In 2019, our Board of Directors and committee co-chairs developed a strategic plan for the organization, to guide our efforts through 2022. We are regularly assessing our activities for alignment with these goals. The plan can be found at: https://tinyurl.com/carolinawetlandsstrategy

GOALS of the CAROLINA WETLANDS ASSOCIATION

1. *Secure formal recognition* for unique and vulnerable wetlands in the Carolinas.

2. *Report on the status, trends, and value* of wetlands in the Carolinas to support good decision-making of local officials, mitigation providers, educators, and the general public.

3. *Provide services, knowledge, and support* of wetland protection and management with land trusts and other conservation groups in North and South Carolina.

4. *Participate in regional efforts* to establish relationships with county and municipal level decision-makers to develop support and provide tools for wetland management.

5. *Educate Carolinians* about societal and ecological wetland services to increase the understanding and appreciation of wetlands by communities.

6. *Provide information and encourage wetland owners to use* best practices to protect and manage existing wetlands.

7. *Support public policy and increase awareness* through education regarding how to better utilize wetland restoration and mitigation (regulated and volunteer).

8. *Develop a diverse, energetic, and active Board of Directors* and cultivate an active community of volunteers and staff to help Carolina Wetlands Association meet its organizational, financial and public outreach objectives.

9. *Maintain a healthy financial portfolio* to provide the stability and flexibility required to efficiently and effectively perform work in support of this strategic plan.

**Spotlight on Volunteers**

Our all-volunteer organization has accomplished amazing things over the last 5 years since our inception; these accomplishments would not be possible without the help of our volunteers. We have relied on a core group of 30 to 40 volunteers who contributed significant time and expertise through:

- creating wetland outreach materials (newsletters, wetland treasure videos, brochures, reports, story maps, and community workshops)
- participating in conferences and workshops
- meeting with various community leaders
- educating land owners on their wetland resources
- applying for designation of a North Carolina wetland site as RAMSAR wetland of international significance
- developing a volunteer wetland monitoring program
- participating in board and committees

Volunteers Alvin Braswell and Eesha Desai inform the public about our wetlands and the wildlife that depend on them. Photo: Carolina Wetlands Association
National and Local Exposure for our Cause

*The Carolina Wetlands Association participated in a number of conferences and events in 2019 and 2020.*

**Association of State Wetland Managers annual meeting** (National) (in-person 2019; virtual June 2020)
- We participated in a webinar highlighting our founding and accomplishments in our 5 year history (featured as an example to other states in building similar associations)

**America Ecological Engineering Society annual meeting** sponsor and exhibitor (June 2019)

**SeaGrant North Carolina Coastal Conference** (Wilmington, NC, Nov 2019)
- We presented a test run for workshop designed for local decision makers on value of wetlands as nature-based solutions to help build community resilience

**NC’s Water Resources Research Institute** (Raleigh, March 2019, 2020)
- In 2019, we sponsored a well-attended conference session with papers and panel discussion, with representatives from the Southern Environmental Law Center, Carolina Wetlands Association, Carolina Ecosystems consulting, and NC Coastal Federation about the federal rule changes to the protected Waters of the US.
- In 2020, virtual, Carolina Wetlands Association hosted a session featuring wetland research with over 100 attendees.

**Various other local events:**
- Educational booths at Town of Cary (NC) Arbor Day celebration, Reptile and Amphibian Day at the NC Natural Science Museum, Bass Lake Day (NC).
- Meet and Greet events for Carolina Wetlands Association - In late 2019, we started holding monthly meet and greet events; we hosted several of these events in Asheville, Raleigh, Cary, and Durham, NC before the pandemic hit.

Supporting Regional Wetland Protection and Restoration

**NC Natural and Working Lands Initiative**

Over the past two years, the Carolina Wetlands Association worked extensively with the NC Natural and Working Lands initiative started by NC Governor Cooper’s office and managed by NC DEQ. This initiative is a stakeholder group from state and federal agencies, nongovernmental organizations, nonprofit organizations, and academia. Board members Rick Savage, Curt Richardson, Kim Matthews, and Heather Clarkson worked on this effort, culminating in the release of a report in June 2020. The recommendations emerging from the stakeholder group’s efforts focus on forest and wetland restoration to increase carbon sequestration, and co-benefits resulting from ecosystem services (such as water quality, flood control, etc.) as well as community resilience building. Alongside these recommendations were many policy suggestions such as expanding the floodplain buyout program to include farms, environmental equity actions, public outreach and education, and incorporating citizen science. The Carolina Wetlands Association also participated in a meeting of the US Climate Alliance in Washington, DC as part of the NC delegation. Link to overall plan: [https://tinyurl.com/nc-climate-resiliency-plan](https://tinyurl.com/nc-climate-resiliency-plan)

