NAGS HEAD WOODS

2021-2022 Annual Report

TOWN OF KILL DEVIL HILLS

FEBRUARY 2023

The Nature Conservancy
North Carolina

Staff

Pictured from left: Lora Eddy, Conservation and Resilience Specialist, Aaron McCall, Northeast Regional Steward; Eric Soderholm, Albemarle-Pamlico Restoration Specialist;

Table of Contents

1.0 Visitor Services 1
1.1 Office 1
1.2 Staff 1
1.3 Preserve Visitation – Trail Counters 2
1.4 Audio Tour 4
1.5 Facilities and Trails 5
2.0 Partnerships, Volunteers, Community 5
3.0 Conservation, Management, Biology 6
3.1 Invasive Species 6
3.2 Deer Management 8

1.0 Visitor Services

Visitor services, especially through the summer months, continue to be an important component of Nags Head Woods management. Our outdoor informational kiosk houses the visitor's registration log along with maps, guides, and other literature. Indoor visitor reception is generally available during business hours. Restrooms, drinking fountain and water bottle refill services, air conditioning, a few comfortable chairs and opportunity to interact with staff are often appreciated by hikers during the hot months.

1.1 Office

As did many other organizations, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) closed all offices in late March 2020. Then in May 2022 the organization moved forward with a "soft opening" for all our offices.

Staff are still working flexible, hybrid work schedules at the Nags Head Woods (Preserve) administrative office, but during the regular work week, most days both the administrative and indoor visitor facilities are open for staff and visitors. The organization saw no decrease in overall productivity during this period of working remote, therefore leadership has continued the option to work both remotely and on site.

1.2 Staff

In March 2022, after 5 years with the Albemarle-Pamlico Sounds Office and the Preserve, Conservation Coordinator, Jennifer Gilbreath accepted a position as the Employee Relations and Engagement Coordinator with TNC's Human Resources Division. We are very proud to see Jennifer grow her career with TNC although she is missed. This past September, Lora Eddy who has worked in our office for the past 6-years transitioned into filling Jennifer's role in the office.

Then this past August, Albemarle-Pamlico Sounds Director, Brian Boutin, accept a position with our partners at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. After six-years of leading our work out on the coast and 12.5 years in total (in two separate stints) with The Nature Conservancy, Brian made significant contributions to our work in Northeast North Carolina.

Like many other businesses on the Outer Banks, we have found it very challenging to fill this position. The labor and housing market has made our recruitment very difficult.

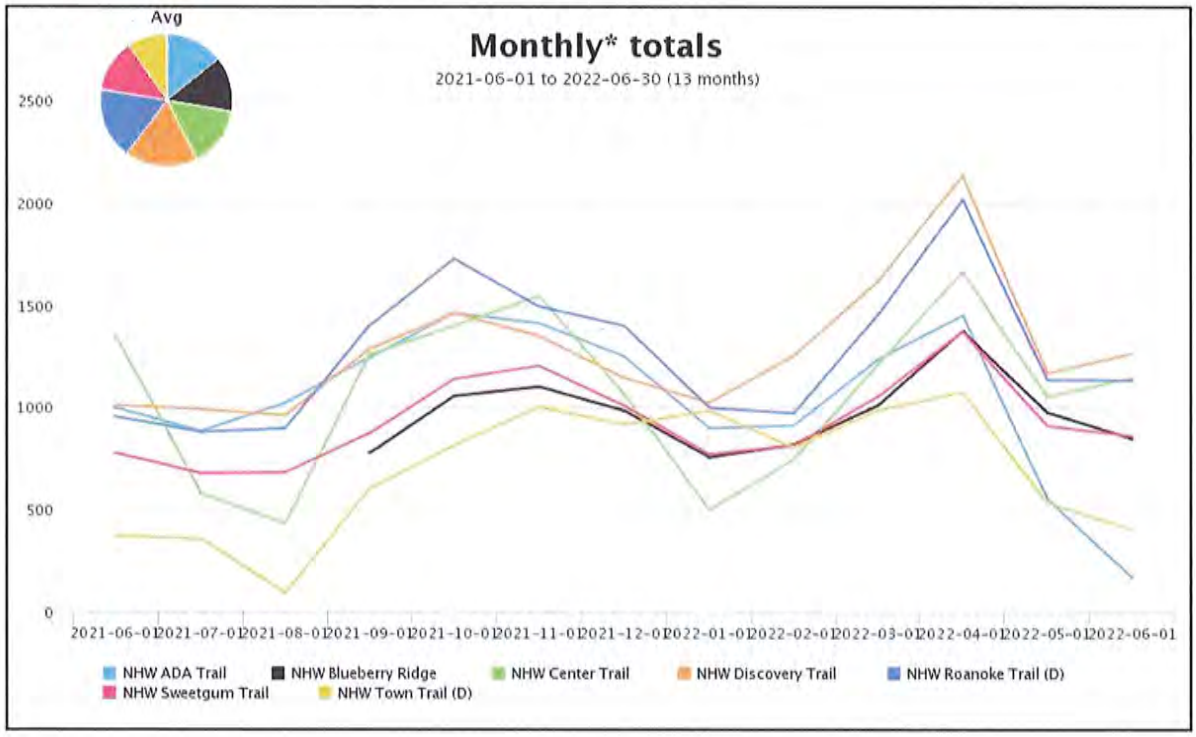
1.3 Preserve Visitation – Trail Counters

