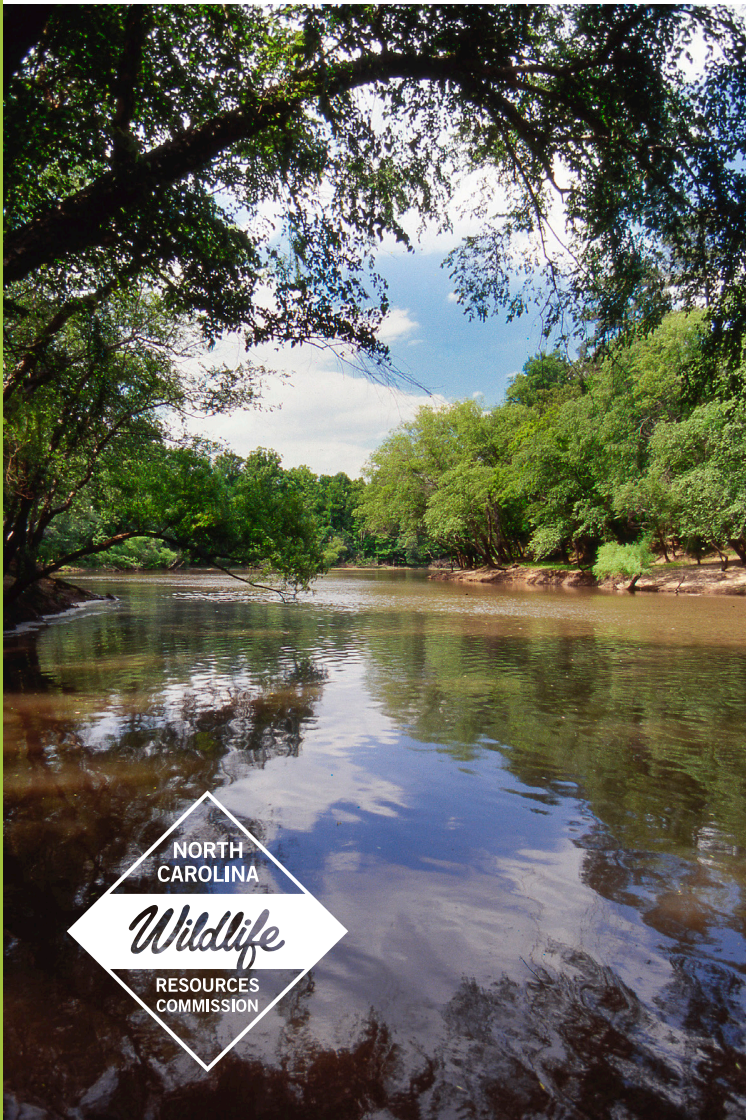


RECOVERING AMERICA'S WILDLIFE ACT

Sustaining North Carolina's diverse fish and wildlife resources





Panoramic view of the Smoky Mountains from the Blue Ridge Parkway (Anthony Heflin)

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Cover photos (clockwise from top left): Pine Barrens Treefrog (Rose Williams); Painted Bunting (John L. Absher); Tangerine Darter (Luke Etchison); Neuse River (Ken Taylor). Unless otherwise indicated, all photos provided by N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission.

INTRODUCTION

The pressures on the nation's fish and wildlife resources have been noted for many years. Dedicated funding for sport fish and game has produced many examples of species recovery. Currently, there is not annual dedicated funding for Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN), which are species that do not have a hunting or fishing season. Similar funding directed at nongame species and their habitats has been provided through the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants (STWG) program. STWG funds are allocated annually along with a per project approval process. Annually appropriated funding has been inconsistent over the last decade, with North Carolina receiving approximately \$1.5 million each year. Yet the need for conservation action has continued to grow.

Efforts to provide similar dedicated funding were invigorated by a [Blue Ribbon Panel](#). Recent efforts are being led by the [Alliance for America's Fish and Wildlife](#) to provide a dedicated and reliable source of funding for the continued conservation, protection and restoration of North Carolina's nongame fish and wildlife species. These efforts could secure up to 17 times more dedicated funding for fully implementing the [North Carolina's Wildlife Action Plan](#) (NCWAP), which is a conservation blueprint for wildlife resource conservation.

The Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) is a bipartisan act that is based on the belief that future generations should enjoy the nation's wild animals and wild places. RAWA would support proactive fish and wildlife conservation by addressing threats to our natural resources and directing funds through NCWAP. The NCWAP is part of the state's existing STWG program that guides conservation efforts that benefit SGCN. North Carolina has nearly 500 SGCN listed in its Wildlife Action Plan.

Passage of RAWA could secure more than \$20 million annually for North Carolina for restoration and conservation of species and their habitats as identified in the NCWAP. Additionally, RAWA would allow the [N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission](#) (NCWRC), along with partners, volunteers and others, to meet four priority goals, as expanded in this booklet. With dedicated RAWA funding, the NCWRC can use this booklet as a valuable resource that outlines goals and helps identify projects and partnerships to implement NCWAP priority projects.

The passage of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) could provide more than \$20 million annually for North Carolina to restore and conserve species and their habitats as identified in the N.C. Wildlife Action Plan.



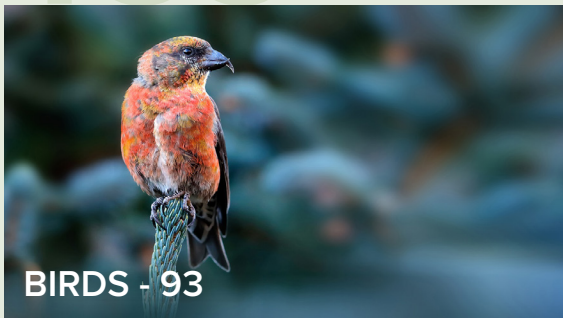
Great Egret (Joshua Liverman)

SPECIES OF GREATEST CONSERVATION NEED

North Carolina is home to more than 1,500 nongame fish and wildlife species and over 6,000 native plant species. RAWA would allow North Carolina to consistently review, assess and plan for the conservation and restoration of nearly 500 SGCN that have low and/or declining populations and need conservation action as described in the NCWAP. Currently, these species include birds, fish, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates, such as crayfish, snails, mussels and insects that are:

- federally listed as threatened or endangered;
- experiencing threats to their life history needs or habitats;
- few or low in abundance or distribution; or
- currently not rare but showing declines in abundance or habitat.

483 SGCN in NORTH CAROLINA



BIRDS - 93

Red Crossbill (Wang LiQuiang)



MAMMALS - 32

Carolina Northern Flying Squirrel (Jonathan Mays)



INVERTEBRATES - 179

Tar River Spiny mussel (Rachael Hoch)



FISHES - 85

Lake Sturgeon (Luke Etchison)



AMPHIBIANS - 51

Green Salamander (Lori Williams)



REPTILES - 43

Southern Hognose Snake (Jeff Hall)

Note: SGCN list is not inclusive of plants until the 2025 NCWAP revision

GOAL 1

KEEPING COMMON SPECIES COMMON

Preventing species from becoming threatened or endangered is good for wildlife and it is less costly to address the needs of common species ahead of federal listing.



Eastern Bluebirds (Steve Byland)

“Keeping common species common and preventing extinction are important actions, because any loss of species will reduce diversity in natural communities and will have unknown consequences for ecosystems, processes, functions, and services upon which we depend.” (Mace and Purvis 2008; Diaz et al. 2006; as cited in the 2015 N.C. Wildlife Action Plan)



Eastern Box Turtle (Jodie Owen)

GOAL 2

MANAGING AND RESTORING NORTH CAROLINA'S SPECIES OF GREATEST CONSERVATION NEED

Creating and expanding programs that will restore SGCN populations, address common threats, enhance disease surveillance and response, and provide early warnings for populations that may be declining.



