



MINUTES
October 16, 2025
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission Meeting
Raleigh, North Carolina

Chairman Mark Craig called the October 16, 2025, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. in the Commission Room at the agency’s headquarters in Raleigh. Craig reminded everyone that the meeting is being audio streamed live and will be available at www.newildlife.gov.

Commissioner Monty Crump led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner David Hoyle gave the invocation.

ROLL CALL

Margo Minkler, Commission Liaison, called the roll. Hayden Rogers, John Coley, JC Cole, John Alexander, and Mike Alford were absent.

COMMISSIONER ATTENDANCE

Mark Craig	Tommy Fonville	Ray Clifton	Tom Haislip
Landon Zimmer	Tom Berry	Steve Windham	Joe Budd
David Hoyle	Brad Stanback	Monty Crump	Reid Smith
Wes Seegars	Jim Ruffin	John Stone	Justin Boyd

VISITORS

Family of Mr. Walter Cross

MANDATORY ETHICS INQUIRY

Chairman Craig advised the Commission of the mandatory ethics inquiry as mandated in NCGS §138A-15.

NOTICES OF COMMISSION APPOINTMENTS – Received Notices of Appointments by Governor Josh Stein of Hayden A. Rogers, for a term ending June 30, 2029; J. Carlton Cole (District 1), Stephen L. Windham (District 4), and James M. Ruffin (District 7), for terms ending June 30, 2031. (**EXHIBITS A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4**); Appointments by Senate President Pro Tempore Phil Berger of Mark R. Craig, Thomas A. Berry, John M. Alexander, Landon Zimmer, and Joseph R. Budd for terms ending June 30, 2027 (**EXHIBITS A-5, A-6, A-7, A-8, A-9 Appointments Bill**); Appointments by House Speaker Destin Hall of John A. Stone, John T. Coley IV, Vernon Ray Clifton, Jr., Thomas L. Fonville, and Reid M. Smith for terms ending June 30, 2027 (**EXHIBITS A-10, A-11, A-12, A-13, A-14 Appointments Bill**); and Appointment by Commissioner of Agriculture Steve Troxler of Justin D. Boyd for a term ending June 30, 2027 (**EXHIBIT A-15**) – *Margo Minkler*

EXHIBITS A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, A-7, A-8, A-9, A-10, A-11, A-12, A-13, A-14 and A-15 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

RECEIVE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION REVIEW OF 2025 STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTEREST FOR COMMISSIONER JUSTIN D. BOYD - Pursuant to NCGS §138A-15(c), *Margo Minkler, Ethics Liaison*, read into the minutes relevant portions of the evaluations by the N.C. Ethics Commission of the 2025 Statement of Economic Interest for Justin D. Boyd, Commissioner of Agriculture Steve Troxler Appointee – *Margo Minkler*

MINUTES OF JULY 24, 2025, MEETING

On a motion by *David Hoyle* and second by *Steve Windham*, the Minutes of the July 24, 2025, meeting were approved as presented in **EXHIBIT B**.

EXHIBIT B is incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

ADMINISTRATION

FINANCIAL STATUS REPORT – *Jason Cottle, Chief Financial Officer*, presented a status report in **EXHIBIT C** on the Wildlife Resources Commission General Fund, Capital Improvement Fund, and the Endowment Fund.

EXHIBIT C is incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

LAWRENCE G. DIEDRICK SMALL GAME AWARD – *Brad Howard, Wildlife Management Division Chief* presented the 2025 Lawrence G. Diedrick Small Game Award posthumously to the Family of Mr. Walter Cross.

COMMITTEE MEETING REPORTS

Boating Safety Committee Report – October 15, 2025 – *Ray Clifton, Vice Chair*, reported the Boating Safety Committee met on October 15, 2025. *Will Casola, Policy Analyst*, presented proposed permanent rulemaking notice of text for the General Provisions of the Local Water Safety Regulations. Next, *Betsy Haywood, No Wake Zone Coordinator*, walked the committee through proposed permanent rulemaking notice of text for Beaufort, Dare, Rowan, and Pitt counties, as well as the Town of Nags Head. *Major Chad Arnold, Law Enforcement Division*, then briefed the committee on upcoming rulemaking for a safety zone near the NC Hwy 28 Bridge on the Little Tennessee River. The committee endorsed the proposed permanent rulemaking items, which were presented as exhibits for consideration later in the meeting. There being no further business, the committee adjourned.

