



North Carolina  
**WILDLIFE  
FEDERATION**

# Journal

WILD LIVES □ WILD PLACES

*Winter 2020*



2019  
ANNUAL  
REPORT



## The Ties that Bind

BY TIM GESTWICKI, NCWF CEO

A North Carolina nearly devoid of wild turkey, with scarcely a white-tailed deer? A mountains-to-the-sea landscape where sightings of bald eagles, osprey, and river otters are a once-in-a-lifetime occurrence? North Carolina?


It's difficult to believe, but at times in the state's history—and even within the 75-year history of the North Carolina Wildlife Federation—this was the case. As we have turned the page on last year and are diving into 2020, there is no ignoring that this is a milestone year for our organization and for our supporters. This year we commemorate 75 years of working for wildlife. *You have to know where you came from, to know where you're going.* That sentiment is top of mind as we reflect on the year in review and 75 years of wildlife conservation. There have been battles won and bitter losses, watershed wildlife laws and species restored. And through it all, this organization has stood with conviction, speaking for all wildlife.

This Federation has, over the better part of seven decades, ensured that its fingerprints were on monumental accomplishments coursing through North Carolina's history and natural landscapes. Seventy-five years is a long time, no matter how you look at it, and it's a time period worth celebrating. We're thankful not only for the foresight of those that came together in Rocky Mount in 1945 to speak on behalf of wildlife in forging this Federation, but for the opportunity to take stock and press onwards for wildlife and habitat with the experiences, lessons, and knowledge from the past as blueprints for meeting the challenges of today and tomorrow.

In considering the past, there are some common principles of conservation consistently present in our organization from year to year and generation to generation. While technological advances have led to new tools in our work and the landscape has changed over the years with rapid population growth and urbanization, there remains over the annals of our history the same core principles today as there were back then—healthy fish and wildlife populations, cultivating and fostering the enjoyment of the outdoors and wonders of nature, proper stewardship of air, water, and soils. And just like at the onset, our Federation strives to be a strong, credible and resolved voice, one sorely needed to speak up for the species and places that have no voice. To be at the table, in the legislative halls, and on the front lines. We started as a Federation, a united group of varying conservation interests, which is exactly what we are today—an umbrella conservation organization of gardeners, anglers, hikers, paddlers, hunters, campers, and nature and wildlife enthusiasts who care about wildlife and habitat. Today our vibrant community wildlife chapter network, along with affiliates, conservation partners, and individual supporters, provide the foundational structure needed for today's challenges. And we need to diversify and include more and more to build a larger, more effective conservation army.

A parallel that can be drawn from our roots to current days is the Federation hallmark of advocating for rules and laws that safeguard wildlife. The past year was a whirlwind of attacks by the Trump administration in a dizzying display of gutting long-established common-sense conservation safeguards. We will have to fight against the rollbacks using all means necessary. The stakes are too high. We recap these in our report as well as some of the more positive outcomes and opportunities. In many regards, this year is poised to be one of the most important in our organization's history.

Another interesting parallel in history involves our state resource agencies. One of the early efforts and victories for the Federation was the work to establish an agency dedicated to science-based wildlife management which occurred in 1947 when the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission was created by law. The goal was professional wildlife management with as little political oversight as possible. We all are thankful that our state wildlife agency is out there every day educating, restoring habitat, acquiring lands for outdoor recreation, and enforcing the laws that protect our public trust resources. Unfortunately, we cannot say the same for our Division of Marine Fisheries. In this annual report we lay out our position and the case for why the agencies charged with fish and wildlife management need to be merged now so that the most efficient and effective management happens for our fish and wildlife public trust resources.

I believe the pioneers who established this organization would be pleased with our Federation if they reviewed this report. I wonder if they imagined there would be a Federation 75 years after creating it? I wonder what it will look like 75 years from now? I wonder what the issues will be then and if we moved forward on climate change and resiliency and wildlife diseases such as chronic wasting disease in our deer or white-nose syndrome in our bat population? Will pollinator populations be stabilized or will crops be artificially grown? Will there be more plastic in the ocean than fish? Here is what I do know: The state of our Federation is strong. Our resolve is steadfast. The need is urgent. Time to get to work! 



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*Cover photograph* A doe and yearling white-tailed deer make their way through snowy woods; © Can Stock Photo / sainc. Other photos, unless noted, courtesy of NCWF.

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## NCWF 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

Looking back is the first step  
towards forging a path forward.  
Our donors and supporters have  
created a platform for NCWF to  
work powerfully on behalf of wildlife in every  
corner of North Carolina. We celebrate that  
support—and our accomplishments—as we  
rededicate this organization to meeting the  
challenges of 2020 and beyond.

## NORTH CAROLINA WILDLIFE FEDERATION

**MISSION** To protect, conserve and restore North Carolina wildlife and habitat.

**VISION** Our stewardship will result in a North Carolina with bountiful and diverse wildlife, including all species of wild flora and fauna, that is valued by its citizens and elected officials, and sustainably managed for future generations.

Our strength is derived from values driven leadership – science-based decision making; non-partisan approach to policy; stewardship of North Carolina's natural resources; inclusivity of broad wildlife interests and perspectives; and partnering with organizations and individuals who share our vision and our passion for wildlife.

**GOALS** Toward that vision, we will:

**POLICY AND PROTECTION** – Strongly influence state and federal policy that affects wildlife and habitat in North Carolina using established conservation models to guide our positions.

**NETWORK OF IMPACT AND INVOLVEMENT** – Foster a diverse, robust network of chapters, members, affiliates and partners; a network fortified by a variety of wildlife and outdoor interests.

**EXPERIENCE AND LEARN** – Enhance and expand opportunities for youth and adults that foster awareness and appreciation of wildlife and the important role healthy habitat plays in sustaining wildlife and humanity.

**SIGNATURE PROGRAMS** – Sponsor and support programs for the enjoyment and conservation of wildlife and habitat, including ethical and sustainable outdoor recreation pursuits.

