

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Wednesday, May 12, 2021

1 p.m. Educational Session 2 p.m. Business Session
1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211

1:00 PM

EDUCATIONAL SESSION

PRESENT: Commission Chairman Robert Taylor, Commissioners Billy Mounger, Clay Wagner, Scott Coopwood, 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, Amy Blaylock, Jerry Brown, Andre Hollis, Toney Fleming, and Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General. Special Guest, Representative Scott Bounds was also in attendance.

Brian Ferguson, Director of Administrative Services, presented a PowerPoint presentation with an overview of funding and plans for improvements over the next three years for Parks. Funds are not currently available to fund all objectives at once, so an investment prioritization broken into three phases was proposed. Each phase is implemented within a Mississippi fiscal year starting with Fiscal Year 2022 and subsequently thereafter as new funds become available. Park improvements were prioritized based on a combination of federal and state funding timelines, public impact, return on investment, and administrative efficiency. Phase 1 will encompass six state parks in the southern third of the state; Phase 2 – five state parks in the northern third; and Phase 3 with five parks in the central area. By grouping the parks together, the following benefits were noted: (1) a single professional can be engaged for the preplanning of capital improvement projects within proximity to one another, reducing costs and administrative burden; and (2) reduced travel distances and time between sites should lower contractor expenses, resulting in lower bids.

Discussion followed. No action was taken by the Commission during the Educational Session.

2:00 PM

BUSINESS SESSION MINUTES

PRESENT: Commission Chairman Robert Taylor, Commissioners Billy Mounger, Clay Wagner, Scott Coopwood, 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, Amy Blaylock, Jerry Brown, Andre Hollis, Toney Fleming, and Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General. Special Guest, Representative Scott Bounds was welcomed by the Chairman.

OPENING PRAYER

Wildlife Chief of Staff, Russ Walsh, opened the meeting with prayer.

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Coopwood, the minutes of the April 14, 2021 Commission meeting were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

The Executive Director informed the Commission of the following items which needed to be added to the May 12, 2021 agenda:

- Wildlife Bureau – Add Proposed Rule 2.7 – Prohibition on Cervid Carcass Importation
- Move Public Comment-MS Hunting Dog Association letter to Wildlife Bureau Section

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar moved to approve the agenda for May 12, 2021 as amended, Commissioner Wagner seconded the motion and the motion carried.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, Director of License/Boat Registration Division, presented the License Sales Report for the month of April 2021. The total revenue for the end of April is up 12% from last year, close to a \$2 million increase compared to sales last April.

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident license sales – up 7%
 - Res Sportsman – up 8%
 - All Game – up 2%
 - Small Game – up 3%
 - Res WMA User Permit – up 16%
 - State Waterfowl Stamp – up 23%
- Non-resident license sales – up 15%
 - NR Freshwater Fishing – up 26%
 - NR All Game – up 13%
 - NR Arch-Prim Weapons – up 19%
 - NR Freshwater Fishing – up 26%
 - NR 3-day Freshwater Fishing – up 51%
 - NR Spring Turkey Permits – up 26%
 - NR WMA User Permit – up 23%
- Permit category – up 16%
- Lifetime License category – up 34%

WILDLIFE

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

Rules 1.1 – 1.46 – WMA Regulations

Ward Bayou WMA – Rule 1.25

Walsh stated that multiple public comments had been received. A letter received from David Smith, President, Mississippi Hunting Dog Association, was brought forward for discussion and a copy has been appended to the minutes. The following concerns at Ward Bayou WMA mentioned in the letter were addressed below:

- **No Buckshot**
The U. S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) does not allow buckshot on any hunting lands within the Mobile district, so to be consistent, they requested it not be allowed on any mitigation lands, which includes Ward Bayou WMA. Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General, also provided a copy of the *USACE Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway 2020-21 Hunting/Trapping Regulations*, citing “5(B) - No buckshot, dogs, or man drives are allowed for deer hunting”.
- **Small Game Hunting with Dogs**
The USACE is mandated to protect critical habitat for threatened and endangered species, including the gopher tortoise and dusky gopher frog. The COE requested closing only the current still-hunting area of Ward Bayou WMA to all dog hunting to further protect this sensitive area (leaving the remaining 12,130 acres open to dog hunting).

