

SC DNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
Minutes January 12, 2010 Meeting
Rembert Dennis Building, Columbia, South Carolina

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chair Stephen Davis, Vice Chair Ed Muckenfuss, Milton Brazell, Paul Bennett, John Troutman, Billy Hoole, Charles Howard, John Gramling

Committee Member Bryson Thomason participated via telephone

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Cleve Smith

STAFF PRESENT: Breck Carmichael, Tim Ivey, Ken Prosser, Derrell Shipes, Susan Johnson, Jay Butfiloski, Charles Ruth, Ross Self, Lynn Quattro, Charlotte Hope, Capt. Harvin Brock, Lt. Mike Sabaka, Brett Witt, Don Winslow

Several constituents were in attendance; Barry Sowers whose interest is deer management, as well as Douglas Ford of the Senate Fish, Game and Forestry Committee.

Chair Davis welcomed members to the meeting and the minutes of the October 13, 2009 were approved as submitted.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMENTS:

Charles Howard asked if Chapter 13 revisions name fish species that will be impacted. Chief of Fisheries Ross Self stated focus groups recommended bass, bream, crappie, trout, striped bass and non game fish. Self further stated most of the changes in Chapter 13 will affect these species. Howard further inquired as to what can be done to improve red breast populations in certain areas. Ross stated a statewide reduction in the red breast creel limit (to 15) is being proposed.

Mr. Howard also addressed the need for a greater effort regarding ATV safety in view of the recent death of the young son of a DNR Conservation Officer.

PROPOSED NEW DEER HARVEST MANAGEMENT PROGRAM FOR SC:

Charles Ruth, WFF's Deer/Turkey Project Leader discussed the concept of a new deer harvest management program for SC. Deer populations in much of South Carolina have moderated over the last 6-8 years likely as a result of habitat change and antlerless deer harvest. Coyotes are a recent addition to the landscape and are impacting fawn survival as well. There is increasing concern from hunters over decreases in deer numbers and the effect nonresidents have on deer management. Considerable work has been done by the agency to document public sentiment related to the future of deer harvest management. The majority of hunters

indicate support for a low cost tagging system and the implementation of some limit on the number of antlered deer that can be harvested. The department has largely gotten away from collecting biological data from deer. Therefore, the department believes it is time to make recommendations that provide for better enforcement and for better management at a more local level. There is no question that habitats, deer numbers, and the desires of hunters vary across the state and a new approach will better serve the future of the resource and hunting.

Staff offered several options for harvest management all of which included the tagging of all harvested deer and a limit on antlered deer. Option 1 for resident deer hunters would include the elimination of the Resident Big Game Permit and the purchase of a set of deer tags (3 antlered and 1 antlerless) with hunters being able to purchase additional antlerless tags depending on management needs. Option 2 for resident deer hunters left the Resident Big Game Permit in place and included, at no additional charge, the issuance of a set of deer tags (3 antlered and 1 antlerless) with hunters being able to purchase additional antlerless tags depending on management needs. Option 1 for nonresident deer hunters included leaving the Nonresident Big Game Permit in place and charging for deer tags (1 antlered and 1 antlerless) with nonresidents being able to purchase additional tags up to the limit for residents.

Finally, staff recommended that a new computer program be developed to analyze deer harvest biological data and that the agency get back in the habit of collecting sufficient data to allow for informed biological recommendations.

CHANGES TO SC'S URBAN DEER MANAGEMENT GUIDELINES:

Charles Ruth provided a hand-out (copy attached to the original minutes). Ruth discussed proposed amendments to the Urban Deer Management Guidelines that were adopted by the agency in 1999 for the purpose of assisting resort communities in managing deer outside of normal hunting. The program has a 10 year track record and over 3,700 deer have safely and efficiently been removed from approximately 18 communities, most of which are on or just off of Hilton Head Island. Current guidelines encumber the communities to a high degree and lead to significant expense in the development of management plans and requirements on sharpshooters. Staff would like to amend the guidelines to decrease the level of documentation required for communities to receive a special permit for sharpshooting and to allow the community more flexibility in selecting sharpshooters. A handout was provided to committee members with specific amendments to the guidelines.

STATUS OF COYOTES IN SC:

Furbearer Project Leader Jay Butfiloski stated coyotes weigh an average of 35 pounds and rabbits, rodents and small mammals are their primary prey, although they will catch and kill deer and turkey when the opportunity exists. Butfiloski further stated most breeding occurs in late winter or early spring with a litter size of 5 to 7. Coyotes are currently present in all SC counties as they are quite adaptable in terms of habitat, including suburban areas. In 2004 legislation permitted the sale of live coyotes to permitted fox running enclosures. Also, possession of live coyotes by trappers is legal from January 1 to April 1. In 2007 coyotes taken