Finance, Audit and Compliance Committee Report – October 15, 2025 – *Monty Crump, Chair*, reported the Finance, Audit and Compliance Committee met on October 15, 2025. *Elizabeth Davis, Internal Audit Director*, gave an update on internal audit engagements, reporting on progress, completed projects, and observation statuses. An administrative operations update was also provided and included the introduction of *Sanjay Nair, Internal Auditor I*. Additionally, key performance measures for the internal audit function were presented to the committee for feedback. With no concerns identified, these measures will be used to assess the function going forward, and results will be reported routinely to the committee. Finally, the results of the Council of Internal Audit required Self-Assessment Maturity Model were presented and indicated that the internal audit function is in compliance with required standards. *Jason Cottle, Chief Financial Officer*, presented a comparison between the current and prior fiscal years, highlighting the revenue and expenditure activity in both the general fund and capital improvement funds. An update was presented as to the current fund balance and asset allocation of the agency's Endowment Fund, noting the recent approval from the Office of State Budget and Management of the agency's request to increase the budget of the Setzer Hatchery renovation project in response to revised construction estimates. Lastly, the topic of increasing license fees in response to the CPI-U increase was introduced, noting the strict timeline necessary to meet an implementation date of July 1, 2026. Revenue collections were compared to initial projections, highlighting the potential impact of buyer resistance. Staff will bring this topic back before the board at the December meeting with updated data and analyses. There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Big Game Committee Report – October 15, 2025 – *David Hoyle, Chair* reported the Big Game Committee met on October 15, 2025. North Carolina State University students presented the results from the Urban Deer Study that has just finished up. The students presented various aspects of the study with topics ranging from population estimates, deer survival and mortality, population dynamics, and some interesting findings related to the human component of deer management. The information from this study will inform the agency on many levels when it comes to our management of deer, especially in a highly developing landscape. Staff gave a quick update on the status of the eastern bear population estimate study, which is in the final stage of analysis and will be used along with our western estimate to help inform the development of the next Bear Management Plan which is scheduled for completion late next year. Having no further business, the committee adjourned.

Small Game Committee Report – October 15, 2025 – *Jim Ruffin, Chair*, reported the Small Game Committee met on October 15, 2025. *John Isenhour, Wildlife Habitat Coordinator* from the Wildlife Management Division, gave an overview of the many Private Lands Programs and Activities available for private landowners. Then he discussed the recent survey of private landowners who had worked cooperatively with Agency staff. The survey identified both opportunities and barriers to private land habitat work and can assist in informing efforts on the ground and in our marketing and outreach. Next *Fairley Mahlum, Director of Communications, Marketing, and Digital Engagement* discussed how some information from the survey and input from agency staff will be used to help development of the webpage to aid the public in finding all these opportunities that are available. Next *Brandon Minor, Northern Piedmont Forestry Manager* from the Land and Water Access Division, gave an excellent update and overview of the ongoing management in the Caswell Small Game Focal Area. Management activities are currently on schedule; there are more timber harvests planned for early 2026 and the burn acres continue to increase. Finally, *Chris Dawes, Piedmont Eco-Region Supervisor*, presented the management efforts at Tillery Game Lands and the opportunities that will continue for those acres in the future. Having no further business, the committee adjourned.

Land Acquisition and Property Committee – October 15, 2025 – *Tom Berry, Chair*, reported the Land Acquisition and Property Committee met on October 15, 2025. The Committee reviewed and approved twelve Phase I land acquisition proposals. The Committee also reviewed and recommended approval for four Phase II land acquisition proposals. The Committee reviewed and recommended denial of one utility easement request at Sandhills Game Land. The Phase II acquisition proposals and easement request were voted on later in the meeting. Having no further business, the committee adjourned.

