	BRUNSWICK COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE **GENERAL ORDER**	NO. **E-07**	LAST REVISION DATE **10/16/2026**	LAST REVIEW DATE **10/16/2026**
SUBJECT Automated License Plate Readers		AMENDS		
REFERENCE		RESCINDS		
PREPARED BY BCSO Policy Review Committee		APPROVED BY: SHERIFF BRIAN CHISM		

Purpose:

This directive establishes procedures and guidelines for the use and oversight of the agency's fixed and mobile Automated Licenses Plate Reader (ALPR) technology. The ALPR program shall be operated only for lawful law enforcement purposes and in accordance with Article 3D of Chapter 20 of the North Carolina General Statutes, including G.S. §§ 20-183.30 through 20-183.33.

This policy governs all agency-owned or agency-operated ALPR systems, all agency personnel who access ALPR data, and all captured plate data obtained by or on behalf of the agency. The policy applies to fixed and mobile ALPR cameras, real-time alerts, historical searches, manual hot lists, data received from other ALPR systems, and vendor-hosted or cloud-hosted ALPR data.

The Sheriff or his designee shall review this policy at least annually and whenever there is a material change in law, technology, vendor services, or agency operations. This policy addresses the subjects required by G.S. § 20-183.31(a), including databases, retention, interagency sharing, training, supervision, security and access, auditing and reporting, access to ALPR systems not operated by the agency, and other matters related to ALPR use.

I. Definitions:

A. Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) – A system of one or more mobile or fixed automated high-speed cameras used in combination with computer algorithms to convert images of license plates into computer-readable data. See N.C. Gen. Stat. § 20-183.30(1).

1. Fixed ALPR locations use cameras that are engineered to focus on the rear license plate of vehicles passing by the camera location. The camera image is sent by cellular data signal to an off-site server where the image is compared with license plates entered into the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) and hot lists as defined below. Only license plates that match an NCIC entry or hot list entry will trigger an alert. The images of the license plates of the vehicles passing by the camera are retained for no longer than 30 days.

2. Mobile ALPR systems work in the same manner. The cameras may be mounted on a vehicle or on a mobile trailer. The ALPR users who are logged in to monitor that particular camera will receive an alert if a captured image matches an NCIC entry or hot list entry.

B. Criminal Justice Officer – A criminal justice officer as defined in G.S. 17C-2 and justice officer as defined in G.S. 17E-2. See N.C. Gen. Stat. § 20-183.30(1d).

C. Hot List – A digital database of specific license plate numbers and associated vehicle information that an ALPR system compares against in real time to generate alerts. Hot-list records may originate from authorized national databases or an agency-created list for a documented law enforcement purpose:

1. Automatic matches and alerts: ALPR systems compare scanned plates against SBI maintained National Crime Information Center (NCIC) databases of stolen vehicles, stolen plates, vehicles used in felonies and misdemeanors, carjackings, wanted persons, missing persons including juveniles, AMBER alerts, sex offenders, and protection orders. If there is a "hit" to one of these databases, officers receive an alert within seconds to allow them to locate the vehicle. This often leads to apprehension of a suspect, recovery of a stolen vehicle, recovery of a missing or endangered victim, and/or recovery of evidence from a crime (such as a handgun used in a homicide).

2. Manual hot list: Custom lists created by local law enforcement for active local investigations, missing persons, or BOLOs (Be On the Lookout).

D. Law Enforcement Purpose – The purposes authorized by G.S. § 20-183.30(5): criminal investigations, arrests, prosecutions, post-conviction confinement or supervision; apprehending an individual with an outstanding felony warrant; locating a missing or endangered person; and locating a lost or stolen vehicle.

E. Missing or Endangered Person – A person identified as missing or endangered by NCIC, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, or a law-enforcement-issued BOLO. See N.C. Gen. Stat. § 20-183.30(8).

F. Scan File / Captured Plate Data – Information obtained by an ALPR system from a plate or vehicle in public view, including the plate image, vehicle image when available, date and time, and location information. Captured plate data is confidential and is not a public record under G.S. § 20-183.32(e).

G. Search - An ALPR search is a retrospective historical query of stored license plate data, whereas a hotlist is a real-time watchlist used to trigger instant alerts.

H. Traffic Violation - Article 3D of Chapter 20 of the North Carolina General Statutes does not define the term "traffic violation." For purposes of this policy, and until such time as the term is defined by North Carolina law, "traffic violation" means any violation of Chapter 20, including infractions, misdemeanors, and felonies.

