

Strategic Plan 2025-2029



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A. Introduction

The N.C. Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) manages, promotes, and enhances the things that people love about North Carolina – its diverse arts and culture, rich history, libraries, and spectacular natural areas. Through its programs, the Department enhances education, stimulates economic development, improves public health, expands accessibility, and strengthens community resiliency.

DNCR manages over 100 locations across the state, including 28 historic sites, eight history museums, two art museums, five science museums, four aquariums, 35 state parks, four recreation areas, dozens of state trails and natural areas, the North Carolina Zoo, the State Library, the State Archives, the N.C. Arts Council, the North Carolina Music Office, the African American Heritage Commission, the American Indian Heritage Commission, the State Historic Preservation Office, the Office of State Archaeology, the Highway Historical Markers program, the N.C. Land and Water Fund, and the Natural Heritage Program. These programs and places unite North Carolinians, create a shared identity, and provide common ground.

From 2025-2029, DNCR will complete major projects and start expansive initiatives to enhance the visitor experience and tell the story of North Carolina. In the next four years, DNCR will open a new Asia Exhibit at the North Carolina Zoo, expand Fort Fisher Aquarium, completely renovate our Museum of History, and build new visitor centers at several historic sites. DNCR will also be leading North Carolina’s commemoration of America’s 250th Anniversary through 2026 and beyond by hosting events that highlight North Carolina’s past and present statewide. The 2025-2029 DNCR Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for achieving strategic priorities to fulfill our mission over the next four years.

Plan Development

DNCR is anchoring 2025-2029 strategic goals around Governor Josh Stein’s priorities to build a safer, stronger North Carolina by integrating the administration’s North Star pillars. The mission, vision, values, goals, objectives, and performance measures for the 2025-2029 DNCR Strategic Plan were developed through a collaborative internal stakeholder process from May to July 2025. DNCR formed an executive leadership workgroup for plan development, hosted a half day workshop with division directors to discuss the plan, and sent a survey to all employees soliciting feedback on strategic planning and agency strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats which received 493 individual responses.

The 2025-2029 DNCR Strategic Plan was developed after consideration of:

- Governor Stein’s North Star Pillars
- Guidance and vision from Secretary Pam Cashwell
- Previous DNCR strategic plans and current division strategic plans
- Executive leadership strategic plan working group meetings
- Responses from all-employee strategic plan survey
- Individual interviews for institutional knowledge
- Feedback from division directors and subject matter experts

DNCR will use a matrix approach to implement the DNCR Strategic Plan by creating cross-agency teams to track progress and work on objectives. DNCR will evaluate the plan annually during its life cycle to consider amendments as needed.

Governor Stein’s North Star Pillars

Economic Opportunity

Create an economy that works for everyone.

Excellent Public Schools

Improve educational outcomes.

Healthier People

Strengthen the health of all North Carolinians.

Safe Communities

Keep people safe and enhance their quality of life.

Helene Recovery

Accelerate recovery in western North Carolina from Hurricane Helene.

Quality Services

Deliver quality services for the people of North Carolina.

B. Mission, Vision, & Values

Mission

We enrich people’s lives through education and stewardship of North Carolina’s natural and cultural resources.

Vision

Our vision is to leverage the state’s natural and cultural resources to build the social, cultural, educational, and economic future of North Carolina.

Values

JOY

We bring joy into our work to help us best serve the public.

CREATIVITY

We invite creativity, innovation, inquiry, and new ideas to fulfill our mission.

STEWARDSHIP

We are stewards of history, culture, stories, art, science, plants and animals, land and water, and places North Carolinians hold dear for present and future generations.

AUTHENTICITY

We use evidence-based methods for researching, managing, and protecting our natural and cultural resources and strive to be trusted sources of information.

PROFESSIONALISM

We are committed to a professional, respectful workplace that provides a welcoming environment and excellent customer service.

COLLABORATION

We foster teamwork and collaborate across DNCR divisions, state government, and with external partners to achieve our mission.

C. Goals, Objectives, & Performance Measures

Goal 1

Expand and advance educational excellence and innovation throughout DNCR's sites and programs and support workforce pathways for our fields of work.

Goal 2

Strengthen local economies by uplifting DNCR sites and services as community anchors.

Goal 3

Preserve, enhance, and expand access to North Carolina's natural and cultural resources to reflect and serve all.

Goal 4

Improve operational efficiencies, collaboration, and customer service across DNCR.

