

## Inland Fishing Proposals for 2025-2026

### Trout

**F1. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Remove the Hatchery Supported Trout Waters section on Henry Fork in Burke County from Public Mountain Trout Waters. This proposal will remove approximately 3.1 miles from Public Mountain Trout Waters.

**Justification:**

This section of river is on private property, and most of the angler access and stocking locations have been posted against trespassing.

*15A NCAC 10C .0205(d)(5)(C) PUBLIC MOUNTAIN TROUT WATERS*

**F2. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Reclassify the section of Hatchery Supported Trout Waters on the Linville River within the U.S. Forest Service's Linville Gorge Wilderness Area (LGWA) in Burke County to Wild Trout Waters. This proposal will not remove any water from Public Mountain Trout Waters.

**Justification:**

Recent changes to the National Park Service stream stocking policy prevent trout from being stocked into waters on the Blue Ridge Parkway. Stocking from U.S. Forest Service lands is difficult due to steep terrain and is no longer attempted for safety reasons. Additionally, reclassifying this portion of river to Wild Trout Waters aligns with current U.S. Forest Service management of designated Wilderness Areas, where stockings typically are not allowed.

*15A NCAC 10C .0205(d)(5)(C) PUBLIC MOUNTAIN TROUT WATERS*

**F3. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Modify the upper boundary of Hatchery Supported Trout Waters on the Hungry River in Henderson County. The new reach will be from Little Hungry River to Green River. This proposal will remove approximately 1.0 mile from Public Mountain Trout Waters.

**Justification:**

This section of river is on private property, and most of the angler access and stocking locations have been posted against trespassing.

*15A NCAC 10C .0205(d)(11)(B) PUBLIC MOUNTAIN TROUT WATERS*

**F4. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Remove the Hatchery Supported Trout Waters section on Little Rock Creek in Mitchell County from Public Mountain Trout Waters. This proposal will remove approximately 7.0 miles from Public Mountain Trout Waters.

**Justification:**

This section of the creek is on private property, and most of the angler access and

stocking locations have been posted against trespassing.

*15A NCAC 10C .0205(d)(16)(B) PUBLIC MOUNTAIN TROUT WATERS*

**F5. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Modify the lower boundary of Hatchery Supported Trout Waters on Big Rock Creek in Mitchell County. The new reach will be from the headwaters to the S.R. 1325 bridge. This proposal will remove approximately 2.3 miles from Public Mountain Trout Waters.

**Justification:**

This section of the creek is on private property, and most of the angler access and stocking locations have been posted against trespassing.

*15A NCAC 10C .0205(d)(16)(B) PUBLIC MOUNTAIN TROUT WATERS*

**F6. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Clarify that the Delayed Harvest Trout Waters section on the Ararat River in Surry County is the portion of the river bordering the Ararat River Greenway downstream of the N.C. 103 bridge. This proposal will not remove any water from Public Mountain Trout Waters.

**Justification:**

The current NCAC text does not clearly describe the boundaries of Delayed Harvest Trout Waters section since Hatchery Supported Trout Waters section is also located along the Ararat River Greenway.

*15A NCAC 10C .0205(d)(20)(A) PUBLIC MOUNTAIN TROUT WATERS*

**F7. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Modify the upper boundary of Hatchery Supported Trout Waters on the Ararat River in Surry County. The new reach will be the portion of the river adjacent to the Ararat River Greenway upstream of the N.C. 103 bridge. This proposal will add approximately 0.5 miles to Public Mountain Trout Waters.

**Justification:**

The Ararat River Greenway was recently extended upstream, and the upper boundary of Hatchery Supported Trout Waters needs to be extended.

*15A NCAC 10C .0205(d)(20)(B) PUBLIC MOUNTAIN TROUT WATERS*

**F8. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Modify the lower boundary of Delayed Harvest Trout Waters on the East Fork French Broad River in Transylvania County. The new reach will move from the East Fork Baptist Church to 350 yards downstream of Whitmire Falls. This proposal will remove approximately 1.0 mile from Public Mountain Trout Waters.

**Justification:**

This section of the river is on private property, and the angler access and stocking locations have been posted against trespassing.

*15A NCAC 10C .0205(d)(22)(B) PUBLIC MOUNTAIN TROUT WATERS*

**F9. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Modify the age of youth from under the age of 18 to under the age of 16.

**Justification:**

The Commission is standardizing the age of youth throughout all its rules to under the age of 16.

*15A NCAC 10C .0205(a)(5) PUBLIC MOUNTAIN TROUT WATERS*

**Crappie**

**F10. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Establish an 8-inch minimum size limit and a 20-fish daily creel limit for crappie at Shearon Harris Reservoir.

