

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Thursday, July 16, 2020
8:30 a.m. Educational Session
9:30 a.m. Business Session

1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211

EDUCATIONAL SESSION – 8:30 AM

Wildlife Bureau Awards

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff, presented the following Wildlife awards to personnel who had exhibited outstanding performance and work ethic over the past year. Each awardee was presented a plaque and gift card in recognition of their efforts. Commission recognition and applause followed each presentation.

- *2019 Wildlife WMA Manager of the Year* – Michael Cleveland
- *2019 Wildlife Biologist of the Year* – Brad Holder

Overview of Customer Surveys at WMAs, State Lakes, and State Parks

Jerry Brown, State Lake Coordinator, gave a PowerPoint presentation outlining customer feedback and recommendations on agency facilities by means of surveys conducted from 2017 to March 2020. A total of 8,958 customer surveys reviewing WMAs, State Lakes, and State Parks have been received and 5,691 recommendations. These surveys are the beginning of a database to measure customer satisfaction, activity participation, and age group interests. Customer surveys were temporarily suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Commission applauded these efforts and gave further insights and suggestions:

- Seek corporate sponsors for Parks due to rapid interest in camping during COVID pandemic.
- Add campsites to the new Simpson County Lake.
- List the top five things that need to be done at each WMA, State Lake, and State Park.
- Add an on-line survey option.
- Accept credit card app on customer's phone.
- Need consistency on how customers make payments at lakes, parks, and WMAs.

Overview of Nongame Fish Program at Museum of Natural Science

Charles Knight, Director of the Museum of Natural Science, introduced Matt Wagner, Museum Fish Biologist. Wagner came forward and gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled, "Five-Year Overview of Nongame Fish Program". Due to so many rivers and habitats, Mississippi is one of

the hot spots for fish diversity in the U.S. with over 495 species. This data is updated annually with over 220,000 records. His presentation walked the Commission through how endangered species are collected and then with a recovery plan in place, each species is restocked to their former habitat.

Wagner gave an overview of microfishing in Mississippi. This new fishing challenge requires learning to fish in new ways and to identify fish smaller than the palm of your hand. The goal is to catch 1,000 different species.

Chairman Taylor gaveled a short recess before the beginning of the Business Session.

MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS SESSION – 9:30 AM

PRESENT: Commission Chairman Robert Taylor, Commissioners Billy Mounger, and Bill F. Cossar.

PRESENT via telecommunication: Commissioners Clay Wagner and Scott Coopwood.

Among the MDWFP staff attending were: Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director; Robert Cook, Deputy Executive Director; Jennifer Head, Michael Bolden, Curtis Thornhill, Chip Ward, 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 Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the minutes of the June 17, 2020 Commission meeting were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar moved to approve the agenda for July 16, 2020, Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Dr. Steve Demarais, Professor, Mississippi State University, Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture. Dr. Demarais on behalf of the White-tailed Deer Ecology and

Management Laboratory (Deer Lab) at MSU came to re-iterate findings from their cooperative research which does not support changing the existing CWD regulation banning supplemental feeding and baiting within 25 miles of CWD positive animals.

MSU Deer Lab research, sponsored by MDWFP, has shown that young and adult males from CWD-positive areas will likely move outside the proposed 10-mile radius, which would bring them in contact with uninfected populations, especially if attracted to, and concentrated at, supplemental feeding sites.

In Mississippi, areas with a feeder are visited by deer about 10 times more frequently compared to an equivalent area of the same habitat without a feeder, based on trail-camera data. Food plots concentrate deer more than natural areas, but only half as much as feeders. And, feeders concentrate mouths/saliva within a very small feeder surface area, in contrast to deer foraging across a wide food plot. Infectious CWD prions can survive for years on an exposed surface. Therefore, any concentration of deer at a single location, even separated by weeks or months, will increase the chance of disease exposure.

The transfer of disease-causing agents through normal deer behaviors, such as mutual grooming, cannot be controlled; but, by limiting human activities, the transfer of CWD is minimized and we can attempt to reduce potential disease transfer.

Discussion followed.

Chairman Taylor wanted to go on the record that this Commission wholeheartedly supports the Wildlife Bureau and this discussion is taking place because the 30-day comment period works. We always listen to the science, biologists, and public.