As we mentioned in our last annual reporting cycle, in January 2021 we installed six infrared trail counters. Therefore, the data we provided last year was just a six-month snapshot of trail traffic in Nags Head Woods Preserve.

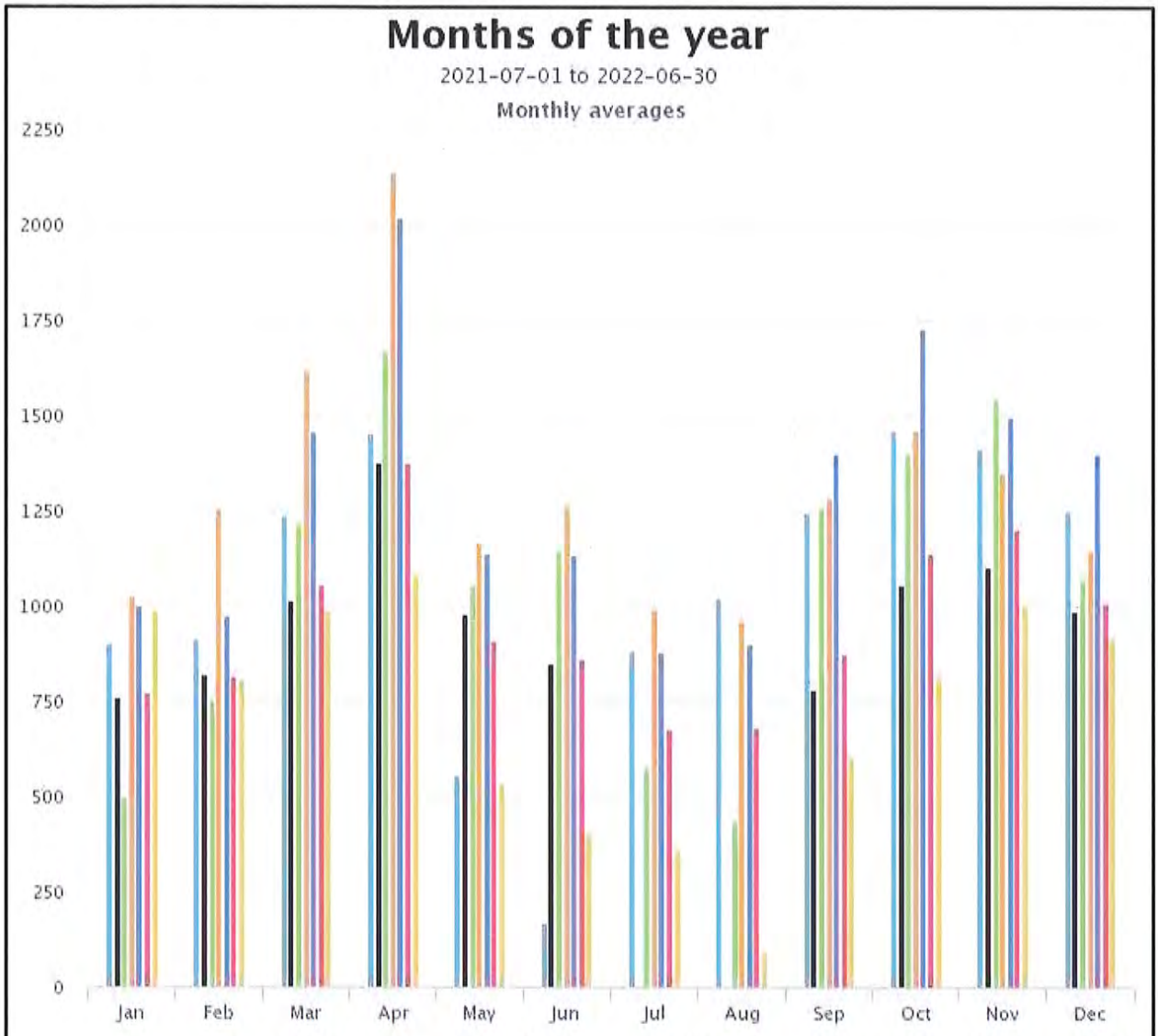
This year we are reporting on a full year's worth of data, from July 2021 to June 30, 2022.

