

SC DNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
August 21, 2014 Meeting Minutes
Rembert Dennis Building, Columbia, SC

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chair Mike Hutchins, Vice-Chair Cleve Smith, John Gramling, Stan Halliday, Sam Hiott, Stephen Thomas

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Bobby Garmany

STAFF PRESENT:

Emily Cope, Billy Dukes, Derrell Shipes, Sam Chappellear, Willie Simmons, Jay Butfiloski, Ross Self, Susan Johnson

Chair Hutchins called the meeting to order, the first meeting after consolidation of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee with the Waterfowl Advisory Committee. Chair Hutchins welcomed members and asked they introduce themselves. Chair Hutchins introduced Martha Herbert, who will be joining the Committee pending DNR Board approval.

CONSTITUENT COMMENTS:

Former Advisory Committee member Paul Bennett thanked DNR staff for the opportunity to work with them during his time on the Committee. He commented on the dedication of staff and how obvious it is they enjoy their jobs. Mr. Bennett also announced the Cheraw Fish Hatchery will host a fishing rodeo on September 13th. He extended best wishes to the Committee in the future.

Chief of Wildlife Billy Dukes presented the Firebird Conservation Award to Mark Coleman. Mr. Dukes announced the award is given by the Northern Bobwhite Conservation Initiative. Mr. Coleman is a DNR constituent who is a small game project and quail plan supporter. Mr. Dukes and the Committee applauded Mr. Coleman for his work and dedication to the restoration of bobwhite quail in South Carolina.

2014-2015 LATE SEASON MIGRATORY BIRD RECOMMENDATIONS:

Derrell Shipes, Chief of Statewide Projects, distributed the frameworks provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and copies of staff recommendations (copies attached to the original minutes). Following Mr. Shipes' presentation, a motion was made to accept staff recommendations. The motion was unanimously approved. The 2014-2015 waterfowl season (excluding sea ducks) is as follows: November 22 – November 29, December 6 – January 25. The State youth day selected is November 15, 2014 and the Federal youth days are January 31 and February 7, 2015. Daily bag and possession limits are included in the handouts.

Committee Member Hiott reported as a result of the way the calendar falls this year, the desired break between Thanksgiving and the opening of the next season is not possible. Mr. Hiott reiterated the USFWS should extend the season to January 31 each year, and encouraged staff to continue to bring up the issue during the Flyway meetings.

WFF Deputy Director Emily Cope commended staff on their deliberation and work on these recommendations. She acknowledged Buford Mabry, former DNR and retired chief legal counsel, who was attending the meeting. Ms. Cope announced Mr. Mabry has been working with various waterfowl

groups within the state and a number of those members have formed Pintail Partners, who are working with private landowners of impoundments to provide youth waterfowl hunting opportunities. Pintail Partners will try to place as many youth as possible on private plantation waterfowl hunts if they were unsuccessful in DNR's draw youth waterfowl hunt.

Mr. Mabry stated he is representing a coalition of waterfowl groups in South Carolina, including the SC Waterfowl Association, Ducks Unlimited and Delta Waterfowl. These groups met with private landowners and corporations and formed Pintail Partners. Mr. Mabry reported one of the goals of this coalition is to provide a youth waterfowl hunt in conjunction with DNR. Their concept is to allow youth who are not chosen on DNR's draw hunt to be selected by DNR to hunt in the Rimini, SC area on managed impoundments. Mr. Mabry is hopeful to implement their plans during the upcoming waterfowl season on the federal youth days for approximately 80 youth. Individuals working toward this effort have secured pledges from ten private clubs in the Rimini area. Pintail Partners will work with DNR staff to handle the logistics of the youth hunt.

A motion was made and unanimously passed to accept staff recommendations for the 2014-2015 migratory bird late season.

FLATHEAD CATFISH UPDATE:

Freshwater Fisheries Chief Ross Self distributed a handout (copy attached to the original minutes). Mr. Self reported flatheads are not native to South Carolina but appeared in the 1960s. As they have expanded across the Southeast adverse effects have been noted on native populations, particularly in coastal rivers.

In 2011 DNR Region 2 staff initiated flathead collections on the Little Pee Dee River as time allowed (using standard electrofishing methods). From 2011 until 2013, 987 flatheads were collected (approximately 8,400 lbs.). Stomach contents revealed approximately 15% contained unidentified fish; 14% pirate perch, and less than 2% contained redbreast.

In June of 2014, DNR staff invited Georgia DNR staff to participate in a workshop to demonstrate their protocol and equipment in flathead removal. Staff spent two days utilizing two electrofishing boats and several chase boats collecting flatheads and covered approximately 4 miles of the Little Pee Dee River. Georgia's highly adjustable electrofishing frequency system versus DNR's system allowed the collection of 827 flatheads in a 2-day period (approximately 2,400 lbs.), when it took DNR staff two years to collect not many over that number. Georgia's efficiency is almost twice as great as DNR's with their 18 pulse frequency system. Stomach contents from a subsample reflected only 1% redbreast in flatheads collected.