White Shiners with Tar River Spiny mussels (Rachael Hoch)

“With North Carolina’s population on the rise and the state’s growth rate higher than the national average, natural habitats for wildlife are losing ground. Nongame species have had the most to lose.” (The 2015 N.C. Wildlife Action Plan)



Virginia Big-Eared Bats (Katherine Etchison)

GOAL 3

CREATING, ENHANCING AND PRESERVING NORTH CAROLINA'S PRIORITY HABITATS

Identifying and managing priority habitats to benefit both nongame and game species.



Prescribed burn on a game land (Thomas Harvey)



Mussel survey on the Cheoah River (Rachael Hoch)

“A landscape composed of multiple natural community types is more likely to contain the necessary resources to provide habitat for a species.” (Stewart et al. 2010; Morrison et al. 2012; as cited by the 2015 N.C. Wildlife Action Plan)

GOAL 4

ENGAGING PEOPLE THROUGH WILDLIFE RECREATION

Engaging, informing and educating citizens in support of conservation by fostering awareness and experiences with nature and expanding the availability of training and tools to educators and conservation partners.



Outdoor recreation brings families together and promotes good mental health



Teaching the next generation promotes a sense of unity with wildlife

“Education, outreach, and recreation opportunities are important tools to engage citizens in conservation and improve understanding of our wildlife resources among the general public and conservation stakeholders.” (The 2015 N.C. Wildlife Action Plan)



North Carolina Birding Trail sign (courtesy N.C. Birding Trail)



An NCWRC biologist during an Eastern Hellbender survey (TR Russ)



An NCWRC-managed boat ramp on the coast (Thomas Harvey)

PROJECT TYPES AND ACTIONS

A variety of programs, projects and actions can be implemented to help achieve the four goals. Because the goals are interrelated, particularly Goals 1–3, many projects will meet multiple goals. Suggestions of possible projects were generated by requesting input from NCWRC staff and from partners.

When presented with the opportunity of RAWA funds, staff and partners generated over 200 project ideas. These ideas were grouped and highlighted into eight themes representing the breadth of fisheries and wildlife management, including institutional and public support.

The eight themes are land conservation; aquatic habitat management; terrestrial habitat management; species management; research, survey, and monitoring; human dimensions management; recreation access; and institutional development.

On the following pages, these themes are spotlighted through a variety of project actions to emphasize the overwhelming conservation that could be realized with dedicated funding.

Land Conservation

One of the most effective and efficient ways to achieve long-term fish and wildlife benefits is by protecting and conserving the land that provides their habitat. This effort can be thought of as “providing the stage” and can be accomplished in several ways, including purchases, easements, agreements and land planning.

Highlighted Action



GREEN GROWTH TOOLBOX

Provide grants to local governments to administer or conduct conservation planning projects and to reduce habitat loss and impacts through land use policy updates. Funds could also be used to assist in establishing greenways in identified wildlife corridors. (Goals 1*, 2**, 3*, 4**)

Other Actions

Land Acquisition Benefiting SGCN Species

Numerous projects distributed across the state to protect particular species or habitats, including terrestrial, wetland and aquatic, and to provide additional wildlife-related recreational opportunities. Parcels range from tens of acres to thousands of acres. Some parcels adjoin or fill in existing protected lands, while others act as connectors between conservation areas. Most projects would require other matching funds and grants. Goals 1*, 2*, 3*, 4**

Landscape Scale Planning

Protect SGCN habitats and corridors by developing guidelines and fine-scale wildlife corridor mapping for use by transportation planning organizations, local governments and land trusts. These efforts would inform a conservation plan to guide NCWRC acquisition to improve coordination with land trusts. Goals 1*, 2*, 3*

* *Primary relationship* - directly addresses the objective of the goal and immediate benefits

** *Secondary relationship* - supports elements of the goal but may be not all components; also a long-term benefit

Aquatic Habitat Management

Managing aquatic habitat is designed to improve or restore the physical and chemical conditions necessary to support balanced, sustainable and comprehensive native aquatic communities.

