



North Carolina
Wildlife Federation

SPRING 2026

Journal



FIX OUR FISHERIES!

Not next year. Not tomorrow. Right now.

CONSERVATION ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

NCWF CHAPTERS IN THE TRENCHES

EXPOSED

BY TIM GESTWICKI, NCWF CEO

There is no more hiding the truth: North Carolina's management of marine resources has failed.

"Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain." This famous line from *The Wizard of Oz* has evolved to refer to the insidious ways we can be manipulated by organizations and individuals, those who work behind closed doors and with a lack of transparency. Oz was the all-powerful entity in charge of the eponymous kingdom, and he was, or so he said, good to the bone. When Dorothy, the Tin Man, the Lion, and the Scarecrow finally make their way to the Emerald City to meet Oz, something funny occurs. Dorothy's little dog, Toto, tugs on the curtain that hides Oz, revealing a feeble old man hoisting levers, talking into multiple voice-altering microphones, and manipulating blaring sounds over speakers. Oz, it turns out, is a mythical scam! Trying to contain the ruse, the great Oz exclaims, "Nothing to see here...we have it under control." But readers and movie watchers—and Dorothy—realize the jig is up.

In the 30 years since the Fisheries Reform Act (FRA) became state law, every fish stock has declined further. Our weakfish and southern flounder fisheries are all but gone. Other fisheries, including spot, croaker, and blue crab—once cornerstones of North Carolina's fishing economy—have collapsed or are collapsing. These fisheries have declined by as much as 95 percent over the past three decades. For years, we and others have offered common-sense solutions, supported by science, including filing rulemaking petitions, supporting legislation that would allow priority species to spawn at least once before harvest, and encouraging efforts to remove destructive gear from our sounds. At every turn, the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries and its rule-making body, the Marine Fisheries Commission, have worked against these basic tenets of sound fisheries management solutions. From where I sit, the biggest challenge facing conservation in North Carolina is the blatant mismanagement, abuse, and waste of our fisheries by the state government. And this is not just an indictment of current elected officials, for this needless squandering of public resources has been going on in North Carolina for decades.

The State has been like Oz with regards to fisheries management. "We got it," we hear. "We will study it. We will make some great changes." It's all akin to the nothing-to-see-here approach that has wrecked our fisheries. We are forever waiting on more data. We are forever being fed excuses, which leads to stagnant actions and the status quo to the detriment of natural resources.



However, the curtain has finally been pulled open on the State for all to see. Two recent developments have shone a bright, stark light on the inadequacies and ineffectiveness of the State when it comes to fisheries management. One of these is the release of a years-long independent science study, mandated by the General Assembly and paid for by the citizenry, to research North Carolina's fish stocks and management effectiveness, and assess its approach in context with that of other states. Not surprisingly, the report confirms what scientists and anglers have long warned: North Carolina's marine fisheries are not being managed to viability. The study is crystal clear; our fisheries are failing, our fish stocks have collapsed, and the economic engine that was once our marine fisheries is no more. The other damning event was the fisheries lawsuit against the State for failure in its duty to rebuild and manage our public trust resources. Overall, the trial proved devastating to the State defense. Testimony from the State's own witnesses revealed that the fisheries management system is failing to protect North Carolina's public marine resources. Even the State's expert witnesses reinforced the plaintiff's core concerns: North Carolina has some of the highest levels of overfishing in the region, critical nursery habitats are not functioning as intended, and the state lacks the scientific data needed to fully evaluate or reverse these declines. One fishery expert for the plaintiffs summed up the trial by comparing North Carolina's fishery management to that of developing nations that still use poison and dynamite to harvest fish.

We cover both of these developments in more detail within these pages, but the bottom line is that the State receives an F grade. Making it even more insulting is that taxpayers have paid around \$900 million since the FRA, with practically no positive results. The curtain pulled back shows a dismal accounting of the State, thus it's no surprise we are known as the laughingstock of the entire country when it comes to fisheries management.

With his cover fully blown, the mighty Oz fled the scene in a hot air balloon, leaving Dorothy and Toto behind. The State, however, cannot flee. And the devastating failure of marine fisheries management in North Carolina is no work of fiction. The curtain is pulled back. The State is on the record. There is no more time for studying or public input. Legislators and the Governor must act and make swift decisions to revamp and completely reboot fisheries management. No more tweaking. It is past time for systemic change. 

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DESIGN/PRINTING

Designed by: Kimberly KC Schott, Red Gate Design

Printed by: Progress Printing, Lynchburg, VA

Published by: North Carolina Wildlife Federation

ABOUT THE COVER

Cover photograph Young angler Jonah Norris with a double handful of spotted seatrout. Photo by Capt. John Mauser. Other photos, unless noted, courtesy of NCWF.

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Wildlife Federation

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Official publication of the North Carolina Wildlife Federation

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NCWF PHOTO
CONTEST
Highlight

**AMERICAN
BLACK BEAR CUB**
by Kimberly Brookbank

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



The Future on Trial



A major lawsuit over coastal fisheries management wraps up, and a generational opportunity to chart a more sustainable future hangs in the balance.

THE TRIAL OVER THE LAWSUIT to hold the State of North Carolina accountable for mismanagement of coastal fisheries was completed over the winter. Brought forth in 2020 by 86 North Carolinians and the Coastal Conservation Association, the lawsuit contends the State has allowed unsustainable fishing practices that have depleted coastal marine fisheries. These

actions violate North Carolina's obligations to its citizens under the public trust doctrine, a centuries-old legal concept incorporated into the State's laws.