Goal 5

Support Western North Carolina's recovery from Hurricane Helene and integrate climate resilience and adaptation throughout DNCR programs and operations.

Goal 1

Expand and advance educational excellence and innovation throughout DNCR's sites and programs and support workforce pathways for our fields of work.

North Star Pillars: Excellent Public Schools, Safe Communities, Economic Opportunity

	Performance Measures
<p>Objective 1.1. Help support and retain K-12 educators by providing professional development opportunities throughout the year including the DNCR Teacher Ambassadors, National History Day, Educators of Excellence, A+ Schools, and Schools in Parks, and secure permanent program funding by 2029.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.1.1. Number of participants in DNCR professional development programs annually • 1.1.2. Percent of counties reached by individual professional development programs • 1.1.3. Percent of permanent funding secured in relation to funding needed • 1.1.4. Percent of teachers satisfied with professional development programs, focusing on relevance, quality, and applicability to the classroom
<p>Objective 1.2. Increase access to DNCR sites through sustained field trip funds and support services with a goal to reach teachers and students in all 100 counties by 2027.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.2.1. Dollar amount of field trip funds distributed annually • 1.2.2. Percentage of total counties served • 1.2.3. Percent of participants satisfied with experience as measured by surveys • 1.2.4. Number of students benefiting from funds
<p>Objective 1.3. Increase classroom engagement by 10% year over year through curriculum development support, classroom visits, virtual field trips, and extracurricular programming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.3.1. Number of classroom visits annually • 1.3.2. Number of students reached through virtual field trips year over year • 1.3.3. Count of extracurricular programming hosted by DNCR year over year • 1.3.4. Number of curriculums developed • 1.3.5. Number of lesson plans with American Indian perspectives developed • 1.3.6. Number of school districts with pilot testing of American Indian perspective lesson plans

<p>Objective 1.4. Continually improve educational opportunities at DNCR sites through exhibit updates and creative interactive programming for children and adults. All DNCR sites should have updated lesson plans specific to their sites with corresponding online plans published by 2029.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.4.1. Feedback surveys on site programming • 1.4.2. Number of newly updated exhibits across sites • 1.4.3. Number of sites with updated lesson plans about sites (2020 or more recent) • 1.4.4. Percent increase in satisfaction with educational programming as a result of improved lesson plans • 1.4.5. Number of sites with opportunities for public feedback on improvement ideas for exhibit and education programming
<p>Objective 1.5. Support continuing education and lifelong learning through increasing digital access to educational content including online exhibits and collections by 15% by 2029 and expanding professional development resources for natural and cultural resource professionals across North Carolina.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1.5.1. Number of workforce development opportunities and participants • 1.5.2. Number of professional development programs offered and number of program participants • 1.5.3. Number of new Public Librarian Certifications issued • 1.5.4. Number of professional development programs for artists funded or hosted by N.C. Arts Council • 1.5.5. Number of Certified Local Government trainings sponsored by the State Historic Preservation Office for local government preservation planners

Goal 2

Strengthen local economies by uplifting DNCR sites and services as community anchors.

North Star Pillars: Economic Opportunity, Safe Communities

	Performance Measures
<p>Objective 2.1. Increase Department-wide web and social media traffic by 30% year over year to drive an increase in average overall visitation of our sites by 10% by 2029 from 2025 totals with a focus on sites that have seen decreases in visitations in recent years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.1.1. Percent change in website traffic year over year • 2.1.2. Percent change in social media engagement year over year • 2.1.3. Total number of visitors annually
<p>Objective 2.2. Sites should establish and improve local partnerships within their communities including engagement and collaboration with local tourism boards, local planning agencies, local businesses and attractions, and stronger collaboration among nearby DNCR sites.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.2.1. Number of hosted community events and events with DNCR participation • 2.2.2. Number of local collaboration events or initiatives between DNCR sister sites and/or divisions • 2.2.3. Number of new partnerships with local businesses, nonprofit organizations, and planning agencies
<p>Objective 2.3. Foster local economies by supporting the arts and music, history, libraries sciences, and outdoor recreation initiatives through grants, service, expertise, events, and programing across with impact in all 100 counties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.3.1. Number of music performances/events funded at least partially by DNCR annually • 2.3.2. Total amount of grant funding awarded to local communities by DNCR annually • 2.3.3. Number of counties benefiting from DNCR arts and/or music funding or programming annually • 2.3.4. Number of counties benefiting from local parks, trails, and outdoor reaction, and ecosystem enhancement grants annually • 2.3.5. Amount in dollars of NC Arts Council grants awarded annually • 2.3.6. Number of counties benefiting from grants to local libraries or DNCR administered services and programming annually • 2.3.7. Number of counties benefiting from Historic Preservation Fund grants annually

