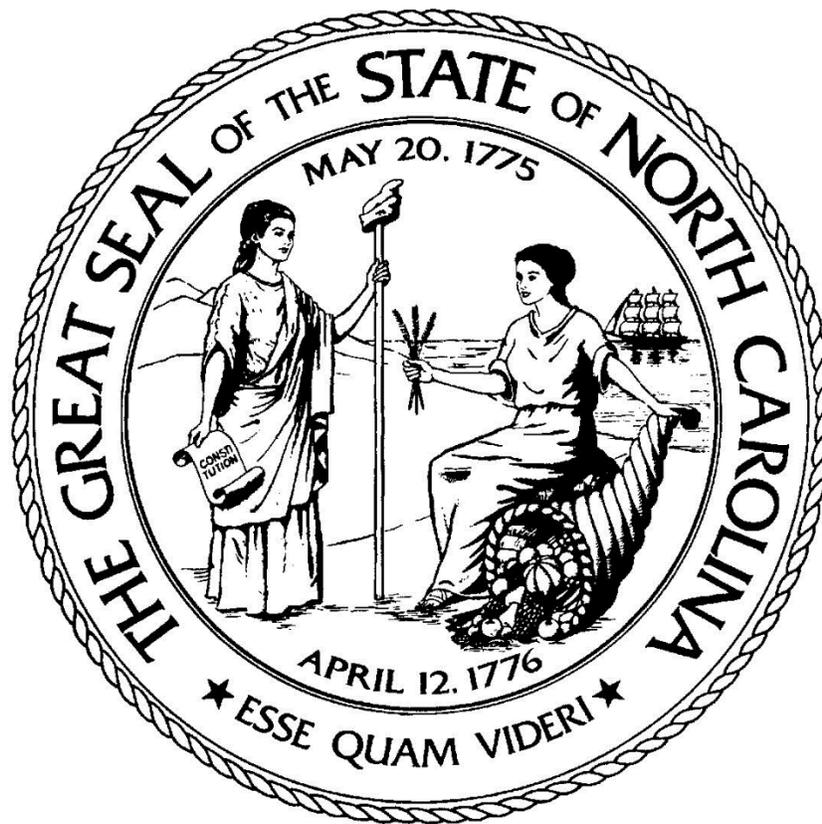


# North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Strategic Plan  
2023 – 2025



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# 1. Strategic Plan Executive Summary

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The North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) was created to manage and sustain the state's fish and wildlife resources through research, scientific management, wise use, and public input. The agency's mission is to conserve North Carolina's wildlife resources and their habitats and provide programs and opportunities that allow hunters, anglers, boaters, and other outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy wildlife-associated recreation. The agency is committed to the fulfillment of this charge in the context of changing social and environmental conditions that affect wildlife conservation, such as habitat loss, climate change impacts, and a growing state population that both puts pressure on wildlife resources and habitats and seeks to enjoy wildlife-associated recreation.

The NCWRC is primarily receipt supported and relies on a sound funding model for a successful future. The agency's three main sources of revenue are federal funds, license and vessel fees, and appropriations from the legislature. During the COVID pandemic, we experienced a robust return on license and vessel receipts, as well as federal funds, due to the increase in outdoor recreation. The agency will invest in marketing efforts to retain these new hunters, shooters and anglers. We also work closely with OSBM and the legislature each year to ensure we maintain the appropriate support and level of appropriations. With sound management and collaboration, the agency is well positioned to meet the needs of wildlife and citizenry of the state in carrying out the mission of the NCWRC.

The NCWRC's strategic plan lists seven broad goals for the agency that supports wildlife conservation and management of the State's public trust resources. These goals are:

- 1) All North Carolina citizens have the opportunity for safe and readily available participation in hunting, fishing, boating and other wildlife-related activities.
- 2) Expand the constituency base by providing and promoting opportunities for every adult and child, regardless of physical abilities, to experience North Carolina's wildlife resources.
- 3) Conserve and enhance the abundance and diversity of the fish and wildlife resources of North Carolina.
- 4) The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission is recognized as a leader in sustaining working lands, conserving wildlife habitats and species diversity, and maintaining the hunting and fishing heritage of North Carolina.
- 5) Communicate, educate, and market wildlife conservation and the role of hunting and fishing in effective wildlife-management programs.
- 6) The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission operates under a sound funding model that meets resource and constituent needs and supports current and future programs and new population's needs.
- 7) Create a work environment where priorities are clear; the decision-making process is efficient and effective; and employees feel a sense of creativity, accountability, value and satisfaction in their achievements and their contributions to the agency's mission.

