



MINUTES
June 5, 2025

N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission Meeting
Raleigh, North Carolina

Chairman Monty Crump called the June 5, 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. Chairman Crump reminded everyone that the meeting is being audio streamed live and will be available at www.ncwildlife.gov.

Commissioner Wes Seegars led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner John Alexander gave the invocation.

ROLL CALL

Margo Minkler, *Commission Liaison*, called the roll. Mike Alford, Joe Budd, David Hoyle, and Hayden Rogers were absent.

COMMISSIONER ATTENDANCE

Monty Crump	Thomas Fonville	Ray Clifton	John Stone	Reid Smith
Mark Craig	Tom Berry	Kelly Davis	John Alexander	
John Coley	Brad Stanback	Steve Windham	Tom Haislip	
Wes Seegars	Jim Ruffin	Landon Zimmer	JC Cole	

MANDATORY ETHICS INQUIRY

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

MINUTES OF APRIL 17, 2025 MEETING

On a motion by Jim Ruffin and second by Wes Seegars, the Minutes of the April 17, 2025 meeting were 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.

COMMITTEE MEETING REPORTS

Habitat, Nongame, and Endangered Species Committee Report – June 4, 2025 – Kelly Davis, Chair, reported the Committee met on June 4, 2025. *Kacy Cook, Coastal Waterbird Biologist*, began the meeting with a presentation on the Eastern Black Rail in North Carolina, including background on the species' distribution, abundance, threats, and conservation efforts. *Dr. Sara Schweitzer, Wildlife Management Division Assistant Chief*, followed with a summary of the Black Rail Conservation Plan. After brief discussion, the Committee voted to approve releasing the Plan for a 30-day public comment period. Next, *Dr. Schweitzer* presented nominations for membership to the Nongame Wildlife Advisory Committee (NWAC). The Committee endorsed the staff recommendation, which was presented later in the meeting. *Shannon Deaton, Habitat Conservation Division Chief*, then provided an update on the 2025 Thomas L. Quay Wildlife Diversity Award cycle. The request for nominations has been re-posted through June 27. *Shannon* also provided an update on the 2025 Draft State Wildlife Action Plan's 10-year revision. Public comments can be submitted through the agency website until July 5, and Committee members are invited to review. A Commission endorsement of the Plan will be requested before it is submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for final approval. *Shannon* also shared a summary of the agency's efforts to assist with debris removal in western rivers and streams following Hurricane Helene. Staff developed a one-page fact sheet of Best Management Practices and created maps of High-Quality Habitat stream reaches for each impacted county in response to partner and public requests. *Rachael Hoch, Inland Fisheries Division Assistant Chief*, provided a presentation on six aquatic species recommended for state-listing review by NWAC's Scientific Council. Staff will evaluate these species using the NC Status Assessment Tool, with proposed listing statuses expected to be presented to the Committee in early 2026. Finally, *Brena Jones, Central Region Aquatic Wildlife Diversity Coordinator*, gave a presentation on the Robust Redhorse in the Yadkin-Pee Dee River and highlighted ongoing conservation efforts aimed at increasing population resiliency. There being no further business, the Committee adjourned.

Small Game and Wild Turkey Committee Report – June 4, 2025 – *Jim Ruffin, Chair*, reported the Committee met on Wednesday, June 4, 2025. *Brad Howard, Wildlife Management Division Chief*, opened the meeting by notifying the Committee that the annual Lawrence Deidrick Small Game Award nomination window is now open and will close July 9. Staff will share nominations with the Committee via email shortly thereafter. Presentations began with *Hannah Plumpton, Upland Game Bird Biologist*, giving a quick summary of the 2025 turkey harvest. Turkey harvest was the 4th highest on record and trends across the state remain steady. Next, *Chris Kreh, Wildlife Management Division Assistant Chief*, updated the committee on fox squirrels. Fox Squirrel populations appear to be steady and range expansion continues statewide. Some questions exist regarding the Sandhills Game Land and hunting pressure on fox squirrels. Staff recommended introducing a point-of-sale permit for fox squirrel hunting on the Sandhills Game Lands to gather additional data on hunting pressure and this will be included in the Game Land Rules package. Next *Daron Barnes, Land and Water Access Division Chief*, updated the Committee on the progress in habitat development on the Caswell Small Game Focal Area. Timber thinning and prescribed burning continue as planned and the early successional habitat is developing well. Finally, the Committee discussed the ongoing efforts of the Quail Restoration Working Group and potential next steps. After a lively discussion the Committee reached the end of the allotted time, and the meeting was adjourned.