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.3.8. Counties benefitting from NC Science Museums Grant annually • 2.3.9. Number of successfully completed historic tax credit projects
<p>Objective 2.4. Ensure all sites statewide have access to internet and broadband for staff and visitors by 2027 based on service availability and expand digital skills and literacy across North Carolina.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2.4.1. Percent of total sites with access to broadband internet • 2.4.2. Libraries with Wi-Fi and broadband access initiatives • 2.4.3. Number of resources or programs available focused on digital skills, online safety, and evolving technologies.

Goal 3

Preserve, enhance and expand access to North Carolina’s natural and cultural resources to reflect and serve all.

North Star Pillars: Economic Opportunity, Safe Communities, Healthier People

	Performance Measures
<p>Objective 3.1. Ensure at least 90% of capital projects on schedule and in budget with adequate funding for project completion through 2029. Capital projects through 2029 include needed renovations for replacement and repairs and significant exhibit upgrades to improve visitor experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.1.1. Percent of total capital projects on schedule • 3.1.2. Percentage of capital projects that stay in budget
<p>Objective 3.2. Lead research and storytelling for America’s 250th (A250) anniversary through 2026 and beyond by lifting the historic and present voices of North Carolina through themes of visions of freedom, gathering of voices, and common ground with participation from all 100 counties.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.2.1. Number of counties with county committees • 3.2.2. Amount of A250 grant dollars disbursed • 3.2.3. Number of A250 events hosted by DNCR • 3.2.4. Number of A250 resources, content, guides, curriculum, and books published
<p>Objective 3.3. Study potential revenue and visitation impacts of expanding discounts to visitors with EBT cards, veterans, and senior citizens and others at sites with fees to reduce economic barriers. Complete study by December 2027.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.3.1. Number of sites that offer EBT discounts, veteran, senior citizen discounts, etc. • 3.3.2. Assessment of historic revenue impacts and visitation impacts to sites that currently have identified discounts in place • 3.3.3. Forecast potential revenue impacts of offering special discounts to increase accessibility to sites with fees
<p>Objective 3.4. Expand digital resource offerings across divisions to make our work more accessible to the public with an objective for all public facing divisions to publish at least one new publicly available digital resource by the end of 2027, e.g., digital collection, online inventory or curriculum, virtual tour, videos, etc.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.4.1. Number of new digital resource offerings across department • 3.4.2. Percent of divisions with new digital content published by 2027 • 3.4.3. Usage data on digital resources to date
<p>Objective 3.5. Increase access to public green spaces like parks, trails, and nature preserves with a goal for all North</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.5.1. Completion of Strive for Access Initiative

<p>Carolinians, including historically underserved residents, to have access to free outdoor recreation within a 10-minute drive of their home.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.5.2. Year over year funds administered by Parks and Recreation Trust Fund • 3.5.3. Change in acreage of state park system • 3.5.4. Number of new trails and green spaces at cultural and historic sites
<p>Objective 3.6. Lead in restoration and protection of the state’s natural and cultural resources by increasing footprint of restoration and preservation statewide and through enhanced data collection and management.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3.6.1. Number of records of rare plant, animal, and natural community occurrences; conservation managed areas; and priority natural areas updated annually • 3.6.2. Year over year funds administered by the Land and Water Fund • 3.6.3. Number and acreage of Dedicated Nature Preserves and Registered Heritage Areas • 3.6.4. Number of historical resources surveyed and mapped year over year

Goal 4

Improve operational efficiencies, collaboration, and customer service across the department.