The NCWRC has developed performance measures for the next biennium that align with these strategic goals and objectives that will assist us in the furtherance of our mission. Utilizing this approach, the agency will connect more North Carolinians with wildlife-related outdoor opportunities while conserving and managing wildlife resources using the best available scientific data.

This document provides information about the agency initiatives for the next two years: emphasizing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in our public-facing and internal operations, internal capacity building through needed updates in our information technology and data management systems and continuing to mainstream evidence-based decision-making into all agency divisions and programs.

## 2. Mission, Vision, and Values

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### Agency Mission Statement

Our mission is to conserve North Carolina's wildlife resources and their habitats and provide programs and opportunities that allow hunters, anglers, boaters, and other outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy wildlife-associated recreation.

### Agency Vision Statement

Our vision is to provide safe, comprehensive, effective, and efficient fisheries, wildlife, and boating programs that:

- Conserve the diversity and abundance of the State's wildlife resources
- Provide diverse opportunities for all citizens regardless of age or physical abilities to access and enjoy hunting, angling, boating, and other wildlife-associated experiences
- Demonstrate to the citizens of North Carolina through education and communication the critical role of wildlife management in sustaining the quality of our wildlife resources and their habitats
- Sustain working lands and their associated wildlife communities
- Have a strong and unequivocal statutory base that supports constituent needs and agency sustainability
- Feature strong partnerships with other natural resource entities to complement the mission of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and leverage resources to achieve that mission
- Are financially secure through diverse, dedicated, and ample funding
- Are based on sound science

## Agency Values

**Accountability:** We are committed to wise and transparent management of the state's wildlife resources and maintaining public trust in that stewardship.

**Customer Service:** We are committed to providing value-added services to the public that are efficient and effective.

**Diversity and Inclusion:** We are committed to respecting and valuing the unique contributions of individuals in our organization and creating an environment where all can use their skills, abilities, and knowledge to succeed. We are committed to serving all North Carolinians and to actively reducing barriers to participation in wildlife-associated recreation activities.

**Quality:** We are committed to consistently using high-quality data and research to deliver high-quality wildlife management, programs, and opportunities, and will proactively monitor and evaluate our efforts to improve results.

**Safety and Health:** We are committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for all of our staff, volunteers, and program participants.

### 3. Goals, Objectives, and Performance Measures

**Goal 1 – All North Carolina citizens have the opportunity for safe and readily available participation in hunting, fishing, boating and other wildlife-related activities.**

Objectives	Performance Measures
Objective 1.1 - Advocate for legislation that supports wildlife conservation.	- Cultivate relationships with conservation champions within state government agencies and with stakeholders
Objective 1.2 - Increase public access to private lands and waterways.	- Evaluate existing access areas and determine growth potential and needs
Objective 1.3 - Partner with other agencies, organizations, and local governments to incorporate wildlife resources in land planning, tourism and agritourism initiatives.	- Develop new partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations in the land planning and tourism sectors
Objective 1.4 - Reduce wildlife-related hunting and boating incidents and violations.	- Perform analysis of hunting and fishing incidents and violations

**Goal 2 – Expand the constituency base by providing and promoting opportunities for every adult and child, regardless of physical abilities, to experience North Carolina’s wildlife resources.**

Objectives	Performance Measures
Objective 2.1 - Provide expanded hunting, shooting, angling, and wildlife conservation courses in the elementary schools.	- Evaluate and increase school and youth programs that teach about wildlife, fisheries, conservation, and associated activities
Objective 2.2 - Increase the public’s and various stakeholders’ understanding of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and its conservation programs.	- Evaluate and improve constituent satisfaction, ability, and confidence in participating in wildlife-related activities
Objective 2.3 - Expand opportunities for all wildlife-associated recreation.	- Evaluate programs to assess recruitment, retention, and reactivation of participants in wildlife-related activities
Objective 2.4 - Increase opportunities for disabled sportsmen and women to participate in all forms of wildlife- associated recreation.	- Identify priority areas for accessibility improvements
Objective 2.5 - Utilize a customer-service model to administer and deliver the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission programs and services.	- Evaluate programs and services with customer surveys