Members and staff of the North Carolina Wildlife Federation were in the courtroom throughout the trial as invested stakeholders of the trial. We provided our professional fisheries scientists to testify for the plaintiffs. Our representatives witnessed the following details, which paint a damning picture of the State's inability to properly manage its marine resources under current administrative structures.

Overall, the trial proved devastating to the State defense. Testimony from the State's own witnesses revealed that the fisheries management system is failing to protect North Carolina's public marine resources. Among those testifying for the state were Kathy Rawls, director of the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF); DMF's deputy director Michael Loeffler; officials with DMF's regional offices and enforcement division; and academic and policy experts. DMF officials, in particular, acknowledged uncertainty about whether management measures are achieving long-term viability; admitted that key species continue to decline under existing regulations; and confirmed that important fisheries lack the stock assessments and monitoring necessary for effective management. Witnesses also confirmed repeated quota overages, inadequate enforcement capacity, incomplete habitat protections, and the continued loss of juvenile fish through bycatch and discard mortality.

Even the state's expert witnesses reinforced the plaintiff's core concerns: North Carolina has some of the highest levels

of overfishing in the region, critical nursery habitats are not functioning as intended, and the state lacks the scientific data needed to fully evaluate or reverse these declines. Collectively, the testimony painted a consistent picture of a management system that is heavily regulated on paper but falling short in protecting and rebuilding North Carolina's fisheries for current and future generations.

The state could cite processes, but its own witnesses could not demonstrate effective stewardship. North Carolina lacks proof that its fisheries management approach is working. The state's own witnesses admitted gaps in science, monitoring, implementation, and results. This is the definition of public trust mismanagement.

Among the testimony were many declarations that directly underscore the plaintiffs' position that North Carolina has mismanaged the state's public trust marine resources and that drastic change is required.

■ Testimony that DMF recommendations can satisfy the statutory requirement "on paper" but may not produce the same result in the real world, and that management can "totally miss the mark." This witness also testified that if the state does not define long-term viability and does not know what it is, it cannot really tell whether it is met. Top officials with DMF admitted that they do not have a working definition for the long-term viability of the fisheries they are tasked with protecting. At least one testified that they are unsatisfied with the current state of coastal fisheries in North Carolina.

■ Senior fisheries officials admitted that the agency cannot say that its management has reduced removals for struggling species. One top official with DMF testified: "I don't know that we've done enough to curtail a continued removal of some of these species." This witness also testified: "We do not have the quota monitoring process for the recreational fishery...I believe they've gone over every year," referring to recreational quota overages. A quota system without real-time monitoring is not a working limit, but an after-the-fact accounting exercise. The state set quotas that it could not effectively track and watched overages repeat year after year, decade after decade.

■ As it relates to Southern flounder, DMF officials testified that this species remains overfished, that overfishing continued under prior regimes, and that earlier measures to reverse this status were "not as effective as hoped." When asked about the scientific basis for his opinion that current Southern flounder management is "conservative," this expert replied: "Not individual scientific methods, no, sir." The record further shows that scientific findings are not treated as a priority for the division. A management label such as "conservative" means little if the state's decisions are not rooted in scientific fact.

■ A regional manager for DMF confirmed the DMF has no stock assessments for Eastern oysters, bay scallops, or hard clams, and that without those assessments, the DMF cannot determine whether those species are overfished, calculate biomass, or estimate removal rates beyond reported harvest. This witness agreed that, for these shellfish species, DMF had publicly admitted that sustainable harvest obligations had not been met or could not be met until appropriate data were collected. This State expert did not dispute the calculation that bay scallop landings had fallen roughly 99.9 percent from historic levels. The witness confirmed that an open 2021 season produced no reported commercial harvest and that there has never been a bay scallop stock assessment.



North Carolina has some of the highest levels of overfishing in the region, critical nursery habitats are not functioning as intended, and the state lacks the scientific data needed to evaluate or reverse these declines fully.



PHOTOS: GAVEL / DMYTRO SKRYPNYKOV / ISTOCK.COM; SPOT / NCFISHES.COM



RED DRUM / JOHNMAUSERPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

■ Law enforcement officials for the North Carolina Marine Patrol testified that trawlers are not just catching shrimp, but also catch bycatch, including juvenile fish, and that N.C. Marine Patrol is rarely onboard unless conducting an inspection. Marine Patrol is grossly understaffed for the scale of work required in North Carolina waters and faces an impossible enforcement task given the available resources.

■ An expert academic witness from N.C. State University clarified that stock assessments must account for all deaths due to fishing, including landed catch plus release mortality. After the judge asked for comments related to distinguishing catch from harvest, he stated, “You need to account for all the deaths due to fishing.” That principle leaves no room to treat bycatch, discard mortality, or release mortality as background noise.



The Collaboratory report is crystal clear; our fisheries are failing, our fish stocks have collapsed, and the economic engine that was once our marine fisheries is no more.



SOUTHERN FLOUNDER / JOHNMAUSERPHOTOGRAPHY.COM

■ Policy experts with the North Carolina Collaboratory confirmed the Collaboratory finding that North Carolina had the highest percentage of stocks with an overfishing designation among comparative jurisdictions. When asked whether the report showed a profound shift in coastal North Carolina’s ecological state, he answered: “The data scream that to me.”