Executive Committee – October 15, 2025 – *Mark Craig, Chair*, reported the Executive Committee met on October 15, 2025 and received a presentation on the draft 2026–2035 NCWRC Strategic Plan, which builds on the current framework and outlines revised goals and strategies for the next 10 years. Committee members discussed the proposed revisions with consensus to move the revised Plan to the full Commission for consideration. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Committee of the Whole – October 15, 2025 – *Mark Craig, Chair*, reported the Committee of the Whole met on October 15, 2025 and started with presentations on the public comments received during the 2026–2027 annual rulemaking cycle for Inland Fisheries, Land and Water Access, and Wildlife Management rules. A summary of public comments received on changes to the Wildlife Captivity and Rehabilitation rules were also shared. The committee received an update on the Conservation Access Pass. After a robust discussion, no action was taken, and further consideration will be given at a future meeting. The proposed 2026 Wildlife Resources Commission meeting schedule was also shared and was presented later in the meeting for consideration. There being no further business, the committee adjourned.

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT – NCWRC Law Enforcement Division – Forging the Future – *Darby Enoch & Garrett Gooch, Training Director and Assistant Training Director*, gave a presentation highlighting the most recent Law Enforcement Basic Academy that graduated in August 2025. The presentation reviewed the traditional Basic Law Enforcement Training program, the Accelerated Lateral Transfer program, and the combined Conservation Law Enforcement-

focused program. It outlined the overall expectations and standards required of North Carolina Wildlife Officer recruits, emphasizing a “teammate-first” mentality, officer health and wellness, and the development of strong communication skills. The presenters also highlighted the importance of understanding the “why” behind enforcement actions and connecting that understanding to the agency’s broader mission. Finally, they stressed the importance of implementing enforcement with empathy and a servant-leadership mindset to build trust and positive relationships within the communities they serve.

2026 WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION MEETING SCHEDULE – On a motion by Monty Crump and a second by David Hoyle, the Commission approved the proposed 2026 Wildlife Resources Commission meeting schedule presented in **EXHIBIT D**.

EXHIBIT D is incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

LAND ACQUISITIONS AND PROPERTY MATTERS

Phase II Land Acquisition – On a motion by Tom Berry and a second by Brad Stanback, the Commission approved to proceed with acquisition of the following properties presented in **EXHIBITS E-1, E-2, E-3, and E-4** by *Ben Solomon, Land and Water Access Division Assistant Chief and Land Acquisition Manager*

- Cardinal Drive Tracts – Montgomery County (**EXHIBIT E-1**)
- Gentry Tract – McDowell County (**EXHIBIT E-2**)
- Shutt Property – Richmond County (**EXHIBIT E-3**)
- Washburn-Spears Property – Franklin County (**EXHIBIT E-4**)

EXHIBITS E-1, E-2, E-3, and E-4 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

Other Property Matters – On a motion by Tom Haislip and a second by Jim Ruffin, the Commission denied the Easement request from Lumbee River Electric Membership Corporation for a transmission line right of way on Sandhills Game Land in Scotland County presented in **EXHIBIT F**.

EXHIBIT F is incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

WATER SAFETY RULEMAKING

Permanent Rulemaking Notice of Text – 15A NCAC 10F .0301 General Provisions – On a motion by Wes Seegars and a second by Landon Zimmer, the Commission approved publishing the Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for proposed amendment to clarify text in 15A NCAC 10F .0301 presented in **EXHIBIT G** by *Will Casola, Policy Analyst*

EXHIBIT G is incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

On a motion by Ray Clifton and second by Jim Ruffin, the Commission approved the following water safety rules presented in **EXHIBITS H, I, J, K and L** by *Betsy Haywood, Water Safety Rules Coordinator*:

Permanent Rulemaking Notice of Text 15A NCAC 10F .0303 Beaufort County – The Commission approved publishing the Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for proposed amendments to 15A NCAC 10F .0303 (**EXHIBIT H**)

