



MINUTES
February 22, 2024
N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission Meeting
Raleigh, North Carolina

Chairman Monty Crump called the February 22, 2024 N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. in the Commission Room at the agency's headquarters in Raleigh. Crump reminded everyone that the meeting is being audio streamed live and will be available at www.ncwildlife.org.

Commissioner Kelly Davis led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Commissioner John Alexander gave the invocation.

ROLL CALL

Margo Minkler, Commission Liaison, called the roll. David Hoyle, John Coley, John Stone, Mike Alford, and Hayden Rogers were absent.

COMMISSIONER ATTENDANCE

Monty Crump	Jim Ruffin	Ray Clifton	John Alexander
Mark Craig	Thomas Fonville	Kelly Davis	JC Cole
Wes Seegars	Tom Berry	Tom Haislip	Joe Budd
Brad Stanback	Landon Zimmer	Steve Windham	

MANDATORY ETHICS INQUIRY

Chairman Crump advised the Commission of the mandatory ethics inquiry as mandated in NCGS §138A-15.

NOTICES OF COMMISSION APPOINTMENTS – Received Notices of Appointment by Governor Roy Cooper of N. Wes Seegars, District 3; Monty Crump, District 6, and Bradford G. Stanback, District 9 for terms ending April 25, 2029; (**EXHIBITS A-1, A-2, A-3**); Appointments by Senate President Pro Tempore Phil Berger of Mark Craig, Thomas A. Berry, John M. Alexander, Landon Zimmer, and Joseph R. Budd for terms ending June 30, 2025 (**EXHIBITS A-4, A-5, A-6, A-7, A-8 Appointments Bill**); and Appointments by House Speaker Tim Moore of John T. Coley IV, Vernon Ray Clifton, Jr., Tommy Fonville, John A. Stone, and Reid M. Smith for terms ending June 30, 2025 (**EXHIBITS A-9, A-10, A-11, A-12, A-13 Appointments Bill**) – *Margo Minkler*

EXHIBITS A-1, A-2, A-3, A-4, A-5, A-6, A-7, A-8, A-9, A-10, A-11, A-12, and A-13 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

RECEIVE STATE ETHICS COMMISSION REVIEWS OF 2023 STATEMENT OF ECONOMIC INTEREST FOR COMMISSIONER JOSEPH R. BUDD - Pursuant to NCGS §138A-15(c), *Margo Minkler, Ethics Liaison*, read into the Minutes relevant portions of the evaluations by the N.C. Ethics Commission of the 2023 Statement of Economic Interest for *Joseph R. Budd, President Pro Tempore Phil Berger Appointee*.

MINUTES

DECEMBER 7, 2023 MEETING – On a motion by *Landon Zimmer* and second by *Jim Ruffin*, the Commission approved the Wildlife Resources Commission Minutes of the December 7, 2023 meeting as presented in **EXHIBIT B**.

EXHIBIT B is incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

ADMINISTRATION

FINANCIAL STATUS REPORT – *Jason Cottle, Chief Financial Officer*, presented a status report in **EXHIBIT C** on the Wildlife Resources Commission General Fund, Capital Improvement Fund, and the Endowment Fund.

EXHIBIT C is incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

COMMITTEE MEETING REPORTS

Education and Communication Report – February 21, 2024 – *Tom Haislip, Chair*, reported the Education and Communication Committee met on Wednesday, February 21, 2024. Staff presented an update on the Pathway to Relevancy Project and the team's efforts in developing an education and engagement program action plan. Led by the Education Division and involving representation from across the agency, the team has recently conducted a gap analysis to identify opportunities for strengthening the agency's engagement with current customers. The committee also received a presentation on a recently completed range survey aimed at improving the range

user experience and ensuring optimal service for this user group. The Wildlife Education Division team has utilized these findings to standardize range operation hours, ensuring facilities run efficiently while providing a safe environment for shooting sports enthusiasts across North Carolina. The meeting concluded with a presentation on the Upland Bird Learn to Hunt Program, a new course offered during the past hunting season. Held at the John Lentz Hunter Education Complex and on the Sandhills Game Lands, participants received both classroom and field training on various aspects of upland bird hunting, culminating in a hunt. The team is collaborating with various partners to develop additional Learn to Hunt Programs, furthering efforts to engage individuals in conservation.

