

## **“Buy It, Protect It” Said Nature Conservancy Speaker**

“Here’s the rare spot. Buy it, protect it,” said Protection Specialist Hervey McIver of Nature Conservancy’s strategy.

McIver spoke at PenderWatch & Conservancy’s monthly board meeting this past Wednesday, October 11<sup>th</sup> at the Hampstead Library.

“We’ve gotten pretty good at protecting things on the land. For example, said McIver of the strategy, The Nature Conservancy closed two weeks ago with International Paper on 77,000 acres in an interior area of North Carolina. In Pender County they made a large purchase in 2002 and are working to connect the natural areas.

The Nature Conservancy’s mission is “to preserve plant, animal and the natural community that represents the diversity of life on Earth, protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.”

Recently the group has begun to focus on waterways, estuaries and oceans. McIver referred to concentrated targets in what they call the Onslow Bight Landscape which includes Stump Sound and nearby coastal areas. .” So far they have leveraged over 35 million in funding and protected 42,200 acres of habitat.

Initiated in 2002, a project to facilitate conservation in the area has brought together 13 federal and state agencies and NGOs, including Camp LeJeune to create the Onslow Bight Conservation Forum.

The Forum’s mission is to “provide for open discussion among the participants concerning the long term conservation and enhancement of biological diversity and ecosystem sustainability throughout the Onslow Bight Landscape compatible with the land use, conservation and management objectives of the participating organizations and agencies.

“We’re really dealing with just what’s left,” McIver said of the North Carolina wilderness that was present when Europeans began to settle here 300 years ago. He showed a map of pre-settlement vegetation and discussed animal species that are extinct because the vegetation that they needed to survive no longer exists. For instance, canebrake was needed for the extinct Bachman’s warbler to survive. When the canebrake went, so did the bird species.

McIver called southeast North Carolina a “biological hotspot” with numerous endemic and rare species. An endemic species is highly localized, he explained. For instance there is the grass like golden sedge, a federally endangered plant that thrives only in the Maple Hill area.

In The Nature Conservancy’s mission to protect habitat it will not only conserve but also restore land into suitable habitat, especially for rare, endangered, and endemic species.

“In this day and age you can’t just let nature take its course,” said McIver. “Recovery of endangered species is one of our goals.”

The Nature Conservancy both makes purchases and facilitates purchases by the state and sometimes other government agencies and land trusts for conservation purposes. Of the areas that The Nature Conservancy manages, some are kept as pure preserves and while others are open to casual public use. However, the group does not focus their resources in the way a state park would by having a small museum and ranger station, explained McIver. That’s a possibility someday, but the focus now is to develop “a conservation vision for the region.”

*For further information on PenderWatch or to become a member call 270-3839, or look for the PenderWatch booth at Autumn at Topsail this weekend.*