Mamie—don't forget fire risks associated with RR
- Camilla is the coastal fed taking a stand on this?
 - Dan Yes, it's first on their list
- Matt—the port needs to be held accountable for the whole environmental issues
- Pete—look at where the conflicts and opportunities are. We won't appose until we determine that there are unmitigatable environmental impacts. They need input immediately.
- Camilla—does anybody know what their process is?
- Dan—the Port Authority is seeking a firm to Shepard this process. Coastal Fed will be more engaged than anybody.
- Fritz and Steve—agencies are meeting now.
- Dan—it seems that fish and wildlife has the only “in” just now
- Tommy—we have a DOT coordinator. The agency will write a response to a proposal and the agency probably won't want any other input.
- Camilla—three approaches:
 - 1. Official role of agencies
 - 2. conservationists can send information in.
 - 3. Coastal Fed has the stick with Environmental Defense
 - 4. Scott--Media needs false promise of economic development and the increase in trade deficit.
- John Ann—what are the products that will be shipped through be? What about hazardous materials? What about historic and visual resources.
- Camilla—we need a fact sheet with Questions and Answers about what the impacts will be
- Tommy—you need to be “sly as a fox” to do this
- Camilla—its how you present yourself that's important. Like: “we want you to know what's out there—give them the information”
- Tommy—bring up quality of life issues
- Matt—question whether this will turn into another Global TransPark

- Tommy—road construction and fill impact and erosion. There are so many road projects in SE NC they ran out of gravel. New quarries could also be an impact.
- Scott—how will this change the system, especially areas that we don't know about?
- Dan What are the port opportunities?
 - Terrestrial mitigation
 - Marine mitigation
 - Fund research, monitoring, and restoration
 - If it flops—restoration of 600 acres
 - Restoration outside of port foot print
 - Under road wildlife corridors
- Camilla—what about the blast zone?
 - Dan—it doesn't seem to be an issue

Wrap up and Next Steps

- Meeting in late June or early July in SC
- Reserve design
 - Onslow Bight identified conservation targets and focused on areas/habitats that were important for targets.
 - Conservation design subcommittee
 - Should we have a subgroup?
 - Camilla—yes but the large group needs to set the parameters
 - Dan—small group could develop a starting point
 - Scott—has a map to begin with and he can send out that map
 - Camilla—we also need to focus on raising awareness and PR
 - John Ann—WRP group should get together
 - Camilla—we need to get going on grant writing

The end