Christopher Winter, President, MS Wildlife Federation. Mr. Winter came today on behalf of Boone and Crockett Club; Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation; CWD Alliance; National Deer Alliance; National Wildlife Federation; Quality Deer Management Association; Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership; Wildlife Management Institute; Alabama Wildlife Federation; Arkansas Wildlife Federation; Mississippi Outfitters Association; Mississippi Wildlife Federation; Rural Property Rights Association of Mississippi; and Tennessee Wildlife Federation.

As the representative of millions of hunters, conservationists, and wildlife professionals, Mr. Winter urged the MDWFP Commission to follow national best practices to manage the spread of chronic wasting disease (CWD) in Mississippi, as recommended by MDWFP biologists. Specifically, to request that the Commission maintain the current 25-mile radii structure of CWD Management Zones, including a ban on supplemental feeding, and to ban the change from a 25-mile radii to 10-mile radii with two 25 mile "surveillance" zones (which included carcass transportation restrictions but no ban on supplemental feeding).

Chairman Taylor wanted to go on the record again that this Commission is not in conflict with the MDWFP Wildlife Bureau. This is a good example of how the 30-day comment period works. We appreciate this process.

Commission Mounger added that when the Commission proposed the change from a 25-mile radii to 10-mile radii with two 25 mile "surveillance" zones last month, this was thought to be a policy change to go out for comment, not a rule change. The Commission listens to the science, MDWFP biologists, and Dr. Demarais; it is a collaborative effort.

Discussion followed.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, Director of License/Boat Registration Division, presented the License Sales Report for the month of June 2020. The total revenue for the end of June is up. Fishing Licenses were up more than 26,000.

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident license sales – up 4.52% - \$300,000
 - Small Hunt/Freshwater Fishing – up 20%
 - 3 day Freshwater Fishing – up 38%
 - Res WMA user permits – up 10%
 - Commercial Fishing – up 28%
- Non-resident license sales – down 1%
 - NR Freshwater Fishing – up 14%
 - NR 1 day Freshwater Fishing – up 13%
 - NR WMA user Permits – up 3%
- Permit category – up 1%
- Lifetime License category – down 2%

Total WMA App Downloads – 32,000

Auto renewal has been a big success with 67,567 customers signed up for auto renewals since February, 2019.

Sportsman's License Package is the best selling.

Thompson reported that the Boat Registration backlog, due to COVID-19 quarantine of the entire License Bureau, is now caught up with 2,600 registrations last week. Boat registration is open to the public on the website, as well as, in person.

WILDLIFE

FINAL – 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**

Rule 1.5 was tabled at the April meeting in order for staff to amend the language on spring turkey season and feral hog hunting during flooding. Rule 1.5, as amended at the May meeting, was tabled by the Commission at the June 17, 2020 Commission meeting to allow for an additional 30 days of comment based on comments received.

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff, came forward at the July 16, 2020 Commission Meeting to recommend tabling this rule again until further data is received concerning the effects of long-term flooding compared to short-term flooding on turkeys.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar made a motion to table FINAL Rule 1.5 until further data is received. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the motion carried. FINAL Adoption of Rule 1.5 was laid on the table, subject to call.

FINAL – 40 Miss. Admin. Code – Part 2, Chapter 2 – White-tailed Deer

- **Rule 2.9 – CWD Management Zone Delineation**
- **Rule 2.7 – Cervid Carcass Importation/Exportation**

Due to public comments received during the past 30 days, Walsh recommended tabling both FINAL Rules 2.7 and 2.9 until a new CWD Management Plan could be drafted and rules would be revamped according to that plan. The 2017 CWD Management Plan was based on other states and was written before a deer actually tested positive for CWD in Mississippi. The Wildlife Bureau would like to look at approaches for a long-term policy in the CWD Plan for Mississippi.