II. Authorized Users, Role-Based Access, and Security

A. Only authorized personnel who have completed required training may operate or access the ALPR system.

B. Access to the ALPR system shall be assigned and limited as follows:

1. Deputies with Mobile ALPR - Real-time alerts only (no searches or manual hot-lists);

2. Investigators/Supervisors/Intel Analysts/Warrants – Case-related historical searches and manual hot-lists of Fixed ALPR only;

3. ALPR administrators – System administration;

4. Auditors - Audit access only (no searches or manual hot-lists); and

5. IT - Technical Administration.

C. At the discretion of the Sheriff or his designee, roles may be altered as needed on a case-by-case basis.

D. Access to ALPR systems shall be immediately removed when an employee transfers, retires, resigns, is suspended, changes duties, or no longer has a legitimate need. The Sheriff or designee shall designate the person or unit responsible for access termination and periodic account review.

III. Authorized Uses and Prohibited Uses:

A. ALPR data shall be obtained, accessed, preserved, or disclosed only for a law enforcement purpose as defined by G.S. § 20-183.30(5). ALPR data shall not be used for enforcement of traffic violations. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 20-183.31(b).

B. Authorized uses include criminal investigations; arrests and prosecutions; post-conviction confinement or supervision; apprehending a person with an outstanding felony warrant; locating a missing or endangered person; locating a lost or stolen vehicle; and other uses expressly permitted by Article 3D of Chapter 20. The following uses are expressly prohibited:

1. personal or curiosity searches;

2. searches by an individual concerning that individual's family members, friends, acquaintances;

3. searches based on protected characteristics (i.e., bias searches);

4. searches for political or other non-law-enforcement purposes;

5. searches unrelated to a specific authorized law enforcement purpose;

6. traffic-violation enforcement;

7. use of an ALPR alert as the sole basis for enforcement action;

8. sharing with unauthorized persons or entities;

9. downloading ALPR data to unauthorized devices or accounts;

10. circumventing audit controls;

11. altering or deleting audit records;

12. and any commercial, marketing, profiling, or unrelated secondary use of agency ALPR data.

IV. Hot-List Governance

A. Automatic matches and alerts: This hot-lists will primarily be compiled from vehicles associated with NCIC entries for the following categories:

1. Stolen Vehicles

2. Gang or Suspected Terrorists

3. Missing Persons

4. Stolen License Plates

5. Wanted Persons with Warrants Entered into NCIC

6. Hot lists may also include vehicles from any on-going investigation.

7. Hot lists shall not include license plates associated with only regulatory motor vehicle violations (i.e. expired registration, inspection violations, driver's license violations).

B. Manual Hot-List

1. Manual hot lists may be created only for a legitimate law enforcement purpose. Every manual hot-list record shall identify the source, entering agency or person, date entered, expiration or review date, reason, responsible owner, case number or CFS number or unique identifier, and verification status.

2. Manual hot lists shall be reviewed regularly and entries shall be removed when the investigative need ends or when the entry is no longer supported by a lawful purpose. No vehicle shall remain on a manual hot list indefinitely.

3. Hot lists shall not be created or maintained solely for regulatory motor-vehicle violations, including expired registration, inspection violations, or driver-license violations, because ALPR data may not be used for traffic-violation enforcement under G.S. § 20-183.31(b).

V. ALPR Alerts and Verification:

A. An ALPR alert or hit is an investigative lead only. It does not, standing alone, establish probable cause or reasonable suspicion that a vehicle or person is involved in criminal activity. Deputies shall independently verify an alert before taking enforcement action.

B. Before acting on an alert, personnel shall, when applicable, verify the license plate number; state or jurisdiction; date, time, and location; source database; vehicle description; current plate status; current status of the underlying record; and whether the circumstances support the alert.

C. For an NCIC alert, personnel shall confirm the current NCIC status before taking enforcement action. For a manual hot-list alert, personnel shall follow the documented reason code and independently establish any facts required by law before enforcement action. Some alerts may require no enforcement action.

VI. Historical Searches and Search Justification:

A. Historical ALPR searches shall be conducted only for a documented law enforcement purpose.

B. Every historical search shall record, at minimum: the user; date and time; case or incident number or CFS number or unique identifier; reason for the search; geographic

area; date and time range; search parameters; specific investigative nexus; and results or action taken.

VII. Data Retention and Preservation

A. Notwithstanding that G.S. § 20-183.32 precludes the preservation/retention of captured plate data for more than 90 days, such data shall not be preserved for more than 30 days after the date of capture. In any event, captured plate data shall not be preserved for more than 90 days unless an exception in G.S. § 20-183.32 applies. The ALPR systems shall be configured to comply with the 30- day preservation/retention period.

