



North Carolina
Wildlife Federation

FALL 2025

Journal



LAWS OF THE WILD

10 laws create the foundation for conservation in America.

NCWF'S WILD PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

NOW OPEN: GOVERNOR'S CONSERVATION ACHIEVEMENTS AWARDS NOMINATIONS

That's a Fact

BY TIM GESTWICKI, NCWF CEO

The sky is blue, fire is hot, ice is cold, trees drop their leaves in the fall and grow new ones in the spring, fish swim, deer don't climb trees, and colors in the rainbow never change. These are truisms that we all surely accept.

Except that these days it seems that just about everything is up for debate, including science and history. It feels like we are in a period bereft of irrefutable facts and data. But there are things that, while they may be debated for whatever reasons, are simply facts. Contrarians are welcome to question or try to dispel the laws of gravity; however, to what end? Knowing they are incorrect, do we engage in conversations, point to facts, or ignore? Subjectivity is based on personal feelings, opinions, and experiences, while objectivity is based on verifiable facts and evidence. For example, 'the male wood duck is the most colorful species in the world' versus wood ducks nest in tree cavities, hollows, or nesting boxes. The former is an opinion, and the latter is an evidence-based fact.

History can be ignored, but that doesn't change what happened. In this *Journal*, we feature our top 10 fish and wildlife laws, underscoring the legacy of conservation safeguards in American history. It is noteworthy that they were accomplished in a bipartisan manner, with the majority being championed by Republicans. While the choices are subjective, as our list includes favorite laws for fish and wildlife, albeit well-researched and analyzed, and others might swap out one for another, their objectivity lies in that they are all laws that have had an indelible impact on our collective natural resource heritage. To put into perspective how the laws are working, we also include updates on the current status of these foundational laws. Minus hyperbole or subjection, we provide the current lay of the land in a just-the-facts manner. Regardless of perceptions or ideals, this update reflects the current reality of these laws.

NCWF can report with confidence to our supporters that we are working the best way possible for wildlife.

From time to time, we all take stock of various aspects of our lives—our finances, our relationships, our work—as we make decisions on how best to live. Laws, too, should be examined, debated, and bettered for the highest efficiency and effectiveness to the citizenry and what we value. Based on input, feedback, and current situations, there can be a metamorphosis of laws to meet the original intended purposes best while meeting current needs. Over the decades, our organizational mission has consistently focused on wildlife and habitat conservation, but the best way to achieve this impact has always evolved. If we were not adaptable, we would be neutered in meeting our charge for wildlife. It is reasonable—if not warranted—to review how taxpayer monies should be most effectively utilized. Again, the same applies to NCWF as we ensure we maximize our resources and can report with confidence to our supporters that we are working the best way possible for wildlife.

As time moves forward, things change, but we still need clean air, water, and healthy landscapes—the very things these laws have protected. The reason we highlight some of the current statuses of some of the laws is to point out how some may need assistance, and how others are doing just fine. One example I'll highlight is the Endangered Species Act. This law has supported the comeback of many species from the brink of extinction, such as bald eagle, river otter, and American alligator. While we agree this act needs to be updated and tweaked, the current proposal goes too far. To remove habitat considerations from how we protect and conserve wildlife is simply illogical. A proposal to redefine "harm" of a species by removing its habitat is basically a death knell. This is not be a tweak or even an overhaul. Current proposals are akin to throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

As you read and reflect on our history of conservation laws, I hope you are as proud of our forefathers as I am. It underscores our collective values during the periods of time they were enacted and built upon. It is up to us to determine if changes like those proposed to conservation laws are in the best interests of America, or are they a bridge too far? **WF**

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ABOUT THE COVER

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SNOWY EGRET
 by Roger Sulenski

NORTH CAROLINA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

- MISSION** To protect, conserve, and restore North Carolina wildlife and habitat for all.
- VISION** A North Carolina with healthy and diverse habitats and wildlife valued by all people and sustained for future generations.
- VALUES** Science-based decision making
 Non-partisan approach to policy
 Inclusive of broad interests and perspectives
 Collaborative with diverse organizations and individuals
 Committed to solutions and impact



Wildlife Laws *in American History*

When thinking about conservation today, an adage rings true: “To know where you’re going, you have to know where you’ve been.”

The United States has a rich history of environmental legislation, marked by landmark laws that have significantly shaped the way the country protects its natural resources. Some safeguard our water, air, and land; others sustain the fish and wildlife that form the backbone of America’s sporting and outdoor heritage.

In this review of ten key federal acts—presented in no particular order—North Carolina Wildlife Federation highlights the foresight and leadership of policymakers and the lasting benefits their work continues to provide for wildlife and habitat. Together, these laws remind us that progress in conservation is built not only on passion, but on action. And that the choices we make today will define the natural legacy we leave for future generations.



WHITE-TAILED DEER / ROBERT STOCKTON / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST

LACEY ACT • Introduced by Iowa Republican congressman John Lacey in 1900, this was the first major federal legislation to protect wildlife in America. The Lacey Act bans interstate or foreign commerce involving any fish, wildlife, or plants taken, possessed, or sold in violation of state or foreign law. The Act has been amended to include a wider variety of prohibited plants and plant products, including some rainforest species, and to curb the transport of non-native pythons to the Everglades. In North Carolina, it is used to curb efforts to transport deer and feral hogs into the state. As the proliferation of non-native and invasive species continues, wildlife agencies are fortunate to have the Lacey Act in their toolbox.