Highlighted Action

STREAM RESTORATION

Repair stream banks, riparian areas and instream habitat at degraded sites. Provide alternative freshwater sources so livestock can be excluded from riparian and stream bank areas. These efforts will improve water quality and protect streamside habitats. (Goals 1*, 2**, 3*)



Powder Mill Creek on North Toe River, after the removal of a dam, to allow for brook trout passage (Scott Loftis)

Other Actions

Invasive Species Management

Control invasive plants that choke waterways, eliminate natural habitats and cause water quality problems. For example, Hydrilla is threatening habitat for rare and listed aquatic species in the Eno River, Deep River and Contentnea Creek. Also, work with other agencies and partners to implement all aspects of the [North Carolina Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plan](#). Goals 1*, 2**

Barrier Management

Identify dams, culverts and other artificial structures limiting fish passage and connectivity between habitats. Developing inventories, assessing feasibility, and prioritizing structures for remediation or removal can provide restoration benefits. Developing fish-friendly remediation plans and implementing replacement or removal measures can inform conservation efforts. Goals 1*, 2*, 3*

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Terrestrial Habitat Management

Improve or restore physical conditions to support balanced, sustainable and comprehensive native wildlife communities while maintaining movement corridors and connectivity between habitats. Often this means managing landscapes to provide diverse habitats that support wildlife by providing food and cover resources necessary for survival.

Highlighted Actions

PRESCRIBED BURN

Develop and assess ways to reduce the backlog of private landowners waiting to have their land burned, including the evaluation of beginner and advanced training programs for NCWRC staff, other agencies and private landowners, resulting in safe and effective application of fire as a land management tool. (Goals 1*, 2*, 3*)



Prescribed burn on a NCWRC game land

BOG ENHANCEMENT

Identify and control non-native invasive plant species on state-owned properties in the northern mountains. Inventory, map and evaluate these habitats on all state-owned lands. Restore, maintain and enhance bog and other wetland habitat on these properties. This habitat work would provide quality reference sites for private landowners who have mountain bogs and want to learn how to enhance and maintain them. Further, this work would benefit plant and animal SGCN, including the Bog Turtle and many pollinators, and will improve water quality and retention. Restored mountain bogs on game lands and other state-owned properties would provide enhanced nature viewing (birds, butterflies, rare plants) opportunities. (Goals 1**, 2*, 3*)



Bunched Arrowhead (Gary Peebles/USFWS)

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Terrestrial Habitat Management Other Actions



Wetland in the Coastal Plain (Jeff Hall)



Land management activities (Matthew Bucher)



Pocosin in the Coastal Plain (NCWAM)

Coastal Region Habitat Restoration and Enhancement

Restore waterbird islands created by coastal dredging projects (e.g., Dept. of Transportation islands), develop living shorelines and oyster beds, install thin-layer-deposition of dredged material to raise marsh beds, inventory and plant submerged and emergent aquatic vegetation, restore and enhance isolated ponds for herpetofauna and rare plants, enhance management of waterfowl impoundments for multiple migratory bird species and restore and purchase significantly important habitats. Goals 1**, 2*, 3*

Statewide Landscape Conservation Effort

Conduct prescribed burns, carry out management activities for SGCN, and conduct invasive species control in each eco-region of the state. Goals 1**, 2*, 3*

Restore Pocosin Hydrology

Re-wet prior-drained organic soil habitats to promote habitat-appropriate species in pocosin and bottomland forest habitats. Focus areas would include Holly Shelter, Van Swamp and Juniper Creek game lands. Goals 1**, 2**, 3*

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Species Management

Species management efforts directly manage or restore one or more species or species assemblage using activities such as propagation, reintroduction and managing disease or competition.

