

# CHAPTER 1: Department Overview

The N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) is the lead stewardship agency for the preservation and protection of North Carolina's natural resources. The organization, which has offices from the mountains to the coast, administers regulatory programs designed to protect air quality, water quality, and the public's health. DENR works to protect fish, wildlife and wilderness areas. DENR also offers technical assistance to businesses, farmers, local governments and the public and encourages responsible behavior through education programs provided through DENR facilities and the state's school system. The agency's activities range from helping to make sure drinking water is safe to managing state parks and forests for safe and enjoyable outdoor recreation experiences. DENR's activities strive to enhance the quality of life available to all North Carolinians and our visitors.

## Mission

To provide leadership, education and advocacy for the responsible stewardship of North Carolina's environment and natural resources.

## Vision

North Carolina's abundant natural resources, healthy environment, and vibrant economy make it the best place to live, work, and visit.

## Goals

Clean Water — We will restore and protect the quality of North Carolina's waters.

Clean Air — We will be very active to assure clean air and improved visibility for all North Carolinians.

Stewardship of Natural Resources — We will preserve, conserve, restore, and manage our natural resources and promote their responsible use now and in the future.

Sustainable Development — We will provide leadership and endorse a healthy environment in a prosperous economy for present and future generations of North Carolinians.

Environmental Awareness/Outreach — We will foster a statewide environmental ethic through community outreach and partnerships, education and hands-on learning experiences.

Organizational Excellence — We will be a model of excellence in public service by emphasizing continuous improvement in communication, teamwork, customer focus and measurable results.

## **HISTORY**

In its present form, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources is a hybrid of a number of agencies that have evolved throughout the history of our state's government. The enforcement of game laws in 1738, years before statehood became a fact, marked the beginnings of the process of forming what we know today as the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. As is the case with many state government departments, many of the components of the agency are much older than the department itself.

- In 1823, the North Carolina Geological Survey was formed, later expanded, and in 1905 renamed the N.C. Geological and Economic Survey -- the forerunner organization to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.
- As early as 1899, the State Board of Health was given some statutory powers over water pollution affecting sources of domestic water supply. The state's power to control the pollution of North Carolina's water resources has remained constant ever since.
- In 1915, the North Carolina Forest Service (known today as the Division of Forest Resources) was created, the state parks system was born with the creation of Mount Mitchell State Park, and the General Assembly established the North Carolina Fisheries Commission Board, charging it with the stewardship and management of the state's fishery resources.
- By 1925, the North Carolina Geological and Economic Survey became the Department of Conservation and Development. The new department consolidated many natural resource functions. Its original focus was on geology, but its involvement in managing many other associated natural resources also grew.
- A long legislative struggle that lasted three full sessions of the General Assembly brought the state's first comprehensive, modern water pollution control law in 1951. The State Stream Sanitation Act (renamed in 1967 as the Water and Air Resources Act) became the bedrock for today's complex and inclusive efforts to protect the state's water resources. By 1959, the General Assembly had created the Department and Board of Water Resources. In 1967, the agency was renamed the Department of Water and Air Resources.
- The Division of Forest Resources expanded its comprehensive services during the 1950-1970s, as did many of the state agencies concerned with the growing complexity of environmental issues. The nation's first Forest Insect and Disease Control Program was set up within the division in 1950. The Tree Improvement Program began in 1963. The Forestation Program was added in 1969 and the first Educational State Forest became operational in 1976.
- For the first half of this century, North Carolina's state parks grew simply through the generosity of public-spirited citizens. Appropriations for operations were minimal until

the State Parks Program was established within the N.C. Forest Service in 1935. Steady growth in park attendance, and a corresponding need for more appropriations to serve that growth, surfaced in the early 1960s and continues today. The General Assembly pumped new financial life into the state park system with major appropriations in the 1970s for parkland acquisition and operations. By the mid-1980s, visitation at state parks had risen to six million visitors per year. Facilities were taxed to the limit and a new era of parks expansion and improvements was beginning.

- The Dam Safety Act was passed by the General Assembly in 1967 and North Carolina became the first state to gain federal approval of its Coastal Management Program with the 1974 passing of the Coastal Area Management Act.
- The Executive Organization Act of 1971 placed most of the environmental functions under the Department of Natural and Economic Resources. A 1977 Executive Order created the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development and pulled the North Carolina Zoological Park (created in 1969 and expanded continuously since) under the NRCD umbrella.
- The General Assembly passed legislation in 1989 to combine elements of the Department of Human Resources and NRCD into a single Department of Environment, Health, and Natural Resources.
- From 1989 to 1997, increases and changes occurred in DEHNR in response to a new awareness by the public and businesses that North Carolina's growing industrial, commercial and population expansion was exacting a high price on natural resources.
- In 1993 the state's three aquariums and the Museum of Natural Sciences became part of DEHNR, and the Office of Environmental Education was created to educate the public — and North Carolina youth in particular — about what constitutes the environment that supports us.
- In the mid-1990s, the department began to respond to new concerns about fish kills, polluted streams and run-off of nitrogen and other substances into rivers and creeks. In 1995 and 1996, animal waste spills into rivers in eastern North Carolina led to a stiffening of waste management requirements; the addition of inspectors to its water quality and its soil and water conservation divisions; and training requirements for farm operators.
- The 1996 General Assembly divided the department once again. On June 1, 1997, health functions were transferred to the Department of Human Resources, which changed its name as well.
- As the 20th Century neared an end, the department was embarking on a series of measures that were proving effective in preserving and protecting North Carolina's natural resources. These included reform of the Marine Fisheries operations, better enforcement measures against those who pollute the state's waters, preserving a million

acres of open space by 2010, restoration of our wetlands, and expansion of programs protecting the state's air.