

SC DNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
Minutes, January 10, 2012
Florence, South Carolina

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chair Johnny Evans, Paul Bennett, John Gramling, Charles Howard, Cleve Smith, John Troutman

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Vice Chair Mike Hutchins, Milton Brazell, Stan Halliday, Billy Hoole, Bryson Thomason

STAFF PRESENT:

Don Winslow, Emily Cope, Ken Prosser, Tim Ivey, Derrell Shipes, Ross Self, Lynn Quattro, Tom Swaynham, Sam Chappellear, Charles Ruth, Deanna Ruth, Susan Johnson, Major William Poole, Capt. Sandy Young

OTHERS PRESENT:

DNR Board Member Randy Lowe and Campbell Coxe

Chair Evans called the meeting to order and the pledge of allegiance recited. The minutes of the October 11, 2011 meeting were approved as submitted.

No constituents were present.

Chair Evans announced John Frampton's upcoming retirement on March 16, 2012. Evans informed committee members that Col. Alvin Taylor has been named Acting Director and he will become Interim Director upon Frampton's retirement.

2011 BEAR SEASON RESULTS:

Region 1 Wildlife Coordinator Tom Swaynham distributed copies of the 2000-2011 SC Black Bear Data Summary (copy attached to the original minutes). Swaynham stated for the past few years there have been approximately 50 bears harvested in the mountain hunt unit annually, with a high of 92 in 2009. This past season was the second highest on record with 80 bears killed. Presently, bear hunting occurs in portions of Oconee, Pickens and Greenville Counties. Swaynham reported the Statewide Bear Committee will meet in February to discuss recommendations to expand the hunt.

Two types of hunts occur in the mountain hunt unit each year. The first week is a still hunt and the second week a party-dog hunt (via application from the Clemson DNR Office). Swaynham reported there were 74 bear parties during the dog season, with 1,110 bear tags sold in the mountain hunt unit and 30 tags issued in the coastal hunt unit. This year's harvest was predominately male.

Swaynham stated there were 350 nuisance bear complaints in 2011, resulting in 16 being trapped and relocated. Fifteen bears were killed on highways in the mountain hunt

unit. There were approximately 350 black bear sightings in the mountains compared to an estimate of 74 in the coastal unit.

Wildlife Biologist Deanna Ruth reported three counties were selected for the coastal bear hunt (Horry, Williamsburg and Georgetown) and ten tags were issued per county. Only one sow was harvested during the hunt and it was from Georgetown County. Twenty-one surveys were returned, which reflected 7 hunts on public land (Lewis Ocean Bay, Wee Tee and the Waccamaw River Heritage Preserve) and the balance on private land. Four elected not to hunt. A total of 11 hunters indicated bear sightings (Horry and Georgetown Counties, none in Williamsburg). Ruth stated there were 74 human/bear contacts and 18 highway kills in the coastal hunt unit.

Ruth noted she met with the management companies of several large residential areas and gave presentations to them regarding nuisance bears. She estimates she reached approximately 2,500 residents in 6 meetings. As a result of this effort, nuisance bear complaints went down considerably.

Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries Deputy Director Emily Cope stated that even with the new coastal bear season and educational outreach, staff is still experiencing issues with bears. She reported they will continue outreach efforts and attempt to handle nuisance bears in a non-lethal manner. If staff determines changes need to be made at the February meeting, Cope stated there will be ample time to implement changes prior to next season.

IMPACTS AND MANAGEMENT OPTIONS OF CORMORANTS:

Derrell Shipes, Chief of Statewide Projects, distributed a fact sheet regarding double crested cormorants (copy attached to the original minutes). He stated there is a small population residing in state year-round and during the winter months, there is a tremendous influx of migratory double-crested cormorants.

Cormorant populations declined significantly due to market hunting activities and the effects of the pesticide DDT. In recent years, Shipes stated the population has increased 8% annually. Cormorants are federally protected under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act; however, the Fish and Wildlife Service has issued two depredation orders that are in effect today. One addresses freshwater aquaculture facilities. The other is a Public Resource Depredation Order, in which state and federal agencies can apply for a permit and take cormorants from public lands and waters. To obtain the permit, basic information must be provided to the US Fish and Wildlife Service. Shipes stated any control measures undertaken by DNR would have to be contracted and there are currently no funds in the budget for this activity, estimated to cost \$100,000 per year.

Shipes reported northeastern states and Canadian provinces have determined that cormorants negatively impact game fish populations, particularly small-mouthed bass and yellow perch. Significant negative impacts have also been documented on vegetation on adjacent islands. As a result, they have sought permits to oil eggs and kill adult birds. Removal of the birds has demonstrated a positive impact.