Highlighted Actions

FRESHWATER MUSSEL RESTORATIONS

Continue and expand hatchery propagation and stocking of mussel SGCN species to facilitate recovery. Since 2011, NCWRC facilities have held or cultured 24 mussel species, of which 160,000 offspring of 15 species have been stocked into North Carolina streams. Of the 15 species stocked, all are state listed, and five species are federally listed. Goal 2*



Examining a Carolina Heelsplitter, a federally endangered species (Gary Peoples/USFWS)



American Chaffseed (USFWS)

AMERICAN CHAFFSEED RESTORATION

Reintroduce American Chaffseed to Sandhills Game Land. American Chaffseed is a hemiparasitic herb, meaning it depends on a host plant but also requires frequent fire or understory removal to persist. Understanding this herb's host, effective management and life history could be combined with reintroduction efforts such as, Safe Harbor Agreement and Habitat Conservation Plans, developed for Red-cockaded Woodpeckers. Goals 2*, 3*

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Carolina Madtom (JWade/Commons Wikimedia)

Species Management Other Actions

Madtom Restoration for Broadtail and Carolina Madtoms

Initiate hatchery propagation for two years. These species are at-risk because of predation by flathead catfish and other invasive species. Goal 2*

Rare Plant Seed Banking and Restoration

Contract with N.C. Botanical Garden to safeguard genetic material and begin recovery actions for listed, G1 and declining rare plant populations. Conduct surveys for seed collections and restoration, and update species occurrence records and conservation rankings. Make seeds/plants available for appropriate augmentation, reintroduction and restoration projects, with a priority for small populations that they be augmented to boost population size to be more self-sustaining/viable. Restoration activities will focus on state lands, where applicable. Goal 2*

Red-cockaded Woodpecker Management

Provide technical expertise and assistance at three Plant Conservation Preserves with historical and extant Red-cockaded Woodpecker records. Project would include surveys, management recommendations and tree delineation. Additionally, expand cooperation efforts with Dept. of Defense (DOD) for additional management that allows DOD to continue its mission training. Goals 2*, 3*



Red-cockaded Woodpecker (Brady Beck Photography)

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Species Management Other Actions

Canby's Dropwort Management

Install fire breaks and control encroachment of hardwoods and pines at North Carolina's only site for the federally endangered Canby's Dropwort at McIntosh Bays Plant Conservation Preserve. Goals 2*, 3*



Canby's Dropwort (Dale Suiter)

Magnificent Ramshorn Restoration

Continue hatchery propagation of Magnificent Ramshorn snail, seek potential stocking locations and remediate habitat with a goal of establishing three populations. Goal 2*



Magnificent Ramshorn snails (Hans Lohmeyer)

Carolina Gopher Frog Restoration

Continue head-starting Carolina Gopher Frogs to augment wild populations. Goal 1*



Carolina Gopher Frog with transmitter (Jeff Hall)

Wildlife Disease, Toxicology, Genetics, Forensics and Rehabilitation Facility and Program

Develop a comprehensive program and facility for NCWRC staff and partners. Manage sea turtle stranding, rehabilitation and salvage needs in North Carolina and nearby states. Support management and research of diseases affecting deer (e.g., Chronic Wasting Disease), amphibians (e.g., *chytridiomycosis* and *Bsal*), bats (e.g., White-nose Syndrome), fish (e.g., Whirling Disease) and many emerging diseases. Incorporate geneticist expertise into agency investigations on multiple fish and wildlife species. Goals 1*, 2*



Labeling samples to send to disease lab

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Research/Survey/Monitoring

Proper management of fish and wildlife populations and habitats is dependent on accurate and up-to-date knowledge of their distributions and population dynamics. Such information is lacking or out-of-date for many species, habitats and geographic areas.

Highlighted Actions

SMALL MAMMAL AND BIRD COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT AT SOLAR FARMS

Assess changes in small mammal and bird communities before and after solar farm installation and identify ways to mitigate the habitat changes associated with this land conversion. This proposal would be a multi-year project conducted by a university or external partners. Goals 1*, 2**, 3*



Established pollinator habitat on a solar farm (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service)

NATURAL HERITAGE INVENTORY

Conduct surveys of natural areas throughout the northeastern Coastal Plain to identify natural areas most important for the conservation of North Carolina's biodiversity. Update and expand the inventory conducted during 1990-1995. Work with partners to develop management and conservation recommendations. Goals 1**, 2*, 3**

NC BIRD ATLAS

Address conservation needs for the greatest number of bird species, including most SGCN, by providing high-quality, statewide distribution and abundance data collected and maintained on eBird.