**Alligators in North Carolina** NCWF continued to advocate for the collection and evaluation of scientific data to inform future management decisions for alligators. Coastal areas of our state are considered the northernmost range for this species, and while scientific data does exist from previous research studies, a more comprehensive collection and analysis of biological data is needed to further evaluate alligator ecology and population dynamics for this species. We continued to support public education efforts needed for residents to safely coexist with alligators and encourage increased opportunities for the public to safely view alligators. As a conservation organization with long-term goals in mind, we will continue to advocate for increasing the quality and amount of available alligator habitat.

## Ways NCWF Provided Support for Wildlife in 2019

As a stakeholder representing our state's wildlife and other natural resources, NCWF values inclusion in discussions regarding the biology and management of wildlife. The list below outlines a few of the ways our expert staff participates and weighs in on wildlife issues.

- Natural Resource Conservation Service, Forestry and Wildlife Subcommittee of the State Technical Committee. NCWF is working to ensure that implementation of conservation programming on private lands is done in ways that maximize their effectiveness in protecting our soil, water and wildlife resources.
- Nongame Wildlife Advisory Committee, NC Wildlife Resources Commission. NCWF staff stays actively engaged in discussions on wildlife.
- North Carolina Pollinator Conservation Alliance. Staff is involved in the Alliance with the intent of implementing the most current scientific knowledge on pollinators and habitat into projects and relaying this information as accurately as possible to our members.
- Boating and Fishing Industry Summit. As a conservation organization, staff attended this summit to build relationships and support Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration.
- Commented on the NC Wildlife Resources Commission's Catfish Management Plan. NCWF expressed the importance of evaluating the ecological relationships among native and invasive catfishes as well as invasive catfishes and other sympatric fish species.
- Commented on Safe Harbor/Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances for Aquatic Species to provide feedback on plans to better enable private landowners to support aquatic species of concern.
- NCWF staff took part in conversations regarding fox and multiple canid species to discuss current population statuses and to evaluate how to support these species through research and habitat conservation.

**Trout Angler Access** NCWF is participating in a working group charged with developing a strategy to increase angler access to waters on private lands that support mountain trout. The working group was

formed by the Wildlife Resources Commission and consists of representatives from the Commission, other conservation organizations, private industry and individual landowners. In recent years, public access to trout waters on private lands has slowly declined due to numerous factors. As a result, many fine trout waters are now off-limits to most of the angling public. The working group is examining the causes of the decline and will identify potential actions that will lead to reversing the decline and increasing the number of waters accessible by anglers. Recommended actions will be presented to the Wildlife Resources Commission for consideration and adoption.

## Little Tennessee River Native Fish Conservation Partnership

NCWF and about 20 other members in Georgia, Tennessee and North Carolina comprise the Partnership. Membership is diverse and includes federal and state natural resources agencies, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, conservation organizations, universities and electric utility companies. Our goal is to promote conservation and restoration of habitat in the Little Tennessee River Basin for the benefit of native fishes and other aquatic wildlife.

We continue to restore and enhance populations of rare native fishes and mollusks on several waters in the basin. Many of these populations were reduced or extirpated due to poor land use practices in the previous century. Habitat restoration and protection have resulted in conditions that are favorable to sustaining many affected species. As a result of stocking individuals relocated from nearby waters or fish hatcheries, several waters within the Little Tennessee River basin now support reproducing populations of previously rare or extinct fishes and mussels.

**Osprey** NCWF built and erected a dozen osprey nesting platforms on Lake Norman to provide good nesting opportunities for this migratory species as well to solve the problem of nesting taking place on boating navigational aids.

**Great Blue Heron** The Lake Norman Wildlife Conservationists started building and installing heron platforms to enhance existing and establish new heron rookeries. Nine new heron platforms were created and a heron camera was installed to raise awareness of the heron rookery and nesting patterns on Heron Island. NCWF's streaming osprey and heron nesting cameras reached audiences across the state, country and world with almost 3 million views.

**Spotted Skunks** The Mountain WILD! chapter is partnering with NC Wildlife Resources Commission and Warren Wilson College to conduct a spotted skunk research study. Chapter members are involved in the creation of spotted skunk hair snares, processing of camera trap photos, and trap monitoring and placement.







(Clockwise from top left) Osprey nesting platform / Osprey nesting platform construction / Chimney swift tower / Chimney swift tower construction / Red wolf / Great blue heron rookery camera installation

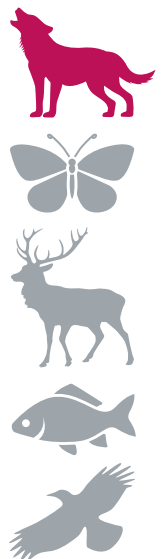
**Red Wolves** As broader support built for red wolves in North Carolina and beyond, NCWF continued its stance of expressing strong support for conservation through the Red Wolf Recovery Program. Red wolves play a vital and unique biological role within their ecosystem and are worthy of continuing conservation efforts. Habitat loss, vehicle collision, gunshot mortality, and hybridization with coyotes are among the threats to the population. The current status of the red wolf on the Albemarle Peninsula shows a continual population decline of more than 75 percent in the last decade. In 2019, NCWF evaluated ways to increase red wolf habitat and continue to promote education opportunities through partnerships with state and federal agencies and private land owners.

As to the wild population, the numbers have dropped over the past year to an estimated 25 or less individuals. In 2019, the wild population faced the first year since the beginning of the Red Wolf Recovery Program that no breeding pairs existed in the wild and no successful litters of puppies were produced. Efforts are currently being made by the US Fish and Wildlife Service to create potentially three new breeding pairs for the 2020 season. This is happening through trapping and relocation efforts in Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge, Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, and St. Vincent's National Wildlife Refuge in Florida. NCWF is hopeful that these management efforts will help to bolster the red wolf population for the future.

Throughout the year, the Federation continued its partnership with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Wildlife Refuge Association to provide improved visitor services, increase environmental education opportunities, and serve as crusaders for natural resource advocacy in Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge and Northeast North Carolina.

