

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Tuesday, November 14, 2017 – Educational Session

Wednesday, November 15, 2017 – Business Session

1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS

EDUCATIONAL SESSION – 2 PM

PRESENT: Commission Chairman Clay Wagner, Commissioners Bill F. Cossar, Robert Taylor, Scott Coopwood, and Billy Mounger.

Among the MDWFP staff attending were: Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director; Robert Cook, Deputy Executive Director; Michael Bolden, Larry Castle, Curtis Thornhill, Col. Steve Adcock, Russ Walsh, Jennifer Head, Larry Pugh, Charles Knight, Randy Watkins, Amy Blaylock, and Doug Mann, Special Assistant Attorney General.

Chairman Wagner recognized the following visitors: Representative Scott Bounds, Chairman of House WFP Committee; and Trey Baker, City Planner for Grenada.

Educational Sessions are for informational purposes only. Commission action on any topic may only be taken during a regular business session. The next regular business session will take place on Wednesday, November 15, 2017 at 8:30 a.m.

GOLF

Doug Mann, Special Assistant Attorney General, was the first presenter. He gave a brief history of the beginning of golf at the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks and where it is today.

Jennifer Head, Director of Parks, gave a PowerPoint presentation and filled in more detail on the past, present, and future of golf at MDWFP. With no line item designated for golf by the Legislature, funding for capital improvements and maintenance for the golf courses comes directly out of the Parks' budget. Even before the Legislature cut Parks' budget by \$2 million last year, golf had put a strain on an already tight budget for the operation of the Mississippi State Parks.

Randy Watkins, Golf Consultant, gave insights on the cost to maintain a golf course, which is roughly \$700,000 to \$800,000 annually; and the impact of the overzealous golf course construction in the mid-90s to the mid 2000s which has spread out the golfing population. This thinning of players has caused golf courses to close across the nation as supply meets demand.

Trey Baker, City Planner for the City of Grenada, informed the Commission of the financial struggles with Dogwoods Golf Course, adjacent to Hugh White State Park, which the City of Grenada currently has an intergovernmental lease agreement with MDWFP to manage and operate. This lease agreement will expire in 2027. Dogwoods Golf Course runs in the red each year and is supplemented by a portion of a Tourism Tax by the City of Grenada.

Discussion followed on the possibility of more budget cuts by the Legislature next year. The Commission concluded that a plan of action should be developed for each golf course property as the first step. Once those plans have been researched and developed, the Commission will take action and proceed to the next level.

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE & HARVEST REPORTING

Larry Castle, Director of Technical Programs, presented a binder to each Commissioner entitled "Chronic Wasting Disease Information, November 2017". Castle began his presentation with a history of CWD (Chronic Wasting Disease) which began in the 1960s in a captive deer population in Colorado and has spread to half of the states and several Canadian providences. Even more alarming, in the last six months, swine have been proven to be susceptible to CWD and, additionally, they survive and spread the CWD prions. Current research, which is still being developed, shows some primates which were fed muscle tissue with CWD positive prions developed CWD. Now there is a public health concern for the disease which never existed before.

Mississippi has not had a deer which tested positive for CWD. Stopping the transportation of deer, ova, semen, and embryos from CWD states to Mississippi is top priority. Currently when MDWFP rules and regulations are violated for the transportation of deer, they are defined as a Class 3 violation, which is \$25. And even more alarming the violator does not have to comply with MDWFP in the future. There is no elevation of fines if they do not comply. A \$25 fine is no deterrent for something this critical. Discussion led to possibly changing this to a Class 1 violation fine in the amount of \$500 - \$2,000, which would require approval of the Legislature.

Castle presented details on how and where MDWFP rules were being broken. Questions followed on how to get the Legislature to pass bills to protect Mississippi from CWD. The House Chairman of WFP Scott Bounds stated that the House approved changing these rules last year, but the Senate did not even take the bill up.

Discussion led to enclosures and how CWD impacts them. It was suggested that in order to keep CWD at bay, each enclosure should be annually permitted. Upon approval, a certificate or permit of compliance would deem that facility a legal, permitted facility. If they are found in violation, the facility would be shut down and the owners charged until that facility has been certified and in compliance again.

Two housekeeping changes to Rule 8.2 were suggested for the Commission to clean up at the Business Meeting on November 15, 2017.

The second and equally important change to control CWD is Mandatory Harvest Reporting. This needs to be reported down to the county level so that biologists have the information they need to control CWD.

Chairman Wagner stated that he will request a meeting with Lt. Governor Tate Reeves and Speaker Philip Gunn to discuss the best methods to control CWD. Any member of the Commission who wishes to join him can.

With no other items to be presented, the Educational meeting was adjourned.

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Tuesday, November 14, 2017 – Educational Session

Wednesday, November 15, 2017 – Business Session

1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS

MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS SESSION – 8:30 AM

PRESENT: Commission Chairman Clay Wagner, Commissioners Bill F. Cossar, Robert Taylor, Scott Coopwood, and Billy Mounger.

