

SC DNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee Meeting
Minutes
April 23, 2013
Dennis Wildlife Center, Bonneau, SC

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chair Mike Hutchins, Paul Bennett, Billy Hoole, Charles Howard, John Gramling, Cleve Smith, Stan Halliday

MEMBERS ABSENT:

John Troutman, Bryson Thomason, (Milton Brazell, excused absence)

STAFF PRESENT:

Emily Cope, Ken Prosser, Sam Chappelle, Ross Self, Lynn Quattro, Anna Smith, Robert Stroud, Joey Lindler, Amanda Stroud, Lorianne Riggin, Dan Rankin, Scott Lamprecht, Hal Beard, Leo Rose, Jim Bulak, Chad Holbrook, Bill Post, Susan Johnson

Chair Hutchins called the meeting to order and asked Fisheries Chief Ross Self to introduce fisheries staff members. Mr. Self noted that a Fisheries staff meeting was held at the Dennis Center the previous day and said staff would be attending tours of the Bayless Fish Hatchery and St. Stephen Fish Lift later in the day.

The minutes of the January 8, 2013 meeting were approved as submitted.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS:

Chair Hutchins announced the agency has hired a firm to develop a DNR application and the process is coming together nicely. He thanked Cleve Smith for the initial recommendation and said the app should include DNR's rules and regulations, limits, sunrise/sunset, and associated items. Chair Hutchins also noted progress is being made to include a download capability for licenses and permits, which could be utilized twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. He said the firm is developing the app at no charge to the agency, but they will obtain revenue via the sale of online advertisements.

Chair Howard stated the recently published May-June issue of *South Carolina Wildlife Magazine* was very well done, particularly the "How's the Fishing" article as it related to redbreast.

There were no constituents present.

OVERVIEW OF THE STRIPED BASS PROGRAM AND AMERICAN SHAD MANAGEMENT EFFORTS:

Fisheries Chief Ross Self distributed several handouts (copies attached to the original minutes) and stated the Dennis Wildlife Center is the epicenter of striped bass management around the country. While it houses many agency functions, the main objective of the Center is to produce fingerling striped bass and hybrids for stocking in

reservoirs and coastal streams. Fish from this facility have been distributed to all 50 states, as well as several foreign countries.

Mr. Self provided a history of the Dennis Center, including the Tailrace and Bayless Hatcheries. He stated prior to the construction of the rearing ponds and associated facilities, the agency was very limited in its grow-out capabilities and most of those functions were at different hatcheries, which led to production and quality control variations.

Mr. Self said species raised include hybrid striped bass, striped bass, white bass, smallmouth bass, redbreast sunfish, bluegill and robust redhorse suckers. He noted there are 54 production ponds, including one reserved for fire protection. Water for the Dennis Center is supplied by Lake Moultrie, with supplemental well water also available.

Mr. Self reported approximately 10 million striped bass fry are produced each year and between 4-5 million are stocked, and the remainder does not survive.

Mr. Self gave an overview of the St. Stephen fish lift operation. Because of the need to continue to move fish coming from the ocean (American Shad, Blueback Herring, and Sturgeon) into the river system, he said a fish lift was created as part of the St. Stephen Power Plant. DNR operates the lift, which is the most effective fish passage facility on the east coast.

Due to modifications and improvements at the facility, Mr. Self stated passage numbers have decreased the last several years. He said there is an ongoing American Shad production operation occurring at the lift as well and they are about a year away from seeing a return of adult American Shad from the sea that were produced at the hatchery.

UPDATE ON STATE WILDLIFE ACTION PLAN REVISION:

Anna Huckabee Smith, State Wildlife Grants Coordinator, stated The State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP)—formerly the Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan—is currently undergoing a revision, pursuant to a requirement by the Federal Government for continued funding under the State Wildlife Grants program.

Ms. Smith stated this iteration of the Plan (2010-2015) will have a total of approximately 1,342 species from the animal kingdom and approximately 454 plants for a grand total of 1,796 priority species of concern. Changes to the list of species included additions, deletions, new common names, name corrections, and priority ranking (HIGHEST, HIGH, or MODERATE) upgrades/downgrades. She reported species listed within the Plan were chosen based on methodology created by each individual taxa committee and reflect those species that (1) are currently under threat/in decline, (2) are stable but need monitoring, or (3) we do not have enough information about them to preclude from the list. In other words, to err on the side of caution, some species are listed due to a lack of data on population size and distribution.

