

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Wednesday, April 15, 2020

No Educational Session 9 a.m. Business Session

Commission, Staff, and Public Viewed Meeting by Means of Webinar
due to Corvid-19 Executive Order

NO EDUCATIONAL SESSION

MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS SESSION – 9 AM

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

Among the MDWFP staff attending by webinar were: Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director; Robert Cook, Deputy Executive Director; Jennifer Head, and Adam Butler. Staff present at MDWFP office were: Michael Bolden, Curtis Thornhill, Col. Steve Adcock, Russ Walsh, Larry Pugh, Ricky Flynt, Houston Havens, Amy Blaylock, Chip Ward, Sharon Polzin, and Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General.

OPENING PRAYER

Deputy Executive Director Robert Cook opened the meeting with prayer.

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, the minutes of the February 17, 2020 Commission meeting were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

The Executive Director informed the Commission of the following items which needed to be added to the agenda:

- Wildlife Bureau – Date Adjustment for Rule 2.2
- Wildlife Bureau - Wild Turkey Season and Population Update
- Law Enforcement – LE Updates & Lands affected by Floodwater

ACTION: Commissioner Wagner moved to approve the agenda for April 15, 2020 as amended, Commissioner Taylor seconded the motion and the motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No written or oral comments were received for the Commission.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, Director of License/Boat Registration Division, presented the License Sales Report for the month of March 2020. The total revenue for the end of March is down 1% from last year.

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident license sales – up \$28,000
 - Small Hunt/Freshwater Fishing – up 8%
 - Res 3 day Freshwater – up 40%
 - Res WMA user permits – up 7%
- Non-resident license sales – down 2%
 - NR Freshwater Fishing – up 4%
 - NR 3 day Freshwater Fishing – up 40%
 - NR 1 day Freshwater Fishing – up 13%
 - NR Fall & Spring Turkey Permits – up
- Permit category – down 8%
- Lifetime License category – down 2%

WMA iOS users - 19,694

Android WMA users – 6,238

Total WMA App Downloads – 25,932

As of April 7, 2020 there has been a total of 7,006 license packages sold.

FISHERIES

Chairman Coopwood asked for an update on the current status for our lakes in Mississippi with the COVID-19 restrictions. The Executive Director stated that the state lakes and state park lakes are closed by order of the Governor. The rivers and Corps of Engineers' lakes are open.

Larry Pugh, Fisheries Bureau Director, presented the following PROPOSED rule changes.

PROPOSED 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 3, Chapter 1 – General Fisheries Rules

- **Rule 1.4 – Statewide Creel Limits**
Recommendation to change slot limit on Largemouth Bass at Lake Monroe from 16-24 to 18-24 inches. This change will allow more fish to be harvested and will be consistent with the slot limit currently in place at Lake Lamar Bruce.

PROPOSED 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part, Chapter 2 – State Fishing Lakes, and Community Fishing Assistance Program Lakes

- **Rule 2.1 – Regulations regarding State Fishing Lakes**
Adding language “Residents” for FREE FISHING WEEKEND clarifies the Rule and agrees with state statute. Simpson County Lake would be added to state lakes that are closed due to the lake being drained in order to repair the dam.
- **Rule 2.2 – Regulations regarding Community Fishing Assistance Program Lakes**
Statement inserted in Rule to allow the Cooperators to close their waters or waive the use rules for special events if a 30-day notice of such is provided to MDWFP.

ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Wagner and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the Commission unanimously approved PROPOSED Rules 1.4, 2.1, and 2.2, as recommended by staff.

Commissioner Taylor questioned if the state lakes would automatically be re-opened when the shelter-in-place order is lifted by the Governor. The Executive Director stated that the state lakes were inclusive in the original order of the Governor and MDWFP would have to make a request to the Governor for consideration to open the state lakes when he opens the state back up and people are mobile again. Commissioner Mounger suggested that a request be made to the Governor to open the state fishing lakes. The Executive Director stated that the main concern was with social distancing and no more than ten people congregating in one place, such as boats and sandbars; however, wording could be placed in the re-opening of the lakes with the stipulation that social distancing order still be in place.

