

WILDLIFE EDUCATION DIVISION

The "HUB" of Agency Relevancy



North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

Acronyms

ALVIN	Automated License and Vessel Information Network
BOW	Becoming an Outdoors-Woman
CPA	Conservation Policy and Analysis Office
CMDE	Communications, Marketing and Digital Engagement Office
CSS	Customer Service Section
DCNR	Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
DO	Director's Office
DoD	Department of Defense
DMF	Division of Marine Fisheries
DPI	Department of Public Instruction
DU	Ducks Unlimited
HAB	Habitat Conservation Division
IFD	Inland Fisheries Division
IT	Information Technology Office
LAWA	Land and Water Access Division
LED	Law Enforcement Division
NASP	National Archery in the Schools Program
NCWRC	North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
NC YHEST	North Carolina Youth Hunter Education Skills Tournament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PFA	Public Fishing Area
R3	Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation
RBFF	Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation
TLP	Tackle Loaner Program
USFS	United States Forest Service
WED	Wildlife Education Division
WMD	Wildlife Management Division

Wildlife Education Division Mission Statement:

It is the mission of the Wildlife Education Division to bring awareness of the importance of the agency, its mission and its work to the public; and to engage with and influence those people through programs and opportunities, so they actively participate in the conservation of the state's wildlife resources.

Recruit – To help people build an appreciation of conservation through the opportunities of hunting, fishing and other wildlife-associated activities that connect them with the wildlife resources.

Retain – Keep people engaged by offering the programs and opportunities they want and need.

Reactivate – Provide opportunities that make hunting, fishing, shooting and wildlife-associated recreation easy and enjoyable so people remember what they are missing.

BACKGROUND

The Division currently known as Wildlife Education (WED) has been a part of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC) since its inception in 1947. Over the past 74 years, WED has undergone countless organizational and name changes, but its importance in the agency has never wavered. WED has always been, with the cooperation of the other Divisions, the HUB of the agency — the connection to the public for creating awareness and appreciation of the agency and its mission. It is the single division where the public can be transformed into constituents, and the agency can share and maintain its relevancy.

In 1948, the NCWRC developed a five-point wildlife conservation program, making WED a pinnacle program for the agency's success. At this point, it was recognized in North Carolina, as with other states throughout the country, that regardless of how well regulations were enacted and enforced, wildlife conservation could not succeed without the support of the people of North Carolina. As such, the mission of WED emerged to focus on bringing more people to an awareness of the importance of the NCWRC's programs so they could do their part in participating and cooperating with those programs.

Throughout the years and despite the changes, the staff and facilities within WED have continued to offer educational programs and engage the public in conservation and wildlife-associated recreation. However, these changes have affected staff morale and focus, especially those who have been with the agency and endured the uncertainties of re-structuring on multiple occasions.

Sensing the struggle within and among the three education centers, NCWRC leaders held a facilitated planning session in November 2019 to build a sense of team cohesiveness and reaffirm the purpose of the centers. Many of the themes identified during that session have been found to resonate with the Division as a whole, including:

- Is what we are doing right?
- There is a need for consistent, supportive leadership that prioritizes communication with appropriate and adequate detail.
- Staff see themselves as a community connection.
- Doubt is introduced by loss of staff and re-organization.
- R3 is being done by many WED staff, but with the creation of an R3 section there is a disconnect within the Division.
- Programs are not counted consistently.
- Little to no data are collected about program participants and outcomes.
- There is little to no sharing of course curricula among staff.
- Programs are not designed to be measurable.
- Program participation does not necessarily drive programming.
- Hunter Education is not offered at every education center.
- There is no defined target market for customers/the public.

Based on this information, leadership recognizes the Division is not performing optimally. While the NCWRC could simply evaluate and attempt to improve the services and programming provided at the education centers, as requested by the agency's Education Committee at its October 2020 meeting, it seems logical to evaluate the

Division as a whole to ensure it is relevant and operating efficiently. To do this, the NCWRC proposes the Division focuses on its ongoing short-term objectives to improve Division and Center operations and programming that meet the Committee's charge. At the same time, the agency proposes the Division work toward identifying a long-term solution to address the problem areas that have been identified by Commissioners, the Division, others in the agency and stakeholders. It is clear WED has a fundamental role in the agency, and the agency feels now is the time to evaluate and assess the mission of the Division, so staff are working toward a common goal that successfully aligns with the mission of the Division and the Agency. Following is an overview of what the evaluation and long-term planning process will look like.