Volunteers gave more than 5,100 hours of donated time for conservation education. In Columbia, visitation increased in 2019 to almost 12,000 visitors entering the doors of the Walter B. Jones Sr. Center for the Sounds and exploring the interpretive boardwalk. This is an increase of over 1,000 visitors from 2018. Thanks to the efforts of the NC Wildlife Federation over the past year, more than 1700 people have attended programs and special events provided through Pocosin Lakes Refuge. These events include among others: red wolf howling programs, school group tours, birding classes, touch table booths at local festivals, and requested topic presentations. Efforts will continue into 2020, showing those living in and passing through Northeast North Carolina the unique habitats and wildlife species that can be found here.

In 2018, visitation to the Red Wolf Center, also located in Columbia, was available by request only or for special programs. Thanks to volunteer efforts in 2019, the Red Wolf Center was open to visitors three days a week and served more than 600 visitors in an eight-month time span. Plans and ideas continue to



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grow at the Red Wolf Center, and thanks to continued support from NCWF and others the future holds hope for many more improvements.

Efforts are still ongoing in 2020 to build a conservation community in the form of a local NC Wildlife Federation Chapter in Columbia, NC. Several projects are planned for the New Year to help conservation minded community members work together for the greater good, making new friends and having fun along the way. Stay tuned for great things to come.

**Chimney swifts** Constructed chimney swift towers to provide a safe nesting area for this declining species. As old chimneys continue to be capped and torn down, chimney swifts depend upon these artificial towers as nesting alternatives.

## habitat

From native pollinator gardens and roadside clean-ups to island erosion habitat work, NC Wildlife Federation and its chapters have been busy conserving and improving habitat for the species that we all love.

- More than 700 hours cleaning and restoring wildlife habitat in locations from roadsides to streambanks.
- Planted more than 5,000 native plants on public and private properties to support wildlife.
- Installed more than 40 nest boxes for wood ducks, bluebirds and nuthatches across the state
- MARSH chapter certified the town of Marvin as a Community Wildlife Habitat, while four chapters worked on recertifying the cities of Charlotte, Asheville, Concord and Matthews.
- NCWF weighed in on concerns regarding the booming wood pellet industry and wildlife. NCWF promotes wildlife-friendly energy and sustainable silviculture practices that promote wildlife and habitat diversity. We see reason for concern regarding potentially destructive practices to habitat and North Carolina's natural resources. Accordingly, we asked the Department of Environmental Quality to conduct an analysis of how wood pellet future expansion would impact the environment, wildlife, and habitat.

**Wildlife Corridors and Connectivity** Wildlife connectivity is a conservation priority for NCWF as millions of individual wild animals are killed on roadways each year. As an organization we continued to support this priority through multiple endeavors. NCWF continued on-going participation in a larger collaborative working group to evaluate ways for numerous wildlife species including elk, black bear, and white-tailed deer to safely cross roadways to reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions. In the eastern part of the state, NCWF partnered with NC Wildlife Resources Commission staff and NC Department of Transportation to begin maintaining underpasses for wildlife to safely cross beneath Highway 64. NCWF contributions to the partnership include assessing the need for fence repairs in areas where wildlife is

funneled to the roadway underpass, debris removal to keep wildlife passages open and functioning, and the monitoring of species utilizing the crossing structures.

**Support for Twelve Mile Project** NCWF was pleased to support the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) Preferred Plan for the Twelve Mile Project in Pisgah National Forest as NCWF advocates for wildlife-friendly and sustainable silvicultural practices that promote wildlife and habitat diversity. The proposed plan is an exemplary example of what a collaborative approach to forest management planning can achieve. If selected, Alternative B would provide a wide range of benefits to wildlife species including elk, ruffed grouse, golden-winged warbler, and numerous aquatic species.

Elk have long been a conservation priority for NCWF as an iconic species and positive reintroduction story in North Carolina. Despite slow expansion of the original herd to its current numbers, habitat improvements such as those outlined in the Twelve Mile Project could positively impact elk population numbers, specifically increased forest openings, burning, and forest thinning practices. The proposed plan for the Twelve Mile Project would likely increase the amount of young forests in the 0- to 10-year age class. It will thin overstocked forest, designate small patch old growth areas, increase prescribed fire, create wildlife openings, promote shortleaf pine where appropriate, promote oak regeneration, and replace inadequate culverts with those better designed to support the passage of aquatic organisms.

**Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge** NCWF offered full support for Alternative A, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's preferred alternative for proposed expansion of the Mountain Bogs National Wildlife Refuge (MNBWR). Southern Appalachian mountain bogs are ecologically notable due to their distinct hydrology and species composition while nearby upland habitat types support additional wildlife.

According to the draft Environmental Assessment, the proposed expansion of the refuge, under Alternative A, could possibly conserve up to 41,000 acres, 677 miles of stream, and 20 miles of corridor for wildlife connectivity purposes. The proposed expansion would continue to protect lands that are home to a suite of threatened, endangered, or at-risk plant and animal species including bog turtle, Virginia big-eared bat, Northern long-eared bat, little brown bat, tri-colored bat, South Mountains gray-cheeked salamander, eastern hellbender, Southern Appalachian purple pitcher plant, green pitcher plant, Gray's lily, swamp pink, bunched arrowhead, and white irisette.

Additional species likely to benefit from protection of reproductive and foraging habitat due to refuge expansion include American woodcock, brook trout, migratory birds, and numerous reptiles and amphibians. In addition to species conservation, NCWF believes expansion of the refuge boundary and more specifically, the addition of the Box Creek Conservation Partnership Area, will prevent habitat



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(Clockwise from top left)  
Neuse River Hawks gardens  
with native plants / PAWS  
installs nest boxes / Elk herd /  
Certified Wildlife Habitat /  
Concord Wildlife Alliance  
cleans and restores habitat

fragmentation and provide natural pathways for movement of species and genetics between isolated pockets of rare habitat on the landscape.