The counters are reporting 30 – 50 hikers per day or between 800 – 1,500 hikers per month on each of the trails. Our most popular trails are the Discovery, Roanoke and ADA trails.

Graph 1. All Trail Counters by Month Line Graph



Graph 2. All Trail Counters by Month Bar Graph

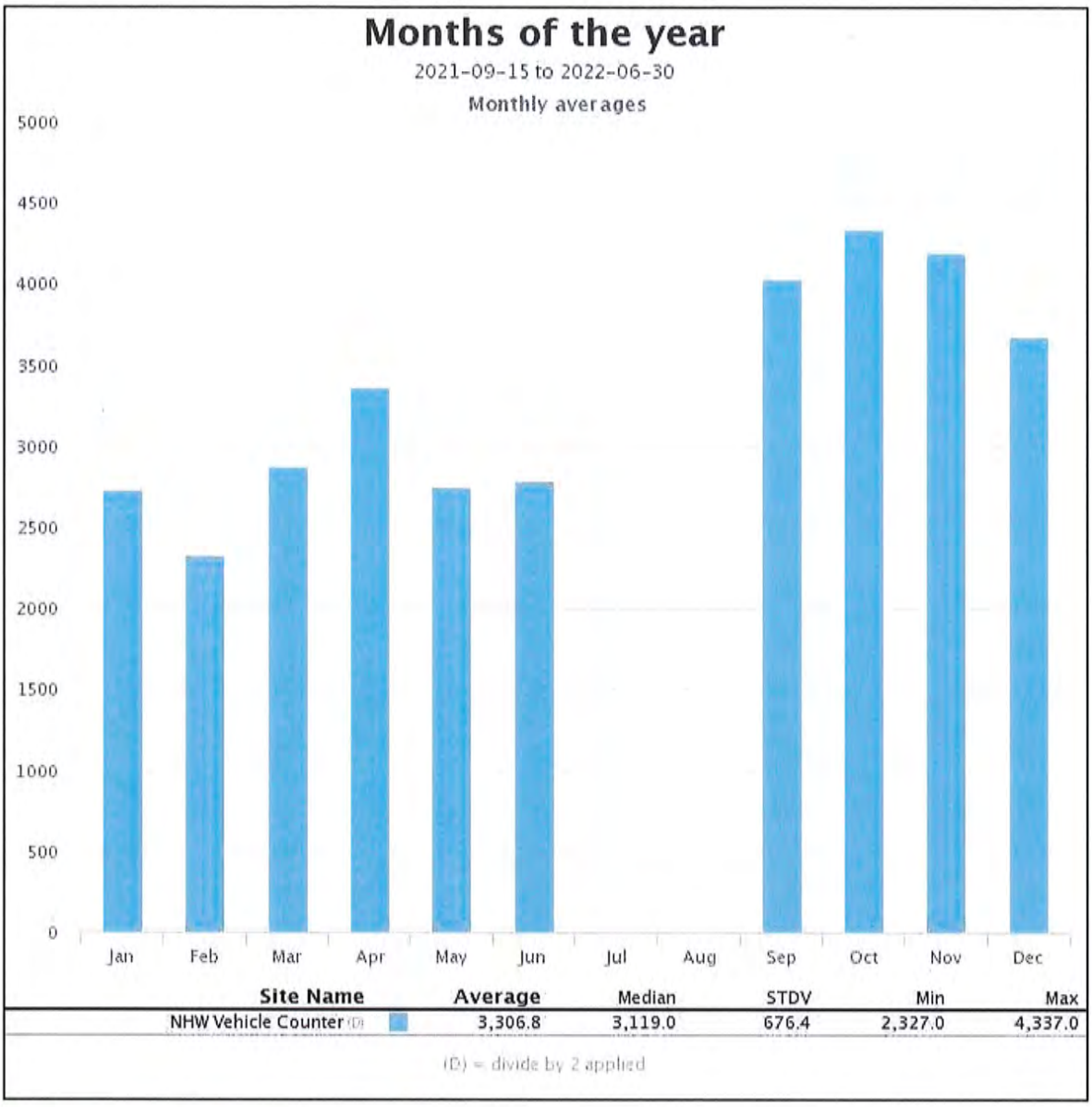


Site Name	Average	Median	STDV	Min	Max
NHW ADA Trail	1,042.6	1,130.0	372.8	170.0	1,462.0
NHW Blueberry Ridge	971.3	981.5	176.3	758.0	1,376.0
NHW Center Trail	1,051.4	1,107.0	389.7	434.0	1,666.0
NHW Discovery Trail	1,305.2	1,259.5	310.8	961.0	2,136.0
NHW Roanoke Trail (D)	1,294.0	1,269.4	337.9	881.0	2,019.0
NHW Sweetgum Trail	947.9	892.6	204.9	678.0	1,373.0
NHW Town Trail (D)	715.2	810.0	299.2	93.0	1,076.0

(D) = divide by 2 applied

We have also installed a roadside vehicle counter, and with 10 months' worth of data for this reporting period, we are seeing over 4,000 vehicles on Ocean Acres and Old Nags Head Wood Road during our peak visitation months when the weather is most pleasant in the Woods.