**Justification:**

While catch rates of crappie in Commission sampling have remained relatively constant over the past decade, the maximum age of crappie collected has declined more than 50 percent. Sampling results from the fall of 2023 indicated the fishery was supported by only two year-classes (ages 2 and 3), and no age 1 fish were collected. Anglers have expressed concern that crappie are being overharvested in the reservoir and have indicated they would prefer a size and creel limit for crappie.

*15A NCAC 10C .0306 CRAPPIE*

**Mullet**

**F11. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Reduce the daily creel limit for Striped and White Mullet from 200 to 100 fish in aggregate and establish a limit of no more than 400 fish total per boat.

**Justification:**

Striped Mullet is considered overfished, and the Striped Mullet Fisheries Management Plan (FMP) Amendment 2 indicates harvest reductions are required. This change will be consistent with the FMP's preferred management option as selected by the North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission at their February business meeting.

*15A NCAC 10C .0422 STRIPED MULLET AND WHITE MULLET*

## Land and Water Access Proposals for 2025-2026

### Use of Game Lands

**G1. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Prohibit target shooting on the Cold Mountain Game Land in Haywood County.

**Justification:**

Opportunities currently exist for target shooting at alternative sites appropriately constructed and monitored to provide a safe environment for participants. The Wayne E. Smith/Cold Mountain Shooting Range located on the Cold Mountain Game Land is within a 30-50-mile radius. This change is consistent with other game lands where target shooting is prohibited within an acceptable radius of shooting ranges and would limit potential issues of unsafe target shooting practices or conflict between game land user groups. The exclusion of this prohibition in rule was an oversight following the construction of the shooting range.

*15A NCAC 10D .0219 COLD MOUNTAIN GAME LAND IN HAYWOOD COUNTY*

**G2. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Add Bates-Bay River Tract, in Pamlico County, to the Goose Creek Game Land Program. Hunting for deer, bear, and turkey will be by permit only.

**Justification:**

This 407-acre tract is made of several small parcels with residential homes on multiple sides. By enrolling this new land into the Special Permit Hunt Opportunity Program for deer, bear, and turkey, we are limiting the chance for negative interactions between hunters and the homeowners, while also offering high-quality hunting opportunities for successful applicants.

*15A NCAC 10D .0229 GOOSE CREEK GAME LAND IN BEAUFORT AND PAMLICO COUNTIES*

**G3. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Distinguish the two waterfowl impoundments on the Gull Rock Game Land. Name the impoundment on the Outfall Canal Tract, the E. Merle Edwards/Loop Road Waterfowl Impoundment. Name the impoundment on the new Willow Point Tract (aka Spencer Bay), the Willow Point Waterfowl Impoundment. Hunting on the Willow Point Impoundment will be by permit only.

**Justification:**

The State is acquiring the Spencer Bay Tract to be added to the Gull Rock Game Land. This tract has a 214-acre waterfowl impoundment and is proposed to be permit only. To reduce confusion, aid in enforcement, and to maintain the hunting framework on the impoundment on the Outfall Canal Tract, the proposal seeks to name the E. Merle Edwards/Loop Road Waterfowl Impoundment on the Outfall Canal Tract in rule. The impoundment is already named on NCWRC maps.

The Willow Point Tract is a new acquisition with a 214-acre waterfowl impoundment to

be incorporated into the Gull Rock Game Land. The impoundment lies within a marsh peninsula between the confluence of the Pungo and Pamlico rivers, and Spencer Bay. The impoundment is a featureless expansion subject to overhunting if open to the framework established for the E. Merle Edwards/Loop Road Waterfowl Impoundment on the Outfall Canal Tract of Gull Rock Game Land. Permitting access to this impoundment will limit disturbances while promoting a higher quality waterfowl hunting experience.

*15A NCAC 10D .0232 GULL ROCK GAME LAND IN HYDE COUNTY*

**G4. General Description of Proposed Change:**

During the open days of the seasons for game birds and game animals, restrict the use of bicycles on Johns River Game Land in Burke County to hunters engaged in the act of hunting.

**Justification:**

Johns River Game Land offers quality hunting experiences by permit only, and disabled and youth hunts occur here throughout the season. Most blinds and wildlife openings are located along interior access roads which increases accessibility. However, it is along these same roads where bicycling occurs and is allowed 7 days per week. The game land has proximity to several large municipalities, numerous access roads, and gentle topography, making it a convenient destination for hikers, bicyclists, dog walkers, and other non-licensed users. An increase in this type of usage is starting to generate conflict among user groups and compromise user experience.

Restricting bicycles from these areas during open hunting seasons for game birds and game animals will increase public safety and alleviate user conflicts.

*15A NCAC 10D .0239 JOHNS RIVER GAME LAND IN BURKE COUNTY*

**G5. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Restrict access on the Lantern Acres Game Land posted waterfowl impoundments to permitted hunters only, to reduce disturbance to waterfowl during open waterfowl hunting seasons.