by deer hunters numbered 24,000 with 25,000 in 2008. Trappers caught nearly 2,400 in 2009. Butfiloski stated heavy fawn predation has been attributed primarily to coyotes during research conducted at the Savannah River Site. Current research just beginning at SRS will involve removal of coyotes in an effort to determine the impact trapping has on fawn recruitment. Butfiloski stated to increase the annual take of coyotes, DNR can encourage coyote harvest and seek legislative changes where needed. The availability of informational literature and depredation permits to allow the take of coyotes by constituents was discussed. Butfiloski further stated educational presentations can also be given to hunting groups, livestock producers, etc., as well as promoting trapping as a way to attempt to control coyotes. Harvest of coyotes during DNR hunts could also be encouraged. Additionally, there is also legislation pending related to the extension of trapping season and the Department has worked with the SC Trappers Association to suggest improvements to the bill. Several alternative management options such as year-round trapping, night hunting and hiring government trappers have been suggested at some point in time by constituents for consideration but each activity comes with a different set of problems. A bounty system for coyotes was also discussed but like most all bounty systems, is deemed to be costly and ineffective.

BALD EAGLE UPDATE:

Derrell Shipes, Chief, Statewide Projects, Research and Surveys, updated the Committee on the success of the Bald Eagle Project as well as recognize Charlotte Hope. Shipes stated Charlotte has been an integral part of the project under the direction of retired DNR Biologist Tom Murphy. Shipes stated DNR began the eagle project in 1977 and staff thought there were approximately 13 nesting pairs in the State. Illegal shooting, habitat loss, and DDT had devastating consequences on the eagle populations; therefore, eagles were included on the endangered species list. Shipes stated in 2009 it was determined there were 297 territories in South Carolina that produced 310 chicks. Consequently, eagles were removed from the endangered species list in August 2007. Shipes stated Charlotte was involved with the eagle project for 24 years, coordinating all flights and checked nest sites across the State. Additionally, Charlotte spent many cold days on the water investigating AVM (a disease that continues to threaten eagles and coots). Shipes stated Charlotte made numerous landowner visits and was very good at resolving conflict, particularly in terms of negotiations for eagles. Charlotte coordinated volunteers (total of 40) for the mid winter eagle surveys, conducted each December/January and ensured that 40 standardized routes were covered and she provided summary results to landowners. Shipes stated due to the eagle success story, Charlotte's job responsibilities now primarily involve sea turtle work. Charlotte was recognized for her contribution to the bald eagle project. Breck Carmichael presented Charlotte an "on the spot" award from DNR in the amount of \$50.00.

FORMATION OF LARGEMOUTH BASS STAKEHOLDER GROUP:

Ross Self stated due to drought conditions over the past few years, the Santee Cooper lakes have been severely impacted by low water. Due to the fact that there has been a decline in the largemouth bass population within the Santee Cooper lake system, Senator John Land has

requested DNR put together a Largemouth Bass Stakeholders Group (similar to the process the agency used regarding striped bass). Ross stated he hopes to meet with Senator Land during the latter part of January and afterwards put together a group of concerned anglers, business owners, etc. to work through a process of reviewing largemouth bass management within the Santee Cooper lake system. Ross stated it had not been decided if this process would involve only the Santee Cooper system or be expanded statewide. Ross encouraged committee members who were interested or knew of someone who would serve well in that capacity to contact him so he could invite them to join the stakeholders group.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

Breck Carmichael distributed a list of proposals for consideration to be included in DNR's 2010 legislative proposal (copy attached to the original minutes). Carmichael informed the Committee of DNR's 5% budget cut just prior to Christmas has been met. Carmichael stated there is a strong possibility of another 5% cut in February which will be problematic for the agency. Should that budget cut become a reality, DNR will have lost approximately 43% of state appropriated funds since 2003 (\$31 million to \$17 million). DNR Director John Frampton recently notified DNR staff that should the additional 5% occur, a reduction in force would be imminent, 40 to 50 staff as well as furloughs. A retirement incentive program was offered to staff a few days prior to this meeting. Carmichael stated DNR staff met with House Ways and Means Committee staff recently and were told beginning July 1, 2010, all of state government will be facing a minimum 15% additional cut. Natural resources brings in a lot of money to the economy of the state. Carmichael asked committee members to continue getting this message to the public.

DNR will be focusing on legislation with revenue-producing potential such as the surface water bill, a state waterfowl stamp increase and an increase in the non-resident alligator hunting fee. A bear bill would allow DNR authority to expand the season; hunting turkey under normal agriculture practices would bring turkey hunting more in line with ag practices used for dove hunting. Carmichael briefly touched on other pieces of legislation to include in the 2010 proposal.

OLD and/or NEW BUSINESS:

Committee Member Howard asked for an update of the 2009-2010 waterfowl season at the April meeting.

Carmichael announced DNR did receive authority to produce specialized license tags (a buck license tag and a painted bunting license tag) that will generate funds to be used in DNR's fish and wildlife fund. The tags will be available in the spring. The endangered species sea turtle tags have been sold out and a number of those will be reprinted (possibly a new design) as well as the red drum tag.

Bryson Thomason said the Greenville News (Outdoor Section) ran a very favorable article on the upstate mobility impaired hunts.

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

Date, time and location to be announced.