Among the MDWFP staff attending were: Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director; Robert Cook, Deputy Executive Director; Michael Bolden, Larry Castle, Curtis Thornhill, Col. Steve Adcock, Larry Pugh, Russ Walsh, Jennifer Head, Charles Knight, Jason Thompson, and counsel, Doug Mann, Special Assistant Attorney General.

Chairman Wagner, having noted for the minutes that a quorum was present, gaveled the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. Chairman Wagner welcomed Representative Scott Bounds, House Chairman of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (WFP) Committee; and Senator Mike Seymour.

OPENING PRAYER

Robert Cook, Deputy Executive Director, opened the meeting with prayer.

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Coopwood and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the minutes of the regular meeting held on October 18, 2017 were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

ACTION: Commissioner Coopwood moved to approve the agenda for November 15, 2017. Commissioner Taylor seconded the motion and the motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments were brought forward to the Commission.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, Director of License/Boat Registration, presented the License Sales Report for the month of October 2017. The total revenue for the end of October was down six percent.

Highlights of Thompson's end of the month report are listed below:

- Resident licenses – down 6%
(MDWFP Foundation purchased 1,800 student licenses the first two weeks of November)
 - Non-resident licenses – down 1%
 - NR 3 day Freshwater Fishing – up 4%
 - NR 1 day Freshwater Fishing – up 2%
- Permit category – up \$38,000
- Lifetime license sales is slightly down less than 1%

The month of November is our biggest generator for revenue of the year. The first two weeks of November have exceeded last year's license sales, so we off to a good start. We look forward to next month.

FISHERIES BUREAU

Boating Access

Larry Pugh, Director of Fisheries, presented a PowerPoint presentation on Boat Ramps and Aquatic Weed Control. There are currently 456 boat ramps in Mississippi, of which 50 are on private land, and the remaining are federal, state, and local government ramps. This past year Fisheries built four new ramps, repaired three, and performed routine maintenance on 20+ ramps. Fisheries receives funds from SFR (Sport Fish Restoration Program). This program provides grants funds for fishery projects, boating access, and aquatic education. Fisheries is required to spend 15% of SFR funds on boating access over a five year period.

Factors which influence cost of a boat ramp, include water depth, road construction to ramp, parking, and purchase/lease of land.

Fisheries became involved in Aquatic Weed Control in 2013 when the PRVWSD (Pearl River Valley Water Supply District) asked us to help control vegetation in the Ross Barnett Reservoir. Fisheries spends \$700,000 annually (salaries, chemical, equipment repair) spraying vegetation for weed control in the Delta water and state/park lakes. Fisheries tries to remove the evasive species and leave the native plants. Sometimes the plants have to be removed mechanically, like at Percy Quin State Park in 2016.

The top four evasive plants in Mississippi are:

- Water Hyacinth - is a major problem at Ross Barnett Reservoir and in the Delta
- Hydrilla

- Cuban Bulrush
- Giant Salvinia – keeping an eye on this. Have only had one or two problems with this in Mississippi. It is a major problem in Texas and Louisiana. Once established it is very expensive and difficult to control.

This presentation was for information only. No action was required by the Commission.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Citation Report

Col. Steve Adcock distributed a handout to the Commission which highlighted citations and shooting range attendance at Turcotte and McHenry. The MSSP Tournament was held at Turcotte, which is growing, with ten schools and 155 youth participating last month. Other events during the month included Farm Safety Day in Smith County, and Super Hunt. The McIver Shooting Range construction is still underway with an anticipated opening day sometime in the Spring of 2018.

A transportation violation was presented where a hunter from Georgia had a 5x7 Bull Elk in the back of his pickup, which he killed in New Mexico and was crossing through Mississippi on his way home to Georgia. This elk was seized and incinerated as it had not been de-boned or otherwise prepared as required by 40 Miss. Admin. Code, Part 2, Rule 2.7. This is another case where a (cervid) carcass was being transported across state lines without having properly prepared the carcass, as required by the rule, in order to prevent the transportation of CWD into the state. Law Enforcement plans to purchase a second incinerator for South Mississippi.

License Reinstatement Requests

Col. Adcock presented the following license reinstatement requests. Each violator was asked to come forward and state the circumstances of his arrest before the Commission.

- *Winston Lee, Grenada, MS*
Lee stated that he and a friend were on their way back from hunting camp when they spotted a deer. His friend's rifle was in the front and Lee's rifle was in the back. He had to pay \$1,500 in fines and a year without hunting.

Col. Adcock recommended the Commission restore his license at this time; however, if he receives another citation, he will serve the full three years for a second offense.

MOTION: By motion of Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, Lee's license was reinstated by unanimous consent with the stipulation that he will serve the entire three years for a second citation.

- *Chandler Smith, Lucedale, MS*

Smith stated that he had been squirrel hunting earlier that day and had several guns in his vehicle. He went out around 3:30 a.m. looking for a deer. He did not shoot anything. He has never done anything like this before.

