

CAPE FEAR WILDLIFE EXPO

The Cape Fear region is uniquely blessed from an outdoorsman's perspective. Not only does the area feature coastlines on both Onslow and Long Bays of the Atlantic, the Cape Fear River flows through the center of the area, adding excellent fresh and brackish water fishing opportunities to the stellar saltwater action along the coast. And that's just the fishing! Hunters enjoy abundant opportunities for turkeys, ducks, deer, and other creatures right in our collective backyard.

So why is it that until 2009, a Cape Fear outdoorsman who wanted to visit an outdoors-related tradeshow to stock up on supplies for the year or just break up the doldrums of an all-too-long win-

ter had to drive to Raleigh or Greensboro?

Thankfully, the area now has an outdoors show all its own, now that the Cape Fear Wildlife Expo has come to town.

The brainchild of W.C. Lanier, the Cape Fear Wildlife Expo took place March 21-22, and was several years in the making.

"I've been working on it for two or three years now," Lanier explained. "I've got another business, a printing business, and we've been working with events and trade shows for the last 15-20 years. I've always felt like Wilmington needed an outdoor show and wondered why we didn't have one, so I felt like it

was time."

The Expo, held March 21-22 at the Coastline Convention Center and Cape Fear Community College's Schwatz Center, brought together 111 vendors with a few thousand of the area's outdoor enthusiasts. In addition to boat dealers, tackle vendors, taxidermists, and the many other exhibitors in attendance, the event incorporated several interactive activities, encouraging attendees to get involved with the exhibits.

The Glitter Gulch Mine station allowed families to use a sluice table to "mine" together for gemstones, and it was located directly across from the "Virtually Hooked" sportfishing simulator, where kids and adults can experience the fight of gamefish ranging from bass to sailfish through an interconnected video display and fishing rod setup.

The NC Wildlife Resources Commission brought along their "Sensory Safari," a 36' rolling wildlife exhibit, and Aquatic Trailer, with two 300-gal

lon tanks featuring native NC finfish and invertebrates.

In addition to the interactive exhibits located throughout the Expo, experts in their respective fields gave demonstrations on fly tying and casting and wild life call making.

All in all, the event gave local outdoor enthusiasts a reason to get out of the house and get geared up and fired up for the coming year's outdoor pursuits. And it's already being planned for next year.

"We just got our dates locked in for next year," Lanier said, "and we're going to expand. We had some high quality vendors this year that we look forward to returning, and we're going to get more new ones as well."

Next year's Cape Fear Wildlife Expo is scheduled again for the third weekend in March, and it promises to whet anglers, hunters, and other outdoors enthusiasts' appetites for the coming season with an even bigger lineup of exhibits and vendors.

Fisherman's Post