Fisheries Committee Report – February 21, 2024 – *Brad Stanback, Chair*, reported the Committee met on Wednesday, February 21, 2024. *Chris Smith, Fisheries Biologist*, presented data indicating that the Roanoke River Striped Bass population is in decline, leading to the decision not to hold a harvest season in 2024. Staff will continue annual monitoring of the population, with supplemental stocking scheduled for Spring 2024 and 2025. *Casey Joubert, Fisheries Biologist*, then presented data showing that over 258,000 anglers in North Carolina fish for striped bass in reservoirs, generating a total economic impact of \$430 million to our state. Survey data will be integrated into the Commission’s Inland Morone Management Plan, slated for completion later this year. Next, *Kyle Rachels, Fisheries Biologist*, discussed the significance and uniqueness of the Lumber River fishery. In 2022, nearly 40,000 anglers spent a cumulative 96,000 hours fishing the Lumber River, primarily from the bank and by local anglers. *Christian Waters, Inland Fisheries Division Chief*, provided an update on renovation plans for the Bobby N. Setzer State Fish Hatchery in Brevard. Permitting and planning are projected to conclude by late 2024, with construction slated to commence in early 2025. Trout stocking will experience necessary reductions during the renovation, and CMDE staff will devise a communication plan to inform the public about changes and renovation progress. Christian also mentioned that MFC and DMF will be discussing mullet management at their February Meeting, while announcements regarding Flounder season dates and Spotted Seatrout management changes will be made later in the year.

Finance, Audit and Compliance Committee Report – February 21, 2024 – *Landon Zimmer, Chair*, reported the Finance, Audit and Compliance Committee met on Wednesday, February 21, 2024. *Jason Cottle, Chief Financial Officer*, presented a comparison of current and prior fiscal year-to-date expenditures and revenues in both the general fund and capital improvement fund categories, providing commentary on any categories experiencing increases or decreases exceeding one million dollars. An update was also provided on the current value and asset allocation of the agency’s Endowment fund, including the amount of expendable income currently available for use. *Steve Chase, Internal Auditor*, presented a summary of the preliminary testing of the Go Outdoors NC reporting features, which did not yield any significant audit findings. Additionally, Chase provided a briefing on the Purchasing Card Compliance Review program, noting that a review of purchasing card transactions from July 1 to December 31, 2023, was conducted with no exceptions noted. In response to a question regarding Wisconsin’s declining hunting license revenue, *Carrie Ruhlman, Policy Development Manager*, presented a graphic illustrating license trends and population growth in North Carolina over the last 20 years. The data indicate an increase in both hunting and fishing licenses individually, but a decline in combination licenses.

Boating Safety Committee Report – February 21, 2024 – *JC Cole, Chair*, reported the Committee met on February 21, 2024. *Sergeants Kennedy, Moss, and Criscoe* gave the committee an excellent presentation on the Law Enforcement Division’s boat operation training, boating incident investigations, port security, and the future of our boating safety training and work. Our boating program is one of less than 20 programs nationwide that are accredited by the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators.

Small Game and Wild Turkey Committee Report – February 21, 2024 – *Jim Ruffin, Chair*, reported the Committee met on February 21, 2024. *Hannah Plumpton, Upland Game Bird Biologist*, provided updates on the 2023 Brood Survey Results, the 2023 Turkey Season Harvest Timing, and highlights from the National Wildlife Turkey Federation Convention in Nashville. Hannah noted that *Sampson Parker, Master Officer of District 6*, received the NWTF North Carolina Wildlife Officer of the Year award for 2023. She also noted that *Chris Henline, LAWA Burnsville Depot Team Leader*, won the Joe Kurz Wildlife Manager of the Year Award. This national award is presented annually to wildlife technical staff who have distributed excellence in wild turkey management and restoration. *Chris Kreh, Assistant Chief*, then opened a dialogue for discussion concerning the current turkey management goal and much of the data Hannah presented. The Committee had an excellent dialogue and charged the staff to review the current goal and report back potential modifications that might be considered related to our statewide goal. The committee also charged the staff to continue to review data and examine any potential modifications to the turkey seasons that might be considered as we move forward. Finally, *Daron Barnes, LAWA Chief*, gave a brief update on the ongoing efforts of the LAWA staff at the Caswell Small Game Focus Area. Daron reported that we are entering burn season and the first burn on the area was conducted yesterday. Our continued efforts to improve the small game habitat in this area will benefit a host of species, including turkeys, as well as our constituents.

Committee of the Whole Report – February 21, 2024 – *Monty Crump, Chair*, reported that the Committee met on Wednesday, February 21, 2024. The meeting commenced with a review of public comments concerning the proposed annual cycle rule changes for the Inland Fisheries, Land and Water Access, and administrative rules for 2024-2025, declaratory rulings, and public fishing and boating access rules. All rules were recommended by the committee as presented, except for the proposed western deer hunting rule. The committee recommended adding the Thursday and Friday of Thanksgiving week as youth days in the western deer season to address the main concern voiced during our western public hearing, thereby allowing youth under 18 to use any lawful weapon on those two days. Additionally, the committee reviewed proposed rule changes related to Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species, along with the associated fiscal note for notice of text. Finally, the committee reviewed and approved a Phase I land acquisition for a potential boating access area at Holden Beach.

