

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Thursday, March 18, 2021

1 PM - Educational Session

2 PM - Business Session

1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211

Original Morning Meeting Time Was Changed to Afternoon
due to Inclement Weather Conditions

EDUCATIONAL SESSION – 1 PM

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

Among the MDWFP staff attending were: Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director; Lynn Posey, Chief of Staff; Larry Pugh, Jennifer Head, Brian Ferguson, Col. Steve Adcock, Russ Walsh, Jason Thompson, André Hollis, Brian Byrd, and Doug Mann.

WILD TURKEY PROGRAM UPDATE

Adam Butler, Turkey Program Coordinator, presented a PowerPoint presentation on the “2021 Mississippi Wild Turkey Report”, which may be viewed on the MDWFP website. His presentation included the findings from numerous datasets on field-based wild turkey studies, which MDWFP uses to evaluate two underlying sets of questions needed to make informed decisions if changes to Mississippi’s wild turkey hunting season are to be made:

- First what, if any, effect does the timing of spring turkey season have on the bird’s reproduction and recruitment?
- Secondly, how would various changes to the season be expected to influence the number of future turkeys available to hunters?

As more and more hunters have expressed concerns over turkey populations, calls to address Mississippi’s turkey season have increased. Despite this, wise management depends upon data-driven decision where all available information is used to forecast the likely implications of policy decisions before they are made.

A study currently being conducted as a partnership between MDWFP and researchers from the Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Aquaculture at Mississippi State University will evaluate how spring hunting frameworks may determine the number of turkeys available in subsequent years. This study will continue through 2023 and initial project studies are not currently available. Some of the various alternatives being evaluated include: delayed opening dates, variations in season length, changes to the bag limit, bag limit splits, mid-day closures, etc.

MINUTES

BUSINESS SESSION – 2 PM

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

Among the MDWFP staff attending were: Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director; Lynn Posey, Chief of Staff; Larry Pugh, Jennifer Head, Brian Ferguson, Col. Steve Adcock, Russ Walsh, Jason Thompson, André Hollis, Brian Byrd, and Doug Mann.

Chairman Taylor welcomed special guests Coach Bob Tyler and Rev. Robert Cook, (retired) MDWFP Deputy Executive Director.

OPENING PRAYER

Chairman Taylor asked Rev. Robert Cook to open the meeting with prayer.

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, the minutes of the February 15, 2021 Commission meeting were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

ACTION: Commissioner Wagner moved to approve the March 18, 2021 agenda as presented, Commissioner Coopwood seconded the motion and the motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments were received.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, Director of License/Boat Registration Division, reported that the total revenue for the month of February was up over 12% (\$1,600,00 increase in revenue compared to the end of February last year).

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident License Sales – up 9%
 - All Game/Freshwater Fishing – up 3%
 - Sportsmen – up 8%
 - Small game/freshwater fishing – up 6%
 - WMA permits – up 19%
 - Waterfowl Stamp – up 22%
- Non-resident License Sales – up 12%
 - NR All Game Hunting – up 13%
 - NR Freshwater Fishing – up 14%
 - NR Arch/Primitive Permit – up 19%
 - NR Duck Stamps – up 21%
- Permit category – up 16%
- Lifetime License category – up 33%

Autorenewal – 45,701 have signed up compared to 28,385 last year.

License packages sold are 20,152 this year compared to 9,909 last year.

MDWFP 2020 Government Experience Award

Jason Thompson recognized Ursula Claxton, Michael McRae, and Josh Carver for their contributions to the MDWFP Hunting and Fishing app which gained recognition through Government Technology's Center for Digital Government and a winner of the 2020 Government Experience Award Hunting-Fishing Citizen Platform. Thompson asked them to stand and a round of applause followed from the Commission and audience.

WILDLIFE

2020 Alligator Hunting Season Report

Ricky Flynt, Wildlife Alligator/Furbearer Coordinator, presented to the Commission the "2020 Alligator Hunting Season Report". The alligator rules and regulations have been tweaked for the past eight years and the current system has been very successful for gator hunters and gator population. Many states are looking to MDWFP as a standard due to its success. This past year brought a total harvest of 876 gators with the average length of 7.75 ft. Only 1-2% of gators are harvested so there is no threat of endangering the species.

