

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025**

**SESSION LAW 2026-43
HOUSE BILL 747**

AN ACT TO MAKE VARIOUS CHANGES TO THE WILDLIFE LAWS.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

CONFIDENTIALITY OF WILDLIFE RESOURCE INFORMATION

SECTION 1. G.S. 143-254.5 reads as rewritten:

"§ 143-254.5. Disclosure of personal identifying and sensitive wildlife resource information.

(a) Social security numbers and identifying information obtained by the Commission shall be treated as provided in G.S. 132-1.10. For purposes of this section, "identifying information" also includes a person's mailing address, residence address, email address, Commission-issued customer identification number, date of birth, information subject to G.S. 106-24.1 transferred to the Commission from the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, and telephone number.

(b) Records that contain site-specific information regarding the occurrence of rare species of plants or animals specified in the current North Carolina Wildlife Action Plan, or the location of sensitive habitats, are confidential and exempt from disclosure under Chapter 132 of the General Statutes when the Executive Director finds that disclosure will create a risk of harm, theft, or destruction to the species or habitats or the area where the species or habitats are located. This subsection does not apply to a request for release of records requested by the owner of record of land where such species, habitats, or areas are located."

AUTHORIZE THE DIVISION OF MOTOR VEHICLES TO ISSUE LIFETIME CONSERVATIONIST AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES REGISTRATION PLATES

SECTION 2.(a) G.S. 20-63(b1) is amended by adding a new subdivision to read:

"(61) Wildlife Resources."

SECTION 2.(b) G.S. 20-79.4(b) reads as rewritten:

"(b) Types. – The Division shall issue the following types of special registration plates:

...

(j) Lifetime Conservationist. – Issuable to the registered owner of a motor vehicle in accordance with G.S. 20-81.12. The plate shall bear the "North Carolina Lifetime Conservationist" logo of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission.

...

(267) Wildlife Resources. – Issuable to the registered owner of a motor vehicle in accordance with G.S. 20-81.12. The plate shall bear the phrase "Wildlife Resources Commission" with a picture in the background representing a native wildlife species occurring in North Carolina. The plate authorized by this subdivision is not subject to the provisions of G.S. 20-79.3A or G.S. 20-79.8.

...."

SECTION 2.(c) G.S. 20-79.7 reads as rewritten:

"§ 20-79.7. Fees for special registration plates and distribution of the fees.



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...
 (a1) Fees. – All other special registration plates are subject to the regular motor vehicle registration fee in G.S. 20-87 or G.S. 20-88 plus an additional fee in the following amount:

<u>Special Plate</u>	<u>Additional Fee Amount</u>
...	
Kick Cancer for Kids	\$30.00
<u>Lifetime Conservationist</u>	<u>\$30.00</u>
Maggie Valley Trout Festival	Expired July 1, 2016

...
 (b) Distribution of Fees. – The Special Registration Plate Account and the Collegiate and Cultural Attraction Plate Account are established within the Highway Fund. The Division must credit the additional fee imposed for the special registration plates listed in subsection (a1) of this section among the Special Registration Plate Account (SRPA), the Collegiate and Cultural Attraction Plate Account (CCAPA), the North Carolina Land and Water Fund (NCLWF) which is established under G.S. 143B-135.234, and the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, which is established under G.S. 143B-135.56, as follows:

<u>Special Plate</u>	<u>SRPA</u>	<u>CCAPA</u>	<u>NCLWF</u>	<u>PRTF</u>
...				
Leukemia & Lymphoma Society – Expired July 1, 2016				
<u>Lifetime Conservationist</u>	<u>\$10</u>	<u>\$20</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
Litter Prevention	\$10	\$10	0	0
...				
Native American	\$10	\$10	0	0
<u>Native Brook Trout</u>	<u>\$10</u>	<u>\$20</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>
NC Agribusiness – Expired July 1, 2016				
...."				

SECTION 2.(d) G.S. 20-81.12 reads as rewritten:
"§ 20-81.12. Collegiate insignia plates and certain other special plates.

...
 (j) Lifetime Conservationist. – The Division must transfer quarterly the money in the Collegiate and Cultural Attraction Account derived from the sale of Lifetime Conservationist plates to the Wildlife Resources Fund established in G.S. 143-250.

...
 (b163) ~~Wildlife Resources Plates. Resources. – The Division must receive 300 or more applications for a wildlife resources plate with a picture representing a particular native wildlife species occurring in North Carolina before the plate may be developed. The Division must transfer quarterly the money in the Collegiate and Cultural Attraction Plate Account derived from the sale of wildlife resources plates to the Wildlife Conservation Account established by G.S. 143-247.2.~~

...."
SECTION 2.(e) The Revisor of Statutes is authorized to alphabetize, number, and renumber the special registration plates listed in G.S. 20-63(b1), 20-79.4(b), 20-79.7(a1) and (b), and 20-81.12 to ensure that all special registration plates are listed in alphabetical order and numbered accordingly.

