



MINUTES
April 16, 2026
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission Meeting
Raleigh, North Carolina

Chairman Mark Craig called the April 16, 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. Craig reminded everyone that the meeting is being audio streamed live and will be available at www.newildlife.gov.

Commissioner Tommy Fonville led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner Joe Budd gave the invocation.

ROLL CALL

Margo Minkler, Commission Liaison, called the roll. Hayden Rogers, Wes Seegars, Steve Windham, John Stone, J.C. Cole, Mike Alford, and Justin Boyd were absent.

COMMISSIONER ATTENDANCE

Mark Craig	Tommy Fonville	Ray Clifton	Joe Budd
Landon Zimmer	Tom Berry	Monty Crump	Reid Smith
David Hoyle	Brad Stanback	John Alexander	
John Coley	Jim Ruffin	Tom Haislip	

MANDATORY ETHICS INQUIRY

Chairman Craig advised the Commission of the mandatory ethics inquiry as mandated in NCGS §138A-15. Vice Chairman Zimmer recused himself from discussion and action on **EXHIBITS H-1 through H-10**.

MINUTES

On a motion by David Hoyle and second by John Coley, the Commission approved the Minutes of the following meetings:

Approval of February 9, 2026, Meeting Minutes – The Commission approved the February 9, 2026, Wildlife Resources Commission meeting minutes as written in the exhibit. **(EXHIBIT A)**

Approval of February 19, 2026, Meeting Minutes – The Commission approved the February 19, 2026, Wildlife Resources Commission meeting minutes as written in the exhibit. **(EXHIBIT B)**

Approval of March 24, 2026, Meeting Minutes – The Commission approved the March 24, 2026, Wildlife Resources Commission meeting minutes as written in the exhibit. **(EXHIBIT C)**

EXHIBITS A, B, and C are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

ADMINISTRATION

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

ENDOWMENT FUND EXPENDABLE INCOME ALLOCATION – On a motion by Monty Crump and second by John Alexander, the Commission approved the Calendar Year 2025 Endowment Fund Investment Income Allocation presented in **EXHIBIT E** by *Jason Cottle*

EXHIBITS D and E are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

COMMITTEE MEETING REPORTS

Wildlife Turkey Committee – March 17, 2026 – *Joe Budd, Vice Chair* reported the Wild Turkey Committee held a virtual meeting on March 17, 2026. The committee received an update on the numerous collaborative meetings the staff attend throughout the year. Updates were shared on the recent 13th National Wild Turkey Symposium where 17% of the research findings presented were directly tied to North Carolina and research funded by the Commission. It was also noted that the Commission currently has projects underway or are collaborating on projects that address three current emerging issues in turkey management: genetics, disease, and predation management. Finally, staff discussed the NWTF Wild Turkey Technical Committee and its role in turkey management including working with all states to evaluate and improve various management and survey techniques. Having no further business, the committee was adjourned.

Habitat Nongame & Endangered Species Committee – April 15, 2026 – *Brad Stanback, Chair* reported the Habitat and Nongame Endangered Species Committee met on April 15, 2026. Staff presented the Yellow Lampmussel Conservation Plan, and with no comments received during the