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

Flynt presented the following rule change:

- **Rule 5.3 – Public Waters Alligator**
 1. Opens 12:00 noon August 27 until 12:00 noon September 6, 2021
 2. Part A (4.c.) Clarifies that Lake Bolivar is specifically an open lake (connected to Deer Creek – therefore a public waterway).

Permit Allocation

- No changes to the seven (7) Zones or their boundaries.
- No change in number of allocated permits (960 total).

Number of permits per zone: 2021

| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| ○ Northwest | 40 |
| ○ Northeast | 130 |
| ○ West Central | 190 |
| ○ Southwest | 190 |
| ○ South Central | 150 |
| ○ Southeast | 160 |
| ○ Pearl/Ross Barnett | 100 |

ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, the Commission unanimously approved PROPOSED changes to Rule 5.3 as recommended by staff.

Executive Order Ratification – Special Youth Hunt on St. Catherine's Creek NWR

Doug Mann, Executive Staff Officer, explained that the Youth-only Special Turkey Hunt at Saint Catherine's Creek National Wildlife Refuge was scheduled before the Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks had set the dates for statewide youth turkey hunts. The Saint Catherine's Creek Youth Turkey Hunt was scheduled two days prior to the dates set by the Commission. This scheduling outside of the dates established by the Commission was the result of simple error. The Executive Director found that none of the young hunters who were drawn for one of these opportunities should be penalized due to harmless error and allowed the hunt to go forward since it would not have a negative impact on the turkey population in the surrounding area. The Executive Director also found that the Special Youth-only Turkey Hunt at Saint Catherine's National Wildlife Refuge met the intent of MISS. CODE ANN. §49-7-39 to provide unique hunting opportunities for youth and should go forward on the scheduled dates of March 6 and 7, 2021. Therefore, the Executive Director, by Executive Order on March 5, 2021, and on behalf of the Commission, authorized the hunt to go forward.

ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Wagner and seconded by Commissioner Cossar, the Commission unanimously ratified Executive Order for the Youth Turkey Hunt at Saint Catherine's Creek National Wildlife Refuge on March 6 and 7, 2021. A copy of the Executive Order has been appended to the minutes.

PARKS

FINAL – 40 Mississippi Administrative Code Part 6, Chapter 1 – General Regulations for Mississippi State Parks

- **Rule 1.1 – State Park Fees**

Stu Rayburn, Manager, Buccaneer State Park, recommended approval by the Commission since there have been no changes to Rule 1.1 and no comments have been received from the public.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar moved to approve FINAL Rule 1.1 as presented, Commissioner Wagner seconded the motion and the motion carried.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law Enforcement Update

Col. Steve Adcock, Chief of Law Enforcement, reported that 190 citations were issued in February 2021 with “No License” being the number one violation, “Trespassing” was second, “Unlawful Possession” was third, and “Hunting after Hours” was fourth. Citations were down this month due to an ice storm which lasted a week during the month of February.

Officers continued their duties by assisting with MSSP events at Turcotte, locating illegal turkey baiting, youth squirrel hunting events, recovery of a drowning victim in Monroe County, and working detail on the Mississippi River. All three shooting facilities were closed during the ice storm and customer counts were down due to weather conditions: 120 customers at Turcotte; 154 at McIvor; and 256 at McHenry.

Officer Recognition

Col. Adcock had the honor of presenting awards to the following law enforcement officers who made outstanding contributions in their line of duty during 2020. Each officer came forward and was given his award, followed by applause from the Commission and audience.

- **Lt. Jason Redden** – Medal of Valor was awarded to Lt. Redden for exhibiting exceptional courage, regardless of personal safety, as he rescued an individual and two pets from a burning house.
- **PVT. Brian A. Tallent** – Medal of Valor was also awarded to PVT. Tallent showing exceptional courage and insight in rescuing an individual being kidnapped. He also performed life-saving measures on the victim before being air-lifted to a nearby hospital. The victim survived and the suspect received multiple charges, including attempted murder.

- **PVT. Payton Marascalco** – SEAFWA Officer of the Year award was presented to PVT Marascalco who demonstrated outstanding responsiveness to state and federal violations. During this past year he wrote 479 citations with a majority following through in court with state and federal convictions.

