



HOUSE BILL 747: 2026 Wildlife Resources Changes.

2025-2026 General Assembly

Committee:	Senate Rules and Operations of the Senate	Date:	June 23, 2026
Introduced by:	Reps. Adams, Moss, Clampitt, Turner	Prepared by:	Trina Griffin
Analysis of:	Fifth Edition		Staff Attorney

OVERVIEW: *House Bill 747 would do all of the following:*

- *Authorize the Executive Director of the Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) to exempt from public disclosure certain records containing site-specific information on rare species or sensitive habitats.*
- *Authorize the Division of Motor Vehicles (i) to develop a new Lifetime Conservationist special registration plate, and (ii) to develop the Wildlife Resources special registration plate as a full-color background plate. It also makes a technical change to the Native Brook Trout plate by indicating that \$20 of the fee is transferred to the WRC.*
- *Make certain changes to the State's Boating Safety Laws in conformance with federal law.*
- *Direct WRC to issue two Elk Permits for the 2027 hunting season: one by a raffle conducted by WRC and one by an auction conducted by a nonprofit wildlife conservation organization selected by WRC. For hunting seasons after the 2027 hunting season, WRC would be authorized to continue issuing Elk Permits through the raffle and auction program based on its evaluation of its elk management goals.*

CURRENT LAW, BACKGROUND, AND BILL ANALYSIS:

SECTION 1: CONFIDENTIALITY OF WILDLIFE RESOURCE INFORMATION

The WRC is subject to the State's Public Records Law (Chapter 132 of the General Statutes) and is prohibited from intentionally communicating or otherwise making available to the general public a person's social security number and other identifying information, which (as applied to WRC) includes a person's mailing address, residential address, email address, and WRC-issued customer identification numbers.

Section 1 of the bill would authorize the Executive Director of WRC to exempt records that contain site-specific information regarding the occurrence of certain rare species of plants or animals, or the location of sensitive habitats, from disclosure under the State's Public Records Law upon finding that disclosure would create a risk of harm, theft, or destruction to the species or habitat or the area where it is located. This section would not apply to a record requested by the landowner of the property where the rare species or sensitive habitat are located.

SECTION 2: AUTHORIZE DMV TO ISSUE LIFETIME CONSERVATIONIST AND WILDLIFE RESOURCES REGISTRATION PLATES

North Carolina offers a number of special registration plates. Upon application and payment of the required registration fees, a person may obtain from the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV) a special

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registration plate for a motor vehicle registered in that person's name if the person qualifies for the plate. The issuance of most authorized plates is contingent upon the receipt by the DMV of at least 300 applications for a standard background plate, or 500 applications for full-color background plates.

As a general rule, the fee for a special registration plate is the regular vehicle registration fee plus a \$10 special registration plate fee. The \$10 special registration plate fee is credited to the Special Registration Plate Account. The cost of some special plates includes a fee in addition to the \$10 special registration plate fee. In those instances, the first \$10 goes to the special registration plate fund and the remainder is transferred quarterly to designated beneficiaries.

In 2014, the General Assembly enacted legislation creating a development process for special registration plates, which requires the organization desiring the plate to submit the required number of paid applications to the DMV before legislation is introduced to authorize the plate. Once legislation has passed, the organization must submit the final artwork and list of paid applicants to the DMV within 60 days, or the authorization expires.

Section 2 of the bill would authorize the DMV to produce a new Lifetime Conservationist special registration plate, to be a standard background plate with the WRC's "North Carolina Lifetime Conservationist" logo. The special registration plate fee would be \$30, with \$20 going to the Wildlife Resources Fund to be used by WRC.

Section 2 would also authorize the DMV to produce the Wildlife Resources special registration plate as a full-color background plate with a picture in the background representing a native wildlife species occurring in North Carolina. The development of the Wildlife Resources special registration plate would not be subject to the minimum applications requirement nor the 60-day requirement for submitting final artwork. Currently, the DMV produces a Wildlife Resources special registration plate as a standard background plate.

This section would also make a technical change to reflect that \$20 of the current \$30 charge for the sale of each Native Brook Trout special registration plate is transferred to the WRC to be used to fund public access to and habitat protection of brook trout waters. The Native Brook Trout special registration plate was authorized by the General Assembly in S.L. 2013-376, which established a \$30 special registration plate fee.

Section 2 would become effective October 1, 2026.

SECTION 3: RECREATIONAL BOATING SAFETY CONFORMING PROGRAM CHANGES

Current State law provides a 90-day reciprocity period whereby the owner of a vessel already covered by an identification number pursuant to federal law or a federally approved numbering system of another State, does not have to record their vessel's identification in North Carolina unless it has been within this State for a period in excess of 90 consecutive days.