SECTION 2.(f) This section becomes effective October 1, 2026.

RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY CONFORMING PROGRAM CHANGES

SECTION 3.(a) G.S. 75A-5 reads as rewritten:

"§ 75A-5. Application for certificate of number; fees; reciprocity; change of ownership; conformity with federal regulations; records; award of certificates; renewal of certificates; transfer of partial interest; destroyed or junked vessels; abandonment; change of address; duplicate certificates; display.

...

(b) Reciprocity. – The owner of any vessel already covered by a number in full force and effect pursuant to federal law or a federally approved numbering system of another state shall record the identification number prior to operating the vessel on the waters of this State in excess of the ~~90-day~~ 60-day reciprocity period provided for in G.S. 75A-7(a)(1). The recordation shall be made pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, except that no additional or substitute identification number shall be issued.

...."

SECTION 3.(b) G.S. 75A-7(a) reads as rewritten:

"(a) A vessel shall not be required to be numbered under this Chapter if it is:

- (1) A vessel that is required to be awarded an identification number pursuant to federal law or a federally approved numbering system of another state, and for which an identification number has been so awarded: Provided, that any such vessel shall not have been within this State for a period in excess of ~~90~~ 60 consecutive days.

...."

SECTION 3.(c) G.S. 75A-6.1(a) reads as rewritten:

"(a) Every vessel operated on the waters of this State ~~that is required to obtain an identification number pursuant to this Chapter, has a valid marine document issued by the federal Bureau of Customs or any federal agency successor to it, or issued pursuant to a federally approved numbering system of another state~~ shall comply with the navigation rules, including requirements for navigational lights, sound-signaling devices, and other equipment, contained in the Inland Navigational Rules Act of 1980, codified as amended at 33 U.S.C. §§ 2001-2038, 2071-2073 (1993) and rules adopted pursuant thereto, see 33 C.F.R. Part 84 (1992)."

SECTION 3.(d) G.S. 75A-13.3 reads as rewritten:

"§ 75A-13.3. Personal watercraft.

...

(d) No person shall operate a personal watercraft on the waters of this State, nor shall the owner of a personal watercraft knowingly allow another person to operate that personal watercraft on the waters of this State, unless:

- (1) Each person riding on or being towed behind the vessel is wearing a personal flotation device approved by the United States Coast Guard. Inflatable personal flotation devices do not satisfy this requirement; and
- (2) In the case of a personal watercraft equipped by the manufacturer with a ~~lanyard type~~ an engine cut-off switch, ~~the lanyard is securely attached to the person, clothing, or flotation device of the operator at all times while the personal watercraft is being operated in such a manner to turn off the engine if the operator dismounts while the watercraft is in operation~~ the engine cut-off switch is being used while the vessel is operating on plane or above displacement speed.

...

(e) A personal watercraft must at all times be operated in a reasonable and prudent manner. Maneuvers that endanger life, limb, or property shall constitute reckless operation of a vessel as provided in G.S. 75A-10, and include any of the following:

- (1) Unreasonably or unnecessarily weaving through congested vessel traffic.

- (2) Jumping the wake of another vessel within 100 feet of the other vessel or when visibility around the other vessel is obstructed.
- (3) Intentionally approaching another vessel in order to swerve at the last possible moment to avoid collision.
- (4) Repealed by Session Laws 2000-52, s. 2.
- (5) Operating contrary to the ~~"rules of the road"~~ navigation rules or following too closely to another vessel, including another personal watercraft. For purposes of this subdivision, "following too closely" means proceeding in the same direction and operating at a speed in excess of 10 miles per hour when approaching within 100 feet to the rear or 50 feet to the side of another vessel that is underway unless that vessel is operating in a narrow channel, in which case a personal watercraft may operate at the speed and flow of other vessel traffic.

...."

SECTION 3.(e) This section becomes effective October 1, 2026. Prosecutions for offenses committed before the effective date of this act are not abated or affected by this act, and the statutes that would be applicable but for this act remain applicable to those prosecutions.

ALLOW THE WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION TO ISSUE ELK PERMITS BY RAFFLE AND AUCTION

SECTION 4.(a) Directive to Commission. – The Wildlife Resources Commission shall issue one resident Elk Permit by raffle and one Elk Permit by auction as provided in this section. These permits shall be issued for the 2027 hunting season, pursuant to rules adopted by the Commission. Any elk taken shall be reported and presented to Commission staff pursuant to the conditions of the permit issued. An Elk Permit obtained by raffle or auction is nontransferable and may not be resold or reassigned.