**Justification:**

In 2007, two waterfowl impoundments were created to provide habitat for waterfowl, waterbirds, and for the public waterfowl hunting opportunities. To provide for quality hunts, turkey hunting, and waterfowl hunting on the posted waterfowl impoundments is by permit only. Hunting outside of the impoundments does not require a special hunt permit.

The posted waterfowl impoundments offer excellent turkey and quail nesting habitat in spring and summer. Both turkey hunters and deer hunters hunt the impoundments prior to flooding for the waterfowl season. Once the impoundments are flooded, deer, and bear hunters primarily stay on the dikes and trails.

In contrast to the limited disturbances deer and bear hunters have on waterfowl, woodcock and snipe hunting have a tremendous negative impact on waterfowl use. Most waterfowl species do not tolerate human presence and will flee the area when disturbed.

The current rule allows all hunters to access the impoundments 6-days per week. This unrestricted use occurs on days prior to and during the permitted waterfowl hunts. This flushes waterfowl from the impoundments and is in opposition to the quality waterfowl hunting experience that the NCWRC wants to offer.

*15A NCAC 10D .0244 LANTERN ACRES GAME LAND IN TYRRELL AND WASHINGTON COUNTIES*

**G6. General Description of Proposed Change:**

Expand the Little Fork State Forest Game Land from a Three Days per Week Area to a Six Days per week Area.

**Justification:**

The North Carolina Forest Service requested the expansion of the game land from a Three Days per Week to a Six Days per Week Area due to its proximity to the educational forest.

*15A NCAC 10D .0263 LITTLE FORK STATE FOREST GAME LAND IN WILKES COUNTY*

## Wildlife Management Proposals for 2025-2026

### Furbearers

#### H1. **General Description of Proposed Change:**

Establish a definition in rule for a submersion trapping system and apply the 72-hour trap attendance requirement that exists for completely submerged conibear-type traps to other legal trap-types that are set as a submersion trapping system.

#### **Justification:**

The main difference between fully submerged conibear®-type traps and submersion trapping systems is the trap-type (e.g., foothold, colony trap) used and how the trap is set. The result of submersion trapping systems is the same as fully submerged conibear®-type traps, and that is for the captured animal to become fully submerged during capture. Longer than 24-hour trap check for submersion trapping systems is consistent with the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (AFWA) Best Trapping Practices. This change would likely increase the efficiency of both trappers and Wildlife Control Agents (WCAs).

*15A NCAC 10B .0301 DEFINITIONS*

*15A NCAC 10B .0306 ATTENDANCE AND TAGGING OF TRAPS*

#### H2. **General Description of Proposed Change:**

Change reporting requirements for licensed fur dealers from monthly to annually to make reporting consistent with other licenses and permit reporting requirements that are based on the July 1 to June 30 license period.

#### **Justification:**

This rule change will reduce regulatory complexity and increase reporting compliance.

Most fur dealers purchase fur four to five months out of the year. However, the current rule language requires fur dealers to submit a form with "no activity" during months of no activity which is unnecessary. In addition, although the forms are currently required to be submitted monthly, the data is compiled annually. Monthly reporting for fur dealers is not necessary for appropriate management of furbearer species.

*15A NCAC 10B .0405 FUR DEALERS*

### Turkey

#### H3. **General Description of Proposed Change:**

Shift turkey harvest to later in the spring when most hens have begun laying eggs to keep with NCWRC's goal to "*maximize continued increases in population size and distribution.*" Specifically, shift the opening date of the regular turkey season to the Saturday on or immediately after April 11th, with season length unchanged. Shift the opening date for the Youth-only season to the Saturday before April 11th and reduce the Youth-only season from seven to two days. This change also defines eligibility for the youth-only season as individuals less than 16 years of age.

**Justification:**

Trends in turkey harvest across much of North Carolina have been increasing steadily for many years. However, trends in reproduction (i.e. brood survey observations) point to long-term declines and have reached all-time lows, with substantially fewer than two poults per hen in recent years. The largest wild turkey ecology research project in North Carolina recently concluded, documenting low nesting success, poor brood survival, and low overall productivity across all regions of the state. The research also identified the average dates that hens initiate nests (April 11<sup>th</sup> – egg laying). Hens begin incubating nests (April 24<sup>th</sup>) and these dates are consistent across the state.

Adjusting hunting seasons is critical to ensure that turkeys have adequate time for breeding and nesting before substantial harvest occurs and is therefore, necessary to maintain high levels of harvest and to promote hunter satisfaction over time.

This rule proposal would shift the harvest to later in the spring, thus moving the timing of the harvest of male turkeys into agreement with statewide turkey breeding and nesting chronology dates. Since the length of the regular season would remain unchanged, and the majority of Youth-only harvest occurs during the first two days, this proposed change is expected to result in only minimal changes to total harvest. Gobbling activity is a key component of hunter satisfaction and this proposed change would have relatively little impact on the amount of gobbling activity that occurs during the time that turkeys are hunted.