



MINUTES
February 19, 2026
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission Meeting
Raleigh, North Carolina

Vice Chairman Landon Zimmer called the February 19, 2026, N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. in the Commission Room at the agency's headquarters in Raleigh. Zimmer 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 Mike Alford gave the invocation.

ROLL CALL

Margo Minkler, Commission Liaison, called the roll. Mark Craig, David Hoyle, Wes Seegars, and Tom Berry were absent.

COMMISSIONER ATTENDANCE

Landon Zimmer	Jim Ruffin	John Stone	J.C. Cole	Mike Alford
John Coley	Ray Clifton	Hayden Rogers	Joe Budd	
Tommy Fonville	Steve Windham	John Alexander	Reid Smith	
Brad Stanback	Monty Crump	Tom Haislip	Justin Boyd	

MANDATORY ETHICS INQUIRY

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

MINUTES

On a motion by Joe Budd and second by John Alexander, the Commission approved the Minutes of the following meetings:

APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 4, 2025, MEETING MINUTES – The December 4, 2025 Wildlife Resources Commission Meeting Minutes were approved as presented in **EXHIBIT A**.

APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 16, 2025, MEETING MINUTES – The December 16, 2025 Wildlife Resources Commission Meeting Minutes were approved as presented in **EXHIBIT B**.

EXHIBITS A & B are 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.

COMMITTEE MEETING REPORTS

Fisheries Committee Report – February 18, 2026 – *John Stone, Chair*, reported the Fisheries Committee met on February 18, 2026. Potential Inland Fisheries rule proposals for the 2027-2028 annual rulemaking cycle were shared. Staff presented an update on the renovation of the Bobby N. Setzer State Fish Hatchery and discussed how the agency is providing anglers with information about the temporary changes to the Public Mountain Trout Waters stocking program. Staff reviewed angling trends for Striped Bass along the Roanoke River. Results from the Lake Norman Bodie Bass Exploitation Study were presented showing that the fishery is very popular among anglers with an annual mortality rate of nearly 45%. Finally, staff introduced a concept for addressing proclamations issued by NCDMF to reduce confusion among anglers. After robust discussion, the committee determined the concept needed more evaluation. With no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Big Game Committee Report – February 18, 2026 – *Monty Crump, Committee Member*, reported the Big Game Committee met on February 18, 2026. Staff presented updates on a variety of big game topics related to deer and bear. First were updates on the 2025-2026 season's CWD testing results and the CWD management strategy. To date, there are 27 new CWD positives and 4 of those came from two new counties, Sampson and Edgecombe. North Carolina is now up to 61 confirmed positive cases of CWD from 7 different counties. Several potential rule ideas related to big game management were presented along with an update of the preliminary 2026-2027 deer and bear harvest; both were record years. Finally, staff shared the timeline for updates and revisions to the Bear Management Plan. Having no further business, the committee adjourned.

Small Game Committee Report – February 18, 2026 – *Jim Ruffin, Chair*, reported the Small Game Committee met on February 18, 2026. Staff presented several potential rule ideas for the upcoming regulation cycle that are related to small game and furbearer species. Next, staff presented several topics of consideration for the Small Game Committee to address during the 2026-2027 Committee cycle. Topics included managing early successional habitat on private lands and the challenges and barriers landowners face, predation management and efforts to develop better recommendations for landowners, and furbearer management including reviewing the results of a survey of trappers and a review of trapping regulations. Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Land Acquisition & Property Committee Report – February 18, 2026 – *Brad Stanback, Vice Chair*, reported the Land Acquisition and Property Committee met on February 18, 2026. The Committee began by reviewing the 2027-2028 Land and Water Access rule proposals. The Committee recommended removing one regulation from the regulation package, specifically the proposal requiring all tree stands, commercially produced blinds and trail cameras placed on game lands without a special use permit to be identified through a displayed tag that includes the name and address of the owner, or their WRC ID. The Committee also reviewed and approved eight Phase I land acquisition proposals, two Phase II land acquisition proposals, and one easement request at Juniper Creek Game Land. The easement request was amended by the Committee to grant an express easement for ingress and egress, with a restriction to only support one single family dwelling. Having no further business, the committee adjourned.

Committee of the Whole – February 18, 2026 – *Landon Zimmer, Vice Chair*, reported the Committee of the Whole met yesterday afternoon and began with a discussion on several proposed changes to Wildlife Management rules for the 2027–2028 rulemaking cycle. The committee then reviewed proposed rulemaking related to water safety, mandatory fish harvest reporting requirements, striped bass, bluefish, and sheepshead. Initial determinations for the periodic rules review were also shared. The rulemaking and periodic rules review items were presented as exhibits later in the meeting. An overview of the Owl Webcam project was presented. The meeting concluded with discussion of plans for the upcoming October Commission meeting. There being no further business, the committee adjourned.

Agency Spotlight – NCWRC Black Bass Management – *Kevin Dockendorf, Coastal Resident Fish Research Coordinator*, and *Kin Hodges, District 7 Fisheries Biologist*, highlighted black bass management across the state. Kevin introduced our native black bass species, described how survey data are used to design regulations, and discussed ongoing efforts to increase reservoir fish habitat. He explained the role of stockings, research projects, and how genetics are used to identify species and detect hybridization. The F1 Bass stocking project was presented as a combination of stocking, research, and genetics to answer questions relating to trophy potential of Largemouth Bass. Kin then discussed the threat Alabama Bass are posing to native bass species and highlighted educational strategies being used to counter the impacts of these invasive species. He then shared some positive aspects of North Carolina black bass fishing, noting that certain Piedmont and Coastal waters are considered to be among the best in the nation. He also shared results from a 2025 black bass angler opinion survey, in which more than 711,000 anglers fished for black bass and contributed over \$2.5 billion to the state's economy. He concluded by noting that the Black Bass Management Plan will be updated using insights gained from the angler opinion survey.

LAND ACQUISITIONS AND PROPERTY MATTERS

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

- Stone Morris Tract – Transylvania County (**EXHIBIT D-1**)
- Rose Creek Waterline – Mitchell County (**EXHIBIT D-2**)

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

Other Property Matters – On a motion by Jim Ruffin and a second by Mike Alford, the Commission approved the Easement request from a private landowner for an ingress and egress easement on Juniper Creek Game Land in Brunswick County with a restriction to only support one single family dwelling presented in **EXHIBIT E** by *Ben Solomon*

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

WATER SAFETY RULEMAKING

On a motion by Monty Crump and second by Justin Boyd, the Commission approved the following water safety rules presented in **EXHIBITS F-2, G-2, H-2, I-2, and J-2** by *Betsy Haywood, Water Safety Rules Coordinator*:

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 15A NCAC 10F .0301 General Provisions – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT F-1** and adopted amendments to 10F .0301 presented in **EXHIBIT F-2**.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 15A NCAC 10F .0303 Beaufort County – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT G-1** and adopted amendments to 10F .0303 presented in **EXHIBIT G-2**.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 15A NCAC 10F .0310 Dare County – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT H-1** and adopted amendments to 10F .0310 presented in **EXHIBIT H-2**.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 15A NCAC 10F .0329 Rowan County – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT I-1** and adopted amendments to 10F .0329 presented in **EXHIBIT I-2**.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 15A NCAC 10F .0354 Pitt County – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT J-1** and adopted amendments to 10F .0354 presented in **EXHIBIT J-2**

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

Temporary Rule Adoption – 15A NCAC 10F .0314 New Hanover County – With Commissioner Zimmer recused, and on a motion by Mike Alford and a second by John Alexander, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT K-1** and denied temporary amendments to 10F .0314 presented in **EXHIBIT K-2** by *Betsy Haywood*

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

Permanent Rule Repeal – 15A NCAC 10F .0368 Nags Head – On a motion by Ray Clifton and a second by Jim Ruffin, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT L-1** and reappealed 10F .0368 presented in **EXHIBIT L-2** by *Betsy Haywood*

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

RULEMAKING

On a motion by Hayden Rogers and second by John Stone, the Commission approved the following temporary inland fisheries rules presented in **EXHIBITS M-2, N-2, and O-2** by *Corey Oakley, Inland Fisheries Division Chief*:

Temporary Rulemaking Adoption – 10C .0218 Harvest Reporting Requirements – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT M-1** and adopted temporary amendments to 10C .0218 presented in **EXHIBIT M-2**.

Temporary Rulemaking Adoption – 10C .0314 Striped Bass – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT N-1** and adopted temporary amendments to 10C .0314 presented in **EXHIBIT N-2**.

Temporary Rulemaking Adoption – 10C .0414 Bluefish – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT O-1** and adopted temporary amendments to 10C .0414 presented in **EXHIBIT O-2**.

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

Temporary Rulemaking Notice of Text – 10C .0425 Sheepshead – On a motion by John Alexander and a second by Jim Ruffin, 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 .0425 presented in **EXHIBIT P** by *Corey Oakley*

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

Periodic Rules Review – Initial Determinations – On a motion by John Alexander and a second by Monty Crump, the Commission approved initial determinations on all WRC rules and joint WRC/MFC rules and to notice the reports for public comment presented in **EXHIBIT Q** by *Will Casola, Policy Analyst*.

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

COMMENTS FROM THE VICE CHAIRMAN – Vice Chairman Zimmer expressed appreciation for the opportunity to preside on behalf of Chairman Craig. He thanked the Commissioners for their attendance and valuable input. He also extended his gratitude to staff for their ongoing hard work and for organizing the meeting.

COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – Executive Director Briggs congratulated all participants in the National Archery in the Schools Program Tournament, with special recognition to the winning teams. He reminded everyone of the upcoming Youth Hunter Education Skills Tournaments beginning next month. He also thanked staff for their hard work and expressed appreciation to the Commissioners for their continued dedication and service.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the WRC meeting was adjourned at 9:52 a.m.
All exhibits are incorporated into the official record of this meeting by reference and are filed with the minutes.



04/16/2026

Mark Craig, Chairman

Date



04/16/2026

Kyle Briggs, Executive Director

Date