30-day public comment period, the Committee endorsed the Plan. Staff also provided summaries of reports from the Freshwater Fish, Freshwater Mollusk, and Freshwater Crustacean subcommittees of the Scientific Council, including results from Status Assessment Tool evaluations, which led to proposed status changes for six aquatic species. The Committee approved the proposed changes and recommended that staff prepare rule text for the Commission's consideration in June 2026. Lastly, staff presented the 2026 nominations for the Nongame and Wildlife Advisory Committee membership, and the Committee endorsed the staff recommendations. Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Finance, Audit, & Compliance Committee – April 15, 2026 – *Monty Crump, Chair* reported that the Finance, Audit, & Compliance Committee met on April 15, 2026. *Elizabeth Davis, Internal Audit Director*, requested approval for revisions to the FY26 Internal Audit Plan. The Committee voted to approve the revisions to the plan. An update was then provided on engagements, observations, as well as on administrative operations. Internal Audit disclosed the audit function will abstain for auditing the internal mileage rate due to involvement in the current rate calculation. Internal Audit will reassess independence and objectivity annually or until the rate is re-calculated by the Finance Office. *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, offering commentary for any variances greater than one million dollars. An update was presented as to the current fund balance and asset allocation of the agency's Endowment Fund. Examples were provided of current year uses of expendable investment income, highlighting the impactful work done by the agency that may not have otherwise been possible without these dedicated funds. Lastly, the amount of expendable investment income earned in calendar year 2025 was presented and will be voted on during the business meeting. Commission Chairman Craig requested that an ongoing progress update on the Setzer Hatchery renovation project be revisited at all future Finance, Audit & Compliance Committee meetings. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Migratory Bird & Waterfowl Committee – April 15, 2026 – *John Coley, Chair* reported that the Migratory Birds and Waterfowl Committee met on April 15, 2026 to review the 2026/27 federal migratory game bird frameworks and staff recommendations for this year's hunting seasons. Also, staff presented the recommendation for peregrine falcon take for falconry. Staff shared updates on the mid-winter Tundra Swan surveys and the eastern mallard study the agency is participating in with other Atlantic flyway states. Finally, staff share some early findings from the Duck Hunter survey that was just finished including the fact that duck hunting in North Carolina generates an almost \$150 million in economic impact to the state. Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Education & Communication Committee – April 15th, 2026 – *Tom Haislip, Chair* reported that the Education and Communication Committee met on April 15, 2026. Staff presented an update on the WRC Managed Shooting Range Rule. The rule is currently in the Game Land Section of the Administrative Code. Staff have been working to update the rule to align with current operational procedures. The rule will be moved to its own section in the NCAC. It will be introduced during the virtual Rules Committee meeting on April 23, 2026. The Committee also

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received an update on the Commission's Youth Shooting Sports Program. Nine District Youth Hunter Education Skills Tournaments were held in March. The program saw an increase of 23 teams, with the largest growth in District 4, where eight new teams were added. The North Carolina National Archery in the Schools State Bulls-Eye Tournament was held in February with 50 schools and 1,037 archers. The State 3D archery tournament was hosted in Caldwell County in March, with 26 schools and 441 archers participating. The meeting continued with a presentation on the agency's Conservation Engagement Partnerships. These partnerships include EcoExplore with the NC Arboretum. The Commission's Wildlife Education and Land and Water Access divisions worked together to identify kiosks at various agency sites, and staff posted signs that engage families in wildlife and conservation learning while they collect digital badges. The meeting ended with a brief update on the barn owl camera project, which has engaged people online through a nesting pair. Two owlets have recently hatched, generating expanded interest from NC schools and sparking more conversations on the agency's social media. After the presentations the Committee meeting was adjourned.

