

SC DNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
Minutes, October 9, 2012
Webb Wildlife Center, Garnett, SC

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chair Mike Hutchins, Paul Bennett, Billy Hoole, Charles Howard, Cleve Smith

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Milton Brazell, John Troutman, John Gramling, Stan Halliday, Bryson Thomason

STAFF PRESENT:

Emily Cope, Ken Prosser, Derrell Shipes, Sam Chappellear, Lynn Quattro, Jay Butfiloski, Susan Johnson, Capt. Gentry Thames

Chair Hutchins called the meeting to order and the minutes of the July 11, 2012 were approved as submitted.

OVERVIEW OF THE WEBB WILDLIFE CENTER, PALACHUCOLA AND HAMILTON RIDGE WMAs:

Emily Cope introduced Jay Cantrell, the Webb Center Unit Biologist since 2005. He stated the property consists of 26,000 acres, with three separate management areas. Mr. Cantrell noted that the Webb portion is almost 6,000 acres and has been owned and managed by DNR since its purchase in 1941. In the 1970s, he said the property's name was changed from Belmont Refuge to the James O. Webb Wildlife Center and Management Area after former DNR Director James O. Webb. He added the area consists of upland pines, bottomland hardwoods, open fields, river swamps, and several ponds.

Mr. Cantrell stated that during the year, staff utilizes forest and wildlife management practices on the property, including an active timber harvesting program. Herbicide work is also performed because of the extensive amount of exotic and invasive species. Mr. Cantrell said staff is involved in a long-term longleaf pine restoration project and conducts controlled burns of 3,000 to 4,000 acres per year.

Mr. Cantrell reported an active dove hunting program has proven successful and the area has a good turkey population. He noted the property is also known for its draw deer hunts. Successful hunters stay overnight in the lodge and are escorted to and from permanent stands. Mr. Cantrell said unescorted draw hunts are provided on Palachucola and Hamilton Ridge, as well as open archery opportunities. He said all three properties have antler restrictions of 4 points on one side or a minimum 12" outside spread, which have been in place for approximately 10 years.

Mr. Cantrell stated the Webb Center contains 13 colonies of the Red-cockaded woodpeckers, a state and federally listed endangered species. He added that long-term research continues on the Eastern diamondback rattlesnake, a species in decline.

Mr. Cantrell reported the Hamilton Ridge tract, formerly owned by International Paper, was acquired by DNR six years ago and the Palachucola tract was donated to DNR seven years ago by the Army Corps of Engineers as mitigation for the construction of Lake Russell.

Chair Hutchins inquired about hog hunting on the properties. Mr. Cantrell stated in addition to scheduled hog hunts, there is no limit on hogs harvested during deer hunts and said there is an active trapping program on the properties.

OPENING DATE DOVE RESULTS:

Emily Cope distributed copies of the public dove fields opening day results (copy attached to the original minutes). In the interest of time, she asked committee members to review it when time allowed and to please let her know if they had questions. Ms. Cope stated overall, opening day proved to be very successful on the public dove fields and noted that Botany Bay continues to be one of the premier youth fields with 60 youth participating on opening day.

ALLIGATOR HUNT UPDATE:

Wildlife Biologist Jay Butfiloski stated this year marks the fifth public alligator season. He explained that the coastal plain is divided into four regions with 300 tags being allocated to each region. Mr. Butfiloski said the season begins the second Saturday in September and continues through the second Saturday in October. He explained that a \$10 non-refundable application fee was required this year and that applications were accepted on line from May 17 through June 30. For applicants selected, there is a \$100 fee for the tag and non-residents must pay has an additional \$200 fee. On WMA lands, Mr. Butfiloski stated DNR has a very limited alligator hunt drawing that includes Bear Island and Santee Coastal Reserve. A \$15 non-refundable application fee is required and only two hunters are selected per location for a specific week, which begins on a Monday and ends on a Saturday. He said successful applicants are required to pay a \$500 fee for residents or an \$800 fee for non-residents and participants must possess a WMA permit. Mr. Butfiloski added that non-residents must also pay an additional \$200 fee for the WMA hunt. He reported that alligator guides must possess a limited commercial use permit issued by DNR. For the first time, Mr. Butfiloski said successful applicants could pay an additional \$75 fee to purchase another alligator tag that could be used to harvest alligators 4 to 7 feet in size.