OTHER BUSINESS

Resolution Honoring Robert L. Cook

Doug Mann came forward and read a resolution honoring the service and career of Reverend Robert Lee Cook who faithfully served the people of the State of Mississippi for over thirty years. The resolution was signed by each member of the Commission and the Executive Director. A framed copy of the resolution was presented to Mr. Cook. Chairman Taylor presented a bible, signed by each member of the Commission, as a memento of Mr. Cook's service as a Pastor of the Gospel. The Executive Director and Col. Adcock presented Mr. Cook with a gift on behalf of MDWFP. Mr. Cook expressed his appreciation to the Commission, Executive Director, and staff. Applause followed.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Date: Wednesday, April 14, 2021
Location: Paul B. Johnson State Park, 319 Geiger Lake Road, Hattiesburg, MS
Time: No Educational Session
1:30 p.m. Business Session

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Chairman asked if there was a need for an Executive Session. Polles stated that there was a need for an Executive Session to discuss personnel matters to include job performance of specific individuals in specific positions and discussion regarding the prospective purchase of land.

ACTION: Commissioner Wagner made a motion to close the meeting to determine the need for Executive Session for discussion on personnel matters to include job performance of specific individuals in specific positions and discussion regarding the prospective purchase of land. Commissioner Cossar seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to close the meeting.

Mr. Mann announced to those present that the meeting was now closed to determine the need for Executive Session regarding personnel matters to include job performance of specific individuals in specific positions and discussion regarding the prospective purchase of land.

The meeting was closed, and the room cleared.

ACTION: Commissioner Wagner made a motion to enter Executive Session to discuss personnel matters to include job performance of specific individuals in specific positions, and discussion regarding the prospective purchase of land. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to enter Executive Session.

Mr. Mann announced to those present outside the meeting room that the Commission had entered Executive Session to discuss personnel matters to include job performance of specific individuals in specific positions, and discussion regarding the prospective purchase of land.

Dr. Polles updated the Commission on several personnel changes that were in the works due to attrition and other factors.

Discussion followed; however, no action was required of the Commission, at this time.

Dr. Polles and Art Kennard updated the Commission on several tracts of land now available for purchase contiguous to properties already under agency management. More specifically, Mr. Kennard advised the Commission that appraisals for a desirable property in Yalobusha County were in and provided the Commission with those numbers.

Discussion followed.

Upon motion made by Commissioner Wagner and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the Commission voted unanimously to make an offer of the average of the two appraisals to purchase the Yalobusha County property.

Dr. Polles updated the Commission on more acreage that was coming onto the market in the vicinity of other WMAs currently under MDWFP management. The Commission encouraged staff to pursue those properties and obtain appraisals if needed.

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

Mr. Mann announced that the meeting had re-opened and that the Commission had authorized staff to make an offer to purchase land in Yalobusha County.

ADJOURNMENT

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



Robert Taylor, CHAIRMAN

4/14/21

Date



Billy Mounger, VICE CHAIRMAN

4/14/21

Date

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

EXECUTIVE ORDER:

**TO RATIFY YOUTH TURKEY HUNT AT SAINT CATHERINE'S
CREEK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
TO BE HELD MARCH 6 AND 7, 2021.**

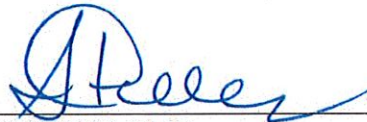
PURSUANT TO the authority set forth in MISS. CODE ANN. §49-1-29 and MISS. CODE ANN. §49-7-39(3), the Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP), hereby finds that the Youth-only Special Turkey Hunt at Saint Catherine's Creek National Wildlife Refuge was scheduled before the Mississippi Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (Commission) set the dates for statewide youth turkey hunts;

The Executive Director further finds that although the Saint Catherine's Creek Youth Turkey Hunt is scheduled two days prior to the dates set by the Commission, the scheduling outside of the dates established by the Commission was the result of simple error;

The Executive Director further finds that no young hunter who has been drawn for one of these opportunities should be penalized due to harmless error, and allowing the hunt to go forward will not have a negative impact on the turkey population in the surrounding area; and

Finally, the Executive Director finds that the Special Youth-only Turkey Hunt at Saint Catherine's National Wildlife Refuge meets the intent of MISS. CODE ANN. §49-7-39 to provide unique hunting opportunities for youth, and should go forward on the scheduled dates of March 6 and 7, 2021.

SO ORDERED, this the 5th day of March, 2021.



SAM POLLES, Ph.D.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR