



MINUTES
December 4, 2025
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission Meeting
Raleigh, North Carolina

Chairman Mark Craig called the December 4, 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.ncwildlife.gov.

Commissioner Ray Clifton led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner John Coley gave the invocation.

ROLL CALL

Margo Minkler, Commission Liaison, called the roll. David Hoyle, Wes Seegars, John Stone, Mike Alford, and Justin Boyd were absent.

COMMISSIONER ATTENDANCE

Mark Craig	Tom Berry	Steve Windham	Tom Haislip
Landon Zimmer	Brad Stanback	Monty Crump	J.C. Cole
John Coley	Jim Ruffin	Hayden Rogers	Joe Budd
Tommy Fonville	Ray Clifton	John Alexander	Reid Smith

VISITORS

Dr. Bill McLarney

MANDATORY ETHICS INQUIRY

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

MINUTES OF OCTOBER 16, 2025 MEETING

On a motion by John Alexander and second by Joe Budd, the Minutes of the October 16, 2025, meeting were approved as presented in **EXHIBIT A**.

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

ADMINISTRATION

FINANCIAL STATUS REPORT – *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.

On a motion by John Coley and second by Jim Ruffin, the Commission approved transferring \$20 million from the Equity Index Fund to the Short-Term Interest Fund.

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

SPECIAL PRESENTATIONS

2025 THOMAS L. QUAY WILDLIFE DIVERSITY AWARD PRESENTATION – *Kyle Briggs, Executive Director* presented the 2025 Thomas L. Quay Wildlife Diversity Award to Dr. Bill McLarney.

COMMITTEE MEETING REPORTS

Boating Safety Committee Report – December 3, 2025 – *J.C. Cole, Chair*, reported the Boating Safety Committee met on December 3, 2025, and reviewed several permanent rulemaking items, including 10F .0307 for Catawba, Iredell, Lincoln, and Mecklenburg Counties; 10F .0324 for Davidson County; 10F .0338 for Caldwell County; and a Notice of Text for 10F .0305 for Brunswick County. The committee endorsed all items which will be presented as exhibits. There being no further business, the committee adjourned.

Habitat Nongame & Endangered Species Committee Report – December 3, 2025 – *Brad Stanback, Chair*, reported the Habitat, Nongame, and Endangered Species Committee met on December 3, 2025. *Rachael Hoch, Inland Fisheries Assistant Chief*, started the meeting by presenting the Augmentation Plans for the Carolina Heelsplitter mussel in Sixmile Creek in the Catawba River Basin and for the Atlantic Pigtoe mussel in the Flat River and Deep Creek of the Neuse River Basin. The Committee approved both Augmentation Plans. Next, *Rachael* presented the Yellow Lampmussel Conservation Plan, including information about ongoing research of the species. Following discussion on the mussel's life history and management activities, the Committee approved releasing the plan for a 30-day public comment period. *Rachael* provided an update on the ongoing Roanoke Logperch reintroductions in the Upper Mayo River and the

recapture of stocked fish during monitoring. Staff will continue stocking and monitoring the species for the next 5 years. *Kathryn Jewell, Social Scientist*, wrapped up the meeting with a presentation on the results of a property owner survey that focused on conservation attitudes about Roanoke Logperch reintroductions and Conservation Benefit Agreements (CBAs) in the Mayo River Basin. Highlights from the survey included over 21% of respondents had heard of the Roanoke Logperch and 51% indicated an interest in learning more about CBAs. With no additional topics, the meeting was adjourned.

Fisheries Committee Report – December 3, 2025 – *Monty Crump, Vice Chair*, reported the Fisheries Committee met on December 3, 2025. *Jeremy McCargo, Anadromous Research Coordinator*, discussed how restoration of Striped Bass in the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico rivers has not been successful despite a 30-year stocking effort and a harvest moratorium implemented in 2019. *Corey Oakley, Inland Fisheries Division Chief*, presented temporary rulemaking to allow for a limited Striped Bass harvest season in those rivers. *David Goodfred, District 8 Fisheries Biologist II*, discussed the effects of Hurricane Helene flooding to smallmouth bass populations in Yancey County. Current monitoring indicates that the Cane River population has declined significantly while the population in the North Toe River is holding steady or possibly expanding. *Kathryn Jewell* presented the results of the North Carolina Black Bass Angler Opinion Survey. Data indicated that black bass is the most sought after species in North Carolina by anglers and brings an economic impact of \$2.4 billion to the state. Finally, *Corey Oakley* updated the committee on repairs at Armstrong State Fish Hatchery, renovations at Bobby N. Setzer State Fish Hatchery, and the completed purchase in October of the Glady Fork Fish Hatchery. With no additional topics, the meeting was adjourned.