This year, Mr. Butfiloski said 6,600 individuals applied for the alligator hunts, which was a slight increase from the previous year. He stated 300 people applied for the hunts on WMAs, which was a significant increase from last year. Mr. Butfiloski said preliminary results reflect 310 alligators harvested, with the largest taken from Lake Marion measuring 13.95 feet in length. Overall, he noted the average size taken is 9.1 feet. Derrell Shipes told the committee he feels the objective of taking problem alligators has been accomplished and said the demand now seems to be for the largest male alligator. Mr. Shipes said he would like to see clear objectives and the application of science to the process so that DNR can maintain a customer base. He reported that DNR has made a commitment to Clemson University for a three to four year alligator project and added

that Clemson is in the process of recruiting a Ph.D. student to work with DNR to establish objectives through the DNR Board. Mr. Shipes said that Florida and Georgia have expressed an interest in joining the study. He announced that DNR's herpetologist, Steve Bennett, is retiring and noted that his replacement will have the responsibility of working with Clemson to establish future objectives for the alligator public hunt program. Mr. Shipes added that a portion of funds derived from the alligator hunt program will be used toward this individual's salary and research.

LOWER SALUDA RIVER TROUT UPDATE:

Lynn Quattro, Assistant Chief of the Freshwater Fisheries Section, stated that due to several issues raised about trout at an earlier DNR Board meeting, staff held two public meetings in the Columbia area in August. She said a summary of the meetings was provided (copy is attached to the original minutes).

At the meetings, Ms. Quattro reported staff presented an overview of the Lower Saluda River (LSR) trout fishery and asked for public input on three questions dealing with the management of the fishery. Staff distributed surveys containing the following questions: (1) do you support a new regulation for the LSR for trout that would allow five trout per day to be harvested, but allowing only one of them to be greater than a specified length; (2) do you support a trout restriction that allows only one of your five trout daily limit to be longer than a specific length (a number of choices were given); and (3) do you support or oppose the use of coldwater trout as bait.

Ms. Quattro stated approximately 100 individuals attended the meetings and the majority of participants were in favor of a regulation change to limit the number of large trout harvested from the LSR. She reported the preferred restriction was to allow a five-trout harvest with only one of them longer than 16 inches and noted the majority of those in attendance opposed to the use of trout as bait.

Ms. Quattro announced that agency is currently developing language to be incorporated into the Chapter 13 clean-up bill for consideration in the upcoming legislative session. She stated the bill would include a trout limit of five fish per day with only one of those longer than 16 inches and would modify the definition of baitfish to make it unlawful to use coldwater trout as bait.

Ms. Quattro stated that staff plans to implement a three-year trout study on the Lower Saluda beginning in December. She said Rainbow and Brown trout will be stocked during the month and the study will involve the mark and recapture of the fish. Ms. Quattro reported that Trout Unlimited is assisting with the administration and funding of a tag return reward program. DNR staff and TU volunteers will be tagging trout used for stocking on December 8 and 9 at the Walhalla Fish Hatchery. Ms. Quattro invited committee members to participate in the event. She noted a creel clerk has been hired for the trout study and the employee will begin after the December stocking has been completed.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE COMMENTS:

Chair Hutchins informed Committee Member Smith his suggestion of a DNR mobile web app is moving forward and he commended Mr. Smith on the idea.

Committee Member Hoole stated he hopes to see the issue of baiting in the Upstate resolved during the 2013 legislative session and that DNR will take a stand against baiting in that area.

Committee Member Paul Bennett stated DNR is hosting a youth fishing rodeo and paddle clinic at the Cheraw Fish Hatchery on Saturday, October 13th. He reported that slots for the paddle clinic were already filled. Mr. Bennett also stated the Retriever Nationals will be held at the H. Cooper Black area in September 2013 and said he has been working with PRT to get water to an inactive pond (Goose Pond) in anticipation of the Nationals event. Mr. Bennett noted that local hunt clubs have offered to assist in this effort as well.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS:

Committee Member Howard had previously requested the Committee revisit the issue of wild hogs. Emily Cope asked Derrell Shipes, Chief of Statewide Projects, to provide a handout reflecting (under the current law) what can be done relating to feral hogs. He distributed copies of capture and enclosure permit data and reviewed them.

Mr. Shipes announced the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA) recently established a hog task force and reported that DNR had been asked for information about hog populations and legal activities in the state. He said DNR's response to the inquiry is in draft form and noted that South Carolina is no more restrictive regarding hogs than most other states. Mr. Shipes reiterated that the illegal transport of hogs must be stopped.

Emily Cope stated DNR has been very liberal in how landowners can dispatch feral hogs and said legislation was recently passed allowing night hunting of hogs. She noted the season is from February 28 to July 1 for individuals registering with DNR to take hogs at night using artificial lights and night vision devices. The required notification system will be in place by February 2013.

A discussion on hogs followed and Committee Member Howard stated he feels there is room for improvement in handling the issue. He said he would like for staff to continue working on a solution to the problem and suggested an incentive for more trapping might be a consideration. Derrell Shipes stated staff will continue to review the current regulations to find innovative ways to issue special permits.

TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

January 8, 2013, 10:00 AM, Styx Classroom, Fish Hatchery Road, West Columbia.

Chair Hutchins stated he would like to select a Vice Chairman for the Committee at the January meeting.