**Protecting Sandy Bottom Preserve** Through Petition for Rulemaking, NCWF supported reclassification of Sandy Bottom Preserve in the French Broad River Basin of Buncombe County from a "Freshwater Wetlands" to a "Unique Wetlands." Sandy Bottom Preserve qualifies for this more-protective classification based on its natural wetland community structure that supports rare flora and fauna, including species of special concern. The unique hydrology of this wetland complex is the foundation for an exceptional array of flora and fauna and should not be disturbed. Many of the species present at this site have very specific requirements for survival and reproduction and are highly sensitive to environmental changes.

The intricate layout of ephemeral pools, spring-fed wetlands, mountain bog, and forest canopy at Sandy Bottom Preserve are home to a suite of rare species including mole salamander, four-toed salamander, southern Appalachian salamander, queen snake, rusty blackbird, bog turtle, and gray bat, among others. Each one of these species plays a role in the health of the larger ecosystem and any future impacts to this site would be in direct conflict to conservation efforts to protect and maintain areas of high biodiversity. Numerous species in the Sandy Bottom Preserve are deemed Species of Greatest Conservation Need and stand to be negatively impacted by any level of disturbance to foraging and reproductive habitat at and around the Sandy Bottom Preserve. High numbers of reptiles and amphibians are lost on roadways each year while moving for breeding or dispersing purposes, which should be avoided wherever possible.



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NCWF is focused on growing its network through new chapters and affiliates, reaching diverse audiences, and impacting new communities every day.

- In 2019, NCWF welcomed two new affiliates, N.C. Backcountry Hunters and Anglers and Environmental Educators of North Carolina, and welcomed back Carteret County Wildlife Club.
- Women in Conservation Leadership—Charlotte (WCL-CLT) was started, with a focus on empowering and developing women leaders in conservation. The first two meetings have brought together women of various backgrounds to strengthen networks, skills and leadership. Discussions center around empowering women as leaders in conservation, understanding the barriers and opportunities for building women's leadership, and individual and group commitments to take action. The Charlotte chapter began after a few NCWF board and staff attended the national Women in Conservation Leadership conference in 2018 and recognized the importance of starting these efforts on a local level. WCL-CLT is open to women working within the conservation movement. This includes women working in and around Charlotte with NCWF and its chapters, city, county, state and federal agencies, and local environmental NGOs.
- New NCWF chapters are developing across the state in High Point, Enfield, New Bern and Wilmington, among others, all in the name of conserving wildlife and habitat.
- NCWF held its first photography contest, bringing in submissions from wildlife photography enthusiasts from across the state. Categories included wildlife, habitat and scenes of North Carolina. The second photography contest will be announced this spring.
- 13 chapters participated in taking action on legislation such as Let 'Em Spawn and Recovering America's Wildlife Act through letter writing campaigns and meeting with representatives.

**Deer Management and Venison Donation** NCWF's deer management and donation program, Farmers and Communities Manage Deer, successfully supported the harvest and donation of more than 600 white-tailed deer during deer season. The deer harvested, donated, and processed all within local communities provided an estimated 96,000 meals to food relief organizations. Harvesting deer in areas of high concentration can reduce damage to agricultural crops, support healthy deer populations, reduce deer-vehicle collisions on roadways, and facilitate the donation of ground venison to feed those in need. The Farmers and Communities Manage Deer program has been driven by the hard work and dedication of our NCWF chapters, community partners, and exceptional volunteers.

**The Next Level** Engaged members from South Wake Conservationists, an NCWF chapter, took deer management and community service to a new level in 2019. Not only did this chapter see increased success in education and outreach focused on the benefits of deer management, the number of deer harvested and donated to their site in Lillington increased enabling the chapter to provide more than 14,000 meals to folks in need in local communities. We commend the chapter for establishing a fantastic partnership with Micro Summit Processors to accomplish their deer processing goals while raising funds to offset the expense of deer processing. Additionally, the chapter collected biological samples for disease testing and jawbones to age deer and prepared deer hides for donation to make wheelchair gloves for veterans.

**Personnel** One of the strengths of the North Carolina Wildlife Federation is its board of directors, and as the year wound down, NCWF was able to bolster its already formidable board with the inclusion of two newly elected members.

Dr. Maria Palamar has a wealth of expertise in wildlife conservation and management having worked in academia, for a state agency, and most recently as a co-founder and partner of Resolve Conservation. Dr. Palamar holds a Doctor of Veterinary Medicine degree from Rio Cuarto National University in Argentina and a Ph.D. in Fisheries, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology from N.C. State University. She spent five years at the NC Wildlife Resources Commission as the State Wildlife Veterinarian and later as Deputy Director of Outreach, Engagement, and Wildlife Health. She's served on multiple Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies' committees, as a Commissioner for NC's Museum of Natural Sciences, and is active with The Wildlife Society, among other wildlife and conservation endeavors. Additionally, she's maintained her status as an adjunct professor at NC State University and is regularly invited as a guest lecturer at the College of Veterinary Medicine at NCSU and Western Carolina University.

Dr. Palamar supports ethical, science-based policy and decision-making, and strives to be a role model for women in conservation. She has strong experience in leadership facilitation and coaching through her work with federal and state conservation leadership programs and she's passionate about broadening the current thinking of what it looks like and feels like to be a conservationist. Dr. Palamar's approach to engagement of all individuals and groups in conservation is authentic and she has conveyed an interest in working with conservation groups who share her desire to build a more equitable and inclusive people-base in support of wildlife and natural resources. Her ability to develop and administer content on leadership and to convey what it means to be an effective leader is invaluable to NCWF as a leading organization in conservation, management, and restoration of NC's wildlife and habitat.







(Clockwise from top left) Women in Conservation Leadership—Charlotte / NCWF board member Rocky Carter / Ground venison donated to those in need through NCWF's FCMD program / NCWF board member Dr. Maria Palamar

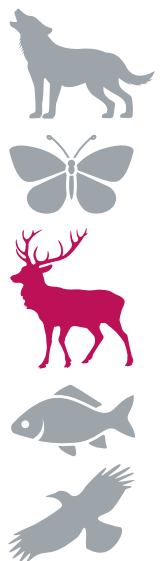
For those who attended our annual Governors' Conservation Achievement Awards or read the last NCWF *Journal*, Rocky Carter, of Swansboro, is unforgettable. Carter, who won the Sportsman of the Year award, is that unique individual that never enters into anything half-heartedly or without careful consideration of the consequences and the expected outcome. It's curious that a fellow born in the high country of Black Mountain, North Carolina, has come to be one the state's staunchest advocates of creatures that swim in salt marsh and tidal rivers. But Carter has made that transition, and North Carolina is the beneficiary. He has been a staunch supporter and leader of the North Carolina chapter of the Coastal Conservation Association. He organized the first Onslow Bay CCA-NC Wounded Warrior Fishing Day in 2015, and helped kick off the Fishing for the Future Youth Fishing Day in Jacksonville.