Land Acquisition and Property Committee – April 15, 2026 – *Tom Berry, Chair* reported that the Land Acquisition and Property Committee met on April 15, 2026. The Committee reviewed and approved one Phase I land acquisition proposal and nine Phase II land acquisition proposals. For the Jackson Tract in Bladen County, staff will confirm that there are no issues with an apparent inholding. Regarding the Bertie County Game Land easement request, the Committee recommended that WRC staff work with the State Property Office to extend a letter of intent to TED Renewables for the utilities request. Staff will also work with the State Property Office to investigate terms, conditions and values for a lease, perpetual easement, as well as a term limited easement. Staff will present findings at a later meeting. Following conclusion of regular business, one additional topic was considered. The Committee considered two counter-offer options for the Buffalo Creek Headwaters project in Watauga and Caldwell counties. After extensive discussion, the Committee made a recommendation for staff to contact the Forest Legacy Program and determine if the original Kirkland appraisal can be used and the property acquired with no cost to the State. If the Kirkland appraisal cannot be used, the Committee recommended proceeding with acquisition of the property utilizing \$12,589,000 from the Forest Legacy Program and \$910,500 from the Commission's Endowment Fund, for a total purchase price of \$13,500,000. This acquisition price is supported by a recent Yellow Book appraisal, and supporting Yellow Book appraisal review, that sets the property value at \$16,786,000. The Committee also moved to deny the landowner's request to retain a timber deed on the property. Having no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Executive Committee – April 15, 2026 – *Mark Craig, Chair* reported that the Executive Committee met on April 15, 2026 and held a robust discussion on ideas to reduce angler confusion caused by North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) proclamations for certain species. The Committee agreed to explore the option of obtaining limited proclamation authority through the State Legislature and to continue discussions regarding rulemaking that would allow for the temporary applicability of a DMF proclamation while temporary rulemaking is considered. There being no further business, the committee adjourned.

Committee of the Whole – April 15, 2026 – *Mark Craig, Chair* reported that the Committee of the Whole met on April 15, 2026 and began with review of proposed water safety rulemaking for Brunswick County. An update on the Setzer Fish Hatchery and spring trout stocking was presented. The Committee then reviewed temporary rulemaking for Inland Fisheries related to Sheepshead. Permanent rulemaking proposals concerning license fees were presented. The Committee also reviewed a petition for rulemaking regarding the Butner–Falls of Neuse Game Land. An update was provided on chronic wasting disease management followed by the introduction of temporary rulemaking notices of text for CWD management areas. There being no further business, the committee adjourned.

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT – Genetic Applications for Conservation and Management – *Dr. Heather Evans, Conservation Genetics Manager*, gave a presentation highlighting various genetic methodologies the agency uses for conservation, management, and enforcement. She discussed how genetic parentage-based tagging can be used to monitor stocking efforts and how population genetics provides information on the genetic health of our wildlife and fisheries populations. Dr. Evans further described how genetics can be used to estimate total population abundances and densities. After detailing the various uses of environmental DNA assays, she concluded by detailing how species identification and identity matching can be used to aid our law enforcement officers in poaching cases.

WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT DIVISION

2026-2027 Webless Migratory Birds, Resident Canada Geese, Extended Falconry, and Waterfowl Seasons – On a motion by John Coley and a second by John Alexander, the Commission reviewed U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service frameworks (**EXHIBIT F-1**), received public comments (**EXHIBIT F-2**), and approved the 2026-2027 season dates and bag limits for webless migratory birds, resident Canada geese, extended falconry, and waterfowl (**EXHIBITS F-3 and F-4**) presented by *Brad Howard, Wildlife Management Division Chief*.

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

2026 Migrant Peregrine Falconry – On a motion by John Coley and a second by David Hoyle, the Commission approved staff recommendations to establish a season for taking up to 5 migrant peregrine falcons for use in falconry in 2026 presented in **EXHIBIT G** by *Brad Howard*

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

LAND ACQUISITIONS AND PROPERTY MATTERS

Phase II Land Acquisition – With Vice Chairman Landon Zimmer recused, On a motion by Monty Crump and second by Brad Stanback, the Commission approved the acquisition of the following properties presented in **EXHIBITS H-1, H-2, H-3, H-4, H-5, H-6, H-7, H-8, H-9, and H-10** by *Ben Solomon, Land and Water Access Division Assistant Chief and Land Acquisition Manager*

- Little Snowbird Tract – Cherokee and Graham Counties (**EXHIBIT H-1**)
- Franklin Bog – Henderson County (**EXHIBIT H-2**)
- Sparta Bog – Alleghany County (**EXHIBIT H-3**)
- Tallulah Bog – Graham County (**EXHIBIT H-4**)
- Jackson Tract – Bladen County (**EXHIBIT H-5**)
- Catherine Creek – Gates County (**EXHIBIT H-6**)
- Welch Tract – Chowan County (**EXHIBIT H-7**)
- Egypt Road – Brunswick County (**EXHIBIT H-8**)
- Odom Correctional Facility Re-allocation – Northampton County (**EXHIBIT H-9**)
- Buffalo Creek Headwaters – Watauga and Caldwell Counties (**EXHIBIT H-10**)