WILDLIFE

PROPOSED – 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 2, Chapter 1 – WMA Regulations

- **Rules 1.1 – 1.46 – WMA Regulations**

Walsh presented the following rule changes for each WMA as outlined in a handout distributed to the Commission. A summary of these changes is outlined below:

Basic Regulation Changes:

- Rule 1.1 & 1.6 – Tree saddle usage and remove camping permit language.

High Water

Canal Section WMA – Rule 1.7

- Tombigbee River gauge at Bigbee reads 17 ft. or higher

Lake George, Sunflower, and Twin Oaks WMA – Rules 1.10, 1.23, 1.24

- All activities, except waterfowl, will close when SB gauge reaches 90 ft.

Mahannah and Phil Bryant WMAs – Rule 1.12 and 1.46

- All activities, except waterfowl will close when MS River reaches 43 ft or SB gauge reaches 82 ft.

Ward Bayou WMA – Rules 1.26

- Ward Bayou Road will close from ward Bayou Bridge eastward at 12 ft on Graham Ferry gauge.

Tuscumbia WMA – Rules 1.32

- Hunting season will close at 14 ft instead of 15 ft according to Tuscumbia gauge.

Clarifying Hunting and Fishing LanguageMahannah and Phil Bryant WMAs – Rule 1.12 and 1.46

- Clarifying when fishing is allowed.

Mahannah, Muscadine, Howard Miller, and Phil Bryant WMAs – Rules 1.12, 1.34, 1.38, and 1.40

- Clarification of draw hunt days.

Tuscumbia WMA – Rule 1.32

- No scouting on waterfowl draw hunt days.
- Waterfowl hunters must wear an orange cap or vest when traveling to hunt in Unit 1.

Muscadine, Howard Miller, Charlie Capps, and Deviney WMAs – Rules 1.34, 1.38, 1.40, 1.41

- Replace Duck with Waterfowl.

Muscadine, Sky Lake, Howard Miller, Capps, and Deviney, Phil Bryant WMAs – Rules 1.34, 1.37, 1.38, 1.40, 1.41, 1.46

- Add Veteran Waterfowl wording.

Malmaison WMA – Rule 1.13

- Youth turkey season will be last full weekend in March.

Natchez SP WMA – Rule 1.26

- Delete Boat Access wording.

Canemount WMA – Rules 1.43

- Delete statement limiting squirrel hunter access.
- Clarify language regarding scouting during turkey hunts.

Cossar SP WMA – Rule 1.45

- Add statement regarding Park Regulations applying regarding pets.

Hunting Regulations**Mahannah, O'Keefe, Howard Miller, and Deviney WMA – Rules 1.12, 1.16, 1.38, 1.41**

- No entry to designated dove fields prior to 1 p.m.

Graham Lake WMA – Rule 1.33

- Standardize wording with upper Sardis to allow 1 of 3 buck bag limit to be any antlered.

Phil Bryant WMA – Rule 1.46

- Deer harvested on the Goose Lake Unit must be checked in at the Ten Point or Hwy 61 Boat Ramp check stations.

Camping**Sky Lake WMA – Rule 1.37**

- Allow camping in designated camping area.

Electric Bicycles**Rules 1.1 – 1.45 WMA Regulations**

- Electric bicycles will be allowed for hunting and fishing access.

ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Taylor and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, the Commission unanimously approved PROPOSED WMA Regulations (Rules 1.1 - 1.46), as recommended by staff.

PROPOSED – 40 Miss. Admin. Code – Law Enforcement Part 4, Chapter 1

- **Rule 1.5 – Regulations regarding the Taking, Catching, or Killing of any Wild Bird, or Wild Animal on Lands affected by Flood Waters**

Walsh proposed the following language be added to protect wild turkeys:

“No person shall take, catch, or kill, or attempt to take, catch, or kill wild turkeys between March 1 and May 1, or any wild bird or wild animal, except waterfowl, between October 1 and February 1 on lands in each of the four designated flood zones along the Mississippi River when flood stage is reached.” (Amended language in the rule will include dates providing an automatic closure to turkey season.)

Discussion followed concerning adding feral hogs to the rule exception.