Drilling Down: Poaching and the illegal wildlife trade remain severe threats to biodiversity. According to the UNODC’s 2024 World Wildlife Crime Report, trafficking now affects around 4,000 plant and animal species. Estimates of its annual value run as high as \$20 to \$23 billion.

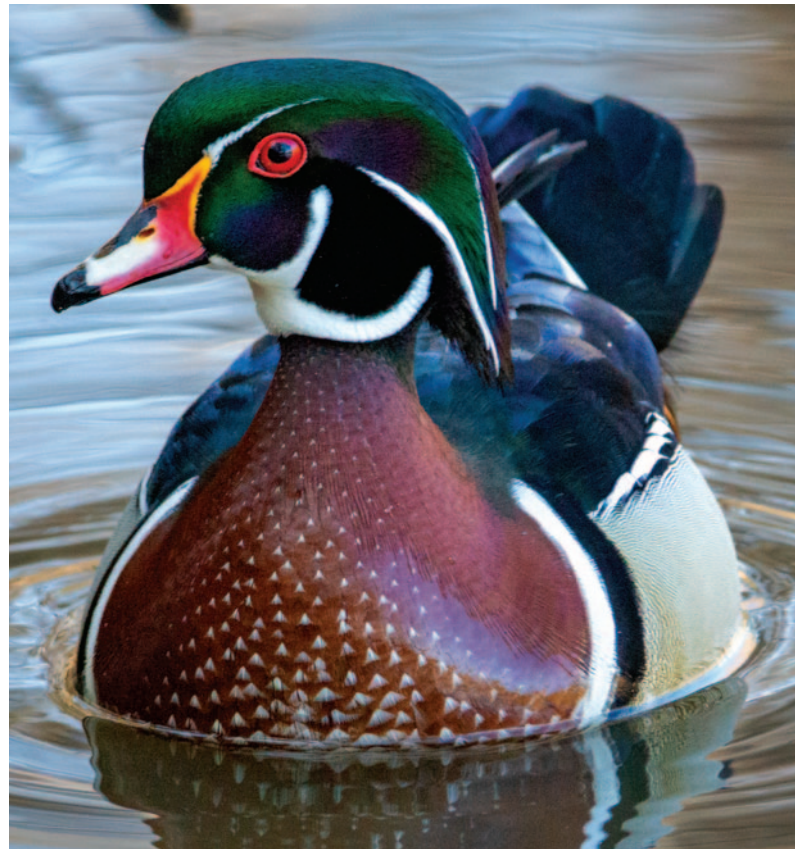
CLEAN WATER ACT • Established in 1972 under President Richard Nixon, the Clean Water Act set national standards for the quality of water in streams and lakes. Just before the Act was passed, rivers like the Cuyahoga in Ohio were literally on fire, and lakes such as Thonotassa in Florida were experiencing their largest fish kills in history. In North Carolina, the mud-choked French Broad River was described as “too thick to drink and too thin to plow.” The Clean Water Act empowered the Environmental Protection Agency to implement regulations on pollution discharges into our waterways. Water quality standards were established and sewage treatment facilities were constructed. Under the Clean Water Act, the US Army Corps of Engineers has purview over dredging and filling of waterways including wetlands. With the goal of “drinkable, swimmable, fishable water,” the Clean Water Act is critical to the nation and to North Carolina and has revived many of our waterways. With more sound and estuarine waters than any other lower 48 state besides Louisiana, and with a quarter-million miles of rivers and streams, North Carolina depends on the Clean Water Act protections more than most.

FEDERAL AID IN WILDLIFE RESTORATION ACT • Commonly known as Pittman-Robertson after its sponsors, this eight-decade-old legislation established an excise tax on firearms and ammunition. Monies are allocated to the Interior Department and distributed to states, which match the funds with 25 percent of the monies from hunting license sales. Species such as white-tailed deer, wild turkey, and wood ducks are shining examples of restoration supported by the legislation. This “tax legislation on sportsmen,” which was adopted during the Great Depression, is a shining beacon in the history of wildlife legislation and proves that dedicated revenue collections can indeed be accomplished.

Drilling Down: On average, North Carolina receives about \$23 million per year for wildlife research, management, and habitat protection.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT • In the early 1970s, President Richard Nixon believed that conservation efforts were failing and inadequate and called on Congress to pass comprehensive reform. In 1973, what some call the Magna Carta of the environmental movement was enacted. The Endangered Species Act serves to protect plant and animal species in threat of extinction, especially as a “consequence of economic growth and development untempered by adequate concern and conservation.” The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) are fully empowered to implement the Endangered Species Act. Significant success stories due to the Act include the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, and southern sea otter. An example of the Endangered Species

Drilling Down: In 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision in *Sackett v. EPA* that drastically limited Clean Water Act protections. In its aftermath, anti-regulation activists are testing the bounds of the court's decision with targeted lawsuits, hoping to restrict further the federal protections. NCWF entered into a lawsuit for one such attempt in eastern North Carolina. Attorneys were preparing for court this year when the Department of Justice requested the parties pause litigation while the Administration further determined the Supreme Court's drastic weakening of wetland Clean Water Act ramifications. Later this year, the EPA and the Corps of Engineers announced that they plan to revise the definition of “waters of the United States” to further narrow the scope of federal clean water protections via rulemaking proceedings.



