



ALLIANCE
FOR AMERICA'S FISH & WILDLIFE



North Carolina

Photo: Jeff Hall

What is the Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife?

The purpose of the Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife is to secure funding for much needed conservation of our most precious natural resources, our fish and wildlife.

This campaign has expanded out of the strong partnership created by the Blue Ribbon Panel on Sustaining America's Diverse Fish & Wildlife Resources, whose members represent the outdoor recreation retail and manufacturing sector, the energy and automotive industries, private landowners, educational institutions, conservation organizations, sportsmen's groups and state and federal fish and wildlife agencies.

How Our Wildlife Conservation is Currently Funded

Congress requires each state to develop a State Wildlife Action Plan – a proactive, comprehensive conservation strategy which examines health and recommends actions to conserve wildlife and vital habitat before they become more rare and costly to protect. North Carolina's Wildlife Action Plan was updated in 2015 and another 5-year review is underway in 2020. An annual allocation from the federal State Wildlife Grant program matched with funds from voluntary tax check-off contributions and license plate sales help, but are not adequate to fully implement the state's Wildlife Action Plan and conserve North Carolina's treasured natural resources.

America's Fish and Wildlife Heritage

Our nation's fish and wildlife are among its most valuable resources, along with clean air, water, healthy forests and agricultural lands that support all of us. Our quality of life, outdoor heritage and prosperity are tied to the health and sustainability of these treasures. The benefits of connecting Americans with nature include:

- Increasing quality time with family and carrying on traditions through fishing, hunting, birdwatching, camping, biking, boating and various other forms of outdoor recreation.
- Physical and mental health increase when we spend time in nature. Even a short amount of time outdoors each day can improve concentration, reduce stress, lower blood pressure and improve mental health, all of which can help prevent disease.
- Ensuring the next generation understands the important benefits of conservation in their communities.

Americans hold their country's resources dear, and our goal is to make sure future generations will have the same available resources and outdoor opportunities.



Primary Challenge to Conserving North Carolina's Wildlife

As our nation's population increases, so does the stress we put on our shared natural resources. When a species is pushed to the brink and becomes endangered, society risks losing a piece of our natural environment that we may never get back. If this trend of federal underfunding continues, fewer North Carolinians will understand the importance of or need for fish and wildlife conservation. Among the species of greatest conservation need in North Carolina are the Gopher Frog, the Carolina Pygmy Sunfish and Eastern Hellbender, which are highlighted below.



Gopher Frogs (*Lithobates capito*) are specialists of the Longleaf Pine ecosystem and their populations have declined for several decades primarily due to habitat loss. The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (Commission) partners with the NC Zoo, NC Aquariums, NCSU-Center for Marine Science and Technology, and Carteret Community College to captive-rear and release young frogs back to the wild. Since 2011, more than 3,000 frogs have been reared and released. Captive-rearing frogs, wetland restoration, land conservation, and research are some of the proactive approaches the Commission is taking to increase populations of this North Carolina native.



The **Carolina Pygmy Sunfish** (*Elassoma boehlkei*) is a small fish found only in streams, swamps and ditches in Columbus and Brunswick counties in North Carolina and counties in northeastern South Carolina. The Commission, along with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, SC Department of Natural Resources, NOAA Fisheries and Three Oaks Engineering, has been working since 2016 to conserve this sunfish by conducting surveys, protecting much of the land within its range in the state and including the species in a state-wide Safe Harbor/Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurance so the species can be stocked into unoccupied suitable habitat, if necessary, in the future.



Eastern Hellbenders (*Cryptobranchus alleganiensis alleganiensis*) are large, aquatic salamanders found in North Carolina only in fast-moving, clean mountain streams in the Ohio and Tennessee drainages. Once common throughout the mid-eastern United States, these giant salamanders have disappeared from many streams due to declining water quality. Since 2007, the Commission has been working with the U.S. Forest Service, Clemson University, N.C. Zoological Park and other partners to monitor populations, conduct applied research, expand public outreach efforts, and address threats to the hellbender at each life stage.



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