Col. Adcock recommended the Commission restore his license at this time; however, if he receives another citation, he will serve the full three years for a second offense.

MOTION: By motion of Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, Smith's license was reinstated by unanimous consent with the stipulation that he will serve the entire three years for a second citation.

- *Steven Smith, Brookhaven, MS*

Smith stated that a friend was driving them to a hunting camp. They thought they saw a coyote and shot at it. The property owner turned a light on them and called the authorities. The next day Smith went and apologized to the property owner. The land owner dropped the charges after his apology. He spent \$4,000 in fines.

Col. Adcock recommended the Commission restore his license at this time; however, if he receives another citation, he will serve the full three years for a second offense.

MOTION: By motion of Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, Smith's license was reinstated by unanimous consent with the stipulation that he will serve the entire three years for a second citation.

- *Evan Smith, MS*

Smith stated that he was arrested the night before he got married. He was on his way back home after the rehearsal and saw a deer. He stopped and shot at the deer. He knew immediately something was wrong. It was a mechanical deer that the Game Warden had set up due to complaints from the landowner that people were feeding and shooting deer on his property. It was out of season for deer hunting. His fines totaled \$5,000.

Col. Adcock recommended the Commission restore his license at this time; however, if he receives another citation, he will serve the full three years for a second offense.

MOTION: By motion of Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, Smith's license was reinstated by unanimous consent with the stipulation that he will serve the entire three years for a second citation.

OTHER BUSINESS

Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director, presented the following new MDWFP staff appointments:

- Lt. Col. Chris Harris – promoted to Assistant Chief of Law Enforcement
- Darren Hardesty – moved from Fisheries to Wildlife (Waterfowl Program)
- Brad Rogers (Former Mayor of Pearl) – Parks (Special Projects Officer)

The Executive Director asked them to stand and a round of applause followed.

NEXT COMMISSION MEETING

DATE: Wednesday, December 13, 2017
LOCATION: Holmes County State Park/MCOTA, 5369 State Park Road, Durant 39063
TIME: 2:45 p.m. Business Session
No Educational Session

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 to discuss transactions in land, ongoing investigations of a law enforcement agency, potential litigation and litigation strategy, and personnel matters involving job performance of individuals in specific positions.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar made a motion to close the meeting to determine the need for Executive Session to discuss transactions in land, ongoing investigations of a law enforcement agency, potential litigation and litigation strategy, and personnel matters involving job performance of individuals in specific positions. Commissioner Taylor seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to close the meeting.

Counsel announced to those present that the meeting was now closed to determine the need for Executive Session to discuss transactions in land, ongoing investigations of a law enforcement agency, potential litigation and litigation strategy, and personnel matters involving job performance of individuals in specific positions. The room was cleared.

ACTION: Commissioner Coopwood made a motion to enter Executive Session to discuss transactions in land, ongoing investigations of a law enforcement agency, potential litigation and litigation strategy, and personnel matters involving job performance of individuals in specific positions. Commissioner Taylor seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to enter Executive Session.

Counsel announced to those present outside the meeting room that the Commission had entered Executive Session to discuss transactions in land, ongoing investigations of a law enforcement agency, potential litigation and litigation strategy, and personnel matters involving job performance of individuals in specific positions.

Dr. Polles updated the Commission on several pending land matters. More specifically, he informed the Commission that a potential deal involving the Secretary of State, Anderson-Tully Timber Company and other non-governmental partners, was still "alive" despite very little movement in recent weeks. In addition, there is a 24 acre tract at Howard Miller WMA that the agency has been in discussions with Anderson-Tully regarding a disputed boundary line. Staff has determined it may be more feasible to purchase the tract rather than enter into a boundary agreement. The agency is going to see if Anderson-Tully is receptive to this solution. The Commission indicated its support of this effort without a vote.

Dr. Polles mentioned a few other prospects and the fact that the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in Atlanta has been very helpful in getting grant monies for several land purchases.

There were no more land matters to discuss.

Chief Adcock and Larry Castle updated the Commission on recent enclosure/importation cases pending and/or coming to a close in Federal Court. As always the major concern for the department is the availability of restitution monies to cover CWD testing and remediation, after sentencing. This led to a general discussion of Commission authority over CWD prevention and ensuring that the department was being as proactive in CWD prevention as possible. Questions as to Commission liability were discussed. No action was required of the Commission.

Finally, Dr. Polles and Deputy Executive Director Robert Cook informed the Commission of several vacancies that were under recruitment.

A brief discussion followed.

There being no further items for discussion in Executive Session, Commissioner Taylor made a motion to open the meeting. Commissioner Cossar seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to open the meeting.

Counsel announced to any members of the public outside the meeting that the Commission had exited Executive Session and opened the meeting. Counsel also announced that no official actions or votes had been taken on the items discussed.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Commission, Commissioner Cossar made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Mounger, and the motion carried.

Chairman Wagner gavelled the meeting into adjournment.



Clay Wagner, CHAIRMAN



Date

Bill F. Cossar, VICE CHAIRMAN

Date