EXHIBITS H-1, H-2, H-3, H-4, H-5, H-6, H-7, H-8, H-9 and H-10 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

Other Property Matters – On a motion by Tom Berry and a second by Brad Stanback, the Commission approved the Bertie County Game Land utility easement exhibit as modified, directing staff to work with the State Property Office on a letter of intent and to evaluate easement and lease options presented in **EXHIBIT I** by *Ben Solomon*

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

WATER SAFETY RULEMAKING

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 10F .0305 Brunswick County – On a motion by Tom Haislip and a second by John Alexander, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT J-1** and adopted amendments to 10F .0305 presented in **EXHIBIT J-2** by *Will Casola, Policy Analyst*

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

RULEMAKING

Temporary Rulemaking Adoption – 10C .0425 Sheepshead – On a motion by David Hoyle and a second by John Coley, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT K-1** and adopted temporary amendments to 10C .0425 presented in **EXHIBIT K-2** by *Corey Oakley, Inland Fisheries Division Chief*

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

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – License Fees – On a motion by Monty Crump and a second by David Hoyle, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **EXHIBIT L-1** and adopted amendments to 10A .1601 and 10H .1801 presented in **EXHIBIT L-2** by *Will Casola*

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

Petition for Rulemaking – 10D .0211 Butner-Falls of Neuse Game Land – On a motion by John Alexander and a second by Landon Zimmer, the Commission reviewed petition in **EXHIBIT M-3** and approved request to notice proposed rule text with an open comment period and public hearing for amendments to 10D .0211 presented in **EXHIBIT M-1** and approved fiscal note for proposed rules presented in **EXHIBIT M-2** by *Will Casola*

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

Temporary Rulemaking Notice of Text – CWD Management Areas – On a motion by Joe Budd and a second by David Hoyle, the Commission approved the request to notice proposed rule text with an open comment period and public hearing for temporary amendments to 10B .0203 & 10B .0502 presented in **EXHIBIT N** by *Brad Howard*

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

CONSIDERATION OF NONGAME WILDLIFE ADVISORY COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS – On a motion by Brad Stanback and a second by Jim Ruffin, the Commission approved the appointment of members to the Nongame Wildlife Advisory Committee presented in **EXHIBIT O** by *Kyle Briggs, Executive Director*

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

SPECIES CONSERVATION PLAN – On a motion by Joe Budd and a second by John Coley, the Commission approved the final adoption of the Yellow Lampmussel Conservation Plan presented in **EXHIBIT P** by *Rachael Hoch, Inland Fisheries Division Assistant Chief*

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

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN – Chairman Craig thanked committee chairs, committee members, and staff for the extensive work that ensures the board meetings run smoothly. He reminded Commissioners of their SEI and ethics education obligations and concluded by encouraging everyone to take a youth hunting during turkey season.

COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – Executive Director Briggs began by noting several upcoming events, including the April 22 Kelly N. Davis Boating Access Area unveiling ceremony, the April 23 virtual Rules Committee meeting, the April 25 State Youth Hunter Education Skill Tournament, and the May 2 Governor’s Conservation Award event at which the agency will receive the Natural Resources Agency of the Year Award. In closing, he

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thanked the Commissioners for their time and support, expressed appreciation to staff as they enter a busy season of field work and the start of boating season, and reminded everyone to stay safe.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the WRC meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.
All exhibits are incorporated into the official record of this meeting by reference and are filed with the minutes.



06/18/2026

Mark Craig, Chairman

Date



06/18/2026

Kyle Briggs, Executive Director

Date