When Carter joined the North Carolina Wildlife Federation board of directors, he brought to the Federation's attention something called the New River Oyster Highway. The idea was to construct 12 man-made oyster reefs along a 20-mile stretch of the New River south of Jacksonville that had lost all its oysters. And like many efforts in which Carter gets involved, the idea is an idea no longer. It's a reality. He helped raise awareness, supporters, and more than \$1.3 million for the oyster highway, which will clean water and boost fish numbers.

Carter's commitment to marine resources is top of mind, always, whether it's leading a charge for big conservation ideas or giving a young angler a hand-made fishing rod to help spark an interest in chasing seatrout and flounder. Carter epitomizes an attitude of paying it forward. We welcome him to the board of directors.

**Shaping the Future** In addition to facilitating the donation of 150 deer to feed the hungry this past deer season, local NCWF chapter Gaston Piedmont Area Wildlife Stewards (Gaston PAWS) joined the NC Wildlife Resources Commission in hosting a collaborative event called Getting Started Outdoors to teach more than 20 participants various aspects of deer hunting including tree stand set-up and safety, game recovery, firearm and shooting safety, hunting ethics, and scouting techniques, among other skills. Participants from across the state were selected based on never having hunted and having no support system of hunters among friends and family.

Highlights of the workshop included a gourmet-style lunch of venison chili, smoked and grilled trout, venison meatloaf, and dove breast with bacon, which was an automatic hit among participants looking to harvest wild game for cooking and consumption purposes. Additionally, NCWRC staff processed whole deer from start to finish teaching attendees how to correctly field dress, skin, and process their own meat. The workshop intent was to connect interested participants with the outdoors in a safe and ethical way while teaching conservation through providing a skill set enabling these future hunters to harvest and consume their own wild game. While the one-day event is only a snapshot of what it's like to prepare for the hunt, Gaston County PAWS members and NCWRC provided mentored deer hunts on private land for the participants where some were able to harvest, process, and consume their first deer.



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Conservation was in the crosshairs throughout 2019, especially on the federal level. Time after time, long-established conservation programs found themselves under withering attacks. And while the North Carolina Wildlife Federation worked hard to turn them back, there's no getting around the fact that conservation policy took a serious hit over the last 12 months. Here are some of the stiffest battles we waged.

- Opposed rules that would eliminate public participation and environmental analysis from the vast majority of public land management decisions by weakening the National Environmental Policy Act.
- Opposing Department of Interior's recent decision to overturn a policy that historically protected areas within the Coastal Barrier Resources System (CBRS) from sand mining operations. The announcement opens the door for federally-funded sand mining within the CBRS, threatening the 3.5 million acres of ecologically valuable coastal floodplains, beaches, islands, and wetlands with taxpayer funded activities. Much of the area within the CBRS has remained undeveloped, providing important habitat for birds, fisheries, and other wildlife, while also protecting communities from floods and storm impacts.
- Fought rule-making efforts to weaken States' rights under the water quality certification section of the Clean Water Act that allows a state to weigh in on federal projects like pipelines, dams, and roads that would impact waterways.
- In a stunning move, President Trump unveiled plans to weaken one of the nation's most successful and important conservation laws for protecting biodiversity.

Under the new proposed language for administering the Endangered Species Act, economic factors would be considered when making endangered species determinations. The proposal would also make it easier to remove protections for a species.

"This is a blatant and egregious proposal to undermine conservation actions while kowtowing to corporate special interests," says NC Wildlife Federation Chairman Billy Wilson. "Without the Endangered Species Act, iconic species such as our American symbol, the bald eagle, would be no longer. This demonstrates a willingness to be a pawn of special interests over the will of the people and any foresight for our children and grandchildren."

The Endangered Species Act, passed nearly unanimously and signed into law by President Richard Nixon in 1973, is one of the most successful conservation laws in history having prevented the extinction of 99 percent of listed species including the bald eagle, manatee, humpback whale, alligator and peregrine falcon. The Act aims to provide a framework to conserve and protect endangered and threatened species and their habitats, something sorely needed now more than ever with a changing climate and growing population.

- Fought Department of Interior proposals to open up vast ocean areas to drilling, and exploration including off N.C.'s Atlantic coastline.
- Fought Department of Interior proposals to open up national monuments and public lands for energy exploration.

**NCWF Challenges Repeal of Clean Water Act Protections in Federal Court** North Carolina Wildlife Federation joined other conservation groups challenging in court the Trump administration's effort to strip away crucial clean water protections from rivers, lakes, streams and other waters that feed drinking-water sources for 200 million Americans. That figures includes 32 million people in the South, or seven out of 10 Southerners. The legal challenge, filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of South Carolina, opens a major court battle over the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' repeal of clean water protections under the Clean Water Act, one of the nation's bedrock environmental laws. The repeal of these standards is one of several steps announced by the administration to gut long-standing clean water protections, including a proposal currently subject to public comment that would leave many waters vulnerable to pollution and fill by redefining what waters are protected.

The Southern Environmental Law Center filed the challenge on behalf of North Carolina Wildlife Federation and the other plaintiffs.

The lawsuit contends that EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers violated a long-standing law that prohibits agencies from altering basic environmental safeguards without giving the public adequate notice and a chance to comment. According to the lawsuit, the agencies failed at their most basic responsibilities: evaluating the effect of their reckless actions and giving the public a meaningful opportunity to comment.

