

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF NORTH CAROLINA
SESSION 2025**

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SENATE BILL 687

Short Title: NC Land and Wildlife Act. (Public)

Sponsors: Senator Smith (Primary Sponsor).

Referred to: Rules and Operations of the Senate

March 26, 2025

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT TO PROVIDE FUNDS TO INVEST IN INITIATIVES TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH
AND HABITATS OF THE STATE'S WILDLIFE POPULATIONS.

The General Assembly of North Carolina enacts:

SECTION 1. Purpose and Findings. – The purpose of this act is as follows:

- (1) To provide additional funding and awareness of Chronic Wasting Disease in the State's deer population.
- (2) To enhance wildlife conservation programs, especially northern bobwhite quail habitat restoration and red wolf recovery initiatives.
- (3) To expand hunting and fishing accessibility through modernized licensing structures and public-private partnerships.
- (4) To protect rural economies and private landowner rights while supporting voluntary conservation efforts.

SECTION 2. CWD Monitoring and Incentives. – The sum of five million dollars (\$5,000,000) in nonrecurring funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year is appropriated from the General Fund to the Wildlife Resources Commission. The Commission will use these funds to expand statewide monitoring, reporting, and mitigation efforts for Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD), including the creation of an incentive program to provide cash bounties to any person reporting a confirmed positive CWD case, a reduced-price hunting license to hunters participating in CWD tracking programs, and grants for research into CWD transmission and mitigation to universities and nonprofit wildlife research entities.

SECTION 3. Quail Conservation and Habitat Restoration. – The sum of five million dollars (\$5,000,000) in nonrecurring funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year is appropriated from the General Fund to the Wildlife Resources Commission. The Commission will use these funds to establish a statewide habitat restoration initiative for northern bobwhite quail, to include the following programs:

- (1) A cost-share grant program to provide matching grants of up to five thousand dollars (\$5,000) to landowners who agree to participate in northern bobwhite quail habitat restoration activities on their lands.
- (2) A quail translocation program in areas of the State identified by the Commission for reintroduction of northern bobwhite quail.
- (3) A study regarding sustainable quail hunting regulations by the Commission. The Commission shall provide a report on this study, including any recommendations for funding needs and legislative changes, to the chairs of the House Committee on Wildlife Resources and the chairs of the Senate



Committee on Agriculture, Energy, and Environment no later than December 1, 2026.

SECTION 4.(a) Red Wolf Conservation and Rural Landowner Support. – The sum of five million dollars (\$5,000,000) in nonrecurring funds for the 2025-2026 fiscal year is appropriated from the General Fund to the Wildlife Resources Commission. The Commission will use these funds to establish the following initiatives for red wolf conservation and rural landowner support:

- (1) A cost-share grant program to provide matching grants of up to ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) to landowners who agree to provide protected habitat for red wolf populations on their land.
- (2) Grants to local governments and local tourism development organizations in rural areas of the State with nearby red wolf populations to promote and establish red wolf tourism programs and activities.

The Commission shall provide a report on its implementation of this section, including any recommendations for funding needs and legislative changes to accommodate making these initiatives permanent, to the chairs of the House Committee on Wildlife Resources and the chairs of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Energy, and Environment no later than December 1, 2027.

SECTION 4.(b) Red Wolf Wildlife Crossings. – The Department of Transportation will utilize the grant received from the Federal Highway Administration's Wildlife Crossings Pilot Program to install wildlife crossings for red wolves on U.S. Highway 64 in and adjacent to the Alligator River National Wildlife Refuge.

SECTION 5.(a) WRC Fee Adjustments. – The Wildlife Resources Commission shall adopt rules to revise its fees and fee payment options for lifetime hunting and fishing licenses in a revenue neutral manner as set forth in this section:

- (1) Create the following age-based categories: infants (0-2 years), young children (3-6 years), youth (7-12 years), teenagers (13-17 years), young adults (age 18-25 years), adults (26-39 years), middle-aged adults (40-59 years), and seniors (60 years and over), with the middle-aged adult category charged the maximum fee, seniors receiving a fifty percent (50%) discount on the maximum fee, and younger age groups charged less than older age groups.
- (2) Offer a multi-generational license discount to families purchasing three or more lifetime licenses at the same time.
- (3) Offer a monthly installment payment option for licenses that exceed one thousand dollars (\$1,000) in cost.

SECTION 5.(b) Other Funding Sources. – The Commission shall seek additional sources of funds from non-State sources for the initiatives funded by this act, including grants from federal and nonprofit wildlife conservation organizations.

SECTION 5.(c) Report. – The Wildlife Resources Commission shall report on its implementation of this section as a part of the annual report required by G.S. 143-250.

SECTION 6. Effective Date. – This act becomes effective July 1, 2025.