

**State Disaster Recovery Task Force  
Environmental Preservation Recovery Support Function Meeting**

Archdale Building, Raleigh

July 18, 2019

1:00pm – 3:00pm

Meeting Minutes

Lead: Toby Vinson, DEQ

Staff: Marlena Byrne, NCORR

*Please note that typically, written meeting minutes will be shorter and will not identify speakers by name. For these minutes, we wanted to provide detail on the organization introductions.*

### Welcome, Introductions, and Overview of Agenda

Toby Vinson (TV) gave welcome. Marlena Byrne (MB) gave a brief overview of the meeting agenda and background on SDRTF and RSFs role. MB and TV also discussed how the RSF process will likely work with the Executive Order 80 Climate Resiliency Plan development process. Discussion of process for updating State Disaster Recovery Framework document.

### RSF Member Introductions

RSF members were asked to introduce themselves, their organization and describe what their organization does in response, recovery, and resilience.

**Chris Canfield, Conservation Trust NC.** CTNC is a land trust, but recently launched a new strategic vision involving climate, resilience, social equity, and community. Discussed lessons learned from Louisiana-- had great science but did not engage communities as well. Huge interest in embedding resilience in communities at the local level. Incorporate land conservation with social and economic issues. CTNC is not as engaged in the disaster recovery side; long-term resilience is what interests us.

**Jim Kjelgaard, USDA NRCS.** Our agency was built out of recovery efforts after the dust bowl and funded by a North Carolinian. We have evolved: started out as soil conservation service; became natural resources conservation service. Long history of providing technical expertise. For the types of activities, we have Farm Bill programs that assist private landowners with resource concerns, technical or financial assistance. In regards to natural disasters, we also have our emergency watershed protection program geared toward sponsors or subunits of local government addressing or mitigating resource concerns as a result of natural disaster. Our state conservationist, Tim Beard, is keen on bringing us back to our roots, we have a number of practice standards. We also have a 9-

step planning process that is the foundation of applying those practices. Whether it's a local disaster or a season of heavy rain, utilizing those steps and our practices, the conservationists in our org can assist. Have somewhat of a local presence with offices in most counties. Actually housed/sponsored by the local soil and water conservation districts. Work with them to address the local resource concerns.

**Vernon Cox, NC Department of Agriculture.** We have a variety of programs to address local resource issues. Work closely with NRCS. Traditional programs- designed to address agricultural nonpoint source pollution, providing assistance to local landowners, work on a broader watershed issues with local sponsors to address stream restoration. After Hurricane Florence also received funding to take on similar activities with direct assistance to farmers. Works closely with NRCS. Provide nonfederal match to that program. Working very closely with local sponsors. Other programs addressing resilience include swine floodplain buyout program, which was funded post-Floyd. Many years funded with CWMTF. One of the great success stories, realize we could make a difference. We've taken somewhere in the neighborhood of 43 farms out of the floodplain. Vast majority flooded in Matthew and Florence. Got some state funding to fund some more buyouts. Hoping to address more of those potential issues to get high risk operations out of the floodplain. The other program we run is the conversation reserve enhancement program. Install buffers to ag land – nonpoint source pollution and floodplain functions. All our programs are run through the soil and water conservation district – they are the mechanism, our local contact.

**Will McDow, Environmental Defense Fund.** Our real interest here is in the longer term recovery and resilience side of the equation. How can the state support resilient landscapes and communities? Expertise in science, communications. How do we help keep agricultural lands productive? We do a lot of work on cover crops and no-till to help farmers adjust to shifting weather patterns. How do we help our floodplains function? How do we get critical infrastructure out of those floodplains? How do we support natural infrastructure as part of that solution? Can we use existing mechanisms, like the Division of Mitigation Services?

**Brian Loadholt, USDA-NRCS, Easement Coordinator.** Most recently has been working on floodplain easement programs. Trying to use designated dollars to pull residents or industrial out of floodplains. To take a look at sites and develop this program. Hopefully in the end we will have some restored floodplain and we will have a place to store some of this water that plagues us in these heavy events. Our program has put a lot of money into helping growers put cover crops, no till, plays a big part in trying to reduce the impact of what's going on. Hold local work group meetings every year. Try to get our dollars around that.

**Will Robinson, The Nature Conservancy.** We do land protection work in the state and around the coast. Work in the coast, mountains, Sandhills. Controlled burns. Working with coastal communities on resilience in a very practical and 1:1 relationship with local communities. Very interested in doing some floodplain restoration work to demonstrate to communities that restoring wetlands provides measurable flood risk reduction. Modeling on places that have been flooded, floodplain mapping work.

