

## Fact Sheet: Buxton Woods Zoning

The Dare County Commissioners will hold a public hearing on whether to retain and enforce the Zone of Influence protecting Buxton Woods Coastal Reserve during its regularly scheduled May meeting.

**Where:** Dare County Administration Building, 954 Marshall C. Collins Drive, Manteo.  
Or via video link at the Fessenden Center Annex, 47013 Buxton Back Road, Buxton.

**When:** Monday, May 5, 2025, 9:00 a.m. Consider arriving early to register to speak.

**Who:** Anyone may speak at the hearing but may be limited to three minutes per person.

**Written Comments:** If you cannot attend, consider emailing comments to the board *before May 5*.

Subject line: "Buxton Woods Zone of Influence Ordinance"

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### What's at stake?

The thousand-acre Buxton Woods Coastal Reserve is located on Hatteras Island, bounded by Cape Hatteras National Seashore and the village of Buxton. It contains the largest remaining contiguous tract of Maritime Evergreen Forest on the entire Atlantic coast, as well as the only maritime shrub swamp (dogwood subtype) community in the world. It is a major source of groundwater recharge for Hatteras Island, and it protects the island's well field. In 1988, the NC Coastal Reserve system was created with Buxton Woods as its first component. It is also protected by state law as a Dedicated Nature Preserve.

Also in 1988, the Dare County Board of Commissioners voted to protect a half-mile buffer around Buxton Woods to protect the maritime forest and groundwater reserves from clearcutting and dense development. That zoning ordinance was indexed and placed in the County Ordinance book as Chapter 155 (Zoning), Appendix A, section 22-27.3 (SED-1, Special Environmental District).

**At the hearing on May 5, the Board of Commissioners will consider whether to retain and enforce the zoning ordinance, modify the ordinance, or repeal the protective buffer provision of the ordinance and remove county protections for Buxton Woods.**

The SED-1 zoning ordinance is available at: <https://www.darenc.gov/departments/planning/zoning-regulations-maps/code-of-ordinances>. The last paragraph reads:

### ***ZONING AMENDMENT - BUXTON WOODS***

*This zoning amendment was adopted by the Dare County Board of Commissioners on September 19, 1988.*

*All land located between the center line of the intersection of NC 12 and Billy Mitchell Airport Road, and the center line of the intersection of NC 12 and Cape Hatteras Lighthouse Road, for a distance of ½ mile north (meg. 1988) from an SED-1 District shall be subject to the following additional requirements:*

*Dwelling density within the **zone of influence** of the SED Ordinance: No multi-family development, townhouses, or condominium project located within ½ mile of any SED-1 zoning district shall exceed a dwelling density of three single family units (whether contained under one or more roofs) per acre or usable land area. Usable land shall be that land defined as "suitable" for septic tank/nitrification field wastewater disposal by the U.S. Department of Agriculture/Soil Conservation Service Soil Survey for Dare County and the Dare County Board of Health.*

*Vegetation Removal: All subdivision, and all development projects within ½ mile of an SED-1 zoning district which are subject to site plan review, shall conform to the land clearing provisions of the SED Zoning District, Section 22-27.3 (e) (1) - Site Alteration.*

## Public Comments: Where Do I Start?

Here is some information about the effects on Buxton Woods of removing the Zone of Influence zoning. Tell the Dare County Commissioners what matters to you, and why!

Issue	Why It Might Matter to You
<p><b>Water quality:</b> A large freshwater aquifer under Buxton Woods provides household water for much of Hatteras Island. Buxton Woods is a major source of groundwater recharge for that reservoir, and its western part surrounds the county's well field on the island.</p>	<p><i>I get my household water from the freshwater reservoir under Buxton Woods. I worry that allowing denser development in the Zone of Influence will increase septic loads and surface pollution, which will stress and pollute the groundwater. I am worried about pollution harming water quality in wetlands, the ocean, and the sound.</i></p>
<p><b>Recreation:</b> Taking away protections for Buxton Woods could destroy a rare maritime forest ecosystem and the recreational activities that people can enjoy there.</p>	<p><i>I love to hike and explore in the maritime forest. There is little maritime forest left to enjoy, and we should preserve what we have.</i></p>
<p><b>Denser Development and Induced Traffic:</b> Allowing denser development within the Zone of Influence will encourage more traffic and development.</p>	<p><i>Allowing dense development in the Zone of Influence will increase traffic and make it harder for me to get around my community. It will change the character of the area where I live. More traffic and development in this area will reduce the quality of life for those who live here.</i></p>
<p><b>Maritime Forest:</b> Buxton Woods is a part of the NC Coastal Reserve and a NC Designated Nature Preserve. It contains the largest remaining contiguous tract of Maritime Evergreen Forest on the entire Atlantic coast, and the only dogwood subtype maritime shrub swamp community in the world. It contains pristine interdune ponds and wetlands known as sedges. Removing the Zone of Influence protections will harm all of these.</p>	<p><i>As a community, we fought hard in the 1980s to protect this land, with its combination of rare ecosystems. It serves as an outdoor laboratory where scientists, students, and the public can learn about processes and functions that shape and sustain the coastal area. The continued vitality of Buxton Woods depends on the state, the national park system, and the county all doing their share to protect their portions of the area.</i></p>
<p><b>Coastal Resources:</b> Taking away protections for Buxton Woods by removing the Zone of Influence protections will harm wetlands, coastal wetlands, estuarine waters, wildlife habitat, and more.</p>	<p><i>I value the resilience and ecological benefits of wetlands, estuaries, and other coastal resources that depend on Buxton Woods, and I am concerned that allowing dense development within the Zone of Influence will impact them negatively.</i></p>
<p><b>Wildlife:</b> Taking away county protection for Buxton Woods will harm a rare maritime forest and the species that depend on it. It is home to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• rare plants, i.e., winged seedbox, gulfcoast spikerush, savannah nutrush, dwarf palmetto;</li> <li>• hundreds of resident and migratory bird species, i.e., osprey, eagles, peregrine falcon, indigo bunting, ducks, warblers, etc.;</li> <li>• rare butterflies and moths (Giant swallowtail, northern hairstreak, messaline underwing);</li> <li>• many other animals, i.e., dusky salamander, eastern narrow-mouth toad, gray fox, mink, river otter, marsh rabbit, and white-tailed deer.</li> </ul>	<p><i>I value wildlife and the opportunity to view it.</i></p> <p><i>I like to hunt and fish, and this area is part of the NC Game Lands program. Allowing dense development outside Buxton Woods will reduce wildlife within it.</i></p> <p><i>I am an avid birder, and the maritime forest is home to numerous species.</i></p> <p><i>I am engaged in scientific research that depends on the Reserve.</i></p> <p><i>I am concerned that allowing denser development in the Zone of Influence will harm the wildlife that I value that depends on Buxton Woods.</i></p>