Ms. Smith stated the main SWAP document will contain 7 chapters and 13 appendices and will include a new section highlighting SWG-funded projects that have been implemented to date. The Supplemental Volume will contain the species/guild accounts. New to the habitat chapter is GAP (2001) analysis data, which more appropriately defines the cover types in each ecoregion of the State. Several items that were not implemented from the 2005-2010 edition of the Plan include creating a centralized database and focus maps. Ms. Smith noted the completion date for the SWAP is scheduled for winter 2013. (A handout of the list of priority species was provided and a copy is attached to the original minutes).

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

WFF Deputy Director Emily Cope highlighted the status of several pieces of legislation. The Fisheries clean-up bill (Chapter 13) has been signed and finalized. A bill has been introduced to change DNR's licensing system to a 365-day license and is currently on the Senate floor. The agency is requesting a "phase in" approach where salt water licenses would take effect January 1, 2014, while others would become effective January 1, 2015. This would allow the agency to request "one time" money from the General Assembly next year to carry DNR through the process of a lag in revenue as the changes become effective.

Ms. Cope announced the removal of the prohibition of baiting for deer on private land in Game Zones 1 and 2 was passed and has been signed by the governor. Legislation was passed extending the alligator season on private land from September 1 to May 31.

DNR was asked to extend the deer season in Game Zone 1 through the 2-week bear season. Ms. Cope stated if the bill is passed and changes in bear harvest numbers are observed, the agency would like to have the ability to limit the number of bear tags currently being issued.

Ms. Cope reported one senator is interested in legislation allowing alligator farming and we have provided a draft guideline of the legislation should he choose to introduce it.

Rep. Kirkman Finlay continues to inquire about allowing the feeding of quail year-round and the ability to hunt turkeys over the food. Under current law, this activity would be considered baiting for turkeys.

Ms. Cope announced DNR has letters from Rep. Hardwick and Sen. Campsen asking the agency to evaluate seasons within each game zone in an effort to provide greater consistency statewide and to make these regulations less confusing to the general public.

Chair Hutchins stated the rules and regulations brochure is being revamped to become more user-friendly.

ELECTION OF COMMITTEE VICE CHAIR:

The nomination of Dr. Cleve Smith was received and unanimously approved.

OTHER OLD AND/OR NEW BUSINESS:

Charles Howard stated he had recently read an article about a case decided in favor of a man who had lost his arm to an alligator on a golf course on Fripp Island. Mr. Howard stated there will be an appeals process in the case, but he could not help but wonder if there could be future consequences to DNR in the way the agency handles nuisance alligators.

Derrell Shipes, Chief Statewide Projects, stated years ago the agency did remove nuisance alligators, but not in the past 10-15 years. DNR issues a number of depredation permits to individuals to kill alligators on private land. Mr. Shipes stated the Fripp Island incident was not the first case in the State resulting in compensation for an individual being attacked by an alligator. Mr. Shipes further stated the golf course had been issued alligator tags and a permit which had not been used. DNR was contacted by an attorney involved in the case and the agency was able to report the property had tags and a permit; therefore, the agency was not in a position of liability. DNR will continue to issue tags and permits in these situations. Mr. Shipes reported in South Carolina and in many if not most other states, wildlife/natural resource agencies are not liable for the acts of wildlife.

Mr. Howard stated he feels it would be good for the agency to let the general public know DNR is not protecting alligators to the point of human life being endangered. Mr. Shipes replied staff could look into developing an article in the future relating to alligator management. Mr. Howard suggested the *South Carolina Wildlife* magazine might be an excellent venue for it.

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

Tuesday, July 9, 2013, at 10:00 AM in the DNR Board Room in Columbia.

Following lunch, staff provided a tour of the Bayless Fish Hatchery and St. Stephen Fish Lift. Chair Hutchins received a number of positive comments about the tour i.e., “very educational and informative” and “tour was thoroughly enjoyed by all.”