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger made a motion and seconded by Commissioner Taylor to approve the proposed rule change with amended exemption of feral hogs along with waterfowl. Before a final vote was taken by the Commission Col. Steve Adcock, Chief of Law Enforcement, came forward. Col. Adcock reminded the Commission when deer are trapped on these high areas during a flood and hog hunting is allowed on these high areas, it creates an issue where people are constantly running the deer back into the water. Discussion followed. The Executive Director stated that the staff will work on the language in the proposal to incorporate some of these issues brought forward. The Commission thanked Col.

Adcock for his comment. Chairman Coopwood tabled this motion to be brought back at the next meeting in May with staff recommendations.

PROPOSED – 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 2, Chapter 2 - Deer

- **Rule 2.2 – Deer Seasons and Bag Limits**

- CWD Update

- Collected 3,079 samples collected since July 1, 2019, totaling 7,600 samples overall (4,100 bucks and 3,500 does)
- During 2019 hunting season, 35 additional CWD positives were detected (26 in Benton Co.; 9 in Marshall Co.)
- The current total in Mississippi for CWD positive results is 54.
- Tennessee had 650 additional CWD positive results since the beginning of the hunting season.

- Proposed Rule Changes

Walsh presented the following changes to Rule 2.2 as tools to detect CWD and reduce deer density in response to Chronic Wasting Disease protocol.

- MDWFP may issue either-sex DMAP CWD Management Tags to participating private lands within a 3-mile radius of any known CWD positive animal. Tags may be used during any open deer season with no weapon restrictions. Any deer harvested with tags shall not be subject to the daily or annual bag limit. The use of tags requires: (1) Applications must be submitted prior to tags being issued; (2) The tag must be affixed to the deer prior to moving; (3) All deer harvested with these tags must be submitted for CWD sampling within seven days; (4) All properties receiving tags must submit a report prior to March 1 to MDWFP that details total annual deer harvest from the property, including the total number of tags used.

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger moved to approve staff recommendations, seconded by Commissioner Taylor, and the motion carried.

- To collect samples in deficient areas and truncate sample collection efforts, *mandatory sample collection* during 2-day periods in 3 regions for the 2020-2021 hunting season:
 - a. November 21-22, 2020 - Issaquena & North CWD Management Zones
 - b. January 2-3, 2021 – Southwest Region
 - c. January 16-17, 2021 – Southeast Region

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger moved to approve staff recommendations, seconded by Commissioner Wagner, and the motion carried.

- South Delta Zone Deer Season.
 - Season: October 1 – January 31.
 - Private lands: 2 buck and 2 doe bag limit.
 - Lake George, Shipland, and Sunflower WMAs: 2 buck and 1 doe bag limit
 - Prolonged flooding this past season in this zone. The fawn crop and deer were significantly impacted for 2019.
 - Mississippi River is currently at 50 ft. and backwater is 95+ ft. and has been for a number of months and looks like it will continue through at least a portion of May.

ACTION: Commissioner Wagner moved to approve, seconded by Commissioner Taylor, and the motion carried.

- Date adjustment for Rule 2.2 based on the hunting calendar. Walsh requested approval of hunting season dates to be included in Rule 2.2.

ACTION: Commissioner Wagner moved to approve, seconded by Commissioner Cossar, and the motion carried.

PROPOSED - 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 2, Chapter 5 – Alligator

Ricky Flynt, Wildlife Alligator/Furbearer Coordinator, came forward and presented some minor changes to the rules below. No changes to the seven Zones or their boundaries. No changes in the number of permits (960) total. Last year a total of 922 alligators were harvested on public land, which is the second highest year.

- **Rule 5.2 – Private Lands Alligator**

- Opens 12:00 noon August 28 – 6:00 a.m. September 21, 2020
- Clarify that all Lifetime Licenses are considered a combination hunting license, therefore permit holders and hunting assistants do not have to purchase an additional combination hunt/fish license.

ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Wagner and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, Rule 5.2 was unanimously approved.

- **Rule 5.3 – Public Waters Alligator**

- Opens 12:00 noon August 28 – 12:00 noon September 7, 2020
- Clarify that no other land-locked lakes are open to hunting except those specifically listed.
- Add Moon Lake in Coahoma County in the NW Zone as an open lake for alligator hunting.

