

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Wednesday, January 20, 2016

2 p.m.

1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

PRESENT: Commission Chairman Charles Rigdon, Commissioners William "Billy" Deviney, Clay Wagner, Bill F. Cossar, and Scott Coopwood.

Among the MDWFP staff attending were: Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director; Robert Cook, Deputy Executive Director; Larry Castle, Michael Bolden, Jennifer Head, Larry Pugh, Chad Dacus, Colonel Steve Adcock, Jason Thompson, Ed Penny, and counsel, Doug Mann and Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorneys General.

Chairman Rigdon gaveled the meeting to order.

OPENING PRAYER

Larry Castle, Director of Technical Programs, opened the meeting with prayer.

Chairman Rigdon recognized Robert Cook, Deputy Executive Director, to honor fellow friend and colleague, Noel Hughes, who passed away on January 1, 2016. Noel served the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks as Director of Intergovernmental and Community Services. Mr. Cook offered a prayer of comfort for Noel's wife, Jo Ann Bates Hughes; his family, and many friends.

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Deviney and seconded by Commissioner Cossar, the minutes for the December 16, 2015 Commission meeting and Special Teleconference Meetings held on December 29, 2015 and January 14, 2016 were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, the agenda for January 20, 2016 was unanimously approved.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Chris Winter, Board Member of the Mississippi River Landowner's Alliance, wanted to personally appear before the Commission to thank them for closing hunting seasons along the Mississippi River until January 31, 2016 due to flooding, and for the additional law enforcement presence.

Chairman Rigdon thanked Mr. Winter for coming.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, Director of License/Boat Registration, presented the License Sales Report for the month of December 2015. Total revenues improved and were only down 1.3%.

Highlights of Thompson's report are listed below:

- Resident License Sales - down 3%.
- Non-resident License Sales - down \$75,000.
- Other Licenses category - up \$104,000 or 61% increase.
- Lifetime Licenses - down \$17,000.
- Flooding of the Mississippi River and closing hunting seasons early has had an impact on Three-day and Seven-day All Game license sales in 2016. Comparing license sales from January 3-19, 2015 to January 3-19, 2016, 514 more licenses, generating \$41,000, were sold in 2015 during this time frame.

WILDLIFE

Rule 1.1 – Basic Regulations for All Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) FINAL

Rule 1.13 – Malmaison Wildlife Management Area FINAL

Doug Mann, Special Assistant Attorney General, explained that the Commission had approved two minor rule changes last month based upon the settlement of a boundary dispute at Malmaison WMA. No comments had been received concerning these changes.

ACTION: By motion of Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, Rule 1.1 and Rule 1.13 were approved unanimously by the Commission as presented.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Citation Report

Colonel Steve Adcock, Chief of Law Enforcement, presented a handout which highlighted license violations, shooting range attendance, and flood details along the Mississippi River (Desoto County to Wilkinson County).

OTHER BUSINESS

Hunting Seasons Closure on Upper Mississippi River

Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director, presented the staff recommendation that hunting seasons – other than waterfowl – remain closed, along the Mississippi River, until January 31, 2016, due to high water. This order also declares all areas inundated by flood waters to be “no wake” zones.

The Director explained that the original rule was written for spring flooding when vegetation regrowth would be present for wildlife when they returned to their original habitat. During the winter there is no food source for returning wildlife after the flood waters recede. Also backwater flooding is too high for some animals to return to their original habitat, even though the Mississippi River has dropped to just below flood levels in some areas.

ACTION: Commissioner Coopwood made a motion to approve an Order to continue the closure of hunting seasons – other than waterfowl – until January 31, 2016 in flooded areas as recommended by MDWFP staff. Coopwood also stipulated that a clear and concise Press Release needs to go out as soon as possible and at another meeting the Commission needs to revisit the water mark levels for emergency situations. Commissioner Wagner seconded the motion and it was approved unanimously by the Commission.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Next Commission meeting date was set for Monday, February 22, 2016 at 9:30 a.m. at Quail Ridge Conference Center, 7811 Highway 397, Louisville, MS 39339.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Chairman asked if there was a need for an Executive Session. The Executive Director stated that there was need for Executive Session.

ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Deviney and seconded by Commissioner Cossar, the Commission voted unanimously to close the meeting to determine the need for Executive Session. The Commission determined that Executive Session was needed for discussions regarding budget line items that could affect the continued employment of individuals in specific positions, job performance of specific employees in specific positions, ongoing investigations of a law enforcement agency, and relocation of a business or industry. Upon motion made by Commissioner Wagner and seconded by Commissioner Deviney, the Commission voted unanimously to enter into Executive Session.

The Executive Director, Dr. Polles, updated the Commission on his meetings with the Chairman of the Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks Committee of the House of Representatives regarding the coming legislative session and the agency’s budget request. Dr. Polles informed the Commission that this year,

as in the past, the agency would be requesting funds and authority to hire and train more conservation officers, and to seek salary parity with other statewide law enforcement agencies. The Department will also ask for bond monies for state park repair and renovation projects and other capital improvements that the agency needs. Dr. Polles also informed the Commission on other matters that were expected to arise during the session.

Discussion followed. No action was required of the Commission.

Dr. Polles and Larry Castle updated the Commission on several investigations of un-permitted wildlife enclosures. The question has arisen as to what a viable standard for reducing a high fence would be for the facility NOT to be considered an enclosure. The current rule states that any facility with a fence of a height and design, to include use of terrain features, that prevents free ingress and egress, is an enclosure. There are three (3) enclosures under investigation that use a body of water for one of the "sides" of the enclosed area.

Discussion followed.

Without a motion or second, discussion resulted in a minimum standard being established by acclamation. Based upon information from staff, the Commission directed staff to consider that a facility whose fencing was no higher than forty-eight (48) inches for at least 25% of the linear footage of fencing, would not prevent free ingress and egress of wild animals. Staff agreed that this was a good baseline as most fawns can jump a 48 inch fence.

No action was required of the Commission. There was no further business for Executive Session.

ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Wagner and seconded by Commissioner Deviney, the Commission voted unanimously to exit Executive Session and open the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Commission, Commissioner Wagner made a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Cossar seconded the motion, and the Commission voted unanimously to adjourn.

Chairman Rigdon gavled the meeting into adjournment.



Charles Rigdon, CHAIRMAN

Date



Clay Wagner, VICE CHAIRMAN

Date