This witness also confirmed that none of the primary Coastal Habitat Protection Plan recommendations related to mapping and monitoring had been completed. The Collaboratory found North Carolina’s Primary Nursery Area system is exceptional in scope and history, but has not been adaptively managed over decadal scales and does not appear to be functioning as intended.

THE BOTTOM LINE

While the plaintiffs brought in numerous top experts in the fields of fisheries management and statistics, including both in-state and out-of-state experts, the State had no expert witnesses from other states who could corroborate that North Carolina is effectively utilizing the best science in its management of marine resources, nor is it protecting critical habitats. Astonishingly, none of the State witnesses had read the highly anticipated North Carolina Collaboratory recommendations or findings, which have been available for nearly a year.

Legislators must act now to modernize fisheries management, strengthen science, protect nursery habitats, reduce bycatch, and maintain the long-term viability of our fisheries held in public trust for all North Carolinians.



INDEPENDENT STUDY SHOWS SEVERE FAILURES OF NORTH CAROLINA MARINE FISHERIES MANAGEMENT

Given the dismal status of marine fisheries in North Carolina, the North Carolina General Assembly mandated and funded a comprehensive study of the state's marine fisheries by the North Carolina Collaboratory during the 2021 legislative session. The Collaboratory is a research funding agency that partners with academic institutions and government entities to turn research into practical information and technologies for use by the State and local governments and the communities they serve.

Researchers from UNC-Chapel Hill, N.C. State University, and East Carolina University studied management and fisheries health in other states and considered the health and management of 13 North Carolina fish species over four years. The report confirms what scientists and anglers have long warned: North Carolina's marine fisheries are not being managed to viability. The Collaboratory report is crystal clear: our fisheries are failing, our fish stocks have collapsed, and the economic engine that was once our marine fisheries is no more.

This independent North Carolina fisheries management study underscores a dire and failed situation needing immediate and significant action.

FIX OUR FISHERIES!

The Collaboratory report supports the following:

North Carolina needs stronger science-based management.

- The Collaboratory recommends independent scientific oversight, binding catch limits, and precautionary buffers.
- Data shows that North Carolina should stop managing depleted fisheries at the edge of collapse and instead use conservative targets that give fish populations room to recover.
- North Carolina fishery management has shown an inability to keep up with science and a failure to utilize relevant data and reports.

North Carolina's management system is overcomplicated and ineffective.

- The Collaboratory report found that North Carolina has the most intensively managed but least restrictive coastal fisheries system in the country. Unlike most states, North Carolina allows a broad range of fishing gear and methods, requiring additional layers of management and regulation, which, as the data shows, is not working.
- North Carolina produces some of the worst fish stock outcomes, with 67 percent of assessed species overfished compared with 9 percent to 35 percent under federal management. North Carolina needs fewer processes and better management.
- The overly long Fishery Management Plan revision cycle is a barrier to effective management. Delayed management is failed management. The state needs faster action when stocks decline or when bycatch and habitat disruption harm fishery viability.
- Data shows that more processes do not equal healthier fish. The state must judge fisheries management by results: viable stocks, protected nurseries, reduced bycatch, and restored public access.
- Public trust resources should be managed for all North Carolinians, not shaped by short-term political or industry pressure.

The destructive impacts of bycatch and habitat degradation cannot be ignored.

- The Collaboratory's framework recognizes the need to better account for wasted bycatch and discards. Killing juvenile fish before they can mature through gill net, shrimp trawl, and crab pot bycatch hurts everyone, including recreational anglers, responsible commercial fishers, coastal businesses, and future generations.
- North Carolina's nursery areas and juvenile fish are not being protected well enough to provide healthy spawning populations.
- The data show that the state cannot rebuild fisheries while allowing damaging practices in the waters where young fish mature.
- Our state must restore degraded habitats such as seagrass meadows, oyster bars, sea fans, sponge communities, and more to ensure long-term fishery viability.
- North Carolina lacks data on the impact of bycatch waste. System health cannot be managed effectively without full data. 



Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards

On May 2, 2026, more than 300 attendees gathered for an evening that celebrated both achievement and momentum. The stories shared reflected a deep sense of curiosity and commitment, and highlighted people exploring, learning, and pushing boundaries right here in North Carolina.

Since its founding in 1958, the Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards program has stood as the state's highest honor for natural resource stewardship. Each year, it brings together individuals and organizations who remind us that conservation is not a distant ideal, but an ongoing, collective effort.

"Tonight we celebrate people who push the limits, broaden our understanding of this state we love, and remind us that even in difficult times, hope is still in our hands," said T. Edward Nickens, chair of the awards committee and master of ceremonies for the event. "In one hand are the challenges we face. In the other, the people in this room who prove that hope is alive, action is possible, and none of us stands alone when we stand up for conservation."

North Carolina attorney general Jeff Jackson gave an introductory address to open the event, and NCWF board chair Dave Cable and Jeff Michael, deputy secretary for natural resources, presented honorees with wildlife statuettes.



LAND CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR
The Futral Family • Richlands

Last year, the Futral family permanently protected 465 acres of Onslow County farm and forestland through a perpetual conservation easement with the Working Lands Trust. Their property will support longleaf pine restoration, wetland protection, sustainable forestry, and wildlife habitat management for generations to come. The project was made possible through a partnership between the North Carolina Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of the Navy, helping limit development near Marine Corps installations, including Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune.

WILDLIFE CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR **Curtis Smalling • Garner**

For more than 20 years, Curtis Smalling has led bird conservation efforts across North Carolina through science-based habitat protection and restoration initiatives. As executive director of Audubon North Carolina, he advanced bird-friendly policies, habitat restoration, and community conservation programs statewide.