- o Clarify that all Lifetime Licenses are considered a combination hunting license, therefore permit holders and hunting assistants do not have to purchase an additional combination hunt/fish license.

Discussion followed on why Moon Lake was being added in the alligator hunt. Flynt responded that the Northwest Zone only has 40 permits and is the least impacted zone. Because the NW Zone has the least amount of public water of the seven zones, MDWFP is always searching for lakes with public access. Flynt said that Randy Sewall, President of the Moon Lake Construction Club, was contacted in January and reported the residents would favor an alligator hunting opportunity. Discussion followed. The Commission suggested a formal meeting or a survey to be conducted with the residents before Moon Lake should be added. The Executive Director stated that a formal letter will be written to the Moon Lake community announcing a question/answer meeting so that everyone can have a voice on whether to open the lake for alligator hunting.

ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Taylor and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, the Commission unanimously approved Rule 5.3 with the exception of Moon Lake, which was tabled for consideration at a later time.

2020-2021 Migratory Game Bird Framework Selections

Houston Havens, Waterfowl Program Coordinator, presented to the Commission the 2020-21 Migratory Game Bird Hunting Season Recommendations which are listed in the table below. Commission changes made at the April 15 meeting are reflected in the chart.

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	DAILY	POSSESSION
Teal (Early Season)	Sept. 12 - 27	6	18
Canada Geese (Early Season)	Sept. 1 - 30	5	15
Woodcock	Dec. 18, 2020 - Jan. 31, 2021	3	9
Snipe	Nov. 14, 2020 - Feb. 28, 2021	8	24
Common & Purple Gallinules	Sept. 1 – Oct 4 AND Nov. 26 – Dec. 31	15 Singly or in aggregate	45 Possession Limit
Rails: Clapper and King	Sept. 1 – Oct 4 AND Nov. 26 - Dec. 31	15 Singly or in aggregate	45 Possession Limit
Rails: Sora and Virginia	Sept. 1 – Oct 4 AND Nov. 26 – Dec. 31	25 Singly or in aggregate	75 Possession Limit

SPECIES	SEASON DATES	DAILY	POSSESSION
Mourning and White-winged Doves (North Zone)	Sept. 5 - Oct 18 AND Oct. 24 - Nov. 21 AND Dec. 23, 2020 - Jan. 16-08, 2021	15 Singly or in aggregate	45 Singly or in aggregate
Mourning and White-winged Doves (South Zone)	Sept. 5 - 20 AND Oct. 10 - Nov. 8 AND Dec. 19, 2020 - Jan. 31, 2021	15 Singly or in aggregate	45 Singly or in aggregate
Ducks, Mergansers, and Coots	Nov. 27 - 29 AND Dec. 4 - 6 AND Dec. 9, 2020 - Jan. 31, 2021	Details Below*	Details Below*
Geese: Canada, White-fronted, Snow, Blue, Ross's, and Brant	Nov. 13 - 29 AND Dec. 4 - 6 AND Dec. 9, 2020 - Jan. 31, 2021	Canada Geese: 3 Snow, Blue, and Ross's: 20 White-fronted: 3 Brant: 1	Canada Geese: 9 Snow, Blue, and Ross's: No Limit White-fronted: 9 Brant: 3
Youth, Veteran, & Active Military Waterfowl Days	Nov. 21, 2020 AND Feb. 6 - 7, 2021	Same as Regular Season	Same as Regular Season

***DUCKS, MERGANSERS, and COOTS daily bag limit and possession:** The duck daily bag limit will include a total of 6 ducks, including no more than 4 mallards (no more than 2 of which may be females), 3 wood ducks, 2 redheads, 1 scaup, 1 pintail, 2 canvasbacks, 1 mottled duck, and 2 black ducks. The merganser daily bag limit will be a total of 5 mergansers, only 2 of which may be hooded mergansers. The coot daily bag limit is 15. The possession limit for ducks, mergansers, and coots is three times the daily bag limit.

ACTION: Motions were made as follows on the 2020-2021 Migratory Game Bird Hunting Season Recommendations.