**Goal 3 – Conserve and enhance the abundance and diversity of the fish and wildlife resources of North Carolina.**

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Performance Measures</b>
Objective 3.1 - Implement the recommendations of the NC Wildlife Action Plan.	- Use science-based decision making to revise the Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) list as needed.
Objective 3.2 - Emphasize best available science in the application of fish and wildlife management programs.	- Increase use of web-based species assessment tools
Objective 3.3 - Promote habitat protection through land acquisition and preservation, impact assessment and mitigation, restoration and enhancement, regulation, and conservation-based development.	- Increase area of lands acquired for public use and conservation.
Objective 3.4 - Evaluate and improve the effectiveness of regulatory programs designed to promote wildlife conservation.	- Increase public understanding and acceptance of regulatory programs and their role in conservation
Objective 3.5 - Establish a comprehensive framework to ensure sustainable wildlife resources within changing climatic conditions and expanding human populations.	- Participate in landscape level climate change and resiliency partnerships

**Goal 4 – The NCWRC is recognized as a leader in sustaining working lands, conserving wildlife habitats and species diversity, and maintaining the hunting and fishing heritage of North Carolina.**

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Performance Measures</b>
Objective 4.1 - Enhance partnerships with land-funding agencies/organizations and other land-management agencies.	- Cultivate current partnerships and develop new partnerships
Objective 4.2 - Establish a broad conservation vision within state government agencies and among an expanded constituency base.	- Enhance partnerships with conservation organizations and agencies - Increased collaboration with conservation champions
Objective 4.3 - Foster partnerships among constituency groups to support the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission mission.	- Increased collaboration with conservation champions within state government agencies and among our stakeholders

**Goal 5 – Communicate, educate, and market wildlife conservation and the role of hunting and fishing in effective wildlife management programs.**

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Performance Measures</b>
Objective 5.1 - Develop a legislative agenda that communicates a common message to legislators regarding issues critical to the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.	- Annual review of legislative initiatives and agenda
Objective 5.2 - Enhance and expand existing school programs that promote awareness of wildlife resources and conservation.	- Evaluate and increase school and youth programs that teach about wildlife, fisheries, conservation, and associated activities
Objective 5.3 - Develop and employ marketing strategies to secure broad public support and an expanding constituency base for the agency mission.	- Implement R3 marketing plan

**Goal 6 – The NCWRC operates under a sound funding model that meets resource and constituent needs and supports current and future programs and new populations’ needs.**

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Performance Measures</b>
Objective 6.1 - Leverage and diversify cooperative funding programs through expanded and innovative partnerships.	- Review and evaluation of programs and individual funding sources
Objective 6.2 - Review and revise fees and fee-based programs to complement the vision of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.	- Conduct semi-annual review of license and permit fees
Objective 6.3 - Develop and implement an endowment program with the focus on non-game programs and conservation.	- Monitor the endowment fund status

**Goal 7 – Create a work environment where priorities are clear; the decision-making process is efficient and effective; and employees feel a sense of creativity, accountability, value and satisfaction in their achievements and their contributions to the agency’s mission.**

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Performance Measures</b>
Objective 7.1 - Improve internal coordination/communications to provide transparency in decision making and program implementation.	- Evaluate staff preferred methods of communication
Objective 7.2 - Identify and review core processes to ensure efficiency and effectiveness and evaluate how rules and processes are supporting the needs of the resources.	- Evaluate and implement policies and procedures that support an efficient and effective work environment
Objective 7.3 - Provide opportunities and support programs for employee development.	- Increase staff participation in professional development opportunities and trainings

## 4. Highlights and Opportunities

### Agency Highlights and Best Practices

The year 2022 marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. Since its inception in 1947, the agency, and its employees, Commissioners, volunteers, partners, and leaders, have made an incredible impact on wildlife conservation in North Carolina. In celebrating the auspicious milestone, throughout the year 2022, major agency accomplishments over the past 75 years were highlighted including:

- Reestablishing North Carolina's wild turkey population from near extinction in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century to a current estimated statewide population of 270,000 birds
- Restoring the state's black bear population since the 1970s
- Creating a wildlife endowment fund with lifetime licenses
- Offering outdoors enthusiasts greater accessibility to wildlife-associated recreation by providing access to over 2 million acres of Commission-managed game lands
- Providing more than 3,000 miles of Public Mountain Trout Waters that not only serve as a local treasure but a destination for fly-anglers all along the East Coast

In July 2022, the agency contracted with a third-party vendor (Brandt) to replace its nearly two-decade old in-house license and vessel registration system (ALVIN). Brandt, the license vendor for SC, VA, GA, FL, TN and other state wildlife agencies, is developing an application that will take the NCWRC a step forward with its license and vessel registration services in terms of technology and innovation, while maintaining the reliability that we have had with ALVIN since it launched in 2003. The agency will save a substantial amount of time and resources marketing and collecting license data through the new system. The Go Outdoors North Carolina system is scheduled to go live July 1, 2023.

