

### YOUTH OUTDOOR ENGAGEMENT COMMISSION NORTH CAROLINA

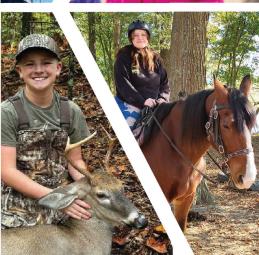












## ANNUAL 2023 REPORT 2023

December 1, 2023

Greetings,

2023 has been a year of change and expansion for the Commission, and we are excited to share the positive impact that our programs have had on North Carolina's youth. In June of this year the N.C. Outdoor Heritage Advisory Council underwent an agency rebrand to become the N.C. Youth Outdoor Engagement Commission, a new name but the same mission of connecting North Carolina's youth with the great outdoors.

Go Outside "GO" Grants have now impacted 97% of North Carolina's counties and has been expanded to provide more funding for advanced projects related to agriculture, aquatic activities, archery, and nature trails. In fiscal year 2022-2023 alone, we worked to approve and award approximately the same number of grants as those awarded from 2019-2022, funding an incredible array of field trips, outdoor programs, and outdoor learning facilities.

Our high school outdoor club program, the N.C. Trailblazers, launched this year culminating in the formation of 33 clubs across the state. These high schoolers are engaging in all manner of outdoor activities, from hiking the Appalachian Trail to kayaking, from practicing archery to learning how to build campfires, and from overnight camping to learning rock climbing skills.

Throughout all of this, the Outdoor Patch Program has continued to incentivize and award North Carolinians (both youth and adult) and out-of-state participants to try out and successfully engage in hiking, camping, fishing, hunting, archery, sport shooting, bird watching, and horseback riding. With a focused community outreach strategy, we've been able to interact with outdoor enthusiasts from all over the State and award patches at a variety of events.

We're immensely proud to present our 2023 Annual Report and showcase the outdoor challenges that North Carolina's youth have engaged in and the ingenuity and commitment to outdoor learning demonstrated by educators across the State. The support of our donors and legislators has been paramount in providing outdoor learning experiences to young North Carolinians and we wish to extend our gratitude for that continued support as we work to increase opportunities and expand our impact. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Justin P. Burr

**Executive Director** 

NC Youth Outdoor Engagement Commission







97
COUNTIES IMPACTED

1,244

**GRANTS AWARDED** 

\$7,316,813.90

### **FUNDING AWARDED TOWARD GRANTS**

### Mission & Summary

The North Carolina Youth Outdoor Engagement Commission strives to encourage and strengthen young North Carolinians' connection to nature by providing opportunities to engage with the outdoors.

The Commission provides programs, such as the grant and patch programs, which promote youth hunting, fishing, hiking, archery, shooting sports, canoeing, birding, horseback riding, and camping.

### Commissioners

Wendell Murphy Jr., Chairman
James Harrell III, Vice Chairman
Owen Andrews
Austin Barnhill
M.S. Brown III
J.T. Coley V
Michael Nye Fulk
Kevin Howell
Channing Jones
Gordon Myers
Mitchell St. Clair
Harry Shaw
Aaron Thomas

## GO OUTSIDE GRANTS







The Go Outside "GO" Grant program was launched in 2019 to provide North Carolina's students opportunities for outdoor experiences and experiential learning. Educators across the state can apply for funding for field trips, onsite outdoor programs, and the construction of outdoor learning facilities.

The General Assembly appropriated \$2 million in non-recurring funds in July 2022, which were fully expended by April 2023, and a further \$3.5 million in non-recurring funds in September 2023. As of December 1, 2023 \$1,607,798.67 has been awarded to schools and nonprofits, comprising 365 total grants.

Last year the Commission set the goal of expanding the impact of the GO Grant program to 8 counties that had not previously received a grant. As a result of targeted communications strategies and collaboration with legislators and school administrations, 5 of the 8 counties have been impacted this year.

2023 also saw the implementation of an expansion of the GO Grant program, to allow for the consideration of advanced grant proposals. Up to \$20,000 is now available for applicants to construct agricultural facilities, aquatic activity structures, archery ranges, and educational nature trails. Additionally, up to \$5,000 is available for overnight field trips.