WOOD DUCK / SHELLEY MOXLEY / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST

Act at work in North Carolina includes the red wolf reintroduction at Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge. North Carolina made history again when Pinehurst Resort was the first to sign a Safe Harbor Agreement for the health and prosperity of our economy and our environment.

Drilling Down: Earlier this year, the FWS and NMFS proposed rescinding the regulatory definition of “harm” under the Endangered Species Act. This sudden, far narrower interpretation of the term runs counter to the Act's fundamental purposes to protect and restore listed species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. NCWF joined comments opposing such an arbitrary and capricious proposal.



BLACK BEARS / BRUCE COPELAND / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST

NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM ACT • When an act has the mission to “administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans,” it has to make NCWF’s Top 10 fish and wildlife bills of all time. This law, enacted in 1966 but founded on earlier legislation, provides for the administration and management of all areas in a national system of “wildlife refuges, areas for the protection and conservation of fish and wildlife that are threatened with extinction, wildlife ranges, game ranges, wildlife management areas, and waterfowl production areas.” In 1903, President Theodore Roosevelt established Florida’s Pelican Island National Wildlife Refuge as the first parcel of what is now a system of more than 95 million acres within 570 National Wildlife Refuges across the country. Also included in the refuge system managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are marine areas, including National Marine Monuments, which provide another 760 million acres within the system. A major stimulus for the refuge system came in 1934 with the passage of the Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp Act, commonly referred to as the “duck stamp act.” National Wildlife Refuges secure, enhance, and manage in

perpetuity this nation’s natural treasures of wild habitats, both aquatic and terrestrial, and populations of fish and wildlife that inhabit these habitats for all citizens to enjoy. North Carolina has 11 National Wildlife Refuges that provide homes for bog turtles, waterfowl, bear, turkey, deer, shorebirds, and native flora.

Drilling Down: The Refuge System has been struggling with a staffing crisis for over a decade due to funding not keeping up with inflation and fixed costs, paired with an increase in acres and visitation. In the past 15 years, the Refuge System has added 18 new refuges, 22 million marine acres, opened 6 million acres for hunting and fishing, and visitation has grown to over 67 million annual visitors. For budget years 2024/2025, the estimated Refuge System needs were \$161 million added to the base budget just to overcome losses due to inflation and ensure minimum field management capacity. The Refuge System has a large, deferred maintenance backlog (in 2024, the backlog was an estimated \$2.6 billion), with most structures near or past the end of their maximum useful life spans, such as buildings, roads, bridges, and trails. Under current appropriations, deferred maintenance costs are projected to reach \$28 billion by FY2050. This year has seen funding reduced and significant staffing reductions.

MIGRATORY BIRD ACT/MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT •

One of the first influential pieces of environmental legislation in the country was enacted in 1913. Before this law was adopted, bird species, nongame and game alike, had no protection and the fashions of the 1800s and 1900s were keen on bird feathers, especially herons and egrets, for hats. The trade in feathers took a tremendous toll—by most estimates, 200 million wild birds were killed per year. Populations of the most hunted species declined to dangerous levels. The Migratory Bird Act

gave the federal government full authority to protect migratory birds with today nearly 800 species listed for protection. In 1918, the legislation was widened in an international convention agreement between the U.S. and Great Britain and subsequently with Canada, Mexico, Russia, and Japan. Under the Act, the taking, killing, disturbing of nests, and possessing of migratory birds is highly regulated. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is granted the authority to set hunting seasons for waterfowl and other migratory birds based on species populations.



LAND AND WATER CONSERVATION FUND ACT • This landmark legislation was passed by Congress in 1964 and signed by President John F. Kennedy. Its objective is to balance the use of offshore oil and gas by allocating a small portion of energy leasing revenues to acquire important habitat and recreational land, and to improve public access to fish, wildlife, and other natural resources. The Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) was established to allocate \$900 million annually from offshore oil drilling revenues to support conservation projects in national parks and national forests, fish and wildlife refuges, local parks, and other public lands. The beauty of LWCF and its dedicated revenue stream from drilling leases is that no tax money is involved, and only a small percentage of the lease fees are designated for the LWCF. This fund is the primary source of funding in America for land preservation. In North Carolina, it has helped protect the Roanoke River and Alligator River national wildlife refuges, the Croatan National Forest, and the Cape Hatteras and Cape Lookout national seashores. Since the founding of the LWCF, however, it has rarely been funded at or near the annual \$900 million statutory level as Congress has repeatedly raided the fund, taking dollars that should have been gone toward important conservation initiatives and using them for other expenditures. The annual diversion of LWCF funds to non-conservation purposes has left a long legacy of backlogged conservation projects across the nation. Signed on August 4, 2020, the Great American Outdoors Act was hailed by NCWF as one of the most important conservation milestones in a generation. The legislation permanently and fully funds LWCF and creates a fund to address an enormous maintenance backlog on public lands. Funding of the federal government's deferred maintenance of public lands will be administered through a newly established National Parks and Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund.