Program Evaluation & Needs Assessment

Staff believe that a comprehensive evaluation and needs assessment are necessary to accomplish the following:

- Provide direction for Division programs and activities.
- Help improve and streamline programming.
- Help staff determine priorities and activities that will have the greatest impact.
- Create cohesion through the alignment of goals, strategies and outcomes.
- Establish benchmarks and monitoring of implementation and impact.
- Utilize obvious connections.
- Develop partnerships to maximize resources and focus on successful outcomes; and,
- Assist staff with identifying what works to help with continual improvement.

These efforts will provide data necessary for WED to develop a long-term plan for the team and distinct operational plans for each major program and Center within the Division.

Wildlife Education Division

Short-Term Improvement Plan – General Overview

Timeline: February 2021 – February 2022

Items in *red italics* have been initiated and/or completed.

Wildlife Education Division

- *Increase internal division communication.*
- *Increase collaboration with CMDE and CPA.*
- *Engage with other Divisions where WED can support.*
- *Develop mission statement.*
- *Maintain a customer service mindset.*

Education Centers

- *Increase virtual programming.*
- *Ramp up in-person programming.*
- *Increase data collection:*
 - ◊ *Visitor information.*
 - ◊ *Instructor surveys.*
 - ◊ *Event registration and follow-up surveys.*
- *Targeted marketing and publicity campaigns (enhance webpages and increase exposure on travel websites and other places people look when trying to find things to do in an area).*
- *Host quarterly center meetings to improve communication among staff and share ideas for programming.*
- *Modify program offerings in COVID and post-COVID environment.*
- **Contact at least 3 partners to fill programing and diversity gaps (Orvis, Davidson River Outfitters, etc.).**
- **Develop and promote bragging board campaign.**

Pechmann:

- *Family-oriented fishing programs and events.*
- **Enhance agency involvement with Lake Rim.**

Pisgah:

- *Market and promote the TLP.*
- *Volunteer fishing assistance during special events (Fly Fishing Expo April 3, 2021).*
- *Pechmann staff assistance to set-up fly fishing program.*

Outer Banks:

- *Transition plan – develop a mutually agreeable programming schedule with the county.*

Hunter Education

- *Develop and incorporate ethical dog hunting into current Hunter Education curriculum.*
 - ◊ *Work with hound hunters to refine curriculum.*
 - ◊ *Implement outreach campaigns on responsible use of dogs for hunting.*
- *Develop North Carolina Hunter Education manual and virtual course.*
- *Adapt NC YHEST to virtual format (COVID).*

Shooting Ranges

- *Improve data collection of range users.*
- *Explore user fees at ranges.*

Archery (NASP)

- *Adapt NASP to virtual tournament format.*
- *Enhance NASP webpage and develop materials to improve outreach and recruitment efforts.*

Regional Educators

- *Increase participation in hunting and fishing programs.*
- **Determine school needs and help develop education programs to meet needs.**
- **Develop and implement “other wildlife-associated recreation” opportunities.**
- **Increase engagement with Wildlife Education Centers.**

R3 Marketing

- *COVID retention plan – reminders to individuals to renew their licenses.*
 - ◊ *RBFF grant implementation.*
- *R3 Marketing Plan (Draft for review April 2021).*
- *Increase outreach to women.*
 - ◊ *Targeted skills workshop marketing – fly fishing.*
- **Hunter Education marketing initiative/study – targeted marketing to individuals who completed Hunter Education but have not purchased a license.**

Wildlife Education Division

Long-Term Improvement Plan – General Overview

Timeline: 2021 – 2022

Program Evaluation & Needs Assessment:

1. Data Collection & Analysis.
 - Internal.
 - External (Public).
 - Stakeholders.
 - Partners.
2. Division and Program Plan Development.
 - Education Centers.
 - Shooting Ranges/Shooting Sports.
 - Hunter Education.
 - Wildlife Skills (Angling, Hunting, Wildlife Watching, Birding, Outdoor Skills, etc.).
3. Implementation.
 - Reorganize, rebrand, refocus.
 - Use data to continuously evaluate and modify/improve programs and opportunities, as needed, to maintain relevancy.