### GO Grant Distribution by County as of December 1, 2023



Fig. 1. Map to show counties where schools/nonprofits have been awarded GO Grants. In 2023, GO Grants distribution has been expanded to Beaufort, Camden, Hyde, Polk, and Richmond Counties.

### GO Grant Impact by County as of December 1, 2023

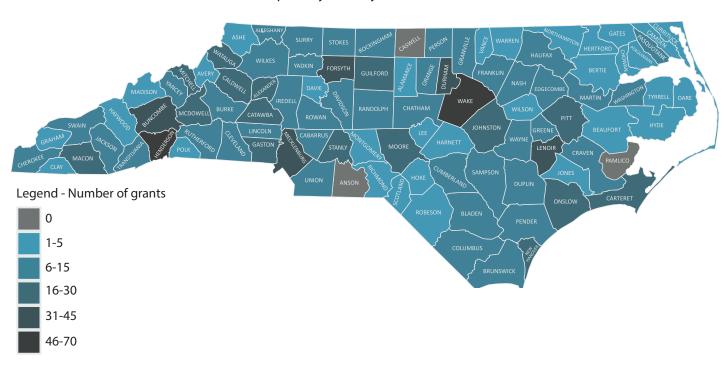


Fig. 2. Map to show GO Grant impact by county - Buncombe, Durham, Forsyth, Henderson, Lenoir, Mecklenburg, and Wake Counties have successfully applied for and been awarded the most grants. Anson, Caswell, and Pamlico Counties have either not applied for or received a grant.

To apply for a GO Grant, applicants may fill out a simple application form and can apply for up to \$2,500 for onsite outdoor programs, up to \$3,000 for field trips, and up to \$15,000 for the construction of onsite outdoor learning facilities. The expansion of these options has provided applicants opportunities to apply for increased funding.



### **Advanced Agricultural Structure**

Provides up to \$20,000 in funding for outdoor structures and equipment that support agricultural programs and classes, including animal barns, mini farms, livestock, tractors, and greenhouses with aquaponic and/or hydroponic systems.



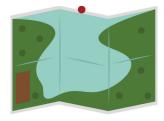
### Advanced Aquatic Activities Structure

Up to \$20,000 funding can be utilized to build structures or purchase equipment for outdoor aquatic activities such as kayaking, canoeing, or fishing. Examples include the purchase of kayaks, canoes, or fishing gear, or the construction of docks/piers.



### **Advanced Archery Range**

Up to \$20,000 funding to construct outdoor archery ranges or purchase archery equipment, including lanes, safety netting, bows, 3D targets, and electronic scoring devices.



### **Advanced Educational Nature Trail**

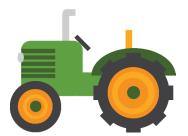
Provides up to \$20,000 in funding to build onsite nature trails, including the construction of structures (footbridges etc.), and the purchase of interpretive signage.



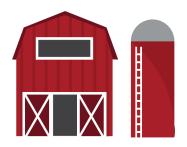
### **Overnight Multi-Day Field Trips**

Up to \$5,000 is available for overnight multi-day field trips. Applicants are encouraged to apply for this increased funding opportunity to participate in more in-depth activities and programs, which may require more than a 1-day field trip.

The advanced grant options have been met with great enthusiasm by the teaching community and allowed for the approval of some unique and high-impact projects. Below is a selection of unique advanced grants that have been approved and awarded this year:



Cleveland High School (Johnston County) was awarded \$20,000 for their FFA program to purchase a 25-horsepower farm/utility tractor to be used at an on-campus farm. Students will be instructed in safe operation of the tractor, farm upkeep, and will be involved in an onsite project to develop a wooded area into a land lab and trail.



Vance Charter School (Vance County) was awarded \$20,000 to purchase a livestock corral pen, cattle chute, chicken coops, and goat-milking stands, to support their agricultural programs and provide students opportunities for hands-on learning experiences with livestock.



Reaching All Minds Academy (Durham County) was awarded \$20,000 to repurpose a shipping container to create an aquaponic greenhouse system, the interior of which will hold the fish-rearing aquarium systems and the roof the vegetable growing area. Students will have opportunities to learn about plants, fish, and their care.