EASTERN WILD TURKEY / BETTYTATE / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST

Drilling Down: Within the Administration's proposed budget to Congress is a 40 percent diversion of LWCF funds. As this would violate laws enacted five years ago, the administration is also seeking legislative changes from Congress governing the LWCF. None of this is positive for public lands conservation, and since there is no budget agreement in D.C., it will be up to Congress to determine if LWCF progresses forward as intended.

MAGNUSON-STEVENS FISHERY CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ACT •

The Magnuson-Stevens Act was enacted in 1979 and has been amended several times. The law established a fishery conservation zone in ocean waters that extends from the 3-mile state jurisdiction to the 200-mile federal jurisdiction. A critical element of the act was the creation of eight regional councils to manage fish populations within the conservation zone to prevent overfishing, allow overfished stocks to recover, and manage all fisheries stocks in a sustainable manner. North Carolina is a member of both the South Atlantic and Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Councils. In the South Atlantic region, seven of the eight managed species groups are determined to be at sustainable levels. The exception

is the overfished snapper-grouper complex for which management measures are being enacted. In the Mid-Atlantic region, 13 of 14 managed stocks are being managed at sustainable levels. The exception is the butterfish, which is currently over-fished. A success story is the recovery of black sea bass populations. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council has recommended that the annual catch limit of black sea bass be more than doubled in South Atlantic federal waters due to increased population numbers. This increase is largely due to actions taken to curtail overfishing following the 2006 stock assessment. The Magnuson-Stevens Act has achieved a level of marine fisheries conservation in federal waters that likely would not have occurred otherwise.



DINGELL-JOHNSON ACT • Also referred to as the Federal Aid in Sport Fish Restoration Act, this law was enacted in 1950 to provide federal funding support to state fisheries management agencies. Similar to the Pittman-Robertson program, the fund was originally derived from a 10-percent excise tax on certain items of sport fishing tackle. In 1984, the Wallop-Breaux amendment expanded the types of fishing tackle subject to the 10-percent tax by placing a 3-percent excise tax on fish finders and trolling motors, collecting import duties on fishing tackle and yachts and other pleasure craft, and incorporating a portion of the fuel taxes attributed to motorboats. State fishing license receipts, boating registration fees, and other non-federal money are used as matching funds (\$3 federal for every \$1 state) to support fisheries management in fresh and marine waters, boating access, boating safety, and aquatic education. The Act also has the little-known stipulation that if a state diverts any portion of its fishing license receipts to fund other programs, it will lose its entire allocation of Dingell-Johnson funds. For more than 60 years, this provision has ensured that 100 percent of anglers' and boaters' license fees go directly to support fishing and boating recreation.

Drilling Down: In 2024, North Carolina's portion of the fund was nearly \$13 million.



STRIPED BASS / SUZANNE CONNOR TAMMARO / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST

FARM BILL (CONSERVATION INCENTIVE PROGRAMS) •

This behemoth 1940s legislation covers agricultural production and distribution, as well as hunger issues, and would not make the NCWF Top 10 list if not for its evolution in 1985. The Farm Bill, which can be called the greatest conservation law you've never heard of, added a conservation title leading to the nation's most successful voluntary conservation programs for private landowners and farmers interested in protecting wildlife habitat, controlling soil erosion, and reducing polluted runoff. The

BLUE GROSBEAK / SUSAN JORDAN / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST



program is based on technical and financial assistance from platforms such as the Conservation and Wetlands Reserve Programs. The Farm Bill is among the largest sources of conservation funding in the federal government, with hundreds of millions of dollars available to protect wetlands, grasslands, and other fragile lands as wildlife habitats. The bill, which is authorized in 5-year increments, gained even more value for conservation in 1990 when wildlife was emphasized. That change led to wildlife corridor protections and the conversion of marginal lands and other environmentally sensitive acreage to vegetative cover, such as native grasslands and riparian buffers, utilizing thinning and prescribed burns to manage habitats for upland species.

Drilling Down: Congress typically renews the Farm Bill every five years. The 2018 bill expired in October 2023. Congress has since passed two one-year extensions, and is currently deadlocked; a bipartisan effort will be necessary to pass a Farm Bill, thereby removing the cycle of uncertainty for landowners who produce food and care for their land. North Carolina lands are 85 percent privately held, and the Farm Bill is crucial to keeping working farms and forests undeveloped. **NCWF**

Nominate Your Conservation Hero

NORTH CAROLINA WILDLIFE FEDERATION has opened nominations for the 61st Annual Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards. There are numerous categories to nominate a wide array of agency professionals, elected officials, volunteers, and organizations committed to North Carolina's wildlife, habitat and natural resources. NCWF first presented its conservation awards in 1958. These prestigious awards are a long-standing effort to honor individuals, governmental bodies, organizations and others who have exhibited an unwavering commitment to conservation in North Carolina. These are the highest natural resource honors given in the state. By recognizing, publicizing and honoring these conservation leaders — young and old, professional and volunteer — North Carolina Wildlife Federation hopes to inspire all North Carolinians to take a more active role in protecting the natural resources of our state.

"Each year we are amazed at the commitment and creativity of North Carolina citizens in protecting wildlife and wild places," stated T. Edward Nickens, NCWF's awards committee chair. "Many of our award winners tell us their Governor's Conservation Achievement Award represents the high point of their career, whether they are full-time scientists or full-time volunteer conservationists."