SECTION 4.(b) Raffle. – The Commission shall conduct a raffle for one resident Elk Permit. Raffle tickets will be twenty dollars (\$20.00) per ticket or a maximum of 30 raffle tickets for five hundred dollars (\$500.00). Purchasers of raffle tickets must either have a valid North Carolina hunting license or be licensed exempt as provided in G.S. 113-276 at the time of purchase. The Commission may retain from the proceeds of the raffle the actual costs of administering the raffle for a resident Elk Permit, not to exceed twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000). The Commission shall deposit the remaining proceeds from the raffle in the Wildlife Resources Fund created under G.S. 143-250 to be used for the conservation and management of elk.

SECTION 4.(c) Auction. – Notwithstanding Article 3 of Chapter 143 of the General Statutes or any other provision of law pertaining to public contracting, the Commission shall select one nonprofit wildlife conservation organization to conduct an auction for one Elk Permit. The nonprofit wildlife conservation organization selected by the Commission pursuant to this section must have been involved in the reintroduction of elk into North Carolina. The nonprofit wildlife conservation organization shall retain no more than twenty-five percent (25%) of the proceeds of the auction for an Elk Permit. The Commission shall deposit the remaining proceeds from the auction in the Wildlife Resources Fund created under G.S. 143-250 to be used for the conservation and management of elk.

SECTION 4.(d) Continuing Authority. – For hunting seasons after the 2027 hunting season, the Commission, based on its evaluation of its elk management goals, may raffle off one or more Elk Permits and select one nonprofit wildlife conservation organization to conduct an auction for one Elk Permit in the manner described in subsections (b) and (c) of this section. The following restrictions apply to those future hunting season activities:

- (1) The Commission must conduct an Elk Permit raffle for one or more Elk Permits if it conducts an Elk Permit auction.

- (2) The Commission shall reserve fifty percent (50%) of all Elk Permits made available via raffle for residents of the State of North Carolina.

SECTION 4.(e) Funds Supplemental. – It is the intent of the General Assembly that receipts generated by the activities authorized by this act supplement, rather than replace, other funds budgeted for management of elk.

SECTION 4.(f) Report. – No later than March 1, 2028, and every year thereafter in which the Commission conducts Elk Permit raffles and auctions, the Commission shall submit to the House Wildlife Resources Committee; the Senate Agriculture, Energy, and Environment Committee; and the Fiscal Research Division a report on the effectiveness of the auction and raffle programs, including the amount of money raised, recommendations as to whether to continue the programs, and, if so, legislative recommendations to improve the programs.

SECTION 5. Conforming Change. – G.S. 113-129(7c) reads as rewritten:

"(7c) Game Animals. – Bear, elk, fox, rabbit, squirrel, white-tailed deer, and, except when trapped in accordance with provisions relating to fur-bearing animals, bobcat, opossum, and raccoon."

SECTION 6. Conforming Change. – G.S. 113-291.8 reads as rewritten:

"§ 113-291.8. Requirement to display hunter orange.

(a) Any person hunting game animals other than foxes, bobcats, raccoons, and opossum, or hunting upland game birds other than wild turkeys, or hunting feral swine, with the use of firearms, must wear a cap or hat on his head made of hunter orange material or an outer garment of hunter orange visible from all sides. Any person hunting deer during a deer firearms season or elk during an open elk season shall wear hunter ~~orange~~ orange in a manner that is visible from all directions. Hunter orange material is a material that is a daylight fluorescent orange color.

This section does not apply to a landholder, his spouse, or children, who are hunting on land held by the landholder. ~~This subsection shall be enforced by warning ticket only until October 1, 1992, with respect to those hunting rabbit, squirrel, grouse, pheasant, and quail.~~

(b) ~~Any person violating this section during the 1987 big game hunting season shall be given a warning of violation only. Thereafter, any~~ Any person violating this section has committed an infraction and shall pay a fine of twenty-five dollars (\$25.00). An infraction is an unlawful act that is not a crime. The procedure for charging and trying an infraction is the same as for a misdemeanor, but conviction of an infraction has no consequence other than payment of a fine. A person convicted of an infraction may not be assessed court costs.

Wildlife Enforcement Officers are authorized to charge persons with the infraction created by this section.

(c) Failure to wear hunter orange material in violation of this section shall not constitute negligence per se or contributory negligence per se."

EFFECTIVE DATE

SECTION 7. Except as otherwise provided, this act is effective when it becomes law.

In the General Assembly read three times and ratified this the 2nd day of July, 2026.

s/ Rachel Hunt
President of the Senate

s/ Destin Hall
Speaker of the House of Representatives

s/ Josh Stein
Governor

Approved 9:43 a.m. this 7th day of July, 2026