East Henderson High School (Henderson County) was awarded \$18,514.81 to purchase a portable sawmill and safety equipment, to support agricultural and woodworking programs that provide students opportunities to prepare lumber and use it in construction projects both on and off campus.



Alexander Central High School (Alexander Co.) students traveled to the Nantahala Outdoor Center to go paddling and rafting.

Green Valley School (Watauga Co.) sixth-graders used their GO Grant funding to ski at App Ski Mountain.





Valmead Elementary School (Caldwell Co.) third-graders went on a day trip to Lazy 5 Ranch to learn about and interact with the animals on-site.

"Their learning took place while enjoying the great outdoors. Thank you for this wonderful opportunity." - Colfax Elementary School

Mountain Community School (Henderson Co.) received GO Grant funding to build and equip an on-campus archery range. Students are shown enjoying the range in their individual lanes.





Island Montessori School (New Hanover Co.) received GO Grant funding to build a mini farm on their campus. The farm includes a chicken coop and range (shown).

Gatesville Elementary School (Gates Co.) students learned about marine life and ecosystems during their trip to Oregon Inlet. Students are shown catching specimen to study and observe.





St. Peter Catholic School (Pitt Co.) sixth, seventh, and eighth grade classes travelled to Camp Don Lee where they participated in fishing and marine life lessons.

Sugarloaf Elementary School (Henderson Co.) students are shown enjoying a paddling adventure in canoes at Camp Harrison.





Franklin County Early College (Franklin Co.) ninth graders spent a day at Sylvan Heights Bird Park learning about the various bird species on-site, including their diets and lifestyles.

Casar Elementary School (Cleveland Co.) students took a fishing trip to Marion Fish Hatchery. NC Wildlife Resource Commission Enforcement Officers gave instructions on proper fishing methods and safety while providing some assistance to the young anglers.





Edneyville Elementary School (Henderson Co.) students hiked and spent time learning about the environment from park rangers at Chimney Rock State Park for Earth Day.

"It was fantastic for our students to experience real-world science in action."

- Macon Middle Scool

Lincoln Charter School (Lincoln Co.) students are shown catching fish and crabs with a net while attending a day camp through UNCW's Marine Quest. They were able to study and observe the marine life on-site and learn more about their role in the ecosystem.





McDowell Early College (McDowell Co.) ninth grade students trekked to Fort Caswell to study the coastal ecosystem.

White Oak High School (Onslow Co.) students are shown collecting data at their on-campus apiary, funded by a GO Grant.





Roger Bell New Tech Academy (Craven Co.) fifth graders went on an adventure to Camp Don Lee. They are shown paddling canoes.

Apple Valley Middle School (Henderson Co.) students travelled to several destinations in the Outer Banks. A student is shown holding their catch from time spent fishing at Jennette's Pier.





# NORTH CAROLINA TRAILBLAZERS OUTDOOR CLUB







This year saw the launch of our high school clubs program, aimed at providing exclusive grant funding to high schools to kickstart outdoor activity clubs. Over 80 teachers from schools across the state completed the preliminary club interest application form, with 33 high schools ultimately selected as part of the inaugural year.

The N.C. Trailblazers Outdoor Club program was conceived as an initiative to provide outdoor experiential learning opportunities to high school students on a continuing basis, through their membership and involvement in an outdoor focused club. Clubs are encouraged and supported to build out a structured curriculum, incorporating club meetings, skills development, and offsite adventurous activities.

Selected high schools were awarded \$10,000 each to kickstart their outdoor clubs and fund outdoor field trips, on-campus activities, and equipment throughout the 2023-2024 school year. Throughout the Fall semester, clubs have been meeting, designating student leaders, drafting equipment lists, and planning field trips.

The high schools that were awarded inaugural clubs can be seen in Figure 3 (pg. 16), along with their county and location within a North Carolina map.

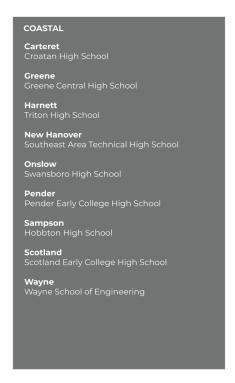
The Trailblazers Outdoor Club Grant application will reopen in January 2024, and it is anticipated that an additional 50 high schools with be added to the program.



