



Overview of Habitat Enhancement at Fisher Farm

Written by John Isenhour, Wildlife Habitat Coordinator for the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission

The North Carolina Piedmont has gradually shifted from grassland to forest due to reduced disturbance and increased pine plantations. While forests offer carbon sequestration and some ecological value, many native species are not adapted to thrive in mature forest ecosystems. Early succession habitats which are dominated by grasses and herbaceous plants have declined across the southeastern U.S. due to changes in land use, reduced fire management, and the disappearance of small-scale farming.

Historically, indigenous people and agrarian communities used fire and mechanical disturbance (e.g., disking, mowing, grazing) to maintain open habitats. Today, development and modern agriculture limit these practices. Large-scale farming relies heavily on herbicides and fertilizers, reducing plant diversity, while residential expansion fragments remaining habitats and restricts fire use.

The Wildlife Enhancement Collaborative (WEC) at Fisher Farm Park is a multi-year, multi-stakeholder effort sponsored by Williams Companies and coordinated by DLC and includes Davidson College, the Town of Davidson, Mecklenburg County, NC Wildlife Resources Commission and local citizens. The work is supported by the Town of Davidson, Atrium Health, USDA, Doosan Bobcat, and NC State Parks and Trails. The WEC seeks to enhance the Park for wildlife and humans. Many efforts are underway to improve the health of the forest areas and to recreate early succession habitat critical for wildlife like native birds and insects in Field A and B as shown on the map totaling five acres. Due to decades of hay harvesting and intentional planting of non-native species like tall fescue, the site's ecology has been altered. Fescue, with its allelopathic properties, suppressed other plants. Once removed via a previous prescribed burn, a flush of non-native species such as Johnsongrass and ryegrass emerged from the seed bank.

The persistence of non-natives was greater than expected in Field A especially. Due to this, we conducted limited interventions in Field B and for Field A we implemented targeted herbicide treatments throughout the summer of 2025. At this point, conditions have improved for native species and Field A is nearly ready for planting in the Spring. We are creating a native seed mix that will be planted using a Truax no-till drill by April 15th. Success depends on favorable weather with cool, moist conditions aiding seed germination and moisture retention.

Post-planting, management will focus on patience and monitoring and be an ongoing process and commitment. Native plants often follow a slow growth pattern: “first year they sleep, second year they creep, third year they leap.” In summer 2026, limited selective herbicide treatments will continue in the Field B following the prescribed burn in the summer of 2026. Field A will continue to be monitored monthly to assess progress and manage invasive species long term.

This information is documented and available publicly at the DLC website. This is a learning process for all involved and the knowledge gained through the WEC will help guide DLC’s work as we seek to enhance additional areas of the park and other protected lands stewarded by DLC.