AGENCY SPOTLIGHT – Environmental Health and Safety – *Allen Strickland, Environmental Health, and Safety Director*, gave a presentation titled “Environmental Health and Safety” The presentation provided an overview of the program's approach to injury prevention and environmental compliance. Highlights of recent successes were showcased, including a new fall protection program and a new respiratory protection program. Additionally, an overview of the agency's environmental compliance success was given.

RULEMAKING

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 2024-2025 Annual Cycle Inland Fisheries Rules – On a motion by Wes Seegars and a second by Brad Stanback, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **(EXHIBIT D-1)** and adopted proposed changes to Inland Fisheries rules presented in **(EXHIBIT D-2)** by *Christian Waters, Inland Fisheries Division Chief*.

EXHIBITS D-1, D-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 2024-2025 Annual Cycle Land and Water Access Rules – On a motion by Joe Budd and a second by John Alexander, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **(EXHIBIT E-1)** and adopted proposed changes to Land and Water Access rules presented in **(EXHIBITS E-2)** by *Daron Barnes, Land and Water Access Division Chief*.

EXHIBITS E-1, E-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 2024-2025 Annual Cycle Wildlife Management Rules – On a motion by Brad Stanback and a second by Steve Windham, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **(EXHIBIT F-1)** and adopted proposed changes to Wildlife Management rules presented in **(EXHIBIT F-2)** by *Brad Howard, Wildlife Management Division Chief*.

EXHIBITS F-1, F-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 2024-2025 Annual Cycle Administrative Rules – On a motion by Ray Clifton and a second by Jim Ruffin, the Commission reviewed public comments presented in **(EXHIBIT G-1)** and adopted proposed changes to Administrative rules presented in **(EXHIBIT G-2)** by *Ben Meyer, Law Enforcement Division Colonel*.

EXHIBITS G-1, G-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

On a motion by Steve Windham and a second by Tom Berry, the Commission approved the following rulemaking items presented in **H-2, I-2** presented by *Melva Bonner, Regulatory Analyst*:

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 10A .0500 Declaratory Rulings Rules – The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **(EXHIBIT H-1)** and adopted proposed changes to 10A .0501 through .0503 Declaratory Ruling rules as part of the periodic review presented in **(EXHIBIT H-2)**.

Permanent Rulemaking Adoption – 10E Fishing and Boating Access Areas Rules –The Commission reviewed public comments presented in **(EXHIBIT I-1)** and adopted proposed changes to 10E .0101 through .0104 Fishing and Boating Access Areas as part of the periodic review presented in **(EXHIBIT I-2)**.

EXHIBITS H-1, H-2, I-1, I-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

Notice of Text – 10I Endangered, Threatened, and Special Concern Species Rules – On a motion by Kelly Davis and a second by John Alexander, the Commission approved publishing Notice of Text in the *NC Register* with an open comment period and a public hearing for proposed rule amendments to 10I .0102 through .0105 presented in **(EXHIBIT J-1)** and approved fiscal notes for proposed rules presented in **(EXHIBIT J-2)** by *Melva Bonner*.


EXHIBITS J-1, J-2 are incorporated into the official record of this meeting.

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIRMAN – *Chairman Crump* commenced his remarks by extending a warm welcome back to Commissioner Joe Budd, who has rejoined the board. Commissioner Budd brings a wealth of experience and insight, and we are thrilled to have him back. In closing, Chairman Crump shared details of the upcoming away Commission Meeting that will be held in Wilmington.


COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – *Director Ingram* began his comments by emphasizing the mission of NCWRC: To conserve North Carolina’s wildlife resources and their habitats and provide programs and opportunities that allow hunters, anglers, boaters, and other outdoor enthusiasts to enjoy wildlife-associated recreation. Next, he shared Sampson Parker, Master Officer of District 6, received the NWTf North Carolina Wildlife Officer of the Year award for 2023 and Chris Henline, LAWA Burnsville Depot Team Leader, was honored with the prestigious Joe Kurz Wildlife Manager of the Year Award. In closing, Director Ingram shared the sad news of the passing of former District One Commissioner Ray White. He served with distinction from 1997 to 2013.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the WRC webinar meeting was adjourned at **9:47 a.m.**
All exhibits are incorporated into the official record of this meeting by reference and are filed with the minutes.



Monty Crump, Chairman 4/18/2024
Date



Cameron Ingram, Executive Director 4/18/2024
Date