Fig. 3. Inaugural Trailblazers Club Grant Awardees by County (2023)



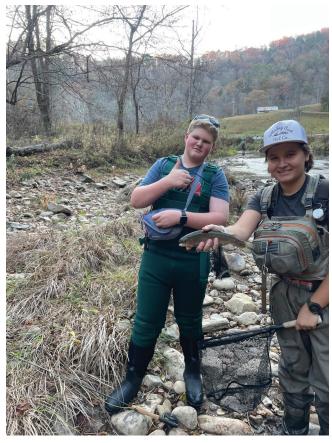






Trailblazers at North Buncombe High School (Buncombe Co.) went fly fishing in the Laurel River on their first trip of the year.







Hillside High School (Durham Co.) Trailblazers ventured to Falls Lake to participate in a day of canoeing and kayaking.





SEA-Tech High School (New Hanover Co.) Trailblazers spent a day fishing off the coast of Wrightsville Beach. The teens caught several species of fish, including a shark (shown above and right).





Trailblazers at Croatan High School (Carteret Co.) went surf fishing at Cape Lookout and reeled in some great catches.





South Stanly High School (Stanly Co.) Trailblazers spent a day horseback riding through trails at a nearby equestrian center.







Trailblazers at Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy (Rutherford Co.) went whitewater rafting on the Nantahala River for one of their first outings.





### OUTDOOR PATCHES







Since 2019, the Outdoor Patch Program has incentivized North Carolina's youth to engage with the outdoors, by awarding free patches to youth 18 and under for the successful completion of a range of outdoor activities.

Requirements for earning each patch differ, with some (e.g., Hiker and My First Fish) designed to support participation by younger or less experienced individuals, and others (e.g., Archery Achievement and Fishing Achievement) designed to provide a greater challenge and demonstration of outdoor skills. Participants must submit photographic evidence of the completion of an activity and, in some cases, additionally complete virtual learning content and educational workbooks.

In 2023 the Commission added two new patches to the program: the Successful Horseback Rider and My First Fish. Additionally, a leaderboard was implemented with end-of-year prizes for top patch recipients to incentivize continued program participation.

The Commission's communications and outreach strategy has resulted in increased engagement with the patch program this year. 2,695 total patches have been awarded and repeat participation has been observed from recipients vying for leaderboard positions.

The leaderboard, composed of 20 participants at a time, is shown in Figure 4 (pg. 24). Participants are ranked by the number of patches earned.



Rank	Name	County	#	Rank	Name	County	#
1 <u>W</u>	Hudson M.	Granville	31	n	Johnnie C.	Harnett	11
2 🌟	Kade L.	Rowan	19	12	Jasmine R.	Caldwell	11
3	David G.	Durham	17	13	Owen L.	Wake	11
4	Jacob B.	Wilkes	16	14	June C.	Jackson	10
5	Boone M.	Granville	16	15	Noah C.	Jackson	10
6 🌟	Benjamin A.	Davidson	14	16	Owen C.	Harnett	10
7	Timothy D.	Guilford	14	17	Hunter S.	Dare	10
8	Elijah R.	Henderson	14	18	Will B.	Wake	10
9	Jaden R.	Caldwell	13	19	Jackson H.	Wake	9
10	Hardy M.	Stokes	12	20	Blake H.	Stanly	9

Fig. 4. Leaderboard to display patch recipients for the year of 2023.



Fig. 5 & 6. Newly-introduced patches; Horseback Rider and My First Fish, respectively.



### IMPORTANCE OF THE NC YOUTH OUTDOOR ENGAGEMENT FUND

Our two fund sources are the state General Fund and donations from individuals who wish to strengthen young North Carolinians' connection to the outdoors. Our nonrecurring funds from the General Fund are not always guaranteed and are reliant on the General Assembly enacting a state budget. Due to this, we rely on our donations built up in the NC Youth Outdoor Engagement Fund to maintain our programs that offer youth the opportunity to engage in the outdoors and bridge the gap while waiting for the state budget to be enacted and certified.