Graph 3. Ocean Acres Vehicle Counter by Month



1.4 Audio Tour

Since its debut in the summer of 2019, our audio tour has been well received with a cumulative number of 1,901 calls and 908 unique callers.

This amenity continues to be regularly used by visitors with 290 calls and 178 unique callers for this FY22 reporting period.

We have worked with partners at the NC Aquarium to develop a script for a second audio tour.

This educational tour presents background on the natural heritage and ecology of Nags Head Woods Preserve in northeastern North Carolina. We are working on the next steps for that project, stay tuned.

1.5 Facilities and Trails

March 2022, Aaron McCall presented to TNC staff on Nags Head Wood's trail blazing effort to expand accessibility through our ADA trail. This webinar series covered how the organization has strived to include all community members with access to our preserves. The concept for this trail started in 2008 and by 2011 with support from the Town of Kill Devil Hills and funding from various sources, we completed this trail. This spring we will be working on maintenance of sections of the ADA boardwalk. Additionally, sections of our Discovery and Center Trail will get some much-needed bridge repairs.

With assistance from Town of Nags Head Maintenance staff, the yellow house along Old Nags Head Woods Road was demolished and removed.

2.0 Partnerships, Volunteers, Community

April 2022 in partnership with the NC Aquarium, we hosted First Flight Elementary School and Nags Head Elementary's 5th grade classes at the Preserve for the Sea2Sound (S2S) event. A total of 143 students were a part of this program, which is a full day, hands-on science field trip that starts at the Atlantic Ocean and traverses the width of OBX, mostly on the Town Trail in Nags Head.

Photo Credit: Rhana Paris/NC Aquarium

3.0 Conservation, Management, Biology

3.1 Invasive Species

We continue to manage invasive plants within Nags Head Woods. This is hard work and a constant effort during the warmer months. The ecology of Nags Head Woods would be critically impacted without continued management and control of these invasive plants.

Thank for doing your part in encouraging residents to not plant these species as many are commonly sold at smaller local and large landscaping stores. A good resource to check is the Invasive Plant Atlas of the United States: https://www.invasiveplantatlas.org/

See table below for detailed management and control practices:

Invasive	Management & Source
Russian Olive This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC	• MANAGEMENT: Controlled by hand cutting and herbicide • SOURCE: Russian Olive is a popular ornamental sold extensively at local stores. Its seeds are brought in by birds, unknowing hikers, and vehicles.

Invasive	Management & Source
Oriental Bittersweet Image via UGA Bugwood Center for Invasives	• MANAGEMENT: controlled by hand cutting and herbicide; • SOURCE: Once a popular ornamental and brought in by birds. It can form massive swaths of heavy cover in trees quickly.
Japanese Stilt Grass This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC Image via UGA Bugwood Center for Invasives	• MANAGEMENT: controlled by herbicide; • SOURCE: It comes in with the gravel for the roadways therefore very difficult to manage. It can form massive swaths of ground cover vegetation quickly.

Invasive	Management & Source
English Ivy Image via Flickr by James St. John	• MANAGEMENT: controlled by hand cutting and herbicide • SOURCE: English Ivy also a popular ornamental for ground cover. brought in by birds, hikers and vehicles. Some English Ivy may have been planted by members of the Nags Head Woods community in the 18th and 19th century and by the company that had planned to develop the Woods in the 1970's.

3.2 Deer Management

Since 1995 we have coordinated with the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission to manage the Nags Head Woods deer population through a registered bow hunt. The bow hunt helps manage the deer population to alleviate nutritional stress and lessen the probability of further declines in herd health.

The bow hunt offers affordable, important heritage and consumptive recreation for local citizens who hunt. Many hunters provide important feedback about the Preserve. This year approximately 700 hours were reported in the year-end hunt survey.

The regular bow hunt season ran from September 11, 2021, to January 1, 2022, with an extended Urban Archery season which closed February 20, 2022. A total of 40 hunters registered for the 2021-2022 season, with a total of 5 deer harvested.

Hunter's requirements:

- A current North Carolina hunt permit,
- Attend an orientation session at Nags Head Woods,
- Complete registration forms including vehicle information,
- Pay a $50 fee,
- Display a registration card in their vehicle while hunting, and
- Complete a year-end survey.

We are very grateful for the Town of Kill Devil Hills' support both this year and in past years!