## Ongoing Initiatives

### *Responding to wildlife diseases*

The agency is working steadfastly to respond to the wildlife diseases emerging throughout the State. From working with partners, stakeholders and constituents to slow the spread of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in the state's deer herd to communicating with and educating the public about avian flu, the agency's efforts to monitor and protect the state's wildlife resources are immense. Efforts to combat CWD include a strong statewide surveillance effort, free CWD testing for hunters, and a comprehensive outreach strategy to inform and educate the public on disease management, public meetings, public comment opportunities, and surveys of hunters to fuel the strategies to detect and monitor the disease and the cooperation necessary to slow the spread to new areas of the State.

### *Emphasizing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility*

The agency is working hard to ensure the opportunity and access it provides allows for use by all citizens of North Carolina, including those with disabilities. The agency has expanded its online resources that highlight disabled opportunity and access points across the state and revived/revamped the track chair program to make the access to and use of this free resource easier for the individuals who need it. Additional efforts are planned to support diversity and inclusion and ensure we exceed ADA requirements for our programs and infrastructure. The agency recently created a Diversity and Inclusion mission and vision, accompanied by a set of strategic priorities for achieving this mission. Our strategic priorities include: 1) creating equitable access and opportunities for all constituents, with the goal of eliminating structural and systemic barriers that hinder North Carolinians from the opportunity to participate in wildlife-associated education and recreation; 2) education and outreach, to make more North Carolinians aware of opportunities to participate in wildlife-associated recreation and conservation; and 3) building a diverse and inclusive agency culture, to recruit and retain the best individuals in all fields of practice from diverse ethnicities, genders, ages, and backgrounds.

### *Mainstreaming evidence-based decision-making*

To improve efficiency and effectiveness of agency operations, we renewed our emphasis on [evidence-based decision-making](#). The agency continues to mainstream the data-driven decision-making processes through the integration of evaluation practices into all educational classes and programs, strategic program planning, and robust and collaborative biological and social research programs. Several examples of these efforts include:

- An evaluation of the Wildlife Education Division was conducted to ensure staff are working toward a common goal that successfully aligns with the mission of the division and the agency. The evaluation accomplished the following:

- Provided direction for division programs and activities
- Established a structure for priority setting and impact assessment
- Created cohesion through the alignment of goals, strategies, and outcomes
- Established benchmarks for regular and ongoing monitoring and evaluation

- Developed a plan for strategic partner engagement to maximize resources and focus on successful outcomes
- Assisted staff with identifying what works to help with continual improvement

At the conclusion of this evaluation, these efforts provided the data necessary for the division to develop a long-term plan for the team and distinct operational plans for each major program which they will be implementing and working from throughout the next two years.

- An upcoming collaborative research project to evaluate the efficacy of boater safety outreach and enforcement efforts and their impact on public safety will provide staff with the information needed to improve programs and operations. Studies like this will be used in conjunction with our ongoing fisheries and wildlife management programs, grounded in the best available science, to help the agency continue its mission of responsible management of public trust resources.

## Collaborative Opportunities

In recognition of the importance of partnerships and collaboration in advancing mission of the agency, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission is emphasizing partnership development in this strategic plan. For the 2023-25 biennial, the agency will focus on collaborative opportunities in four key areas: outreach to broader and more diverse constituencies, local and municipal government partnerships, land and habitat management, and research partnerships.

- The Wildlife Education Division is conducting a review of its partnership efforts as it implements its data-driven strategic plan. Based on research including surveys, focus group discussions, and outreach to partners, the division is building a partnership strategy to work with organizations to recruit, retain, and reactivate more North Carolinians into wildlife-associated recreation.
- We partner with local municipalities to create and improve boating access areas and public fishing areas, to deliver educational programming, to provide additional water access and wildlife viewing opportunities to the public, and to promote wildlife-centric planning and development.
- The agency will continue to recruit and retain conservation organization partners for land acquisition and management, and other state agencies for wildlife habitat management and diversity projects.
- The agency is developing partnerships with local universities and researchers to leverage their expertise in analyzing data and designing projects that answer key agency questions. These partnerships make an important contribution to building our capacities in biological and social research to support evidence-based decision-making.

The agency simply would not be as effective without these partnerships. We continuously look for and seek out these types of partnerships to expand our capacity and ensure we are operating and managing the state's resources as effectively and responsibly as possible.