Engage partner organizations and the public to provide accurate, repeatable and actionable data, inform decision-making on conservation issues and management actions, and generate novel research opportunities to further investigate rare or imperiled bird species. Goals 1*, 2*, 4**



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Research/Survey/Monitoring Other Actions

Alligator Management Plan Implementation

Conduct surveys to obtain presence and numbers of alligators in select areas. Conduct GPS telemetry studies to determine annual habitat selection and nesting ecology, and to determine efficacy and survival of relocated alligators. Study survival of eggs, hatchlings and juveniles. Determine genetics of North Carolina alligator populations relative to other U.S. populations. Establish outreach materials and programs to engage the public in alligator conservation. Train additional staff and others so human-alligator interactions can be managed better. Goals 2*, 4**



Taking measurements of an alligator (Alicia Davis)



Big Brown Bat (Katherine Etchison)

Bat Hibernacula Surveys in the Piedmont

Assess hibernacula use by bats with a focus on culverts, bridges and other man-made structures, while continuing to coordinate with N.C. Dept. of Transportation on mitigation activities. Goals 1*, 2*

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Research/Survey/Monitoring Other Actions

Monitor Resilience of SGCN Habitats Affected by 2018 Hurricanes

Inventory known locations of rare SGCN species in Coastal Plain counties flooded by Hurricanes Florence and Michael (2018), to assess the status of SGCN and habitat in most impacted areas. Goal 2*

SGCN Inventories of Game Lands

Initiate the inventory and mapping of SGCN and associated habitats on state-owned game lands. Goal 2*

Aquatic SGCN Inventories

Monitor aquatic SGCN including fish, mussels, crayfish and aquatic snails across the state. Goal 2*

Reptile and Amphibian Surveys in the Sandhills

Enhance field efforts on Sandhills Game Land specific to surveys and research, habitat management, and efforts that inform conservation and management decisions. Goals 1*, 2*, 3**

Increase Knowledge of Small Mammal Focal Species

Develop agency expertise and serve as a state resource on small mammal SGCN (other than bats), including biology, distribution and potential for management. Focal species would include rabbits, flying squirrels, red squirrels, wood rats, shrews and mice for which there are knowledge gaps and conservation concerns. Goals 1**, 2*

Triangle Natural Area Inventory

Update Natural Area Inventory for Alamance, Chatham, Durham, Orange and Wake counties. This would be a five-year project to survey terrestrial and aquatic habitats for rare, at-risk and protected plants and animals, and identify priority natural areas for conservation. Goals 2*, 3**

Statewide Pollinator Inventory

Determine comprehensive baseline pollinator diversity across the state, specifically including native bees, wasps and butterflies. Goals 1*, 2*



Monarch Butterfly on Swamp Milkweed (Mark Herreid)

* *Primary relationship* - directly addresses the objective of the goal and immediate benefits

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Human Dimensions

Managing habitats and species is only two-thirds of the picture. Additional funds would provide an opportunity to emphasize efforts on influencing human behavior and how people interact with wildlife, both directly and indirectly. This science of human dimensions includes education and enforcement, as well as managing human activities and influencing behavior to balance the positive and negative impacts to benefit fish and wildlife.

Highlighted Actions

URBAN PROGRAMMING

Provide programming and education experiences that would link urban youth and adults with access to green areas. Topics may focus on urban wildlife interactions and opportunities available.

Goals 1**, 3**, 4*



Passing on the benefits of nature to the next generation (Shutterstock)



Outdoor recreation and appreciation are good for mental health (Muddy Sneakers)

MUDDY SNEAKERS

Partner with Muddy Sneakers to create programs and work with middle schools to teach programs on public lands. Programs focus on habitat and species found locally.