For over 60 years, this annual awards program has brought together a diverse group of conservationists to highlight the good news about wildlife conservation across the state.



"We hope it inspires others to take a more active role in protecting North Carolina's natural resources for future generations," Nickens said. Nominations are being accepted through January 31, 2026, by using the QR code at left.



NCWF Announces 7th Annual Photo Contest

Photographers across the state captured the beauty and diversity of our state's natural resources for North Carolina Wildlife Federation's Photography Contest.

Winners and Honorable Mentions for 2025

highlighting North Carolina's wildlife and habitat— from the coast to the mountains. Categories included Carolina Critters, People in Nature, Scenes of North Carolina and Pollinators & Insects, and were anonymously presented to a panel of judges to determine who would be this year's winners and honorable mentions.

NCWF received submissions from adult and youth photographers



Honorable Mention, Carolina Critters: John-Andrew Lovins / Getting into Cataloochee Valley before sunrise can be a tall order, but getting to watch the resident elk start their day in the pre-dawn light is a unique and magical experience for fans of North Carolina wildlife.



Honorable Mention, Carolina Critters, Youth: Finn Tyrrell / My favorite subjects are adorable, fascinating, beautiful birds. This photo doesn't have much of a backstory from me, but from the bird's perspective, it shows a moment in the midst of a spring rain, resting before grabbing a snack at the feeders and fleeing to find shelter elsewhere. And I love that.



WINNER, People in Nature: Hailey Nelms / I took this photo in the game lands along the Northeast Cape Fear, adjacent to Sledge Forest – an old-growth forest at risk of being developed. Even now, this little pine makes me optimistic for the future. Save Sledge Forest.



WINNER, Pollinators & Insects: Jacob Long / Moments like this remind me that even the smallest and most ephemeral of God's creatures have a beauty and purpose worth noticing. When we take the time to slow down and truly look, we find wonder in the lives that often go unseen.





WINNER, Carolina Critters, Youth: Shreyes Chalasani / While I wanted a photo of the turtle's face, it never fully extended out of its shell, and I was left with an underexposed and poorly illuminated shot of it. However, I saw the photo had potential as the flash was able to illuminate just the eyes, and I was able to walk away with this unique photograph.



Honorable Mention, Scenes of North Carolina: Chris Cotton / I drove three hours from Charlotte with my fingers crossed, and to my luck, the valley floor in Pisgah National Forest was blanketed with sunrise fog. Once the sun rose above the distant mountains, its light pierced through the trees, casting beautiful rays across the quickly burning fog.



Honorable Mention, People in Nature: Mark Kwiatkowski / This black-and-white photograph captures a tranquil moment of a fly fisherman standing in the water below the dam at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina. The contrast between the stillness of the angler and the movement of the rushing water enhances the serene, contemplative mood of the scene. The image evokes a strong sense of solitude, nature, and timeless outdoor tradition.



WINNER, Scenes of North Carolina: Annie Lazo / We sat on the dew-soaked grass atop the bald in the Roan Highlands – capturing waves of synchronous fireflies as they lit up the dark, all while the stars and Milky Way stretched across the sky.



WINNER, Carolina Critters: Ryan Imperio / After a summer storm passed, I spotted a great blue heron standing within a cloud of steam along Lake Crabtree. It paused to scratch its neck awhile also raising the feathers on top of its head, a moment I was fortunate enough to capture.



Honorable Mention, Pollinators & Insects: Barb Case / These two ruby-throated hummingbirds were definitely unhappy about both of them looking for nectar on the same plant in my backyard. I watched and photographed their bickering until one of them gave up and flew away!

Next in The Field: NCWF's 2025 Scholarship Winners

Seven undergraduate, graduate, and Ph.D. students attending N.C. State University and Duke University received 2025 North Carolina Wildlife Federation scholarships to support their studies and careers in wildlife conservation. "Early-career conservationists need more than passion—they need opportunity," said Dr. Liz Rutledge, NCWF vice president of wildlife resources. "These scholarships help bridge the gap between education and action, giving talented students the resources to turn their ideas into meaningful outcomes for wildlife."



Alamance Wildlife Club Sponsored Grant: Mason Ibrahim

Mason Ibrahim is pursuing a master's degree in environmental management at Duke University, concentrating in coastal and marine systems and environmental analytics and modeling. Her work focuses on large-scale coastal restoration, with an emphasis on revitalizing critical habitats, including seagrass meadows, salt marshes, and oyster reefs. Mason aims to develop restoration strategies that are both ecologically sound and socially inclusive, integrating scientific innovation with local community knowledge.



Conservation Leadership Scholarship: Sweta Dixit

Sweta Dixit is a Ph.D. student in parks, recreation, and tourism management at NCSU, where her research focuses on fostering human-wildlife coexistence by engaging local communities and bridging the gap between research, policy, and governance. Originally from Nepal, Sweta brings a valuable international perspective to her studies, informed by firsthand experience with human-wildlife conflict near protected areas. Her current projects include research on community perceptions of red wolf and Florida panther conservation, as well as the development of educational materials to support coexistence initiatives. Sweta has served in leadership roles with The Wildlife Society and international conservation organizations, moderating sessions at global conferences and publishing peer-reviewed articles.



