



MINUTES
February 6, 2025
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission Meeting
Raleigh, North Carolina

Chairman Monty Crump called the February 6, 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. Crump reminded everyone that the meeting is being audio streamed live and will be available at www.ncwildlife.gov.

Commissioner Tom Haislip led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Tom Berry gave the Invocation.

ROLL CALL

Margo Minkler, *Commission Liaison*, called the roll. Thomas Fonville, Ray Clifton, Hayden Rogers, Reid Smith, and J.C. Cole were absent.

COMMISSIONER ATTENDANCE

Monty Crump	Wes Seegars	Jim Ruffin	Landon Zimmer
Mark Craig	John Alexander	John Stone	Tom Haislip
David Hoyle	Tom Berry	Kelly Davis	Mike Alford
John Coley	Brad Stanback	Steve Windham	Joe Budd

MANDATORY ETHICS INQUIRY

Chairman Crump advised the Commission of the mandatory ethics inquiry as mandated in NCGS §138A-15. Commissioner Zimmer recused himself from discussion and action on **EXHIBIT D-2**.

MINUTES OF DECEMBER 5, 2024 MEETING

On a motion by David Hoyle and second by Wes Seegars, the Minutes of the December 5, 2024 meeting was approved as presented in **EXHIBIT A**.

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

ADMINISTRATION

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

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

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

2024 THOMAS L. QUAY WILDLIFE DIVERSITY AWARD PRESENTATION – Executive Director Kyle Briggs presented the 2024 Thomas L. Quay Wildlife Diversity Award to Dr. Wilson Laney.

COMMITTEE MEETING REPORTS

Land Acquisition and Property Committee Report – February 5, 2025 – *Tom Berry, Chair*, reported that the Land Acquisition and Property Committee met on February 5, 2025. The Committee began by reviewing the 2026-2027 Land and Water Access rule proposals. The Committee also reviewed and approved three Phase I land acquisition proposals, two Phase II land acquisition proposals, and two other property matters. Chairman Berry concluded by reminding the Committee of two important ongoing projects in the mountain region that would establish new game lands: the Turkey Ridge-Callaway Mountain project and the Hickorynut Mountain project. Neither project would be possible without our valued conservation partners. With no additional topics, the meeting was adjourned.

Fisheries Committee Report – February 5, 2025 – *John Stone, Chair* reported the Fisheries Committee met on February 5, 2025. *Christian Waters, Inland Fisheries Division Chief*, presented the 2026-2027 Fishing Rule Proposals, which addressed fishing in impoundments that are Hatchery Supported Trout Waters, boundary changes to Public Mountain Trout Waters, Largemouth Bass, White Bass, no fishing during spawning season in the King's Bridge slough, and prohibiting the transport and possession of golden mussels. *Seth Mycko, District 5 Fisheries Biologist*, discussed how Piedmont municipal lakes are hidden gems for great Largemouth Bass fishing. He outlined Commission fisheries management activities such as conducting fish surveys and installing fish habitat, including artificial structures and native aquatic vegetation. He also highlighted the ease of access and amenities that contribute to a great fishing experience for any angler. Christian Waters presented on the N.C. Division of Marine Fisheries (NCDMF) proclamation to close the Spotted Seatrout season in coastal and joint fishing waters until June 15,

2025, due to recent cold stun natural mortality events. After discussing potential options for Commission action, the committee voted unanimously for staff to prepare a temporary rule to close the harvest season for Spotted Seatrout in inland fishing waters and joint fishing waters (when taken by hook and line) until June 15. Christian Waters also discussed how NCDMF is reviewing Striped Bass data through 2024 for the Neuse and Tar River basins to determine if the populations are self-sustaining and what effect the gill net closure above the ferry line has had. Staff will provide future updates to the committee. *Corey Oakley, Inland Fisheries Assistant Chief*, discussed restoration efforts following Hurricane Helene at both Armstrong and Bobby N. Setzer State Fish Hatcheries. Due to fish loss at Armstrong, 2025 trout stockings will need to be reduced by 20%. Corey also mentioned that the *Better Fishing with 2 Bald Biologists* podcast will now include video content placed on the agency's YouTube channel and used for other marketing and communication efforts. With no additional topics, the meeting was adjourned.