### **DONATION UPDATES IN 2023**

The North Carolina Youth Outdoor Engagement Fund was established in 2015 by the Outdoor Heritage Act. The legislation instructed the NC Wildlife Resources Commission to add a check-off donation option of up to two dollars when an individual is purchasing a hunting, fishing, trapping or vessel license on the purchasing page, allowing individuals to donate directly to our trust fund. In those first three years, our annual donations averaged \$87,480.40 per year.

In 2018, the NC General Assembly instructed the NC Wildlife Resources Commission to add an "any other amount" option to our donation page. Once this addition went into effect in July 2020, our average annual donations jumped to \$259,448.44 over the next three years. Our annual donations significantly increased after the "any other amount" option was added.

In July of this year, the NC Wildlife Resources Commission implemented a new license purchasing system, called Go Outdoors. In this system, the NC Wildlife Resources Commission relocated our legislatively mandated donation page behind a round-up donation page to the Wildlife Resources Commission Wildlife Diversity Fund. Additionally, the NC Wildlife Resources Commission removed the "any other amount" option on our donation page. Since July, we have seen a drastic decline in our donations from license/vessel registration purchases. We attribute this decline to the changes made to our donation page during the Go Outdoors system's implementation. In the first four months of fiscal year 2023-2024, we have seen a 72% drop in license check-off donations compared to the previous three years, when all statutory requirements were enacted. This drop brings our monthly donation totals down to 30% less than when our program was in its infancy in 2016.

Figures 7-9 (pg. 26) show the donation pages as they appeared on the ALVIN system (prior to July 2023) and as they currently appear on the Go Outdoors NC system (July 2023 - present).

Figures 10 & 11 (pg. 27) summarize the fund totals by fiscal year, to include donations, interest, and other funding sources.

Figure 12 (pg. 28) details the total monthly donations received since the Commission was eligible to accept donations (2016-present).

### N.C. YOUTH OUTDOOR ENGAGEMENT COMMISSION ANNUAL REPORT 2023

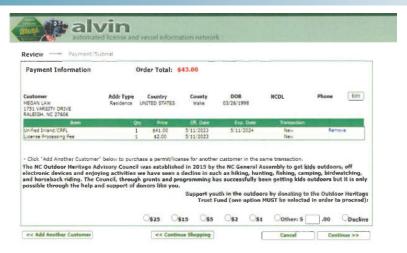


Fig. 7. Summary page as it appeared on the ALVIN system, which was in place prior to the implementation of the Go Outdoors NC system.

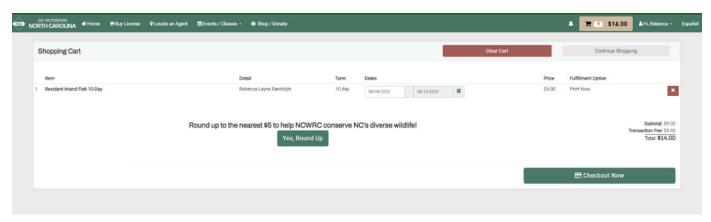


Fig. 8. Summary page as it currently appears on the Go Outdoors NC system, where NC WRC has a round-up option to the Wildlife Diversity Fund.



Fig. 9. Pop-up donation page as it currently appears on the Go Outdoors system. This is displayed after the summary page shown in Fig. 8 (above).

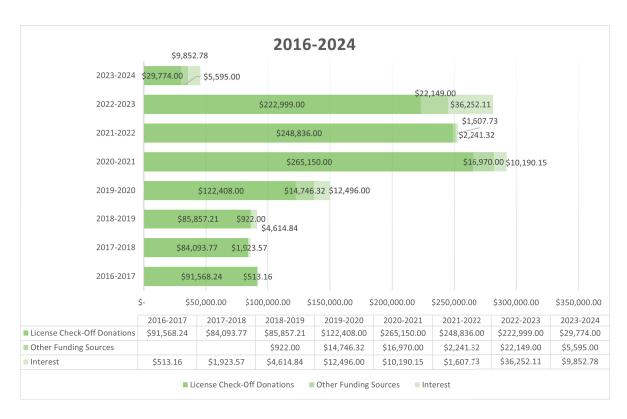


Fig. 10. Bar Graph depicting license checkoff donation numbers, interest, and other funding sources by fiscal year.