Migratory Birds & Waterfowl Committee Report – December 3, 2025 – *John Coley, Chair*, reported the Migratory Birds & Waterfowl Committee met on December 3, 2025, to receive updates on several topics of interest regarding migratory game birds. *Chris Turner, Game Birds and Wildlife Health Unit Supervisor*, updated the committee on potential changes to the federal frameworks for the 2026 waterfowl seasons including the ability to increase the bag limit on Atlantic Population of geese in the northeast hunt unit from 1 to 2 along with likely changes to the snow goose hunting seasons next year. Next, *Brad Howard, Wildlife Management Division Chief*, gave a brief update on the Waterfowl Hunters Survey which is currently in progress. The survey will close at the end of December, and staff will update the Committee at the April meeting when presenting their final recommendations for the migratory bird seasons for next year. Finally, *Fran Farley, Migratory Game Bird Biologist*, gave us an update on the ongoing woodcock research being conducted by states in the Atlantic Flyway. North Carolina was a significant participant in the initial study and will contribute to the second phase which will look at wintering habitat, nesting ecology, and harvest management. Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Wild Turkey Committee Report – December 3, 2025 – *Steve Windham, Chair*, reported the first meeting of the newly established Wild Turkey Committee was called to order on December 3, 2025. *Cully McCurdy, National Wild Turkey Federation District Biologist*, gave an excellent presentation regarding wild turkeys in the southeast from a partner's perspective. *Cully* discussed the Turkey Federation's new initiative called Habitat for the Hatch; this is a 10-year initiative designed to combat the turkey declines by focusing on brood and nesting habitat improvement. *Cully* provided a short overview of the Federation's impact in North Carolina, including the nearly \$1.25 million provided directly to the WRC to support the Agency's management efforts in the last 5 years. It is very clear that the Turkey Federation is and will remain a great partner for wild

turkey management in our state. Next, *Hannah Plumpton, Upland Game Bird Biologist*, gave a summary of the Commissions accomplishments for wild turkey spanning the last 13 years. *Hannah* discussed regulatory changes as well as research accomplished in that time including the largest turkey ecology research project ever conducted in North Carolina. She then discussed where we were going with our efforts to continue to stay focused on our turkey population management. Ongoing disease research stemming from the ecology project, the adjustment of the seasons that will take effect this upcoming spring, and the first turkey hunter survey in 30 years were just a few of the highlights for upcoming turkey work. Having no further business, the committee was adjourned.

Executive Committee – December 3, 2025 – *Mark Craig, Chair*, reported the Executive Committee met on December 3, 2025. *Jason Cottle, Chief Financial Officer*, and *Carrie Ruhlman, Policy Manager*, presented an overview of license fee increases. The proposed 3.4% CPI-U license-fee increase was discussed, and revenue projections were provided. Discussions about trends in license sales, impacts to federal funds, and comparisons of license fees in adjacent states followed. Additionally, the Committee was briefed on the potential impact of the REINS act, and staff were asked to keep the REINS act requirements in mind for future CPI-U discussions. *Executive Director Briggs* indicated that staff would continue to revisit the CPI-U increase every two years, as was previously directed by the Commission. Lastly, a brief discussion was held regarding the ideal asset allocation of the agency's Endowment fund, and the Finance Committee was asked to develop a recommendation. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Committee of the Whole – December 3, 2025 – *Mark Craig, Chair*, reported the Committee of the Whole met on December 3, 2025, and began with the presentation on the 2025 Thomas L. Quay Wildlife Diversity Award. The committee then reviewed the Draft 2026–2035 NC Wildlife Resources Commission Strategic Plan. Next, the committee reviewed two notices of text related to License Fees and Commercial Activity Permitting. This was followed by discussion of three permanent rulemaking adoptions for Paynes Branch Game Land, Wildlife Service Agents, and Furbearer Propagation. The committee also reviewed three property matters, including a memorial request for former staff member Clay Allen, an easement request on Gull Rock Game Land in Hyde County, and an easement request on Mitchell River Game Land in Surry County. Updates on CWD as well as current deer and bear harvest estimates were shared. The Committee approved a recommendation presented by Commissioner Crump on behalf of the Finance Committee to move \$20 million from the Equity Investment Fund to the Short-Term Investment Fund. A motion was then made to enter closed session pursuant to N.C. General Statute 143-318.11(a)(3) to consult with agency counsel regarding ongoing litigation. After returning to open session, the meeting resumed. There being no further business, the committee adjourned.

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT – BEAVERS IN NORTH CAROLINA – *Falyn Owens, Wildlife Extension Biologist*, gave a presentation about the natural and cultural history of beavers in North Carolina. She spoke of the role beavers played in the early settlement of America, their extirpation, and subsequent restoration efforts. She also discussed ecological benefits provided by beavers in contrast to the damage they can cause, and options for managing their populations in the state.