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger made a motion to table FINAL Rules 2.7 and 2.9, subject to call. Commissioner Wagner seconded the motion and the motion carried.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law Enforcement Update

Col. Steve Adcock, Chief of Law Enforcement, reported that 525 citations were issued this past month with trespassing being the number one violation. Law Enforcement patrolled the waters during the Fourth of July and contacted 1,240 boats and 266 canoes, kayaks, etc. Three stolen boats were recovered during the month. Officers helped with the MSSP State Tournament at

McIvor. All three shooting facilities were open for business with 837 customers at Turcotte; 519 at McIvor; and 418 at McHenry.

Reinstatement Requests

Two requests were made for license reinstatement. Col. Adcock stated that each violator had taken his Hunter Education class and paid his fines. Each was asked to come forward and state the circumstances of his arrest before the Commission.

- **Jonah Caskey, West Point.** Caskey stated that he was riding around in his vehicle after dark with some friends. They saw a deer, stopped, and a friend shot the deer. There were girls in the car with them. His fines totaled \$2,400.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar made a motion to approve Caskey's reinstatement with the provision that if he receives another citation during the next 12 months, he will serve the full three years for a second offense. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the motion carried.

- **Christopher Rayner, Lena.** Rayner stated that he was driving around after dark with his son, who was 13 years old at the time. He saw a coyote cross the road and turned a light on the coyote. He had a loaded shotgun in his vehicle but did not shoot. He learned that you cannot shine a light on someone else's property without permission and not to carry a loaded gun in the car.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar made a motion to approve Rayner's reinstatement with the provision that if he receives another citation in the next twelve months, he will serve the full three years for a second offense. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Outreach Programs Update

Michelle Carter, Director of Outreach Programs, came forward and presented a PowerPoint presentation and a handout for the Commission on the MSSP Youth Program. The MSSP State Tournament was June 24-25. Shooting Sports are classified by both the CDC and the NFHS as "Lowest Risk" because competitions are practices are done with social distancing and no sharing of equipment. This makes shooting an attractive sport for the schools to offer during COVID-19 pandemic.

Carter reported that 47 schools have signed up for MSSP this fall; 19 private, 23 public, and 5 clubs.

McHenry Shooting Facility's clay range is still in the planning stages. The Commission recommended talking to Winchester to sponsor the clay range.

OTHER BUSINESS

Order – Reopen Old Natchez Trace Lake at Trace State Park

Larry Pugh, Fisheries Chief of Staff, presented an Order by request of State Parks and the Fisheries Bureau to open Old Natchez Trace Lake at Trace State Park, in Belden, Mississippi, for fishing and recreation on August 5, 2020. This opening would be subject to Executive Orders from the Governor regarding COVID 19 response.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar made a motion to approve the Order, seconded by Mounger, and the motion carried. Said Order, by reference hereto, is made a part of these minutes.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Date: Thursday, August 20, 2020
Location: 1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211
Time: 8:30 a.m. Educational Session
9:30 a.m. Business Session

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Chairman asked if there was a need for an Executive Session. Executive Director Polles stated that there was a need for an Executive Session to discuss budgetary items.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar made a motion to close the meeting to determine the need for Executive Session for discussion on budgetary line items that could affect the continued employment of specific employees. Commissioner Mounger 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 for the discussion of budgetary line items that could affect the continued employment of specific employees.

The meeting was closed, and the room cleared.

Discussion followed.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar made a motion to enter Executive Session to discuss budgetary line items that could affect the continued employment of specific employees. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to enter Executive Session.

Counsel announced to those very few remaining outside the conference room that the Commission had entered Executive Session to discuss budgetary line items that could affect the continued employment of specific employees.

Jennifer Head, Budget Director, updated the Commission on several budget matters to include the recently approved department budget for FY 2021, being HB 1708 of the 2020 Regular Legislative Session. Head pointed out several areas where the department's spending authority had been cut. Specifically, Head focused on the cuts in General Fund appropriations that could affect the State Parks.

A brief discussion followed.

Head gave a brief overview of the FY 2022 budget request that is currently being prepared.

No action was required of the Commission.

ACTION: There being no further items for discussion in Executive Session, Commissioner Cossar made a motion to open the meeting. Commissioner Mounger 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. No votes were taken.

ADJOURNMENT

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



Robert Taylor, CHAIRMAN

8/20/2020

Date



Billy Mounger, VICE CHAIRMAN

8/20/2020

Date