**Community Support for Nature-based Solutions**

Carolina Wetlands Association has taken on the challenge of developing a workshop to educate local decision makers about the value of wetlands, their place in nature-based solutions, and how they help build community resilience. The first version of the workshop was presented in 2019 at the SeaGrant North Carolina Coastal Conference in Wilmington, NC; future plans were delayed due to Covid-19. We also started working with some small coastal communities and tribes to help them evaluate their wetland resources and worked toward protection and restoration efforts.

Workshop available at: [https://tinyurl.com/carolinawetlands-workshop](https://tinyurl.com/carolinawetlands-workshop)
We are excited to announce our submittal of an extensive application to nominate the wetlands at one of our Wetland Treasure sites, Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention; this would be the first such designation in North Carolina. Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge wetlands are internationally important because they are wintering grounds for an incredible number (many hundreds of thousands) of waterfowl and other birds coming from summer grounds in the tundra of the US, Canada, and Greenland.

Pocosin Lakes wetlands are a rare type worldwide (peatland wetlands) which deserves attention for its value in providing water storage, habitat, and significant carbon sequestration. The formal process for designation requires approval from US Fish and Wildlife Service headquarters, as well as support from state, and local government agencies and the international Ramsar wetland certifying body.

Wetland Treasures of the Carolinas Program Continues

In 2019, we created a story map on our website for our Wetland Treasures, which showcases photos, location, and descriptions of these special places. We are proud to have designated 25 Wetland Treasures of the Carolinas. In-person tours to our 2019 treasures were well attended; virtual tours were published online for all 2020 wetland treasures and in-person tours are being planned for 2021. A nomination form is now on our website for anyone to nominate a new wetland treasure. We are currently designing and purchasing signs to place at our Wetland Treasure sites, to increase awareness of the value and importance of these wetlands.

Our New Online Story Map of our Wetland Treasures of the Carolinas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Designated Wetland Treasures of the Carolinas - 2019 and 2020</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>2019</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bluff Mountain Fen (Ashe County, NC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Croatan National Forest (Craven, Carteret, and Jones counties, NC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Merchants Mill Pond (Gates County, NC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Santee Coastal Preserve (Charleston County, SC)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Woods Bay (Florence, Clarendon, and Sumter counties, SC)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2020</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Panthertown Valley Bog (Jackson County, NC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bunched Arrowhead Heritage Preserve (Greenville County, SC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Brogdan Bottomlands (Johnston County, NC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Pocosin Lakes National Wildlife Refuge (Hyde and Washington Counties, NC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Botany Bay Heritage Preserve (Charleston County, SC)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Fiscal Report

During 2019 and 2020, we received $18,296 in donations, grants and sponsorships, had $7,648 in expenses, and reached the end of 2020 with $11,252 in available funds. Pandemic shutdowns reduced our mission-related expenses drastically in 2020, but donations remained strong. As part of our fundraising campaign in 2020, we held a photo contest for our 2021 wetland calendar. Over 55 entries resulted in a beautiful thank you gift reminder of the Carolinas’ wetlands for the whole year.

In 2020, we published a new landowner’s guide to wetland restoration at http://carolinawetlands.org/index.php/learn/landowners/. The short guide introduces rationales for restoring wetlands and methods for doing so. Brochure is downloadable at: https://tinyurl.com/carolinawetlands-landowners

Our website gets 1,000 to 1,500 page views per month with 400 – 600 separate users per month, 90% of whom are new visitors to the website. The majority of these visitors are looking for wetland information such as this.

Thank You to our 2020 Sponsors

In 2020, we began our sponsorship program to raise additional funds for our work. These sponsors donated $500 or more to the Carolina Wetlands Association and were mentioned on our website and monthly newsletter.

Axiom Environmental, Inc.  Restoration Systems, LLC.
Backwater Environmental  Water & Land Solutions
Kris Bass Engineering  Wildlands Engineering
Land Mechanic Designs, Inc.

The mission of the Carolina Wetlands Association is to promote the understanding, protection, restoration, and enjoyment of North and South Carolina’s wetlands and associated ecosystems through science-based programs, education, and advocacy.

Follow us on Facebook, Instagram (carolina_wetlands_assoc), YouTube (Carolina Wetlands), Twitter (@CarolinaWetland), and LinkedIn

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