LAND ACQUISITIONS AND PROPERTY MATTERS

OTHER PROPERTY MATTERS – On a motion by Ray Clifton and a second by Tom Berry, the Commission approved the memorial request for former staff member Clay Allen presented in **EXHIBIT C-1** by *Ben Solomon, Land and Water Access Division Assistant Chief and Land Acquisition Manager*.

With Commissioner Reid Smith recused, and on a motion by John Alexander and a second by Jim Ruffin, the Commission approved the request for an easement on Gull Rock Game Land in Hyde County presented in **EXHIBIT C-2** by *Ben Solomon*.

On a motion by Monty Crump and a second by Ray Clifton, the Commission approved the request for a right-of-way access easement on Mitchell River Game Land in Surry County presented in **EXHIBIT C-3** by *Ben Solomon*.

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

WATER SAFETY RULEMAKING

On a motion by J.C. Cole and second by John Alexander, the Commission approved the following water safety rules presented in **EXHIBITS D-2, E-2, and F-2** by *Betsy Haywood, Water Safety Rules Coordinator*:

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 15A NCAC 10F .0307 Catawba, Iredell, Lincoln, and Mecklenburg Counties – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT D-1** and adopted proposed amendments for vessel livery requirements on Lake Norman presented in **EXHIBIT D-2**.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 15A NCAC 10F .0324 Davidson County – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT E-1** and adopted proposed amendments to 10F .0324 presented in **EXHIBIT E-2**.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 15A NCAC 10F .0338 Caldwell County – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT F-1** and adopted proposed amendments to 10F .0338 presented in **EXHIBIT F-2**.

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

Permanent Rulemaking Notice of Text 15A NCAC 10F .0305 Brunswick County – On a motion by J. C. Cole and a second by Ray Clifton, the Commission approved publishing Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for proposed amendments to 10F .0305 presented in **(EXHIBIT G)** by *Betsy Haywood*.

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

RULEMAKING

Temporary Rulemaking Notice of Text – 10C .0314 Striped Bass – On a motion by Ray Clifton and a second by Monty Crump, the Commission approved publishing the Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for temporary amendments to 10C .0314 presented in **EXHIBIT H** by *Corey Oakley, Inland Fisheries Division Chief*.

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

On a motion by Tom Berry and second by Brad Stanback, the Commission approved the following rules presented in **EXHIBITS I-1, I-2, and J** by *Will Casola, Policy Analyst*:

Permanent Rulemaking Notice of Text – 10A .1601 License Fees – The Commission approved publishing Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for amendments to License Fees presented in **EXHIBIT I-1** and approved fiscal note for proposed rules presented in **EXHIBIT I-2**.

Permanent Rulemaking Notice of Text – 10H .1801 Commercial Activity Permitting – The Commission approved publishing Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for proposed amendments to Commercial Activity Permitting presented in **EXHIBIT J**.

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

On a motion by Monty Crump and second by John Alexander, the Commission adopted the following rules presented in **EXHIBITS K-2, L-2, and M-2** by *Will Casola, Policy Analyst*:

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 10D .0295 Paynes Branch Game Land – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT K-1** and adopted 10D .0295 presented in **EXHIBIT K-2**.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – Rule Readoption: 10G .0400 Wildlife Service Agents – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT L-1** and adopted amendments to 10G .0400 rules presented in **EXHIBIT L-2**.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 10H .1100 Furbearer Propagation – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT M-1** and adopted amendments to 10H .1100 rules presented in **EXHIBIT M-2**.

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

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission Strategic Plan, 2026-2035 – On a motion by Joe Budd and second by Monty Crump, the Commission approved the strategic plan for 2026-2035 presented in **EXHIBIT N** by *Christian Waters, Chief Deputy Director*.

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

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN – Chairman Craig expressed his appreciation to staff for their continued hard work behind the scenes. He also reminded everyone that it is hunting season and encouraged sharing knowledge, skills, and land with others as an opportunity to introduce new participants to outdoor traditions. He concluded by extending holiday well wishes to all.

COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – Executive Director Briggs reflected on the past year, noting that it had gone by very quickly and describing it as one of the fastest years in his 31-year career. He expressed appreciation for the commissioners' advice and guidance throughout the year and commended the agency's staff, emphasizing the strength and dedication of the team across the agency. He concluded by extending holiday well wishes and wishing everyone a safe holiday season.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the WRC meeting was adjourned at **10:10 a.m.**

All exhibits are incorporated into the official record of this meeting by reference and are filed with the minutes.



Landon Zimmer, Vice Chairman
02/19/2026
Date



Kyle Briggs, Executive Director
02/19/2026
Date