Finance, Audit, and Compliance Committee Report – June 4, 2025 – *Landon Zimmer, Chair*, reported the Committee met on Wednesday, June 4, 2025. *Elizabeth Davis, Internal Audit Director*, presented the 2025 updated WRC Internal Audit Charter to the Committee. Key updates to the charter were discussed, and the Committee voted to approve the charter. The results of the Annual Risk Assessment were presented and noted to have informed the development of the Fiscal Year 2026 Audit Plan. The plan was subsequently presented and the Committee voted to approve the plan. An update was given on current engagements and administrative operations. *Jason Cottle, Chief Financial Officer*, presented an overview of year-to-date revenues and expenditures in both our general and capital improvement funds, as compared to the prior fiscal year. An update was provided as to the current value and asset allocation of the agency's Endowment Fund, as well as the current availability of expendable investment income. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Education and Communication Committee Report – June 4, 2025 – *Tom Haislip, Chair* reported the Committee met on Wednesday, June 4, 2025. Staff presented an update on the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman Program, outlining the team's efforts to evaluate and rebuild the program to ensure it aligns with the Commission's mission. Moving forward, the program will be called the Outdoor Skills Academy, and its first event took place this week in Avery County. Several additional classes are scheduled for this summer, culminating in a major weekend event planned for this fall. The Committee also received a presentation on the evaluation of the John E. Pechmann Fishing Education Center and plans for its future. In the fall, staff gathered information from agency staff, volunteers, and past class participants to improve programming and expand outreach in the community. Staff recommended expanding the scope of course offerings,

developing an integrated volunteer strategy, and marketing programs locally to meet public needs. Both evaluations presented further the goals identified in the Division's program action plans, which the team has recently developed with input from the entire agency. The meeting concluded with a presentation on the agency's youth shooting sports offerings, including the National Archery in the Schools Program and the Youth Hunter Education Skills Tournament. More than 25,000 students participated in these combined programs in 2024. Some past participants in these shooting sports programs have received scholarships and even gone on to work with the agency. The true success is evident in the smiles on the students' faces as they interact with the agency staff. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Committee of The Whole Report – June 4, 2025 – *Monty Crump, Chair*, reported the Committee met on Wednesday, June 4, 2025, and began with presentations related to the 2026–2027 annual rulemaking cycle. *Corey Oakley, Inland Fisheries Division Chief*, presented proposed Inland Fisheries Rules, followed by *Daron Barnes, Land and Water Access Division Chief*, with proposed changes to Land and Water Access Rules, and *Brad Howard, Wildlife Management Division Chief*, with proposed changes to Wildlife Management Rules. *Brad* also presented proposed changes to Wildlife Captivity and Rehabilitation rules under Section 10H .1400. Next, *Will Casola, Policy Analyst*, reviewed public comments received and presented temporary rulemaking for Sea Trout 10C .0325 and Pisgah Game Land 10D .0260. *Corey Oakley* then provided a brief update on Flounder. The Committee moved into closed session pursuant to N.C. General Statute §143-318.11(a)(3) to discuss ongoing litigation. There being no further business, the Committee returned to open session and adjourned.

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT – NCWRC Prescribed Burning Program – Building, Training, Innovating – *Casey Phillips, Land and Water Access Forestry Program Leader*, gave a presentation highlighting the prescribed burning program on game lands across the state including historical and current achievements, strategies and tactics for meeting agency goals, and new capabilities and efficiencies. He described grants and partnerships, new training, equipment and technologies, and how those tools are integrated into the program to mitigate the inherent risks of prescribed burning while achieving the greatest benefits possible with limited resources.