"This repeal of our water protections is a rushed political decision that should be based on science, as is the Clean Water Rule," said Tim Gestwicki, CEO of North Carolina Wildlife Federation. "Folks who love our streams, rivers, and wetlands deserve better, which is why this grievous repeal must be fought in court."

"Clean water is a way of life we take for granted in America, but now large polluters are trying to dismantle bipartisan water protections in place for almost 50 years," said Blan Holman, a managing attorney at the Southern Environmental Law Center. "The administration is pretending that pollution dumped upstream doesn't flow downstream, but its plan puts the water used by hundreds of millions of Americans for drinking, bathing, fishing, and business at risk. We are going to court to protect clean water across the country."







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**Recovering America's Wildlife Act** NCWF continued to provide unwavering support for Recovering America's Wildlife Act (HR 3742) as it was reintroduced in Congress in 2019 and received a favorable vote (26-6) in the House Committee on Natural Resources. If passed, this bipartisan legislation would not only provide hope to thousands of species in need of swift, proactive conservation and recovery efforts nationwide, it would also provide the dedicated funding desperately needed to transform the way wildlife professionals implement conservation and restoration efforts in perpetuity. Loss of species diversity and landscape changes can directly impact overall ecosystem function; therefore, proper wildlife and habitat stewardship are key components of the transition toward a more sustainable existence for humans and the environment and deserve our attention and support. As an organization dedicated to the conservation, protection, and restoration of wildlife and habitat we're proud to continue our efforts to pass HR 3742 in the House and Senate and would like to thank our North Carolina co-sponsors including Representatives Budd, McHenry, Price, and Rouzer.

**Silver Linings** On the positive side of the equation, there was real ground work and signs of bipartisanship for conservation programs that have worked successfully for decades. Fish and wildlife are not issues owned by either Democrats or Republicans. These are American issues. So even though impeachment trials, state gerrymandering court battles, and election year campaigns will be front and center in the news, there are significant opportunities to make progress at all levels of government and with both political parties and to get our message out to inspire even greater action. Many conservation priorities are teed up to become law in 2020 with hard work, among them the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Public Lands Maintenance, hurricane recovery and coastal resilience, Clean Energy incentives and programs, and wildlife priorities such as corridors funding, chronic wasting disease, forage fish conservation, and marine mammal protection.

The North Carolina Wildlife Federation is ready. That hasn't changed in 75 years. And we need our partners and supporters. That hasn't changed, either. Let's get started.

Between family nature walks, loon tours, and deer programs, the NCWF community is helping with education and fostering awareness for wildlife.

- Presented 68 nature programs on topics including coexisting with coyotes, bird migration, and snakes of North Carolina.
- NCWF chapters participated in hosting eight Kids in Nature Days to inspire youth and families to experience the outdoors and wildlife.
- In 2019, NCWF was a proud sponsor of the Black Bear Festival in Plymouth and a participant in the first Smoky Mountain Elk Fest. Eastern North Carolina is home to the largest black bears in North America while the western part of the state supports one of several elk populations in existence through successful species re-introduction programs. These festivals provide an opportunity for NCWF's staff and grassroots chapters to interact with the public and to gain awareness for wildlife.

**Great Outdoors University** Connection to nature is why NCWF's Great Outdoors University (GoU) program was created. In 2019, we provided more than 26,500 participants opportunities to experience these connections to nature and create unforgettable memories through participation in one or more of 150 day trip adventures and 19 events including family fun days. The GoU program and its success continues to grow each year developing stronger roots and producing interconnected saplings. One indicator of this success is the retention of our participant partners over the years who have increased their participation and value the opportunities that GoU provides. To date we have 42 participant partners and 35 destination partners who engage in one of our 25 curriculum options.

On all of the adventures, GoU lets nature be the teacher and the participants enthusiastically respond to the wonderful opportunities that nature provides to have fun, explore, discover, learn ... and engage.

CROWN's Kids in Nature Day at Freedom Park, Charlotte



ANNUAL REPORT 2019

# IT'S TIME: Consolidate the Division of Marine Fisheries into the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

The North Carolina Wildlife Federation Board of Directors has passed a resolution calling for the consolidation of the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) and the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission (MFC) into the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission. Such a move would remake the landscape of marine fisheries conservation in North Carolina, and it's long past due. Here's why.

Efficiency and science-based management are critical aspects of any professional natural resource management program. The missions of the WRC, DMF, and MFC to protect and enhance the public trust, natural resources and habitats of North Carolina are closely aligned, but areas of duplication, redundancy, uncertainty, and inefficiency exist. Similarly, areas of synergy exist that could be improved through agency and commission consolidation. A merger of the agencies and commissions would save significant funds, reduce bureaucracy, reduce public confusion, and increase effectiveness of natural resource management in North Carolina.

Theoretically, the mission of these agencies is to protect and enhance public trust natural resources. Competing user groups on the marine fisheries side compromise the mission by engaging politics and self-interest into the equation. While both sides have their share of political wrangling, there is little debate that the marine side has proven problematic.

It is impossible to place partisan members on the Marine Fisheries Commission and expect them to serve the public trust as opposed to the desires of their constituents or their own self-interest.

Violations of wildlife laws are serious, come with stiff penalties, and can be life altering. Violations of fisheries laws are often considered the cost of doing business.

Licensing, data collection programs, enforcement, administrative functions (budget, human resources, leadership, information and technology), motor and vessel fleet, and others are duplicative.

A critical difference between the two agencies arises when managing resources or areas of joint responsibility. Functional differences in mission application result in differing opinions on managing shared resources (e.g., striped bass, joint waters), resulting in both intrastate and interstate conflicts.

Additionally, a science-based management protocol is not driven by economic considerations. While the WRC manages for both abundance and quality fisheries, with less consideration of short-term economic impacts, the DMF is charged with managing for the maintenance of harvest at maximum levels. The WRC approach is often more consistent with best management practices.

And no matter the structural makeup of a body governing public trust resources, conservation and professional science-based management of natural resources should be both efficient and insulated from politics. As DMF is housed within the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and overseen by a Secretary and Deputy Secretary who are political appointees, more political oversight and interference is likely, handcuffing professional management and science-backed decision-making. While DMF biologists provide adequate data and analysis, MFC and/or departmental policy decisions often neglect those findings.