SPORTSMAN OF THE YEAR **Robert Holland "Sandy" Brady • Reidsville**

Robert Holland "Sandy" Brady has devoted decades to mentoring young hunters and anglers while promoting ethical sportsmanship and wildlife stewardship. Through partnerships with conservation organizations and youth outdoor programs, he expanded opportunities for outdoor education and habitat conservation.

MARINE CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR **Joan Maxwell • Edenton**

Joan Maxwell has demonstrated longstanding leadership in marine conservation and recreational sportfishing through her work with Regulator Marine.

She has championed sustainable fisheries management, responsible angling, and protection of North Carolina's coastal resources.



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR **Abby Weinshenker • Concord**

Abby Weinshenker has advanced conservation education through hands-on learning, citizen science, and community engagement initiatives. Her leadership with student Envirothon teams and environmental programs inspires young people to become active conservation stewards.

FOREST CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR **Julie H. Moore • Raleigh**

For more than 40 years, Julie H. Moore has protected and restored North Carolina's longleaf pine ecosystems

through habitat conservation and species recovery initiatives. Her work with public agencies, private landowners, and volunteers strengthened stewardship of at-risk habitats statewide.

YOUNG CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR
Celia Kaul • Charlotte

For six years, Celia Kaul was greeted at her Montessori school in Charlotte by a towering deodar cedar tree. When plans for a new school threatened the tree and surrounding habitat, Celia and a friend met with arborists, school officials, and developers, researched preservation options, wrote essays, and helped lead a petition that gathered nearly 900 signatures. Their work earned Charlotte's Mayor's Tree of the Year award and inspired widespread community support. Reflecting on the experience, Celia wrote, "This may be my first fight, but may it never be the last."



CONSERVATION ORGANIZATION OF THE YEAR • N.C. Coastal Land Trust

The N.C. Coastal Land Trust protected 150 acres on the south end of Topsail Island through its "Save The South End" campaign. By combining fundraising, grants, and community partnerships, the organization preserved critical habitat, public access, and nesting areas for threatened species.

NATURAL RESOURCES AGENCY OF THE YEAR • North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

The Commission is recognized for advancing red wolf recovery through renewed collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Its leadership strengthened science-based conservation efforts, interagency cooperation, and species recovery initiatives on the Albemarle Peninsula.



CONSERVATION HALL OF FAME
Katherine Skinner • Durham

For nearly four decades, Katherine Skinner led The Nature Conservancy in North Carolina, helping protect more than 460,000 acres and advancing conservation efforts statewide. Her leadership helped shape landmark projects and funding initiatives, including the Roanoke River National Wildlife Refuge, longleaf pine restoration, and major state conservation trust funds. Raised in Williamston along the Roanoke River, Skinner built a career grounded in pragmatic, action-oriented conservation leadership. Through partnerships with state and federal leaders, nonprofits, and private landowners, she helped secure lasting protections for critical habitats and natural resources across North Carolina.

NATURAL RESOURCES SCIENTIST OF THE YEAR • Dr. Arthur E. Bogan • Raleigh

For 50 years, Dr. Arthur E. Bogan has advanced research and conservation of freshwater mussels, publishing foundational scientific work and describing dozens of new species. His research has guided conservation planning and aquatic ecosystem protection worldwide.

BUSINESS CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR
Raven Invasive Plant Management • Asheville

Founded by Raven Sterling, Raven Invasive Plant Management restores Blue Ridge ecosystems through non-chemical invasive plant removal and native habitat recovery. The company's work supports endangered species conservation and sustainable land management practices.

NCWF COMMUNITY WILDLIFE CHAPTER OF THE YEAR • NCWF Lake Norman Wildlife Chapter

Following Hurricane Helene, NCWF Lake Norman Wildlife Chapter removed more than 50 tons of debris while restoring island and shoreline habitats. Through volunteerism, habitat projects, and environmental education, the chapter strengthened conservation engagement across the region.

PUBLIC LANDS CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR • Blue Ridge Guide Association

The Blue Ridge Guide Association has advanced conservation and water quality monitoring efforts throughout the Southern Appalachian region. Working with guides, outfitters, and conservation partners, the group supports trout habitat protection and sustainable outdoor recreation economies.



CONSERVATIONIST OF THE YEAR
Bill Rabon • Winnabow

For eight terms in the North Carolina Senate, Bill Rabon has been a leading advocate for conservation funding, wildlife crossings, and protection of native habitats across the state. He has consistently supported policies that strengthen North Carolina's natural resources and outdoor heritage. Most recently, Senator Rabon championed efforts to restrict large-scale inshore shrimp trawling in North Carolina's estuarine waters, including important nursery habitats like Pamlico Sound. Despite significant opposition, he remained committed to protecting coastal fisheries, public trust resources, and the long-term health of North Carolina's marine ecosystems.