CONSIDERATION OF NONGAME WILDLIFE ADVISORY COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS – On a motion by Kelly Davis and second by Brad Stanback, the Commission reappointed *Jeff Beane, North Carolina State Museum of Natural Sciences*; *Elaine Jordon, Coastal Companies*; *Dr. Mike Martin, North Carolina Department of Agriculture*; *Dr. Joe Poston, Catawba College*, and appointed *Dr. Ryan Heise, Duke Energy* to the Nongame Wildlife Advisory Committee.

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

RULEMAKING

Permanent Rulemaking Notice of Text – 2026-2027 Annual Cycle Inland Fisheries Rules – On a motion by Ray Clifton 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 amendments to Inland Fisheries rules presented in **EXHIBIT D-1** and approved fiscal note for proposed rules presented in **EXHIBIT D-2** by *Corey Oakley, Inland Fisheries Division Chief*

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

Permanent Rulemaking Notice of Text – 2026-2027 Annual Cycle Land and Water Access Rules – On a motion by Tom Haislip 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 amendments to Land and Water Access rules presented in **EXHIBIT E-1** and approved fiscal note for proposed rules presented in **EXHIBIT E-2** by *Daron Barnes, Land and Water Access Division Chief*

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

Permanent Rulemaking Notice of Text – 2026-2027 Annual Cycle Wildlife Management Rules – On a motion by John Alexander and a second by Kelly Davis, the Commission approved publishing the Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for amendments to Wildlife Management rules presented in **EXHIBIT F-1** and approved fiscal note for proposed rules presented in **EXHIBIT F-2** by *Brad Howard, Wildlife Management Division Chief*

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

Permanent Rulemaking Notice of Text – 10H .1400 Wildlife Captivity and Rehabilitation – On a motion by Jim Ruffin and a second by Brad Stanback, 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 10H .01401 through .1406 presented in **EXHIBIT G-1** and approved fiscal note for proposed rules presented in **EXHIBIT G-2** by *Brad Howard*

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

On a motion by Steve Windham and second by Wes Seegars, the Commission approved the following temporary rules presented in **EXHIBITS H-1 and I-1** by *Will Casola, Policy Analyst*:

Temporary Rulemaking Adoption – 10C .0325 Sea Trout – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT H-2** and adopted temporary size and creel limits for sea trout in inland waters and for hook-and-line in joint fishing waters presented in **EXHIBIT H-1**

Temporary Rulemaking Adoption – 10D .0260 Pisgah Game Lands – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT I-2** and adopted temporary rules for permitted activities on the Lutz Tract of Pisgah Game Land presented in **EXHIBIT I-1**

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

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN – Chairman Crump began his remarks by encouraging Commissioners to attend the ribbon cutting for the Samarcand Wildlife Law Enforcement Training Facility on June 23, describing it as a legacy event for the agency. The program will also include a rededication ceremony honoring fallen officers, whose memorial has been relocated to the facility. He announced that Commissioner Reid Smith has generously invited the Commission to visit his farm in conjunction with the December meeting. Additional details will be shared in the coming months. Chairman Crump recognized Tom Berry, who was inducted into the Guilford County Sports Hall of Fame. In closing, he noted that the election of the Chair and Vice Chair will take place at the July meeting and encouraged any interested Commissioners to submit their names ahead of time.

COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – Executive Director Briggs expressed his appreciation to staff for their continued hard work in supporting the agency’s mission. He gave special thanks to those involved in preparing the annual cycle rule proposals, noting the significant effort required to refine the proposals in a way that balances the needs of both wildlife and constituents. He also thanked the Commissioners for their ongoing support, advice, and guidance, especially for the time and effort they contribute outside of formal meetings. In closing, he shared that the Law Enforcement Basic School graduation will be held on August 1 at Pinehurst First Baptist Church and encouraged Commissioners to mark their calendars.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the WRC webinar meeting was adjourned at 9:50 a.m.
All exhibits are incorporated into the official record of this meeting by reference and are filed with the minutes.

07/24/2025

Monty Crump, Chairman

Date

07/24/2025

Kyle Briggs, Executive Director

Date