**Walter Clark, DNCR, Division of Land and Water Stewardship.** We have two programs: Natural Heritage program; and Clean Water Management Trust Fund. Going to become the “NC Land and Water Fund”, which more accurately describes what we do. Established around 1997 with a focus on water quality. Did a lot of sewer infrastructure work. That mission has evolved. Not only water quality, but also protect natural heritage areas, cultural sites, and land around military installations. Work with our clients who are nonprofits like CTNC and TNC, they can apply to Clean Water for funding, as can local governments and state agencies. The fund is funded by the legislature. Recent history \$20-25 million/year of grant funding awarded. Thinking about resiliency is the greatest opportunity for Land and Water Fund. A lot of opportunity to think about how to put coherent plans together and approach us about how they can fund projects that really fit into this. So we do acquisition and we also do stream restoration. We also have planning grants. Two other people who have more to say than I: **Will Summer and Meredith Wojcik**, who works with our Natural Heritage Program.

**Will Summer, DNCR.** We protect and enhance floodplain and wetlands function. Land acquisition has the advantage of keeping incompatible uses out of the floodplain for future disasters. Resiliency comes home as future disasters avoided, e.g. the swine buyout program.

**Rebecca Sadosky, DEQ Drinking Water Program.** Work in partnership with a lot of different organization but also have a public health aspect because of drinking water. We have a seat at the EOC, our role is to assess the impact on drinking water systems. Our role in recovery is a systems role. Point and nonpoint sources of pollution, and examine all water sources for risk to contamination. EPA also has a requirement that all utilities have to plan for manmade and natural disasters. While resiliency planning is not a piece of that, we are still examining our role in that. Once water systems have assessed whether they are vulnerable.

- Question for her– drinking water state revolving fund? Not in my division, but I believe there is availability of funding for resiliency projects. They are starting to look at, four projects that are coming in to them, looking at the resiliency aspects of the grants that come in.
- Question – where do wells fall in this? We have a lot of groundwater public sources, but we don’t deal with private wells. That’s HHS.

**Bill Holman and Wilder Semans, Conservancy Fund.** Spun out of TNC in 1985. Like the Conservancy, primarily land and water conservation org., supporting both conservation and compatible economic development. We have a number of business units and strategic conservation groups. Falls lake protection. We have a resourceful community program that does a lot with community development in eastern NC. Partner-driven, community development initiative, state parks, CTNC, etc. very interested in doing things at a larger scale.

**Adrian O’Neal, NC State Parks.** Conservation, recreation and education. Education is one of the areas that we really tie in here. We have been on every aspect of resilience. Educating folks on why we are doing what we’re doing is one of the most important parts that we can contribute. We have 475 staff, 200 of those are ranger staff, giving a tidbit of advice every time someone comes into the park. Education is a more important piece than we understand. This document we are working on

will be great, but there is probably a need for a layman's version so that regular people understand what's going on. We try to locate parks in places where they benefit the landscape.

- Question – how is the recovery coming? Pretty good shape. Last hurricane, Fort Macon had flooding inside the fort. One of the biggest impacts we had. Could be easy to say it's because of climate change but also some problems with pumps in the setup.
- Back in hurricane Matthew, lost a couple dams. DEQ doesn't own any dams but we get to regulate all of them. Cumberland County – 7 dams in a row – all the ones above decided to open their dams but we couldn't open because it's historic.

**Meredith Wojcik, DNCR – Natural Heritage program.** Mission is to inventory state's biological resources. We are a resource for other agencies with our data. We have state natural areas that have been prioritized because of their unique species. Maintain a database of managed lands from a variety of organizations. We also have a conservation planning tool which includes a few different layers which can be used for conservation planning at the local level. Planners can plan in accordance with their natural resources. All of our databases are available through an online review tool – can run a project and get a report out of the tool.

**Blakely Hildebrand, Southern Environmental Law Center.** Focused on the long-term resiliency planning side of the conversation. Four of the states where we work are coastal and are grappling with the same things. Have some policy and legal experience that we can bring to bear. Marsh protection, smart and resilient infrastructure planning.

**Grady McCallie, NC Conservation Network.** Statewide advocacy organization. My area is water land use, planning, resiliency, as an organization part of what we bring to the table is to advocate for adoption of policy that others have come up with. My organization has a role with communication within environmental NGOs. My role is to make sure that those not at the table are still getting at the table. Also have an interest in equity and environmental justice and how that is built into policies. We are here for relationship-building, interested in policies that we are interested that might fit into this process. When I think about the kinds of things we care about in the context of resilience – 1 is environmental impacts that are centrally environmental, like what happens when a waste water treatment plant is flooded. 2- Environmental impacts of resiliency and recovery that aren't primarily environmental – affordable housing, energy efficiency, nontoxic. 3- Really interested in decisions about economic recruitment after disaster, systems level impacts.