2026

Governor's Conservation Achievement Awards

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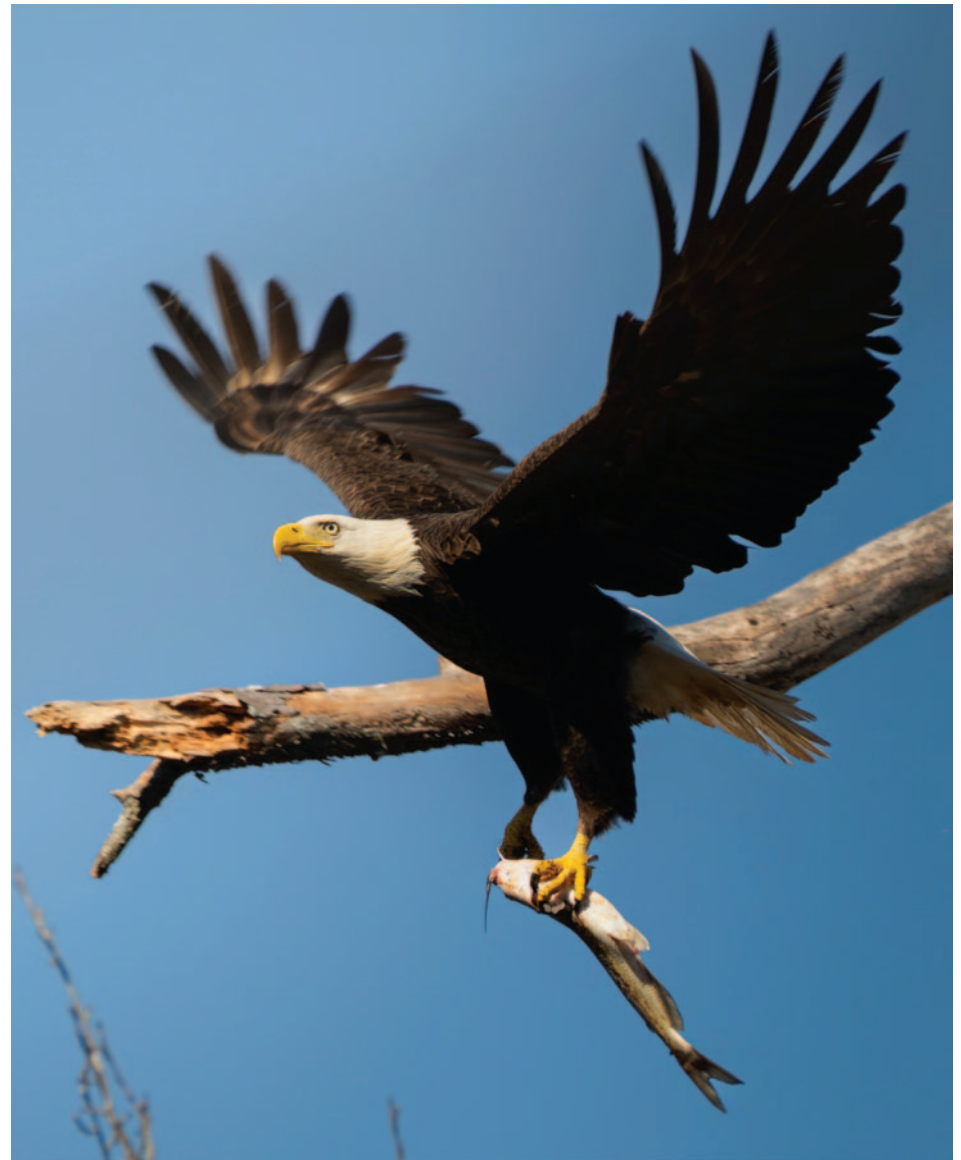
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WILDLIFE ENFORCEMENT OFFICER OF THE YEAR • William "Thomas" Weaver • Lawndale

Officer Thomas Weaver has protected natural resources and public safety through wildlife enforcement, rescue operations, and youth outreach initiatives in Cleveland County. His leadership, specialized training, and dedication exemplify excellence in wildlife law enforcement.

BALD EAGLE / CHASE HOLLANDER / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST



WILDLIFE VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR Dennis Ward • Hickory

Dennis Ward has volunteered more than 1,250 hours with the Carolina Raptor Center, rescuing and transporting injured raptors while educating the public about wildlife conservation. His service reflects a deep commitment to wildlife rehabilitation and public outreach.

MARINE PATROL OFFICER OF THE YEAR Jonathan Price • Jamesville

Officer Jonathan Price has strengthened marine conservation and public safety through fisheries enforcement, boating safety investigations, and emergency response operations. As a member of the Marine Patrol Swift Water Rescue Team, he also assisted with life-saving rescue efforts during Hurricane Helene.

The Ritual of Stewardship

YOU CAN LEARN A LOT about a conservationist by asking where their connection to wildlife and habitat first began. Often, it starts with something simple—a fascination with animals at the zoo, a favorite place to explore in the outdoors, or the simple joy of playing in the woods with friends as a child. But just as often, that connection deepens into something more lasting through loss. A neighboring woodlot cleared for development. The tragic sight of dead animals lining the highway roadside. The quiet disappearance of the birdsong you used to hear every day. Somewhere between that love and subsequent loss, concern becomes conviction. Each conservationist may start in a different place, but many share the same realization: the natural world they care about is not guaranteed to remain.

For Dave Myers, it began with water.

Long before Lake Norman became a destination, and before its shorelines filled with homes and boat traffic, it was simply “the river” to those who grew up alongside it. For Dave, the youngest of four siblings raised in Charlotte, that river was both playground and classroom. His family’s early days camping along the shoreline in the 1960s slowly gave way to something more permanent—a shelter, then a lake house, and eventually a lifelong connection to the water that still shapes his days.