Final Year Totals						
\$	92,081.40					
\$	86,017.34					
\$	91,394.05					
\$	149,650.32					
\$	292,310.15					
\$	252,682.05					
\$	281,400.11					
\$	45,221.78					
	\$ \$ \$ \$ \$					

Fig. 11. Total donations by fiscal year. 2023-2024 total is partial (July-October).

Month	Private Donations
Apr-16	\$5.00
May-16	\$250.00
Jun-16	\$150.08
Jul-16	\$10,172.24
The second secon	- CONTRACTOR OF THE PARTY OF TH
Aug-16	\$11,720.25
Sep-16	\$12,165.66
Oct-16	\$8,603.10
Nov-16	\$6,942.80
Dec-16	\$3,712.53
Jan-17	\$3,051.39
Feb-17	\$3,262.01
Mar-17	\$5,215.53
Apr-17	\$7,596.74
May-17	\$8,490.45
Jun-17	\$10,230.46
Jul-17	\$8,650.02
Aug-17	\$10,142.64
Sep-17	\$10,292.91
Oct-17	\$9,500.33
Nov-17	\$6,943.57
Dec-17	\$3,070.57
Jan-18	\$2,955.17
Feb-18	\$2,863.66
Mar-18	\$4,387.31
Apr-18	\$7,247.28
May-18	\$7,920.02
Jun-18	\$10,120.29
Jul-18	\$9,366.85
Aug-18	\$10,154.32
Sep-18	\$7,632.15
Oct-18	\$9,296.84
Nov-18	\$7,181.39
Dec-18	\$4,131.64
Jan-19	\$3,051.78
Feb-19	\$2,820.65
Mar-19	\$4,672.57
Apr-19	\$8,464.02
May-19	\$9,149.00
Jun-19	\$10,858.00
Jul-19	\$10,634.00
Aug-19	\$10,547.00
Sep-19	\$10,469.00
Oct-19	\$15,601.32
Nov-19	\$6,943.00
Dec-19	\$8,459.00
Jan-20	\$3,366.00

Month	Private Donations
Feb-20	\$2,486.00
Mar-20	\$5,845.00
Apr-20	\$10,560.00
May-20	\$21,883.00
Jun-20	\$30,361.00
Jul-20	\$29,067.00
Aug-20	\$26,043.00
Sep-20	\$29,519.00
Oct-20	\$23,611.00
Nov-20	\$17,754.00
Dec-20	\$20,357.00
Jan-21	\$11,273.00
Feb-21	\$16,859.00
Mar-21	\$20,353.00
Apr-21	\$27,747.00
May-21	\$28,945.00
Jun-21	\$30,592.00
Jul-21	\$29,867.00
Aug-21	\$26,562.00
Sep-21	\$34,436.00
Oct-21	\$24,028.00
Nov-21	\$17,924.00
Dec-21	\$10,706.00
Jan-22	\$8,301.00
Feb-22	\$9,139.00
Mar-22	\$16,161.00
Apr-22	\$23,867.80
May-22	\$23,899.00
Jun-22	\$26,186.52
Jul-22	\$23,339.00
Aug-22	\$25,988.00
Sep-22	\$28,474.00
Oct-22	\$21,247.00
Nov-22	\$16,017.00
Dec-22	\$21,320.00
Jan-23	\$9,851.00
Feb-23	\$8,834.00
Mar-23	\$19,443.00
Apr-23	\$20,880.00
May-23	\$24,091.00
Jun-23	\$25,664.00
Jul-23	\$7,454.00
Aug-23	\$7,733.00
Sep-23	\$13,310.00
Oct-23	\$6,872.00

Fig. 12. Table shows total monthly private donations since the establishment of the donation system.



Mailing Address: 1715 Mail Service Center Raleigh, NC 27699
Physical Address: 1751 Varsity Drive Raleigh, NC 27606

Main Email Address: GoOutside@nc.gov

Main Phone Line: 919-707-4030 Main Fax Line: 919-707-0148

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