**Marlena Byrne, NCORR** - The focus of this RSF is on environmental preservation, but the specific issues we work on can be determined by the group. We also want to maintain a statewide focus, and that will be informed by what is happening at the local level. Hopefully what we will hear in getting feedback out to local partners, helping their decision-making. Want to continue to look from a statewide perspective.

**Jess Whitehead, NCORR.** Encouraged people to check out other RSFs because you can connect with other groups.

Question to NCORR team – when I think about disasters, I think about really natural disasters like hurricanes to very human disasters like nuclear plant meltdown or a pandemic. Mostly I am thinking

about natural disasters. Does this include things like industrial disaster? Are those folded in to the overall framework?

Yes. This covers any kind of disaster the state might face. But not about emergency management – it's about the long-term recovery.

**Julie Mayfield, Mountain True.** Regional environmental advocacy group. Any county that touches mountains – about 23 of them. We work on clean water, clean energy, land preservation, and land use and transportation. Do a fair amount of on-the-ground environmental improvement projects. We take a landscape view of the mountain region. We are also, as many groups are talking about, moving into thinking about this more broadly, equity and health, things like that.

We have not done so much on recovery in general, but in the wake of Matthew that we have four riverkeepers on our staff and two of them loaded up all the boats that we have and headed out to eastern NC to do a lot of water sampling. That was not all in coordination with state agencies and other entities that are out there working. My hope in the future is that in places where there are these disasters, that the capabilities of groups like waterkeepers and riverkeepers and their capacities could be done really in coordination with agencies that are much busier focused on other kinds of things. Our org can play a key role in recovery.

On the resiliency side, one thing we bring to this conversation is the western NC perspective. We don't have the kind of flooding as the east, but we do have flooding on a fairly regular basis but we do have landslides and we do have wildfires. Each has challenges and policy initiatives that could address them. We have thought a lot about those and have strong opinions about what they are. We bring a deep understanding of the ecology and environment of this region – ecologist and biologist on staff. Every foot of the national park lands.

**Jimmy Gentry, Chair of the Board of the NC Foundation for Soil and Water Conservation.** The best tie in we are going to have with this group is that we are beginning a recovery resilience program that's going to focus on agriculture. In the process of putting together.

### Unmet Needs and Opportunities

- *What unmet needs are your organizations aware of?*
- *What barriers—legislative, procedural, administrative—are your organizations facing in serving survivors and protecting the environment during the Florence and Matthew long-term recovery?*

TV led discussion.

Issues Raised Regarding Unmet Needs and Challenges:

- **Modeling:** Need better understanding of river basin impacts. Could be a collaborative exercise, way to build a shared understanding and regionalism around river basins.
- Need for funding overall

- Need for amendments to Clean Water Management Trust Fund enabling leg – ask trustees to look at awarding points to projects that are part of a regional plan (comprehensive plan, resiliency plan, etc)? A way to incentivize planning.
- Specific to the coastal areas – Possibility of funding planning and grants through the Division of Coastal Management program
- So much of fed funding looks backwards. Need funding to do things before they flood.
- Ongoing capacity issues at the local level. If they have a planning process, they need a local person to see that through. They need capacity for implementation. Also need maintenance of what is implemented. Local places get money, and they build something, but then the funding dries up and the funding goes away.
  - Helping local governments that get funding use it in the best way possible
  - There are local governments out here that you can give a ton of resources they are absolutely not interested in doing any planning related to climate change. If that planning won't be mandated, creating some planning incentives for doing that. Talking about doing a regional resilience planning that doesn't rely on individual local governments.
  - Local government education – so when they get money for resilience, they have a straightforward path on how to spend it. Potential connection with COGs.
- CWMTF used to fund stormwater projects, now it's out of that business. If we are going to help places become more resilient, we need to support their stormwater. Moving beyond water quality to flooding aspect. The MS4s in the state that run their own local stormwater – a lot plan to 25-year design, but that's not statewide.
- Regarding stormwater, we need to look at the flooding aspect, not just water quality.
- Heirs properties and buyouts issues—we need a legislative fix; adoption of uniform code.
- Need a closer relationships between DEQ and department of Ag and soil and conservation. Common understanding at a high level between those agencies. A refocusing of the funds we have for Ag best management practices to be targeted toward those watersheds or those farms that we know are presenting real problems for water quality.
- Benefit-cost ratios – use of BCR in funding projects and the impact of that on lower wealth communities

## Wrap Up and Next Steps