B. Data may be preserved beyond 30 days only as authorized by G.S. § 20-183.32, including a qualifying preservation request or a state or federal search warrant. A preservation request shall comply with G.S. § 20-183.32(c), including the required camera/location, license plate, date or time frame, specific and articulable facts, and case and party information.

C. After one year from the initial preservation request, preserved captured plate data shall be destroyed according to the custodian's record or data-retention policy unless another timely preservation request resets the retention period, as provided by G.S. § 20-183.32(c).

D. Evidence derived from ALPR data that is properly incorporated into an active criminal investigative case or evidence system may be retained according to the agency's applicable evidence and records-retention requirements, provided the underlying captured plate data is preserved only as permitted by G.S. § 20-183.32.

VIII. Interagency and External ALPR Data Sharing

A. Captured plate data may be disclosed only to a criminal justice officer at a State or local law enforcement agency or a similar official at a federal law enforcement agency for a legitimate law enforcement purpose pursuant to a written request from the requesting agency. Written requests may be electronic. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 20-183.32(e).

B. All requests for agency-held ALPR data from another law enforcement agency shall be reviewed by the Sheriff or designee. The request and disclosure shall identify the requesting agency and official, the legitimate law enforcement purpose, the case or investigation when applicable, the data requested, the applicable time/location parameters, and any restrictions on further disclosure or retention.

C. The agency shall not sell captured plate data for any purpose and shall not disclose captured plate data to non-law-enforcement persons or entities except as otherwise expressly permitted by law. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 20-183.32(e).

D. Accessing data obtained from an ALPR system not operated by this agency is subject to the same law enforcement-purpose, authorization, documentation, confidentiality, security, and audit requirements applicable to agency-held ALPR data. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 20-183.31(a)(8).

IX. Training

A. Users shall complete initial training before receiving ALPR access. Training shall address ALPR purpose and legal authority; this policy; authorized and prohibited uses;

law enforcement purposes; privacy and constitutional considerations; hot-list governance; alert/hit verification; historical searches and documentation; data retention and preservation; data sharing; security; audit and accountability; and disciplinary and criminal consequences.

B. Refresher training shall be completed at least annually and whenever there is a substantial change in policy, law, system functionality, or vendor services.

X. Supervisory Oversight, Auditing, and Program Evaluation

A. At least every 30 days, the Sheriff's designees shall audit ALPR use for compliance with this policy and applicable law. For the purpose of "Fixed ALPR," the designee is the Professional Standards division. For the purpose of "Mobile ALPR" the designee is the IT Director. Review shall include, as appropriate, user activity, search justification, case-number use, excessive or repeated searches, searches involving employees or acquaintances, unusually broad geographic or time-range searches, searches outside assigned duties or work hours, large-volume searches, external-network searches, hot-list activity, data sharing, security events, and access inactivity.

XI. Program Oversight/Evaluation/Audit Review

A. All requests for shared data access from other law enforcement agencies and/or invitations to access data from private ALPR systems shall be forwarded to the Sheriff or his designee for approval.

B. Damage or other malfunctions to equipment shall be immediately reported to the personnel's supervisor.

C. To ensure manual entries are removed when no longer of interest the personnel who created the entry shall be responsible for removal of the entry.

D. The Sheriff, or his designee, shall conduct an audit of the ALPR systems at least once every 30 days to ensure compliance with all applicable policies and laws.

E. Anyone becoming aware of possible violations of this policy, including but not limited to the unauthorized access, use, release and/or dissemination of ALPR data, shall refer the matter to their supervisor.

XII. Maintenance

ALPR vendors will be responsible for maintaining the operability of each camera (including software updates) and will repair or replace damaged or malfunctioning cameras. ALPR vendors will maintain all records of repairs and maintenance.

XIII. Violations

A. Violation of this policy may result in administrative or disciplinary action, up to and including loss of ALPR access and other action authorized by agency policy and applicable law. Nothing in this policy limits any criminal, civil, administrative, or employment consequence otherwise authorized by law.

B. Any person who violates Article 3D of Chapter 20 by obtaining, accessing, preserving, or disclosing ALPR data in a manner other than that allowed by the Article may be charged with a Class 1 misdemeanor. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 20-183.33.

C. Any person who willfully and without authorization, directly or indirectly, accesses or causes to be accessed any ALPR system to obtain ALPR data without a legitimate law enforcement purpose may be charged with a Class H felony. N.C. Gen. Stat. § 14-454.1(b).