However, WRC commissioners have no mandated financial incentives related to their decisions. WRC decisions are not immune from political considerations, but in our opinion are generally less influenced by them. The DMF process for implementing management measures is complex and time-consuming. Public meeting periods for fishery management plans (FMP) typically last more than a year, and are coupled with reviews and input from executive and legislative interests, political operatives, and commissioners who have financial interests in the outcomes. This process often takes years while resources suffer.

Consider one example of the time this process takes. The most recent blue crab FMP amendment began in September 2017 with orientation of advisors and to discuss the goals and objectives. The advisors worked on the amendment, at public meetings, until June 2018. Over the next 12 months the advisors and DMF developed issue papers and positions to present to the MFC. The MFC reviewed and approved the amendment in August 2019 for public comment in September 2019. The MFC approved the revised FMP in November 2019 to send out for Secretarial and General Assembly review in January 2020. The MFC was slated to approve the final FMP in February 2020, but did not. It is now up for approval in May 2020, a process that is now on track to last at least 33 months.



+



= ONE MISSION,  
ONE COMMISSION



Politics must not direct natural resource management. The WRC is a constitutionally-independent commission established by statute having individual members who answer only to the entity that appointed them, i.e. Governor, Speaker, or Senate Pro Tem, as specified in statute. The WRC as an agency answers only to the Wildlife Resources Commission. That means that even though it is housed within the DEQ organizational chart, its Secretary has no oversight authority. The MFC is different because the DMF is subject to the DEQ Secretary's oversight. That means that while the MFC can make regulatory policy independently of the Secretary, it is dependent on the DMF to implement the decisions. Therefore, the Secretary can block the MFC at the implementation stage. Furthermore, to amend or supplement management plans of a particular species in times of need, permission must be granted by the Secretary.

The management structure for North Carolina's marine resources has resulted in a tragic decline of those resources. Marine and estuarine resources and their associated habitats have continued to degrade since 1997 and the dire condition of our marine resources now is largely due to unchecked partisan politics and managing for short-term economics versus long-term resource and economic sustainability.

## THE TIME TO ACT

Logically and fiscally, a merger is both overdue and greatly needed for the citizens of North Carolina and their public trust resources. Collectively, we know what to do and how to do it. The WRC can only accomplish so much within its agency purview, when every step toward conservation of jointly-managed fishery resources is met with DMF and MFC resistance by increasing harvest on already depleted stocks, failing to end overfishing, failing to rebuild stocks that are overfished, and failing to protect nursery habitats from destructive fishing practices.

North Carolina's experiment has failed. East Coast states have a myriad of structures for managing their public trust resources. Most states have, appropriately and successfully, a consolidated program for the protection of natural resources or fish and game/wildlife collectively. Only four states—Maine, Massachusetts, Virginia and North Carolina—have marine fisheries specific agencies. Interestingly, these states are, or in the case of North Carolina, were, the biggest producers of commercial seafood products on the East Coast.

Given these facts, the North Carolina Wildlife Federation strongly recommends the consolidation of the MFC and DMF into the WRC to create one fish and wildlife agency as an efficiency measure to reduce wasteful, excessive duplication of responsibilities, programs, personnel, and services; to realize economies and efficiencies from consolidation; and to improve administrative, regulatory, and management efforts directed toward the public trust fish and wildlife resources of North Carolina.

It's a big idea. And its time has come.

## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

<i>Wildlife Resources Commission</i>	<i>Division of Marine Fisheries</i>
WRC rules are generally implemented with the resource in mind.	DMF rules focus on the economic well-being of the harvester.
The cost of a ticket for violating WRC laws results in losses of property, privileges, and money.	The cost of a MFC ticket is the cost of doing business, there is little consequence.
WRC has seen numerous successes from wild turkey to mountain trout with harvest seasons and limits increased over time.	The DMF has seen little to no success in terms of rebuilding a population that results in expanded resource populations.
WRC manages for the public trust of all North Carolina citizens.	DMF manages for maximum economic extraction for relatively few citizens.
WRC can implement rules rapidly in the best interest of the resource.	DMF rulemaking takes years.
WRC is an independent commission, answering only to the entity that appointed individual members.	DMF's commission is overseen by political appointees.

## WHY A MERGER MATTERS

*The numbers tell a story of institutional failure.*



North Carolina boasts **two million acres** of estuary—the rich nursery grounds required by many fish and shellfish—and is the **only state from Maryland to Texas that trawls in nursery grounds.**

In 2018, **9.7 million pounds** of shrimp were harvested.



**1 pound** = **4 pounds**  
of shrimp of bycatch  
(discarded fish)

In the past two decades, commercial landings have plummeted for many fish species.

Atlantic croaker .....	<b>85% decline</b>
Kingfishes .....	<b>54% decline</b>
Striped mullet .....	<b>47% decline</b>
Spot .....	<b>94% decline</b>
Southern flounder .....	<b>88% decline</b>
Bluefish .....	<b>78% decline</b>
Total landings for these six species .....	<b>79% decline</b>

## How do you put wildlife in your will? ASK MANLEY FULLER.



There are few people who can get “muddy and grubby” in the field one day and testify in front of Congress another. Manley Fuller can. Many experiences have shaped him as a conservation lover. He studied alligators and mapped peat deposits at Croatan National Forest, worked as Executive Director of the Florida National Wildlife Federation, and now hangs his hat as Vice President of Conservation Policy at North Carolina Wildlife Federation.

He believes in giving where you’re living and has made immediate as well as long-term investments in NCWF by joining the Charlie Shaw Society and leaving a gift for NCWF in his will.

“You need to take care of stuff close to home,” said Manley. “I want to leave something when I’m gone to help NCWF and the wildlife and habitats it works to protect.”

Manley is worried about increased growth in North Carolina and the pressure this puts on wildlife habitat.