North Star Pillars: Quality Services, Safe Communities	Performance Measures
<p>Objective 4.1. Analyze opportunities for the responsible utilization of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within Department operations and launch 3 pilot programs for AI within divisions and/or the Department by Fall 2026.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.1.1. Analysis and report on potential AI use cases • 4.1.2. Number of pilot programs
<p>Objective 4.2. Identify agency-wide internal policy gaps and needs by February 2026 and address all gaps identified by July 2027. Reassess policy gap analysis annually.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.2.1. Completion of policy gap analysis • 4.2.2. Percent of policy gaps addressed
<p>Objective 4.3. Strengthen Department safety by decreasing staff vacancy rates to an average of 15 percent, reducing deferred maintenance needs by 15 percent each year, and develop a background check policy by December 2026 to improve guest safety.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.3.1. Annual average department vacancy-rate • 4.3.2. Percent of deferred maintenance projects completed • 4.3.3. Creation and implementation of background check policy
<p>Objective 4.4. Launch DNCR rebrand to position the agency to internal and external stakeholders as one unified agency by January 2026, train DNCR staff as brand ambassadors and provide resources for consistent visual identity by April 2026 and revise standardized onboarding materials for all DNCR employees by May 2026 with quarterly review to ensure content is up to date.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.4.1. Published rebrand materials • 4.4.2. Number of training courses provided • 4.4.3. Number of staff trained • 4.4.4. Standardized onboard materials for all DNCR employees published
<p>Objective 4.5. Improve internal communication across the Department with more opportunities for employee input and feedback and increase opportunities for professional development and cross-divisional collaboration opportunities for staff.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.5.1. Number of professional development training opportunities for DNCR employees annually • 4.5.2. Number of surveys and employee feedback opportunities annually • 4.5.3. Number of cross-divisional staff events annually • 4.5.4. Number of all-employee communication emails and meetings annually

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.5.5. Percent of employees satisfied with internal communication year over year
<p>Objective 4.6. Provide meaningful opportunities for public participation and engagement in planning initiatives that directly impact constituents by: providing multiple opportunities and adequate time for public feedback, widely advertising public input opportunities, and broadening reach to historically underserved populations with a goal of integrating public feedback opportunities into all DNCR site planning processes by 2029.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4.6.1. Annual review and update of Public Participation Plan • 4.6.2. Number new long-term planning initiatives within divisions with at least one community meeting • 4.6.3. Number of site update planning processes that provide opportunity for written or verbal public feedback during design process • 4.6.4. Number of initiatives that expand access to visitors with limited English proficiency

Goal 5

Support western North Carolina’s recovery from Hurricane Helene and integrate climate resilience from future disasters and preservation of natural and working lands throughout DNCR programs and operations.

North Star Pillars: Safe Communities, Helene Recovery, Economic Opportunity

Performance Measures

Objective 5.1. Impacted DNCR sites should be 80% recovered and operational from Hurricane Helene by 2028 and 95% recovered and operational by 2029 as measured by onsite visitation, revenue generation, and percentage of sites publicly accessible comparable pre-storm activities.

- 5.1.1. Percent of reparable structures restored
- 5.1.2. Tons of debris cleared
- 5.1.3. Percent of total trails reopened
- 5.1.4. Onsite visitation numbers for Helene-impacted sites
- 5.1.5. Revenue generation compared to pre-storm levels

Objective 5.2. Support local economic recovery through financial support and technical assistance for performing and visual arts economy, libraries, and outdoor tourism in western NC through 2029.

- 5.2.1. Amount spent on local grants for arts, libraries, and parks
- 5.2.2. Number of grants awarded to local arts, library, trails and parks initiatives

Objective 5.3. Evaluate climate hazards and risks across DNCR sites statewide by 2027 and integrate cost-effective climate resiliency best practices in facilities improvements, natural heritage work, historic preservation and Department long-term capital planning by the end of 2028.

- 5.3.1. Completion of DNCR asset Climate Risk Assessment
- 5.3.2. Integration of climate vulnerability into relevant DNCR planning and evaluation processes

Objective 5.4. Effectively manage statewide climate mitigation, resilience and adaptation of North Carolina’s ecosystems by fully expending funds for the Atlantic Conservation Coalition program by September 2029 and continued commitment to support Executive Order 305’s goals of preserving one million acres, restoring one million acres, and planting one million urban trees by 2040.

- 5.4.1. Acres preserved from 2025-2029
- 5.4.2. Acres restored from 2025-2029
- 5.4.3 Atlantic Conservation Coalition dollars spent by 2029

D. Priority Questions

1. What is the quantifiable economic impact of all DNCR sites to North Carolina?
2. How can we improve onsite visitation data collection methods and maximize use of collected data to make better evidence-based decisions?
3. How can we responsibly use artificial intelligence for operational efficiency?
4. What audiences are we not effectively reaching and how can we leverage and elevate opportunities for collaboration to reach broader audiences?
5. How can we prepare North Carolina and our agency for population growth over the next four and ten years? What opportunities and challenges do population growth present for our mission?