There appears to be a bountiful flathead catfish population in the LPD. Mr. Self stated there is a possibility that a removal program in that area might be effective, as in Georgia's Satilla River. Staff is in the process of getting specs for new electrofishing equipment and hope to make a purchase in the next few months. Staff will continue to monitor the situation.

ALLIGATOR PROTOCOL:

Derrell Shipes distributed a handout reflecting DNR's Wildlife Section Alligator Coordinators, and Primary and Secondary Alligator Control Agents (copy attached to the original minutes). He reported DNR's alligator conservation program has grown to be a significant economic value to the agency, with revenue at approximately \$200,000-\$250,000 per year.

Mr. Shipes said DNR has an adaptive alligator response system in which staff manages calls regarding nuisance alligators. He explained DNR has entered into contracts with control agents for many years

and these individuals handle alligators that are dangerous or are in a public place such as a parking lot, street, on someone's front porch, etc. In most cases, the agents are instructed to kill the alligator and to use it. They are paid \$100 per response and they receive the value of the alligator. DNR also has secondary control agents, utilized as stand-bys, or in a fall-back situations. Some of these individuals have been agents for 12 to 15 years. Next year, Mr. Shipes said staff will reinstitute a system of meetings with the agents every year so they will know exactly what is expected from them.

DNR's guidelines specify that relocating nuisance alligators is not allowed. Mr. Shipes stated there are coastal communities that have been relocating alligators within the jurisdiction of the permit area. The communities undertake the responsibility, liability and risk when they relocate a problem alligator. However, there are individuals on some of these properties that are knowledgeable about effectively handling the relocation of an alligator.

NEW WHEAT GUIDELINES FOR DOVE HUNTING:

Small Game Project Leader Willie Simmons distributed copies of Clemson Extension Service's "Attracting Doves...Legally," South Carolina's Official Planting Guide for Mourning Dove Fields (copy attached to the original minutes). He stated the agency has received numerous inquiries regarding the change in wildlife planting for forage or grain production. The planting guide states: October 1 – November 30, for optimal germination, cover seeds 1 to 1.5 inches with soil, or evenly broadcast on well-prepared seedbed established with heavy tilling. The seeding rate: drill 80-150 lbs/acre or evenly broadcast up to 200 lbs/acre.

Mr. Simmons reported many people have asked if they are allowed to plant fields in succession if the crop fails. That activity would be illegal. Planting strips would be allowed within the dates specified. DNR wildlife biologists and conservation officers met with individuals from Clemson and the USFWS to ensure consistency in addressing questions from the public about the changes. There will be a training session on September 4 with Clemson Extension staff and DNR staff. DNR has issued a news release about the change and the planting guide is also available on DNR's website.

COYOTE MANAGEMENT UPDATE:

Furbearer Project Leader Jay Butfiloski distributed copies of coyote-related presentations/activities (copy attached to the original minutes). Mr. Butfiloski reported he has participated in eleven presentations to a variety of groups with concerns about coyotes, including animals moving into island and suburban/urban areas. Methods and materials utilized in coyote removal on these areas differ from those used in rural areas. Mr. Butfiloski stated coyote precaution signs for urban/suburban areas are being printed for distribution and will provide information on ways to alleviate and/or prevent human/coyote interactions. Mr. Butfiloski also participated in several morning radio shows in the Mt. Pleasant area related to suburban coyotes.

Most presentations/demonstrations are more of the traditional catch/kill activities often utilized in rural areas. DNR, Clemson Extension Service and the SC Trappers Association worked together to coordinate these presentations. DNR staff will continue their hands-on traditional trapping demonstrations to interested groups. Additionally, Mr. Butfiloski recently met with several enthusiastic predator callers (wehuntsc.com website), as coyotes can be legally hunted with electronic calls. The predator caller group has agreed to assist with coyote calling demonstrations as part of some coyote workshops and with the Palmetto Sportsmen's Classic.

MUSSEL PROPAGATION:

Freshwater Fisheries Chief Ross Self distributed a handout (copy attached to the original minutes) and stated mussel populations have been declining across the southeast. The Carolina Heelsplitter is federally listed and six other species are being considered. There are 29 freshwater mussel species in South Carolina. Mr. Self stated their life cycle can translate into hatchery culture operations, and can now be produced in captivity. DNR is partnering with the USFWS in Charleston to develop hatchery facilities to work with freshwater mussels. Initial mussel propagation technical efforts will be performed at Cohen Campbell Hatchery. Mr. Self reported staff is looking forward to more active management and stock enhancement work with SC's native mussel population. Future mitigation opportunities involve the Haile Gold Mine and DOT projects.

OTHER OLD AND/OR NEW BUSINESS:

DNR's app has been reviewed by staff and changes submitted to the contractor. Once those changes are incorporated, there will be a large roll-out for review and testing. Staff anticipates this process to take approximately 8 to 10 weeks.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS:

Mr. Gramling volunteered his time to staff to help any way he can regarding quail issues.
Mr. Halliday offered to speak to DNR constituents in Spartanburg County regarding turkey legislation.
Ms. Cope stated she would be calling on committee members for assistance with deer and turkey legislation during the next legislative session.

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

November 12, 2014 @ 10:00 AM, Columbia DNR office.