Motion by Taylor, seconded by Cossar to change the North Zone Dove dates by taking seven days (more or less) out of January and place it after October 10 (staff figuring adjustments so the number of weekends are preserved), and the motion carried with new dates as Sept. 5, 2020 – Oct. 18, 2020 AND Oct. 24, 2020 – Nov. 21, 2020 AND Dec.23, 2020 – Jan. 8, 2020.

Motion by Wagner, seconded by Taylor to approve the South Zone Dove dates as recommended, and the motion carried.

Motion by Wagner, seconded by Taylor to approve Duck Season Recommendations, and the motion carried.

Motion by Wagner, seconded by Taylor, to delete the Nov. 21 date and move that day to Feb. 7 for a two-day weekend on February 6-7, 2021 for Youth, Veteran/Active Military Days, and the motion carried.

Commissioner Taylor requested that staff present for public comment all of the migratory game bird season dates as adopted by the Commission and currently listed under the Proposed Rules on the website.

Wild Turkey Season and Population Update

Adam Butler, Turkey Program Coordinator, presented the following information:

- On Game Check, 9,786 turkey harvests reported
- 70% users harvested 1 bird; 25% two birds; 5% three birds
- There is a perception that more people are home now and turkey hunting.
- Last year was the first year for the WMA app, and people are catching on how to use it.
- WMAs have 20% more harvests this year.
- Chickasaw WMA has the largest harvest this year as well as last year.
- Mississippi State University will take our existing data and produce a harvest turkey model. Turkey Federation is contributing some money to help us. We will have science and solid numbers to base any recommendations. A group from Southeast Mississippi came to the Commission last year with a concern for the low turkey numbers. This model will help us look into this.
- Turkey Summit was originally planned to be held the latter part of May. Meeting timeline is TBD now due to coronavirus.
- Top five counties with the largest harvest are Lafayette, Attala, Copiah, Marshall, and Adams in that order.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law Enforcement Update

Col. Steve Adcock, Chief of Law Enforcement, informed the Commission of 12 fatalities and 10 injuries this past Easter Sunday due to tornados across the state. Two or three days after the storm, Law Enforcement felt lucky that everyone missing was accounted for. Our officers have been helping with traffic control in these areas as well. Officers are still working the lakes, reservoirs, and waterways to insure that people are keeping a safe distance from each other. We are not having any problems except on sandbars with some people partying. A lot of people are fishing and hunting.

Some recent hunters posted on social media a rather large turkey harvest. After an investigation, officers found that they had not reported their harvest on Game Check and had no licenses. Currently, several active cases are being investigated. In Southwest Mississippi, 100 turkeys were harvested with federal charges and arrests made and some possible arrests forthcoming.

Lands Affected by Flood Waters

We are currently looking at high flood water on the Mississippi River.
Vicksburg is cresting near 50.4 ft. today.
Arkansas City crested at 43.5 ft. on April 10th.
Greenville crested at 54.5 ft. on April 9th.
Natchez is anticipated to crest at 57.5 ft.

The Yazoo Backwater Area is expected to crest at 96.5 to 97 ft. this weekend. The gates of the Steele Bayou Control Structure are expected to open this weekend. The water should go down 46 feet in 10 days, which is a significant drop and the backwater will be released.

OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was brought forward.

MDWFP FALLEN OFFICER DEDICATION AND NEXT MEETING DATE

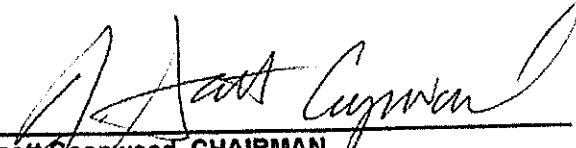
Date: Wednesday, May 14, 2020
Location: 1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211
Time: 10 a.m. MDWFP Fallen Officer Dedication
1 p.m. Educational Session
2 p.m. Business Session

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Chairman asked if there was a need for an Executive Session. Executive Director Polles stated that there was no need for an Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Commission, Commissioner Wagner moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Cossar, and the motion carried. Chairman Coopwood gavelled the meeting into adjournment.



Scott Coopwood, CHAIRMAN

Date



Robert Taylor, VICE CHAIRMAN

Date