Freshwater Fisheries Chief Ross Self stated staff have no hard evidence concerning the impact of cormorants on fisheries. He reported there is a perception among anglers that the cormorants are causing harm. Self stated there is no evidence that cormorants are feeding on game fish, but realizes they are competing with them. He reported that a Clemson doctoral student is working on a nationwide cormorant study and staff has had some involvement. Self stated they will continue to monitor this issue. Shipes noted DNR is not seeking to protect cormorants and when permits are needed, DNR issues them.

FERAL HOG CONCERNS AND CONTROL ACTIVITIES:

Shipes distributed copies of (1) Copies of Section 50-16-25 (unlawful release of pigs; permit exceptions) and Section 50-9-655 (pig transport and release permit; (2) Application for Permit to Remove Live Hogs from the Wild/Capture Permit Facts and Conditions and (3) Hog Hunting Enclosure Permit Application/Enclosure Permit Facts and Conditions (copies attached to the original minutes). Shipes stated feral hogs have become a statewide problem due to the relocation and transport by individuals who like to hunt them. Shipes reported feral hogs are very destructive and have destroyed hundreds of acres of farmland, native plants, and wildlife habitat in a very short time.

To stop the relocation of hogs and reduce and/or eliminate the population, DNR worked with the General Assembly and passed legislation in 2010 prohibiting the removal or transport of feral hogs from the wild without a permit and a tag (provided by DNR). A permitted hog can only be released on the same tract it was captured or into a DNR permitted enclosure within the same county that is utilized for hunting purposes. DNR inspects hog enclosures prior to the issuance of a permit. This law also allows hunters to harvest feral hogs at night with certain weapon restrictions.

In 2010, DNR issued 2 permits for enclosures. In 2011, 2 permits were issued for enclosures and 2 for live trapping. Shipes stated these laws appear to be helpful in the control of feral hog transport, and in reducing their populations and property damage.

Committee Member Howard stated he feels the current system should encourage more trapping. He also stated he is not in favor of killing hogs in traps and would like to see modification of rules concerning transportation of live hogs. Additionally, Mr. Howard is not in favor of ear tagging of hogs. If a person is permitted to trap with a permitted pen, he could transport a hog to his pen and perhaps then tag the hog or if the hog leaves the pen, it would be have to be killed.

Mr. Howard stated that from a landowner's standpoint, one must do whatever is necessary to control hogs. He feels there should be stronger laws to prevent the devastation hogs cause to landowners. Contracting with a reliable person to remove hogs on a regular basis could result in a positive impact. Mr. Howard distributed copies of an article titled "Wallowing in Success" taken from *Quality Whitetails* concerning the devastation and destruction feral hogs caused for a landowner in Alabama. Emily Cope

stated that staff have discussed this issue and will likely meet with law enforcement personnel to consider additional options and modifications.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

Emily Cope stated today marks the return of the General Assembly for the 2012 session. She advised this will be the second year of a two-year session, so legislation active at the end of 2011 will be picked up again. Cope reported DNR's primary interests for 2012 include the Freshwater Fisheries Chapter 13 revisions and the introduction of a deer management strategy. Cope distributed copies of an overview of the comprehensive deer management recommendations, related Code Sections, and a one-page document from DNR's website seeking additional public comment. The request will be published in a DNR News Release, on DNR's Facebook page, on Twitter and via an E-blast to everyone holding a big game permit. DNR will be accepting comments until January 20th. Then, will be compiled and presented to the DNR Board at their January 26th meeting.

Chair Evans stated it is the priority of the Board to see deer management legislation passed this session. He further stated surveys regarding this issue have been going on for years and results indicate a strong desire for changes in limits, but the outcome will be up to the General Assembly.

Committee Member Troutman stated that requesting additional public comment appears to be overkill as 98% of those attending a meeting in Edgefield were in favor of the proposal. He further stated DNR needs to find a sponsor in the General Assembly to move this legislation forward.

Cope said any help committee members can provide in terms of contacting their local legislators in support of DNR legislation would be appreciated.

Cope provided members a copy of DNR's recently published *South Carolina's Guide to Freshwater Fishes*.

There was no old and/or new business.

TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

April 10, 2012 in Columbia* Several committee members expressed an interest in meeting at Botany Bay Wildlife Management Area in the future.

***Since the meeting, Chair Evans and staff decided the meeting will be held at Botany Bay Plantation on April 11.**

DNR's Chief of Staff Don Winslow announced John Frampton's retirement function on February 22, 2012 and asked members to please plan to attend.