Section 3(a)-(b) would reduce the number of days that vessels registered out-of-State can be present in the waters of this State before having to register their vessel in North Carolina, from 90 days to 60 days.

The federal Inland Navigation Rules expressly applies to all vessels upon the inland waters of the United States (33 CFR § 83.01). Under current State law, however, only the following types of vessels operated on the waters of this State are expressly required to comply with the navigation rules: (i) vessels required under State law to obtain an identification number; (ii) vessels that have a valid marine document issued by the federal Bureau of Customs; and (iii) vessels issued an identification number pursuant to a federally approved numbering system of another state.

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Section 3(c) would clarify that every vessel operated in the waters of this State is required to comply with the Inland Navigation Rules, not just numbered or documented vessels.

Current State law requires that persons operating a personal watercraft that is equipped by the manufacturer with a lanyard-type engine cut-off switch must keep the lanyard securely attached to them at all times during operation.

Section 3(d) would revise this provision so as to apply to personal watercraft equipped with any sort of engine cut-off switch, not just lanyard-type engine cut-off switches.

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

SECTION 4-6: ALLOW WRC TO ISSUE ELK PERMITS BY RAFFLE AND AUCTION

15A NCAC 10B .0225 provides that the season for taking elk runs from October 1 to November 1, taking elk shall be by permit only with a bag limit of one elk per permit, and that elk may be taken by any legal weapon as defined in G.S. 113-291.1.

In 2016, WRC resolved to "delay the issuance of any elk hunting permits until such time as the sustainability and allocation of harvest among State, federal, and tribal lands are determined."

S.L. 2018-90 created a Resident Elk License and a Nonresident Elk License. The license would allow an individual to take elk during the open elk season by methods authorized by WRC. At this time, WRC has not issued any elk hunting licenses.

Section 4(a) would direct WRC to issue two Elk Permits for the 2027 hunting season: one resident Elk Permit by raffle, and one Elk Permit by auction. Any elk taken must be reported and presented to WRC staff pursuant to the conditions of the permit issued. Permits issued under this act may not be transferred, resold, or reassigned.

Section 4(b) would direct WRC to conduct the raffle for one resident Elk Permit issued for the 2027 hunting season. Raffle tickets would be sold for \$20 per ticket or a maximum of 30 raffle tickets for \$500. Purchasers of raffle tickets would be required to either have a valid hunting license or qualify for a license exemption. From the proceeds collected from the raffle, WRC would be allowed to retain its actual costs of administering the raffle, up to 25% of the total proceeds collected. WRC would deposit the remaining proceeds in the Wildlife Resources Fund to be used for the conservation and management of elk.

Section 4(c) would direct WRC to select one nonprofit wildlife conservation organization involved in the reintroduction of elk into North Carolina to conduct an auction for one Elk Permit. The nonprofit wildlife conservation organization would be allowed to retain no more than 25% of the proceeds of the auction for an Elk Permit. WRC would deposit the remaining proceeds in the Wildlife Resources Fund to be used for the conservation and management of elk.

Section 4(d) would allow WRC, based on its evaluation of its elk management goals, to continue issuing Elk Permits for future hunting seasons by way of raffle and auction in the same manner as provided in this bill for the 2026 hunting season, except that WRC would be allowed to raffle off more than one Elk Permit per year.

The following restrictions would apply to future hunting seasons: (i) WRC would not be allowed to issue an Elk Permit via auction without also issuing one or more through raffle; and (ii) WRC would be required to reserve for North Carolina residents half of all Elk Permits made available via raffle.

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Section 4(e) would state the intent of the General Assembly that the receipts generated by these raffles and auctions only supplement, rather than replace, other funds budgeted for elk management.

Section 4(f) would direct WRC to submit a report by March 1, 2028, on the effectiveness of the Elk Permit raffle and auction program to the House Wildlife Resources Committee, the Senate Agriculture, Energy, and Environment Committee, and the Fiscal Research Division. WRC would be required to submit this report every year in which it conducts Elk Permit raffles and auctions.

Sections 5-6 would make conforming changes to the State wildlife statutes to include "elk" in the definition of "Game Animals" and require hunters to wear hunter orange when hunting elk.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Except as otherwise provided, this act would become effective when it becomes law.

**Wendy Ray, and Kyle Evans, staff attorneys with the Legislative Analysis Division, substantially contributed to this summary.*