Big Game Committee Report – February 5, 2025 – *David Hoyle, Chair*, reported that the Big Game Committee had met on February 5, 2025. *Brad Howard, Wildlife Management Division Chief*, shared the Wildlife Management Division's Big Game Rule Proposals for the upcoming rule cycle. Most proposals were aimed at transitioning into a CWD management phase in the agency's CWD areas for the 2026 deer season. Establishing these rules is expected to help address CWD on the landscape while maintaining hunter support in these areas. In more positive news regarding deer, staff recommended moving to a full-season either-sex harvest in six western deer season counties and the final three counties of the northwestern deer season. These changes highlight the continued improvement in deer numbers on private lands in the west. Next, *Miranda Turner, Wildlife Health Biologist*, provided an update on the status of CWD in the state. Eight new positive deer were detected this year, but all were within the current positive counties, so there were no surprises. Finally, *Colleen Olfenbittel, Game Mammal and Surveys Unit Supervisor*, shared preliminary harvest numbers for the past deer and bear seasons. It was a strong year for both species, with the second-highest deer harvest on record and another record harvest for bears. Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Finance, Audit and Compliance Committee Report – February 5, 2025 – *Landon Zimmer, Chair* reported the Finance, Audit & Compliance Committee met on February 5, 2025. *Elizabeth Davis, Internal Audit Director*, presented a thorough overview of the Internal Audit Strategic Plan, detailing its development process as well as current goals. The committee was updated on the status of all current engagements and their anticipated completion timeline, noting that the addition of a new internal audit position is currently underway. Lastly, an action plan update was provided to the committee, outlining the timeline for implementing corrective actions for items identified during previous internal audit reviews. *Jason Cottle, Chief Financial Officer*, presented the committee with a comparison of current and prior-year expenditure and revenue figures in both the general and capital improvement funds, highlighting any variances in excess of one million dollars. An update was provided on the current balance of the agency's endowment fund and its asset allocation. The committee will continue to monitor the fund's performance closely and determine if any adjustments need to be made to the current allocation. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Committee of The Whole Report – February 5, 2025 – *Monty Crump, Chair* reported the Committee of the Whole met on February 5, 2025. *Brad Howard* presented rule proposals for changes to the spring gray squirrel season and for establishing biologically sensitive time periods for the 2026-2027 annual rule cycle. Next, *Betsy Haywood, Water Safety Rules Coordinator*, reviewed the proposed rule and public comments received regarding changes to the water safety rules for White Lake in Bladen County. Following that, *Carrie Ruhlman, Rulemaking Coordinator*, reviewed the proposed rule and public comments received for a temporary rule for vessel liveries on Lake Norman in Catawba, Iredell, Lincoln, and Mecklenburg Counties. There being no further business, the committee adjourned.

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT – The History and Status of Canada Geese in North Carolina – *Doug Howell, Migratory Game Bird Coordinator*, presented a 125-year history of two North Carolina Goose Populations. Atlantic Population Canada geese, who breed in arctic Canada, underwent significant declines beginning in 1960 through 1992, when the season was closed in the Atlantic Flyway for 15 years. This decline spurred a goose stocking program from 1983-1988 to augment declining goose hunting opportunities. Several thousand problem geese from as far north as Ontario, CA were transported to NC where they were released in the Coastal Plain and Piedmont. This formed the foundation of today's Resident Goose Population. Resident goose numbers grew significantly over the next several decades and are currently slightly above WRC's management goal, but stable, as monitored by goose banding.

