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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Cowans Ford Missing Kayaker

(Lincolnton) Lincoln County emergency responders are continuing to search for a missing person in the Catawba River in the area of the Cowans Ford Dam. On Sunday October 19th, 2025, at approximately 5:30 pm, the East Lincoln Fire Department responded to a call regarding a kayaker who had flipped his vessel. A friend of Pablo Benitez Neri, 45, of Lincolnton, told officials the two of them had been fishing in two separate vessels along the Catawba River when he saw Neri's kayak overturn. The witness told officials Neri was not wearing a life jacket. Rescue boats were launched to search for the missing boater. Severe weather suspended the initial search Sunday evening, and the search resumed Monday morning. Additional resources are being used including sonar capabilities, aerial drones, SBI cadaver dog, shoreline searches, and a remote operations vehicle.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all the agencies involved in assisting in the search for Mr. Neri, including members from the East Lincoln Fire Department, Lincoln County Emergency Management, Lincoln County Sheriff's Office, Lincoln County Swiftwater Team, NC Wildlife, Denver Fire Department, Mt. Holly Fire Department, Huntersville Fire Department, Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department, Cornelius Fire Department, Sherrill's Ford Fire and Rescue, and SBI.

This remains an active search. The Hwy 73 Public Boat Access will remain closed through Friday October 24th. Questions regarding the search efforts can be directed to Lincoln County Public Affairs Officer Vanessa Leon.