Alyssa Weeks

Alyssa Weeks is a rising senior at NCSU studying fisheries, wildlife, and conservation biology with a focus on

wildlife science. Her research includes white-tailed deer conservation genetics and camera trap studies. She has gained hands-on experience in genetic analysis and wildlife research technologies through her work at the North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences and the Biodiversity Lab. Alyssa plans to pursue graduate school and a career in mammal ecology and conservation research, with a strong interest in tropical wildlife conservation through an upcoming study abroad program in Ecuador. She also serves as Vice President of the Leopold Wildlife Club, supporting the development of future wildlife professionals.



Annabelle Dyer

Annabelle Dyer is a rising junior at Duke University pursuing a B.S. in environmental sciences with a minor in chemistry. Her work bridges field research, laboratory science, and public communication to advance environmental health and restoration. She has conducted research on tire wear particles in bee pollen and honey in the Rittschof Lab, analyzed chemical data with the Environmental Working Group, and worked in oyster restoration with the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and Duke's Bass Connections team. She hopes to pursue a career that combines environmental research, data-driven analysis, and outreach to inspire actionable change in conservation and sustainability.



Devin Raburn

Devin Raburn is pursuing a master's degree in fisheries, wildlife, and conservation biology at NCSU, where her research focuses on endemic and ESA-petitioned crayfish species. Her work aims to generate critical data on species ecology, habitat needs, and distribution to inform conservation planning and management. Devin is currently collaborating with partners on genetic analyses to refine understanding of the Oktibbeha Rivulet Crayfish, a candidate for federal protection, and is cataloging more than 14,000 crayfish and fish specimens for museum collections. She serves as co-president of the NCSU Student Subunit of the American Fisheries Society and plans to continue her career as an aquatic ecologist, focusing on the conservation of at-risk freshwater species.



Isabella Livingston

Isabella Livingston is a Ph.D. candidate in genetics and genomics at NCSU, where she is applying molecular tools to advance wildlife health and conser-

vation. Her research integrates genetics, biotechnology, and ecology to address real-world conservation challenges. Currently, Isabella is developing a SNP panel to support the identification and population monitoring of black bears across North Carolina, a project conducted in collaboration with the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. Her work aims to strengthen evidence-based conservation and improve wildlife management strategies through the use of genetic data. As an active member of The Wildlife Society's Molecular Ecology Working Group, Isabella helps review grants and organize professional development workshops for early-career scientists. She plans to continue bridging molecular research and applied conservation to promote the long-term sustainability of species and ecosystems.



Paige Meadows

Paige Meadows is a rising junior at NCSU pursuing dual majors in fisheries, wildlife, and conservation biology and agricultural business management, along with a minor in environmental education. Passionate about connecting people with nature, Paige aspires to become a park ranger or environmental educator. She serves as a College of Natural Resources Ambassador and has led outreach efforts for events such as NCSU's Open House and the Festival for the Eno. Paige's research experience and environmental education work with the City of Raleigh reflect her dedication to fostering conservation awareness in younger generations.



Celebrating a Young Conservationist

AT THIS YEAR'S NATIONAL HUNTING AND Fishing Day Celebration at the John F. Lentz Hunter Education Complex in Ellerbe, excitement filled the air as families explored booths, met wildlife experts, and connected with organizations from across the state. Every child who attended had the opportunity to be entered into a special drawing for a North Carolina Lifetime Unified Infant/Youth Sportsman and Coastal Recreational Fishing License—a prize symbolizing a lifelong connection to the outdoors.

When the winning name was drawn, it was young Mila Jenkins who took home this remarkable gift. Her new license grants her the opportunity to hunt and fish throughout North Carolina, from mountain trout streams to coastal waters. Covering big game, waterfowl, and inland and coastal recreational fishing, Mila's license represents not just access but a legacy, ensuring she can experience, respect, and help conserve North Carolina's rich natural heritage for years to come.



**NCWF WELCOMES NEW COMMUNITY WILDLIFE CHAPTER:
FALL LINE OUTDOORS**



North Carolina Wildlife Federation welcomes Fall Line Outdoors, a new Community Wildlife Chapter dedicated to helping people safely and responsibly experience North Carolina's outdoors. Grounded in respect for the state's wildlife and habitats, Fall Line Outdoors brings together hunters, anglers, and conservation-minded residents who recognize that time spent afield fosters both skill and stewardship.

The chapter's mission is to introduce newcomers to ethical hunting and fishing traditions through hands-on education, safety instruction, and conservation engagement. With support from certified instructors and experienced volunteers, participants learn practical skills—from firearm and boating safety to fish ecology and wildlife identification—while gaining an understanding of the responsibilities that come with outdoor recreation.

Wildlife conservation is central to Fall Line Outdoors' work. Members promote sustainable harvest practices, habitat protection, and appreciation for how regulated hunting and fishing contribute to healthy ecosystems. Through education, volunteer projects, and community partnerships, the chapter aims to ensure that future generations can continue to enjoy North Carolina's rich natural heritage.