“We need to build connecting habitats for wildlife; especially in more suburban areas,” said Manley. “We need to do a much better job of managing our marine fisheries and have places for people of all walks of life to enjoy and experience nature in a variety of ways. These are public trust resources and we all have a responsibility to protect, conserve, and restore them.”

Manley experiences nature’s bounty every day at his home in Hickory. “I see deer, coyotes, ground, hogs, wood chucks, blue birds, great blue herons, and even saw a

pancake shaped, spiny soft shell turtle lay its eggs in my yard. There’s a lot worth saving and enjoying,” Manley said.

Seeing the inner workings of NCWF as an employee has only solidified trust in NCWF to put his investments where they’re most needed now and into the future. “I plan to continue supporting NCWF as an employee or not, through financial investments, and time. That is, unless NCWF decides to run me off,” Manley laughed.

“If your desire is a positive future for wildlife and nature and having quality outdoor experiences in North Carolina,” he said, “then NCWF can help you further your dreams for conservation in the state. I support NCWF because it is an extremely effective advocate for landscape scale wildlife habitat connectivity from the mountains to the sea on both public and private conservation lands benefiting people from all walks of life from our cities to the rural areas of North Carolina.”

**Have you left a gift to NCWF in your will or estate plan? We’d love to hear what inspired you to make such a meaningful commitment. Don’t have a will? You’re not alone! Now is a great time to start planning. Call (919-833-1923) or email ([dom@ncwf.org](mailto:dom@ncwf.org)) NCWF Development Director, Dom Canavarrro. Did you know you can also designate NCWF as a charitable beneficiary of your donor advised fund or life insurance plan? Contact Dom today to discuss the conservation legacy you want to create.**

## The Glenn Sisters’ Lasting Legacy

*The bond between sisters can be strong. And their legacy, even stronger.*

Carrie and Lena Glenn were born in the late 1800s on a Gaston County farm. They were two of ten children, five boys and five girls. Their parents strongly believed in their education.

Carrie was a teacher in Gastonia City Schools and a supervisor and teacher in Gaston County Schools. Lena taught in Greensboro and was a librarian at the Gaston County Public Library. After retiring they lived together at the family home and had extensive vegetable and flower gardens. They lived simply, frugally, and charitably. Carrie and Lena established what would become the Carrie E. and Lena V. Glenn Foundation on August 30, 1971 with a gift of \$25,000. After their deaths, the Foundation acquired Carrie and Lena’s combined estates of close to three million dollars and has grown to grant almost \$8.55 million dollars since 1972.

“The generosity of the Glenn sisters will be felt in our community for many years to come,” said Laura Lineberger, Executive Director of the Glenn Foundation.

NCWF’s Great Outdoors University (GoU) was the honored recipient of their generosity in 2019. The Glenn Foundation made it possible for 213 Gaston County youth to get outside in nature and learn about the biodiversity of our natural world.

“GoU is unique in the way it brings nature and children together through outdoor educational experiences,” said Lineberger.

The Glenn Foundation Board of Directors reviews every application received. “Their only directive is to do the most good where it is needed most,” said Lineberger.



*Carrie E. Glenn*



*Lena V. Glenn*

Lineberger joined GoU for an Adventure Day Trip this past summer. “Not only were they (kids) connecting with nature but also with each other,” said Lineberger. “I watched their faces and saw their smiles. I was reminded of what is common place in nature to an adult is often amazing to a child.”

“We are grateful for the partnership and investment of the Glenn Foundation,” said Mary Bures, GoU Program Director. “I only wish I could have met the sisters and visited their garden.”

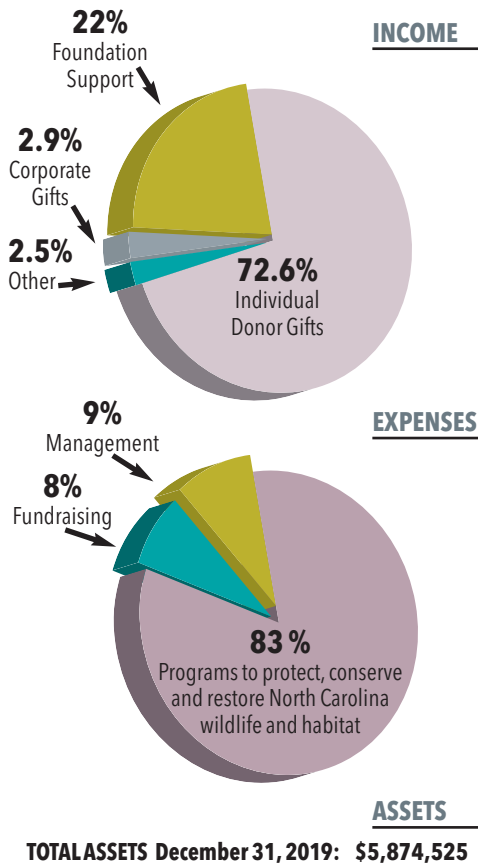
“As North Carolinians, we all have the responsibility to care for the natural beauty of this state so that future generations will have the opportunity to enjoy it as well,” said Lineberger.



## NCWF FINANCIAL REPORT 2019

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## NCWF Foundation Partners

NCWF greatly appreciates the partnership of the below foundations for investing in wildlife and habitat in North Carolina.

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 American Endowment Foundation • *Operating support*  
 Bank of America Charitable Foundation • *Great Outdoors University*  
 Blumenthal Foundation • *Butterfly Highway*  
 Camp Younts Foundation • *Camo Coalition*  
 Chatham Foundation • *Wildlife Community Chapters*  
 Duke Energy Foundation • *Trees for Trash and Wildlife Community Chapters*  
 Habitat Enhancement Program • *Wildlife and habitat along the Catawba-Wateree River*  
 Mary Norris Preyer Fund • *Training new leaders and volunteers*  
 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation • *Butterfly Highway*  
 NC Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services • *Farmers and Communities Manage Deer*  
 SunTrust Foundation • *Great Outdoors University*  
 The Carrie E. and Lena V. Glenn Foundation • *Great Outdoors University*  
 The Luke Garrison Foundation • *Great Outdoors University*  
 Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation • *Operational support*