

Tarheel Wildlife



**A GUIDE FOR MANAGING WILDLIFE
ON PRIVATE LANDS
IN NORTH CAROLINA**

North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission



Preface

We are blessed in North Carolina with a rich assemblage of wild animals and wildlife habitats from the heights of Mount Mitchell to the sandy beaches of Cape Hatteras. Approximately 90 percent of our 31 million acres of land is privately owned. Private land ownership and the ability to determine the form and function of the land is a long-held and important American right. Along with those rights come certain responsibilities and many opportunities.

Aldo Leopold* wrote that “[t]here are people who can live without wild things and some who cannot.” I cannot. My connection to wild animals and their habitats started longer ago than I can remember. On my family’s Guilford County farm, I quickly learned about managing the land for multiple personal, economic, and aesthetic benefits. Leopold also wrote that “[t]here are two spiritual dangers in not owning a farm. One is the danger of supposing that breakfast comes from the grocery, and the other that heat comes from the furnace.” In farming and land management, we avoid these spiritual dangers and learn the lessons that are forged by planting, growing, harvesting, and consuming our own food; providing for our families; long hours of working the land; glimpsing a mink working a slough; hearing that long-awaited gobbler on a crisp April morning after several years of habitat management; watching gold finches feeding in a field of “weeds;” or welcoming the dawn amid the swirl and buzz of descending waterfowl.

The benefits of land management come in different forms to different people. We manage land for certain habitats and associated wildlife to satisfy our needs. In the 21st century, most land management decisions are economic; however, that need not always be the case. In addition to addressing the economic realities of keeping lands in private ownership and production; aesthetic values; personal pride; watching particular species of wildlife that we find enjoyable; opportunities to hunt, trap, or fish; conserving rare species of wildlife or plants; and seeing the wonder in childrens’ eyes as they watch a deer fawn are all reasons that we manage the land. But there are additional reasons, beyond those that are personally important, for us to be thoughtful and deliberate in our land stewardship decisions.

Although most lands in our state are privately owned, wildlife occurring on these lands is publicly owned; they are public-trust resources. Whether state-trust resources like black bears and salamanders, or federal-trust resources like migratory birds, all wildlife belongs to all citizens. Because wildlife are public-trust resources, management decisions made by private landowners affect the natural systems in which we live, often beyond our property boundaries; our neighbors; our community; and, especially with migratory species, our nation and beyond. It is important that private landowners think about these multiple perspectives in making land management decisions.

The future of North Carolina’s natural resources depends heavily on the decisions and actions taken by private landowners. I hope this publication provides you with information to promote your family’s well-being, retain your connection to the land, perpetuate our rich and diverse natural heritage, and maintain a state where our children and our children’s children will be grounded in place and want to call that place, North Carolina, home.

David T. Cobb, Ph.D.
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* Aldo Leopold (1887-1948), a renowned scientist and scholar, is considered the father of wildlife ecology. His book, *A Sand County Almanac*, led to a philosophy that created a “land ethic” based on living in harmony with the land and with one another.

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A Guide for Managing Wildlife on Private Lands in North Carolina

By Terry Sharpe

Managing a piece of property for wildlife should be looked upon as a process, so enjoy and take pride in each step along the way; whether the result is the first bluebird to take up residence in your newly constructed nest box, the flush of a covey of quail from cover you developed along a ditch bank, or the sight of a gobbler strutting in your freshly burned pine forest.

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