In the 1980s, Dave began supporting the North Carolina Wildlife Federation as a donor and later as a member of NCWF’s Shaw Society. At the time, his role was informal and less about participation and more about alignment. It wasn’t until retirement approached that conservation took on a more active form. A conversation with a neighbor led to an introduction to Billy Wilson, president of the NCWF Lake Norman Wildlife Chapter, and an opportunity to assist with a fish reef project on Lake Norman.



CHARLIE SHAW SOCIETY Donor Story

What began as a single project grew into deeper engagement as Dave stepped into leadership and helped guide the chapter through a period of renewed energy and focus. It reinforced something he had believed all along: conservation doesn’t have to start big. It just has to start.

Still, he holds a clear vision for the future. “I hope to see a future where conservation is fully integrated into how we live and grow,” he says, “where protected lands are expanded, and communities actively value and participate in preserving North Carolina’s natural heritage.”

Somewhere between an early connection to wildlife and landscape, and the changes he’s witnessed since, care became conviction. And like the water that first shaped it, that conviction continues to move forward. Moving steadily and persistently, a shared ritual that continues shaping what comes next.

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.

BUCK HORTON / ZEBRA SWALLOWTAIL BUTTERFLY / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST



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www.ncwf.org/legacy



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Kate Greiner, CFRE
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Welcome New Board Members

THE NORTH CAROLINA WILDLIFE FEDERATION welcomes three new board members to the team.



Tom Gates is president of MarketPlace Management, Inc., which owns and operates approximately 1.2 million square feet of retail shopping center space in the Southeast. He also founded Mirador Real Estate Advisors and the law offices of Tilman Thomas Gates PLLC, advising real estate and corporate clients in the U.S. and abroad. Previously, he chaired the real estate development and finance practice at Robinson, Bradshaw & Hinson, P.A. Tom earned degrees from Duke University and The Johns Hopkins University and is active with several Charlotte-area nonprofit organizations. “I can’t possibly count the blessings and benefits of a lifetime spent in North Carolina’s wild places,” he said, “and I look forward to working with NCWF to protect and enhance our native wildlife habitat for future generations of North Carolinians.”

EASTERN BOG TURTLE / KELLY TAYLOR / USFWS



Will Ricks is an experienced wildlife biologist and conservation professional with more than 15 years of work across North Carolina and the Southeast focused on wildlife management, habitat conservation, and environmental compliance. A member of the North Carolina Wildlife Federation since 2017, he has also been actively involved with The Wildlife Society at the state, regional, and national levels, including leadership roles within the North Carolina Chapter. Will brings strong expertise in species and habitat management, conservation planning, and regulatory frameworks such as the Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and NEPA, along with a track record of collaboration across agencies and partners. He spends much of his time outdoors through fieldwork, prescribed fire, hunting, fishing, and time on his family farm, reinforcing his commitment to North Carolina’s natural resources.



Emily Murdoch has spent more than 15 years advising businesses and individuals on tax strategy, real estate transactions, and long-term financial planning across North Carolina. Through her work as a tax partner at GreerWalker, she has developed extensive experience in commercial and residential real estate, complex partnership structures, and strategic business planning. Emily brings deep expertise in accounting, tax compliance, and organizational growth, along with a strong commitment to helping nonprofits and businesses build long-term financial strength. Her experience will help support NCWF as the organization continues to grow its programs, revenue, and operational capacity. Emily earned degrees from North Carolina State University and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, and she and her family enjoy spending time outdoors and camping throughout North Carolina.

Apply Now: NCWF Scholarships for the Future

Are you a college student passionate about wildlife or the environment? North Carolina Wildlife Federation is awarding up to \$2,500 in scholarships to students majoring in wildlife, fisheries, forestry, conservation, or environmental fields.

Nominations are open to full-time students at accredited colleges in North Carolina that offer two- or four-year programs. Don't miss your chance to fund your future in conservation—find out more at ncwf.org/scholarships.



It's Time to Get Snapping!

North Carolina Wildlife Federation is accepting submissions from professional, amateur, and youth shutterbugs for its 8th Annual Wildlife Photo Contest, open from July 1 through September 1. Categories are "Carolina Critters," "People in Nature," "Scenes of North Carolina," and "Pollinators and Insects". Images should highlight the beauty of North Carolina's nature and wildlife, whether in your backyard or across the state. Find out more at ncwf.org/photo-contest/



CAROLINA CRITTERS: RED FOX / JOHN-ANDREW LOVINS / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST



SCENES OF NORTH CAROLINA: LAKE BRANDT / CATHERINE DEATON / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST

POLLINATORS AND INSECTS: RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD / JOE POSTON / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST



PEOPLE IN NATURE: CANOEING THE SWAMP / TIM CAUCUTT / NCWF PHOTO CONTEST

LAST DAY LUCK – TURKEY SEASON 2026 *by Brian Walo*



Getting outside in nature has been a hallmark of NCWF and its chapters for eight decades. Whether it be birdwatching, gardening for wildlife, paddling, fishing, hunting, or just walking in the forest, connecting people with nature is critical in deepening commitments to conservation. Here is a first-hand account of one such outing from Brian Walo of NCWF Fall Line Outdoors Chapter.

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I've spent most of my life fishing every chance I get, so much so that I make numerous trips to the Gulf Coast of Florida every year to do nothing but fish for days on end. Regardless of the weather, tide, time of day, or other factors, I always seem to start catching on the morning I'm slated to leave for home. There's just something magical about that last day and the last chance it brings with it before the fun is over for a while. I've come to refer to this as my "last day luck." And it isn't just a fishing-trip phenomenon.