Goals 1**, 3**, 4*



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Human Dimensions Other Actions

Public Education

Create and develop videos for educating North Carolinians about species and habitat conservation, as well as with the work being done to implement North Carolina's Wildlife Action Plan. Goals 1*, 2*, 3**, 4**

Urban Wildlife Conservation and Recreation

Work with suburban and urban stakeholders and private landowners to address their wildlife interests and concerns, increase outdoor recreational and wildlife viewing opportunities, inform them of the Wildlife Conservation Land Program and offer other land management and economic options. For example, expanding the N.C. Birding Trail Infrastructure Grant Program will increase construction of low-impact trails and pathways, viewing blinds, and platforms and informative signage. Goals 1**, 3**, 4*



Enforcement of illegal sale and trade of wildlife (Jeff Hall)

Human Wildlife Interactions (HWI)

Enhance the HWI call center. Provide a greater social media presence and messaging, including interacting with Nextdoor messaging and response. Goals 1**, 4**



Urban wildlife (Magalie St-Hilaire Poulin)

Enforcement Focus on Illegal Sale and Trade

Focus on the illegal sale and trade of listed wildlife and plant species, including wildlife trade from CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora), an international agreement between governments created to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival. Enforcement activities can aid in efforts to inform the public and enforce existing statutes and regulations that protect SGCN. Goal 2*

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Recreation Access

Recreation access is specifically included in the RAWA legislation, provided it is related to SGCN. Ease of access to wildlife viewing, boating, angling and hunting is important to maintaining and increasing support from the public for wildlife conservation initiatives.

Highlighted Action

WILDLIFE VIEWING AREAS

Work with communities and partners to provide kiosks, blinds and signage.

Goals 1**, 4*



Informational kiosk at Lake Raleigh in Raleigh, N.C. (Jodie Owen)



People are using the NCWRC's recreational sites more than ever (Monkey Business Images)

Other Actions

Boating access for motorboats, kayaks and canoes provides enhanced opportunities to enjoy fish and wildlife associated with lakes, streams, rivers and sounds. Goal 4*

Informational signage about SGCN in different habitats at trailheads or along trails on game lands. Goal 4*

Maintenance of hiking and horseback riding trails on game lands. Goals 3,* 4*

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Institutional Development

Support functions, such as contract administration and administrative support, must be provided to field practitioners for any NCWAP projects to be successfully implemented.

Highlighted Action

CONSERVATION PLANNING TOOL

Continue support for maintaining SGCN animal data in N.C. Natural Heritage Program Biotics database application to ensure that current data will be available to federal, state and local government agencies, environmental consultants and conservation organizations for species status assessment, environmental review and conservation planning. Includes annual update of the Biodiversity and Wildlife Habitat Assessment and Open Space and Conservation Lands components of the Conservation Planning Tool and the NCWRC Green Growth Toolbox. Goals 1*, 2*, 3**



Being outdoors promotes a sense of unity with wildlife
(Nicole Reichert)

Other Actions

Plant Conservation Coordination (PCP)

Develop a list of plants as an SGCN list and investigate areas of overlap with existing SGCN and habitat needs. Coordinate and facilitate plant conservation initiatives among state land managers and conservation organizations, and liaison management activities in areas with imperiled plant populations. Coordinate between PCP and NCWRC to provide information relevant and useful to the enforcement of the Plant Protection and Conservation Act. Goals 2*, 3*

Data Maintenance and Analyses

Build and maintain connected databases, applications for statistical data requests, survey results and research findings. Provide access to statistical experts, as necessary. Goals 1*, 2*

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BE A PART OF THE ACTION

The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and species experts have identified nearly 500 species of greatest conservation need in North Carolina. Without conservation and management now, many of these species may not get the conservation work needed to keep them common and off the federal list.

TODAY is the time to invest in the future of our wildlife. Americans love and need our wild places. We want to see wildlife thrive. Through the Recovering America's Wildlife Act, we would secure funding and ensure the health of fish and wildlife for generations to come.

Our Nature. Our Nation. Our Future.

Share your support of the Recovering America's Wildlife Act:

ncwildlife.org/RAWA ♦ OurNatureUSA.com

[#RecoverWildlife](https://twitter.com/RecoverWildlife)



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