Wildlife Education Division:

- Maintain internal and external collaboration.
- Align resources with Agency's legislative purpose.
- Illustrate the successes of the Division.
- Assist agency with data collection and future marketing to past, present, and future customers.
- Learn from past mistakes and continue forward momentum.

Education Centers:

Pisgah-specific enhancements:

- Modify schedule to accommodate customer needs.
- Facility:
 - ◊ Signs/branding.
 - ◊ Sheltered outdoor learning area.
 - ◊ Educational raceway stream.
- Programs:
 - ◊ Add hunting courses.
 - ◊ Family-focused fishing events.

Pechmann-specific enhancements:

- Modify schedule to accommodate customer needs.
- Facility:
 - ◊ Explore addition of:
 - Community archery park.
 - Pellet range.
 - ◊ Improve atmosphere of facility/grounds to be more welcoming.
 - Barbed wire fence.
 - Signs/branding.
 - ◊ Address erosion issues on Bone's Creek.
- Programs:
 - ◊ Add hunting courses.
 - ◊ Increase family-focused events.

Hunter Education:

- Develop more advanced and/or specialized hands-on opportunities utilizing ranges and education centers.
- Broaden efforts with skill seminars.

Shooting Ranges:

- Hire full-time staff.
- Incorporate programming.
- Partner with organizations to host competitive events.

Archery (NASP):

- More broad focus on archery programming across the state.
- Develop community archery park program.
- Increase school participation – present at educational conferences for teachers/principals/superintendents across the state.

Regional Educators:

- Curriculum review of programs to align with the DPI, based on needs of schools.
- Identify partners to deliver “other wildlife-associated recreation” programs and opportunities.
- Broaden efforts with R3 programming.

R3 Strategic Plan:

- Executing R3 planning summit with partners.
- Development of R3/NCWRC branding effort.
- Demographic data collection from target markets.
- Participation with multi-state initiatives.

Wildlife Education Division

Long-Term Evaluation, Needs Assessment & Planning – General Overview

Timeline: 2021-2022

The following steps and tasks will be used to accomplish the evaluation and needs assessment:

Step 1: Project Initiation

- Draft project proposal.
- Identify stakeholders.
- Kick-off meeting with team.
- Finalize project proposal.

Step 2: Data Collection & Review

- Stakeholder meeting(s).
 - ◊ External analysis.
 - ◊ Internal analysis.
 - ◊ Limiting factors and issues.
 - ◊ Obstacles and opportunities.
- Public perception survey(s).
- Existing data gathering.
 - ◊ Programs.
 - ◊ Competitors/Industry.
 - ◊ Customers.
 - ◊ Performance.

Step 3: Data Analysis & Reporting

- Analyze data from stakeholder meeting(s), public survey(s), and existing information.

Step 4: Division Plan Development

- Stakeholder meeting(s).
 - ◊ Goal and strategy development.
- Draft plan.
- Stakeholder review.
- Finalize plan.

Step 5: Individual Program Plan Development

- Draft plans & evaluation protocols/tools.
- Stakeholder review.
- Finalize plans.

Step 6: Implementation

- Staff implement plans/programs and use tools.

WED Stakeholders

The following individuals/groups to be included, but not limited to, in the evaluation and long-term planning for WED:

- Division Staff.
- Commissioners.
- Deputy Director, Constituent Support and Engagement.
- Center Volunteers.
- NCWRC Division Chiefs/Office Heads or their designee.
- NGOs and partners (Trout Unlimited, Transylvania Co. Tourism, Cumberland Co., DoD, DU, Wild Turkey Federation, RBFF, Council for Advancement of Hunting and Shooting Sports, Orvis, Bass Pro, Academy Sports, etc.)
- Other Agencies (DMF, DNCR – aquarium, state park, USFS).
- Previous Program Participants.
- Teachers/School groups.



Wildlife Education Division
wrceeducation@ncwildlife.org
ncwildlife.org
919-707-0170

Photo Credits:

Front Cover clockwise from top left: NCWRC; Melissa McGaw; Thomas Harvey; Thomas Carpenter