After a long month of distant gobbles, bumped birds, and unanswered calls while standing over fresh tracks, careful consideration was given to which area we would be hunting on the last day of the 2026 wild turkey season. My friend Francisco and I weighed all the options, opting for a ghost tom that had yet to gobble but that had been teasing me over the last few weeks with large tracks consistently in the same area.



The last day of the season seemed like a long shot based on what I had seen and heard over the last month, but I walked in the dark with hopeful optimism to the area we picked out. Once I got set up, on a nice bench above a creek, my optimism began to fade as my calls produced no gobbles.

While I sat under a tree contemplating my next move, and taking turns between calling and wolfing down a breakfast bar, I finally got a response. Francisco was planning to join me, but his alarm clock never went off, so I sent him the pin of where I was sitting, and he was ready to make the best of the time we had left for the day. Fortunately, he was close by, and willing to come out.

Once he made his way into the woods, we took stock of what I had seen and not heard, and decided to move further north. After a long walk on seemingly endless sandy roads, that plan also proved fruitless in both a lack of sign and numerous unanswered calls.

It looked like the season was going to end the same way it began: quiet and birdless.

With less than four hours left to the season, we threw a Hail Mary and moved to a new, unfamiliar location. It was a quick and hopeful ride, but one tempered with a sense that this was not going to be the year I got my first wild turkey.

Once parked, we geared up and set off down a fire break, all the while joking about what a bust this season was shaping up to be. After only about 100 feet, I looked up just in time to see a hen doing the 40-yard dash up the road in front of us. And that's when it started to rain. All we could do was laugh at our misfortune.

We ducked under the canopy of a large oak, intending to wait out the storm and the last minutes of our bad-luck season. Once the rain let up, we continued down the road for another couple of hundred yards before spotting the same hen racing up the road. I felt it was necessary to point out the fresh tracks in the sand. I'm not sure Francisco appreciated the humor the same way I did.

Down the road we continued, toward a hillside next to a very pretty creek bottom, calling all the way. Finally, we got what we came for: Francisco hammered his box call, only to be cut off by a relatively close gobbler. The optimism and boyish hope came flashing back as we quickly made our way to what looked like the perfect spot to set up for a gobbler looking for love. We left the road and cut into the woods, making a direct line to our intended setup, only to have a jake run right out of a bush to our right, and across the road to our left about 15 yards in front of us. All we could do was laugh and press on.

About 10 yards later, as we were moving over the road to get set up on the other side for the gobbler, another jake flew off from the opposite side of the road. At this point, it was Birds-4, Us-0.

And then it started to rain, again. And we laughed, again.

Once we set up and started calling to the gobbler in the rain, what sounded like several birds began to cluck straight out ahead of us. I finally thought we might actually get a chance at a turkey, so I shouldered my shotgun in anticipation of a bird coming in while Francisco continued to call. After a very quick five minutes, while still listening to the birds out in front of us, I saw movement out of the corner of my left eye. Two more birds were heading right for us from my left side about 30 yards out.

Francisco was still calling, seemingly unaware of the newcomers, and I did my best to whisper “jakes!” As they came around, I lined up on the larger of the two, and down he went. My first turkey ever was in the bag. I don’t think I’ve smiled that way in quite some time. The feeling of a successful hunt is a new one for me, and I’m filled with gratitude and appreciation for Fall Line Outdoors Chapter, as well as for Francisco. Time is a gift, and he has been nothing but giving with his. For that, I am forever thankful for his guidance and expertise.

I had the good fortune this year of having time to dedicate to this new hobby and spent dozens of hours in the woods on the hunt. On the final day of the season, with just a few hours left, it finally worked out. Last-day luck struck again.

CHAPTER CHARTERING

NCWF is excited to celebrate the chartering of six new Community Wildlife Chapters this year, marking continued growth in grassroots conservation engagement across the state. These locally led chapters strengthen NCWF’s mission by empowering residents to advance wildlife habitat improvement, environmental education, and outdoor stewardship in their own communities. Together, these new chapters expand the Federation’s reach from the mountains to the coast, building a stronger network of conservation-minded volunteers and partners. Their formation reflects growing momentum across North Carolina for community-driven efforts that support healthy wildlife and working landscapes.

Fall Line Outdoors
(Harnett, Lee, & Cumberland)

High Country Wild
(Ashe & Watauga)

ReWild AVL
(Asheville)

Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch
(Haywood, Jackson, & Swain)

Swannanoa Valley Wild
(Swannanoa, Black Mountain, & Montreat)

Uwharrie Wildlife Stewards
(Montgomery & Stanly)

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



LAKE NORMAN WILDLIFE



LOWER CAPE FEAR WILDLIFE



NEUSE RIVER HAWKS
CONSERVATIONISTS
(Wake Forest)



PAWS (GASTON COUNTY
PIEDMONT AREA
WILDLIFE STEWARDS)



REWILD AVL
(Asheville)



SMOKY MOUNTAINS
WILDERNESS WATCH
(Haywood, Jackson, & Swain)



SOUTH WAKE
CONSERVATIONISTS
(Holly Springs)



SWANNANOVA VALLEY WILD!
(Swannanoa, Black
Mountain, & Montreat)



TRIAD WILD!



