
NC Natural Heritage Program *VOLUNTEER*

NC Natural Heritage Program
Volunteer Manual



Introduction

North Carolina is home to thousands of species of native plants and animals. In fact, the biodiversity of our state ranks among the highest in the nation. Collectively, these native plants and animals, and the places where they live and grow, are known as North Carolina's **natural heritage**.

The **NC Natural Heritage Program** (NCNHP) collects information about the locations of rare native plants and animals, as well as high-quality examples of natural communities, across North Carolina. This information is used to identify those areas of land and water that are important for the conservation of our state's biodiversity — the places that can help maintain our natural heritage

NC Natural Heritage Program Mission

To provide a scientific basis for effective conservation of rare species and natural areas by consolidating and distributing information for planning and protection efforts.

Three main functions of NCNHP:

- **Natural Area Inventory**
- **Information Services**
- **Land Conservation by Nature Preserves**

Natural Area Inventory

The information NCNHP collects comes from two major sources:

Natural Heritage Program biologists, who survey natural areas throughout the state; and,

a *statewide network of biologists* who provide information collected for their own research. These include:

- Federal and state conservation agencies
- Private firms and contractors
- Academic researchers
- Private citizens
- Volunteers

Information Services

The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program compiles, maps, and distributes information about rare species, natural communities, and conservation sites.

Sharing what we know

NCNHP staff answer information requests from a variety of sources, including federal and state agencies, academic researchers, consultants, land trusts, and the public. We provide geographic data layers as well as detailed reports to partner agencies in order to help manage and protect rare species and natural areas.

NCNHP publications include:

- Rare Plant and Rare Animal lists
- Classification of the Natural Communities of North Carolina
- Inventory Reports (County Natural Area Reports, Aquatic Species Reports, etc.)
- Online maps of rare species, high priority natural areas, conservation areas, natural communities, and conservation planning data.

Land Conservation

NCNHP identifies the most important places for the conservation of rare species and high quality natural communities. These places occur on both private and public lands. We prioritize these natural areas to help focus conservation planning efforts and financial resources where they bring the most benefit for human and natural populations.

NCNHP works closely with partners by participating in regional and site-specific conservation plans. Partners include:

- State and federal agencies
- Non-profit groups and land trusts
- Local governments
- Public and private landowners

NCNHP also encourages stewardship of natural areas through two programs enabled by the Nature Preserves Act (G.S. 143B-135.250):

Registry of Natural Areas

Landowners can voluntarily register their property with the Natural Heritage Program to demonstrate their commitment to retaining the land in its natural state.

Dedication of Natural Areas

Outstanding natural areas may be dedicated as nature preserves for the benefit of present and future citizens of North Carolina. Dedication is intended to permanently preserve the natural character of the land.

What can I do to help protect North Carolina's natural heritage?

Everyone can:

- Learn about native species and natural areas across North Carolina
- Join a conservation group such as a land trust, watershed association, or natural history society
- Learn more about the natural resources in your own backyard
- Visit public lands (state parks, game lands) in your neighborhood

Landowners can:

- Manage your land to promote its natural values
- Protect your land through conservation agreements such as Registry and Dedication

Professional scientists and academic researchers can:

- Partner with NCNHP to identify research priorities and coordinate monitoring efforts
- Share data that will contribute to rare species conservation

Naturalists and Volunteers can:

- Monitor nature preserves

NCNHP Volunteers

Volunteers can directly help NCNHP staff meet the goal of conserving North Carolina's natural heritage. NCNHP volunteers of various skill levels are actively involved in data exchange or collaborative work on issues or sites where NCNHP has an interest. As noted above, sharing data that contributes to rare species conservation is highly encouraged. NHP volunteers collect data that is not part of a paid contract effort.

Volunteer status will be reviewed annually. To maintain volunteer status, data or monitoring reports should be submitted to NHP at least once per year, or more often if applicable. Data sharing agreements and tier elevation requests will be completed depending on the project.

Categories of NCNHP Volunteers

1. **Affiliates** - Highly skilled individuals that have demonstrated a long-term relationship with NHP through data exchange, and both parties anticipate maintaining the relationship.
2. **Research Affiliates** - Collaborators conducting target surveys for natural heritage resource values in North Carolina can contribute data that will help NCNHP assess rarity and conservation priority of species or natural areas.
3. **Monitoring Affiliates** - Volunteers monitoring the status of specific rare species or natural community occurrences in Registered Heritage Areas or Dedicated Nature Preserves.
4. **Cooperators** - Occasional or incidental contributors of data.

Visit our website to learn more!

<http://www.ncnhp.org>

North Carolina Natural Heritage Program
121 West Jones Street (physical address)
1651 MSC (mailing address)
Raleigh, NC 27699-1651



WAIVER, RELEASE, AND DATA SECURITY AGREEMENT

THIS INCLUDES A RELEASE OF LIABILITY. PLEASE READ CAREFULLY BEFORE SIGNING.

The North Carolina Natural Heritage Program (NCNHP) and the undersigned volunteer understand and agree to the following terms:

1. The undersigned volunteer is not an employee of the State of North Carolina and is 18 years of age or older;
2. The NCNHP will not pay the undersigned volunteer any salary or other compensation for services rendered under this agreement;
3. As a volunteer, the undersigned is not eligible for worker's compensation benefits from the State for any injury suffered while performing services under this agreement;
4. There are no fringe benefits associated with this volunteer service (including, by way of example and not limitation, hospital or medical benefits, participation in the State retirement system, reimbursement for travel expenses, etc.);
5. This arrangement for volunteer service is an "at will" arrangement, and either the NCNHP or the undersigned volunteer may terminate the volunteer relationship upon giving notice of intent to terminate the volunteer relationship to the other party;
6. Volunteer service does not confer any privilege or right to future appointment to a position as an intermittent, temporary or permanent employee with the State of North Carolina, or any agency thereof;
7. The undersigned volunteer may, in the course of voluntary service, obtain sensitive information **which should not be distributed to third parties without permission of the landowner or Natural Heritage Program**;
8. Sharing Natural Heritage Element Occurrence Records or GIS Shape files without permission may result in termination of the volunteer's service and subject the volunteer to other penalties available under North Carolina and federal law;
9. The volunteer will not survey private property without landowner permission.
10. NCNHP may seek emergency medical treatment for the volunteer in the case of an accident, injury, or illness without further approval;
11. Volunteer service with the Program may include working in outdoor settings which present inherent risks and dangers - those dangers include (by way of example and not limitation) risks posed by being exposed to poisonous plants, venomous snakes, or insects, and risks posed by being exposed to extreme heat, cold or uneven terrain. Volunteer expressly assumes any and all risks attendant to volunteering with NCNHP;
12. For the duration of time the volunteer performs services for the Program under this agreement, the volunteer will abide by any NCNHP policies identified by the Program to the volunteer as relevant and necessary for the volunteer's work within the Program, including the Program's policies regarding computer and Internet use, use of alcohol, drugs, or firearms during work hours, and sexual harassment/inappropriate conduct;
13. **For use with cost-share calculations, the volunteer is requested to submit a summary of actual hours worked each month.**

Volunteer Initials _____

14. The volunteer is requested to inform NCNHP staff of any health issue that may affect field work situations (e.g., bee sting allergy).

In return for receiving permission from the **North Carolina Natural Heritage Program (NCNHP)** for allowing me to participate as a volunteer, I agree to assume all risks of loss and injury that may arise out of my participation and I agree to waive any and all claims against NCNHP, participating property owners and the other parties described below.

Participation and Safety Agreement

As a volunteer for NCNHP, I understand that I am free to refuse to participate in or continue activities in any setting where I feel my personal safety is at risk, and that I should alert the staff of NHP to any hazardous situations. I hereby release and forever hold harmless NCNHP, its officers, participating land owners, directors, representatives, agents, and staff from any and all actions, cause of action, claims, demands and liabilities arising out of injury to or damage sustained by me in connection with my volunteer work for the NCNHP at any time henceforth.

I realize that working with NCNHP projects may involve risks and hazards, which may include, but are not limited to working in the forest or other urban or rural terrain that may be uneven, rocky and otherwise hazardous. I am aware of these and other risks and hazards inherent in participating and hereby assume sole responsibility for all such risks and hazards.

Data and Site Security Agreement

I understand that all Natural Heritage Element Occurrence data information given to me for the purpose of completing a volunteer project for NCNHP must be kept secure. I agree not to disclose information on sensitive plant or animal species or their locations to anyone not authorized by NCNHP or the landowner.

Any material collected for specimens or identification will be collected in compliance with current, valid permits from appropriate regulatory and land management agencies.

Use of Likeness Agreement

I grant NCNHP permission to use my likeness in photograph(s) or video, in any and all of its publications and in any and all other media, including public website publication and social media channels, whether now known or hereafter existing, controlled by NCNHP, in perpetuity, and for other use by the entities herein described.

Volunteer signature	Printed name	Date
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For Staff Use Only:

Volunteer Application Approved:

NHP Volunteer Coordinator Signature	Printed name	Date
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