A FOOT IN THE DOOR

Charlotte Wildlife Stewards led a coalition aimed at adding a height exemption for plant growth by those gardening for wildlife. Currently, a landowner can receive a code violation for plants that exceed 12 inches in height, which is contrary to the positive benefits native plants have for local wildlife, such as birds and pollinators. After months of speaking at public forums, sending hundreds of emails, and making countless phone calls, Charlotte's mayor announced her commitment to do the work needed to get the ordinance change. This is a major win for wildlife conservation in Charlotte. By codifying the exemption, the city turns its values into policy, sending a clear message that the city is committed to its principles.

HERPS & HABITATS EDUCATION

NCWF Wildlife Habitat Stewards of Northeastern NC Chapter hosted a herps workshop at Merchants Millpond State Park in partnership with NCWRC state herpetologist, Jeff Hall. During the first part of the workshop, participants learned about several herp species that call northeastern North Carolina home. The presentation included identification tips, listening to vocalizations, and population monitoring using community science. After the presentation, folks enjoyed a guided herp hike to search for reptiles and amphibians around Merchants Millpond State Park. Species discovered included Atlantic coast slimy salamanders, pickerel frogs, a box turtle, a red-bellied water snake, southern cricket frogs, and North America's smallest frog, the little grass frog.

NCWF's Community Wildlife Chapters are grassroots movements powered by local passion and purpose. To get involved with any of these chapters, contact info@ncwf.org.

CHECK OUT OUR CHAPTERS!
For more info, email us at info@ncwf.org.



CHARLOTTE WILDLIFE STEWARDS



CONCORD WILDLIFE ALLIANCE



DURHAM WILDLIFE STEWARDS



FALL LINE OUTDOORS (Harnett, Lee, & Cumberland Counties)



HABITAT BUILDERS (Western Union County)



HAWK (HABITAT AND WILDLIFE KEEPERS) (Matthews)



HIGH COUNTRY WILD



INNER BANKS WILDLIFE (Washington)



LAKE JAMES AREA WILDLIFE AND NATURE SOCIETY (Nebo)



LAKE NORMAN WILDLIFE CONSERVATIONISTS



LOWER CAPE FEAR WILDLIFE



NEUSE RIVER HAWKS CONSERVATIONISTS (Wake Forest)



PAWS (GASTON COUNTY PIEDMONT AREA WILDLIFE STEWARDS)



SOUTHEASTERN SWAMP STEWARDS (Whiteville)



SOUTH WAKE CONSERVATIONISTS (Fuquay-Varina, Raleigh)



SWANNANOVA VALLEY WILD!



TRIAD WILD!



TRI-COUNTY CONSERVATIONISTS



UNION COUNTY WILDLIFE CHAPTER



WILDLIFE HABITAT STEWARDS (Northeastern NC)

Sid Little: *Getting Hooked on Conservation*

FOR SID LITTLE, A LIFETIME OF CONSERVATION began with a simple tug on the line.

Growing up in Wilmington, North Carolina, his earliest memories trace back to the salty air under the bridge to Wrightsville Beach, fishing with his dad. “For a five-year-old, that was about the coolest thing you could do,” he recalls. Before long, Sid was spending entire afternoons casting shrimp from the pier in front of his family’s home. His mother could watch from the window to make sure he was still there, but she didn’t need to worry. Sid was hooked.

College and career pulled him away from fishing for a time, but that familiar feeling found him again in Burlington when a friend invited him to try bass fishing. It was a first for the life-long saltwater angler. “For some reason, I was the only one who caught fish that day,” Sid laughs. “And I was also the only one who didn’t know what I was doing.” That lucky day reignited something deep within him. Soon, he bought his first boat, and what began as a pastime became a passion.

As Sid spent more time on the water, he began noticing changes. Species long missing from the landscape—white-tailed deer, white bass, bald eagles, and pelicans—were returning, and it struck a chord for Sid. “I began to appreciate that the only reason they were back was because concerned folks like NCWF and others were willing to commit the time and resources to bring them back. It was eye-opening.”

Soon, Sid joined the Alamance Wildlife Club, an affiliate of North Carolina Wildlife Federation. Over the years, he’s seen firsthand how grassroots conservation can bring species back from the brink, one community, one volunteer, one project at a



time. Now, as a proud member of the NCWF’s Shaw Society, Sid continues to support that work for generations to come.

For him, the most rewarding part of conservation isn’t just what’s been restored. It’s what’s being passed on. He finds his greatest joy in sharing the outdoors with his grandchildren, helping them feel the same wonder he did as a boy standing on that pier. “Watching a kid catch their first fish is more exciting than anything,” he says. “They get so excited, and once they’re hooked, that excitement and respect usually stays with them.”

From the whitetails and eagles that returned to our state, to the next generation discovering the thrill of their first catch, Sid sees every moment outdoors as part of a bigger story: a story of renewal, responsibility, and the simple joy of being part of something wild.

Members in the Charlie Shaw Society are our most dedicated supporters—generous members who have made a commitment to the work and programs of North Carolina Wildlife Federation through an annual contribution of \$1,000 or more. Gifts can be made in one lump sum or in any number of smaller contributions within a calendar year, and can be directed to any Federation program that is of interest to the donor.

MATT FELPERIN / RUFFED GROUSE / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST



**CREATE A BETTER
FUTURE FOR WILDLIFE.**

It's easier than you think.