TRI-COUNTY CONSERVATIONISTS
(Chatham, Alamance, & Orange)



UNION COUNTY
WILDLIFE CHAPTER



UWHARRIE WILDLIFE STEWARDS
(Montgomery & Stanly)



WILDLIFE HABITAT STEWARDS
(Northeastern NC)

The Season

Jeff Beane's GUIDE TO
NATURAL NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina Wildlife Federation
1024 Washington Street
Raleigh, NC 27605

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JUNE

June 25: It's National Catfish Day! North Carolina has 18 species, including three still undescribed.

June 26: It's National Canoe Day! Get a canoe onto your favorite stream, lake, pond, or swamp if you can. Wild quinine, sticky false-foxglove, Eastern milkpea, daisy fleabane, and sandhills dayflower are blooming. Redlip shiners and mountain redbelly dace are spawning in mountain streams.

June 27: Green June beetles begin emerging, usually following rains that soften the soil, allowing adults to dig to the surface.

June 28: Northern pinesnakes are nesting. This state-threatened species, found mostly in our Sandhills region, is unique in that females typically spend days digging a long tunnel ending in a nest chamber, where they deposit their small clutch of large eggs (the largest laid by any of our snakes). Other animals use these chambers as refugia.

June 29: Both green salamander species are nesting in our southern mountains. These terrestrial salamanders deposit their eggs in narrow rock crevices and attend them until they hatch.

June 30: Loggerhead sea turtle nesting peaks. American kestrels are fledging.

JULY

July 1: Black skimmers are nesting. Blackberries are ripe.

July 3: Bobwhite eggs are hatching. In the mountains, several dusky salamander species are nesting; these semiaquatic salamanders attach their egg clutches to the undersides of rocks or logs, in or near water, with females often tending them until hatching.

July 5: Velvet ants are mating. These beautiful insects are actually terrestrial wasps (also known as cow-killers, they also do not kill cows). The wingless females have potent stings, but sting only if handled.

July 6: Eastern cicada killers are mating. These large, colorful wasps are often needlessly feared, especially during their mating aggregations; they are harmless to humans (although not to cicadas) unless handled.

July 7: Summer runs of white perch provide good fishing on the Chowan River.

July 8: Bog turtles are nesting in mountain and foothill wetlands. Unlike most turtles, this rare species does not dig a nest in soil but conceals its small eggs in moss or in grass or sedge tussocks.

July 10: Squirrel treefrogs, eastern narrow-mouthed toads, and oak toads are breeding in temporary wetlands after summer thunderstorms.

July 11: Blue grosbeaks are fledging and American goldfinches are nesting.

July 14: It's Shark Awareness Day!

July 15: Peak flight period for our largest butterfly, the giant swallowtail. Grass cicadas have emerged—these tiny cicadas prefer to sit in grass rather than in trees.

July 16: World Snake Day—celebrate our state's 38 species!

July 17: Black bear mating peaks. Ditch daisy is blooming.

July 18: Watch and listen for the aerial "boom displays" of the common nighthawk on hot, humid afternoons.

July 18-26: 15th annual National Moth Week. Get nocturnal to behold our impressive moth diversity: <http://nationalmothweek.org/>.

July 22: Our heaviest insect—the eastern Hercules beetle—is flying. Look for it around lights at night.

July 23: Pine lily and Indian pipe are blooming.

July 24-26: North Carolina Herb Association's "Wild Herb Weekend," Valle Crucis, NC: <https://www.ncherbassociation.org/>.

July 25: Imperial moths are flying.

July 28: Garter snakes and ribbon snakes are giving birth. Eastern gray squirrels are bearing their summer litters.

July 28-29: Delta Aquarid meteor shower peaks.

July 30: Water spider orchid, sandhill golden-aster, and sandbog death camas are blooming. Royal walnut moths are flying.

July 31: Fence lizard eggs are hatching. Earth snakes and DeKay's brown snakes are giving birth. Turk's-cap, Michaux's, and Sandhills lilies are blooming.

AUGUST

August 1: Several milkweed species are blooming.

August 2: Mercury reaches its greatest western elongation from the Sun—the best time to view the Swift Planet. Look for it low in the eastern sky just before sunrise.

August 3: Even on the hottest days, the heat-loving six-lined racerunner is active. Look for it streaking between patches of cover in open, sandy habitats.

August 12-13: Perseid meteor shower peaks—best viewed from a dark location after midnight.

August 13: Many snake and lizard eggs are hatching. American groundnut and yellow fringed orchid are blooming.

August 15: Venus reaches its greatest eastern elongation from the Sun—the best time to view the Bright Planet. Look for it in the western sky after sunset.

August 16: Peak migration for many shorebird species along the coast.

August 22: Peak hatching for loggerhead sea turtle nests.

August 30: Green salamander eggs are hatching.

August 31: Goldenrod, asters, blazing star, and other late summer wildflowers are in bloom.

SEPTEMBER

September 1: It's hurricane season—watch for unusual seabirds driven inland by storms, and for late-season-breeding amphibians.

September 2: Bull elk are bugling in Cataloochee Valley. That unique sound should be experienced by everyone.

September 3: Peak birthing time for copperheads.

September 6: Hellbenders are breeding in our Mountain rivers. Unlike most salamanders, these declining Appalachian giants spawn in a similar fashion to most fishes. Males prepare breeding chambers under large rocks, defending them against rivals. If a female deposits her eggs beneath a male's chosen rock, he'll fertilize them externally and guard them until they hatch. Never move large rocks in hellbender streams—it damages their homes and breeding habitat!

September 7: Peak abundance for the little metalmark, an uncommon butterfly of our southeastern Coastal Plain. And a big dove hunting day.