

Safety and Heroism



Dustin Durham

DUSTIN DURHAM AND CHASE VAUGHAN

Wildlife Resources
Commission,
Law Enforcement Division



Chase Vaughan

Returning home after a long shift around 11 p.m. on September 16, 2022, Sergeant Dustin Durham with the Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC) learned from his wife that a 75-year-old man with dementia had gone missing in their community that afternoon. After checking with local responders, Sergeant Durham recruited a colleague, WRC Officer Chase Vaughan, to use his drone in the search. After convening with Northampton County Emergency Management Services, Sergeant Durham and Officer Vaughan offered their expertise on the lay of the land before receiving their assigned search area.

Using the drone's thermal technology, Officer Vaughan scanned over 500 acres in search of heat signatures that might indicate human life. The search continued for several hours, with Sergeant Durham and Officer Vaughan refusing to give up while the man was still in jeopardy. As Officer Vaughan flew the drone over the last section of their search area, he spotted a promising heat signature. The officers knew this was likely their last chance to find the missing man.

Sergeant Durham advanced through dense woods in pursuit of the signature, crawling on hands and knees to reach the spot where Officer Vaughan led him. At nearly 3 a.m., Sergeant Durham radioed that he found the missing individual. Sergeant Durham calmly moved the man to a clearing, where they waited as Officer Vaughan directed first responders to the location. The man's grateful family was notified that he was safely transported and treated after spending 12 hours in the elements.



As law enforcement officers within the Wildlife Resources Commission, these dedicated state employees enforce state fishing, hunting, trapping and boating laws. Their efforts were well outside the scope of their job responsibilities but their skills, determination and familiarity with the area proved invaluable in saving a man's life. Sergeant Dustin Durham and Officer Chase Vaughan are exceptional employees of the State of North Carolina. The state of North Carolina thanks Sergeant Durham and Officer Vaughan for their exemplary service.