Make a gift that lasts longer. Many people like to leave a gift to charity in their will because they care about causes that are important to their lives. A gift to NCWF in your will, retirement funds or life insurance ensures future generations can enjoy the wildlife and habitat that you care about in North Carolina.

www.ncwf.org/legacy



Interested?

Kate Greiner, CFRE
VP of Philanthropy
P: 704/332-5696
E: Kate@ncwf.org

The Season

Jeff Beane's GUIDE TO
NATURAL NORTH CAROLINA

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DECEMBER

December 13-14: Geminid meteor shower peaks. Bundle up and find a dark location for this shower, which is usually the strongest of the year, producing a good show. Ideal viewing should be at around 2 a.m.

December 14-January 5: Christmas Bird Counts are held around the state. For information on how to participate in the world's largest and oldest organized wildlife survey (now in its 126th year), contact your local Audubon chapter or the Carolina Bird Club, www.carolinabirdclub.org.

December 15: Eastern tiger and Mabee's salamanders—two of our rarer ephemeral-pond-breeding amphibians—begin breeding with the first warm or heavy winter rains in the Sandhills and Coastal Plain.

December 16: Black bears begin their winter dormancy, but they may be active during warm periods, and sometimes all winter, especially in coastal areas where food is plentiful.

December 18: Migration peaks for Canada geese and snow geese.

December 22: Ursid meteor shower peaks.

December 25: Most herbaceous plants have gone dormant or been killed by frost, but Christmas fern and running-cedar still contribute festive green to the forest floor. Likewise, there's mistletoe in the otherwise bare hardwood tree canopy—be sure to stand under it.

December 27: The great flocks of double-crested cormorants along the Outer Banks and other portions of our coast are a spectacle worth seeing.

December 29: Black bear cubs are being born.

December 31: Large flocks of yellow-rumped warblers frequent the red-cedar and wax-myrtle thickets along the coast. It can pay to check these carefully for occasional overwintering warblers of other species.

JANUARY

January 2: Most butterflies have migrated, hibernated, or been killed by frost, but on warmer days, especially along the coast, lingering adults of hardy species like common buckeye, variegated fritillary, monarch, red admiral, and American lady may be seen flying.

January 6: Waterfowl populations are peaking along the coast; Pea Island and Lake Mattamuskeet National Wildlife Refuges are especially good waterfowl viewing areas. Swanquarter and Cedar Island ferries provide good viewing opportunities for sea ducks.

January 7: Bald eagles are laying eggs. Watch for rare visits from winter finches like redpolls, crossbills, and evening grosbeaks.

January 10: Migration is peaking for mallards and black ducks. Jupiter will be at its closest approach to Earth, brighter than any other time of year, and visible all night. This is the best time to view and photograph the giant planet; its four largest moons should be visible with good binoculars.

January 11: White-tailed deer are shedding their antlers.

January 12: Great horned owls are nesting.

January 14: Barred owls begin nesting.

January 16: Mourning doves are beginning courtship flights.

January 20: Most flycatchers winter in the tropics, but the eastern phoebe hangs around all winter, adding berries to its diet, along with whatever winter insects it can find. Pay close attention to any flycatchers in winter—rare visitors like Say's phoebe and ash-throated flycatcher show up occasionally.

January 21: The huge flocks of red-winged blackbirds, common grackles, and other blackbirds overwintering along our coast are impressive. The large coastal refuges, like Pocosin Lakes, Alligator River, and Mattamuskeet, are good spots to view this spectacle.

January 25: Watch for humpback whales and other marine mammals along the coast, particularly off the Outer Banks.

January 28: Raccoons and opossums are mating.

January 30: Wood frogs breed during winter rains. Like many winter-breeding amphibians, these handsome frogs of our Mountains and Foothills are highly freeze-tolerant.

January 31: Chorus frogs have begun calling over much of the state: upland chorus frogs in the Piedmont; Brimley's, southern, and ornate chorus frogs in the Coastal Plain; and spring peepers nearly statewide.

FEBRUARY

February 2: It's World Wetlands Day—a good time to visit and appreciate your favorite wetland. Check out the Carolina Wetlands Association <http://carolinawetlands.org/> to learn more.

February 3: Spring waterfowl migrations are beginning. Atlantic sturgeon are migrating to their upriver spawning areas.

February 6: Spotted salamanders and mole salamanders will be breeding in temporary woodland pools with the first warm, heavy rains.

February 8: Song sparrows and northern cardinals are beginning to sing their spring songs. Striped skunks have begun their mating season; males are moving in search of females. Watch carefully for them while driving at night.

February 12: Rainbow trout are spawning in the Mountains.

February 13: Wood ducks are seeking nest sites.

February 15: The spectacular aerial courtship displays of American woodcock can be observed during late evenings. Check with your local Audubon Society or bird club for possible woodcock-watching field trips.

February 16: Skunk-cabbage is in bloom. Yellow perch are spawning.

February 17: Four-toed salamanders begin nesting. These tiny, uncommon amphibians conceal their egg clutches in moss or sedge tussocks in temporary pools and seeps, usually tending the eggs until hatching.

February 20: Gopher frogs—among our most imperiled amphibians—are breeding in the southeastern Coastal Plain and Sandhills.

February 21: Collins's mountain chorus frogs may be heard on warm nights in Cherokee and Clay counties.