Permanent Rulemaking Notice of Text 15A NCAC 10F .0310 Dare County – The Commission approved publishing the Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for proposed amendments to 15A NCAC 10F .0310 (**EXHIBIT I**)

Permanent Rulemaking Notice of Text – 15A NCAC 10F .0329 Rowan County – The Commission approved publishing the Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for proposed amendments to 15A NCAC 10F .0329 (**EXHIBIT J**)

Permanent Rulemaking Notice of Text 15A NCAC 10F .0354 Pitt County – The Commission approved publishing Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for proposed amendments to 15A NCAC 10F .0354 (**EXHIBIT K**)

Permanent Rulemaking Proposed Repeal of 15A NCAC 10F .0368 Town of Nags Head – The Commission approved publishing Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for proposed repeal of 15A NCAC 10F .0368 (**EXHIBIT L**)

EXHIBITS H, I, J, K, and L are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

RULEMAKING

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 2026-2027 Annual Cycle Inland Fisheries Rules – On a motion by Steve Windham and a second by John Stone, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT M-2** and adopted amendments to Inland Fisheries rules presented in **EXHIBIT M-1** by *Corey Oakley, Inland Fisheries Division Chief*.

EXHIBITS M-1 and M-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 2026-2027 Annual Cycle Land and Water Access Rules – On a motion by Monty Crump and a second by Wes Seegars, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT N-2** and adopted amendments to Land and Water Access rules presented in **EXHIBIT N-1** by *Daron Barnes, Land and Water Access Division Chief*.

EXHIBITS N-1 and N-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 2026-2027 Annual Cycle Wildlife Management Rules – On a motion by Ray Clifton and a second by Landon Zimmer, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT O-2** and adopted amendments to Wildlife Management rules presented in **EXHIBIT O-1** by *Brad Howard, Wildlife Management Division Chief*.

EXHIBITS O-1 and O-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 10H .1400 Wildlife Captivity and Rehabilitation – On a motion by Steve Windham and a second by David Hoyle, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT P-2** and adopted amendments to 10H .1401 through .1406 presented in **EXHIBIT P-1** by *Brad Howard*.

EXHIBITS P-1 and P-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN – Chairman Craig began by echoing the remarks of the previous Chairman and extended his appreciation to all committees for their continued hard work. He noted that the efficiency and smooth pace of the meeting were a direct result of the substantial preparation and efforts carried out behind the scenes. Special thanks were extended to the staff, committee chairs, and all committee members for their dedication and commitment. The Chairman also reminded everyone that this is an exciting time of year with the start of hunting season. He emphasized the importance of mentoring the next generation of hunters, noting that only about five percent of the population hunts. He encouraged all hunters to take the opportunity to introduce new individuals, especially youth, family members, and friends. He pointed out that access to land and a lack of mentorship are often barriers for newcomers, and challenged hunters across North Carolina to help overcome those barriers by taking someone new into the field this season. The Chairman concluded by calling on Commissioner Wes Seegars.

Rename Boating Access Area Motion – On a motion by Wes Seegars and a second by Tommy Fonville, the Commission approved a proposal to pursue renaming a Boating Access Area in Hyde County in honor of former Commissioner Kelly Davis, contingent upon consultation with Ms. Davis to determine the preferred location.

COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – Director Briggs expressed condolences for the passing of Clay Allen, Technician at the Suggs Mill Pond Depot, and asked that his family be kept in everyone's thoughts. He recognized the upcoming retirement of Colonel Meyer, thanking him for his years of dedicated leadership and service. He also reported strong interest in the first permit hunt draw at the newly acquired Willow Point Saltwater Impoundment in Hyde County, with 284 applications for 82 permits. He concluded by thanking the Commissioners and staff for their continued support and hard work.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the WRC meeting was adjourned at 10:17 a.m.
All exhibits are incorporated into the official record of this meeting by reference and are filed with the minutes.



Mark Craig, Chairman

12-04-2025

Date



Kyle Briggs, Executive Director

12-04-2025

Date