LAND ACQUISITION AND PROPERTY MATTERS

Phase II Land Acquisition – On a motion by Tom Berry and second by Kelly Davis, the Commission approved to proceed with the acquisitions of the following properties presented in **(EXHIBITS C-1, C-2)** by *Ben Solomon, Assistant Chief and Land Acquisition Manager*

- Ransom Road Tracts – Haywood County **(C-1)**
- Bell Tract – Pender County **(C-2)**

EXHIBITS C-1, C-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

Other Property Matters – On a motion by Mike Alford and a second by Jim Ruffin, the Commission approved the request for ingress, egress and utilities easement on Sandhills Game Land presented in **(EXHIBIT D-1)** by *Ben Solomon*

- Sandhills Game Land – Request for ingress, egress and utilities easement on Sandhills Game Land **(D-1)**

With Commissioner Landon Zimmer recused, and on a motion by Tom Berry and second by Steve Windham, the Commission approved the NC DOT request for permanent right of way easement, and a temporary construction easement along Highway 561 at Shocco Creek Game Land presented in **(EXHIBIT D-2)** by *Ben Solomon*

- Shocco Creek Game Land – NC DOT requests a permanent right of way easement, and a temporary construction easement along Highway 561 at Shocco Creek Game Land **(D-2)**

EXHIBITS D-1, D-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 15A NCAC 10F .0304 Bladen County – On a motion by Steve Windham and a second by Joe Budd, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **(EXHIBIT E-1)** and adopted proposed changes within the Restricted Area at White Lake in Bladen County presented in **(EXHIBIT E-2)** by *Betsy Haywood, Water Safety Rules Coordinator*

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

Temporary Rulemaking – 15A NCAC 10F .0307 – Lake Norman Vessel Liveries – On a motion by David Hoyle and a second by John Alexander, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **(EXHIBIT F-1)** and adopted proposed vessel livery requirements on Lake Norman presented in **(EXHIBIT F-2)** by *Carrie Ruhlman, Rulemaking Coordinator*

EXHIBITS F-1, F-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting

Temporary Rulemaking Notice of Text – 15A NCAC 10C .0325 Sea Trout – On a motion by John Stone and second by Steve Windham, the Commission approved publishing the Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for a temporary closure of the sea trout harvest season in inland waters and for hook-and-line in joint fishing waters **(EXHIBIT G)** by *Christian Waters, Inland Fisheries Division Chief*


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


COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN – Chairman Crump opened his comments by recognizing the agency's staff for their outstanding work in managing natural resources based on science and biology. He emphasized their decades-long commitment, which has led to significant conservation successes, sometimes even presenting new challenges in recovery efforts. Additionally, he highlighted the swift efforts of staff in Western North Carolina to restore the hatchery-supported trout program, acknowledging its vital economic impact on the region. The Chairman also welcomed the Executive Director to his first meeting in the role, noting that he has already been deeply engaged in legislative matters and key initiatives. He commended the Executive Director's institutional knowledge, experience, and dedication, which have enabled him to make a strong start. In closing, Chairman Crump provided an update on the agency's transition into the new Samarcand Wildlife Law Enforcement building, which should be fully operational by the end of the week. He mentioned plans to coordinate a ribbon-cutting event for the Commissioners, including a tour and luncheon, to showcase the completed facility.

COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – Executive Director Briggs began by expressing gratitude to the Commissioners for their confidence in him and for appointing him to the position. He noted that January had passed quickly and appreciated the calls and advice he had received. He also extended his thanks to agency staff, particularly Deputy Directors Hocutt and McRae, for their support in helping him transition into the role. He took the opportunity to announce that Christian Waters would be joining the executive team as Chief Deputy Director, beginning Monday. He expressed enthusiasm for the experience and contributions Christian would bring to the agency as they continue advancing conservation efforts.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the WRC webinar meeting was adjourned at 10:12 a.m. All exhibits are incorporated into the official record of this meeting by reference and are filed with the minutes.

	04/17/2025
Monty Crump, Chairman	Date

	04/17/2025
Kyle Briggs, Executive Director	Date