Phil Bryant WMA – Rule 1.46

For clarification, a slight change was made to the Phil Bryant WMA since the last Commission meeting to include:

- *Last two weeks be open for waterfowl on the Backwoods Unit with clarification that it ends at noon.*

ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Coopwood and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, the Commission unanimously approved FINAL WMA Regulations (Rules 1.1 - 1.46), with the clarification change to Rule 1.46.

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

Rule 2.2 – Deer Seasons and Bag Limits

No comments were received and staff recommendation to approve for FINAL passage Rule 2.2.

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger moved to approve staff recommendations on FINAL Rule 2.2, seconded by Commissioner Coopwood, and the motion carried.

FINAL – 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 2, Chapter 8 – Regulations regarding Animals in Captivity and Enclosures**Rule 8.2 – Regulations for Enclosures**

No comments were received and staff recommendation was made for final passage.

ACTION: Commissioner Wagner moved to approve FINAL passage of Rule 8.2, seconded by Commissioner Cossar, and the motion carried.

PROPOSED – 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 2, Chapter 2 - Deer**Rule 2.7 – Prohibition on Cervid Carcass Importation to Protect MS from CWD**

SECTION C: 1 - 7 were amended as follows (underlined verbiage reflects amendment and C. 3 - 5 are listed due to numbering change with new C.3.):

- C. 1. Meat from cervids that has been completely deboned or quarters or other portions of meat with no part of the spinal column or head attached (bone-in quarters).
- C. 3. Hunters may only transport a deer head outside of a MDWFP-defined CWD Management Zone to a permitted taxidermist participating in the CWD collection program. A CWD sample number must be obtained from the participating taxidermist prior to transporting the deer head outside of the MDWFP-defined CWD Management Zone. This sample number accompany the deer head while in transport and be available for inspection by Law Enforcement upon request. The deer head must be delivered to the participating taxidermist within 5 days of receiving the sample number.
- C. ~~3.~~ 4. Cleaned teeth
- C. ~~4.~~ 5. Finished taxidermy and antler products.
- C. ~~5.~~ 6. Hides and tanned projects.
- C. ~~6.~~ 7. Any portions of white-tailed deer originating from land outside of a MDWFP-defined CWD Management Zone between the Mississippi River levees in Arkansas and Louisiana.

Discussion followed.

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger moved to approve PROPOSED Rule 2.7 as recommended by staff, seconded by Commissioner Cossar, and the motion carried.

PARKS**Parks Update**

Andre Hollis, Director of Park Operations, stated that Parks' revenue is currently \$4.9 million for this year, which is a good comeback from the pandemic. Highlights of his report include:

- Kids camps are closed due to the proximity of eight bunkbeds (16 people) per cabin and food service is not yet available. Chairman Taylor voiced his opposition to closing the camps, unless there is a CDC or Mississippi guideline mandating closure.
- Percy Quin's park office is currently being updated, along with updates to water, electricity, and sewer for 32 campsites.
- Buccaneer – A slide is being added for the pre-school children and 44 campsites are being upgraded on the gulf view. Bids have not been awarded for this yet.
- J.P. Coleman and John Kyle – Due to material shortage, renovations which were to be completed in May are now scheduled for September.
- Wall Doxey - bath house renovation should be completed soon.
- Tishomingo – problem with discharge of wastewater at the treatment plant. The pool will remain closed this summer due to plumbing problems. Campsites are being updated, too.
- Hugh White – AmeriCorps will be back August 6 – October 19 to help.
- Parks Car Tags - 327 pre-orders.
- Parks App - 1,800 Apple downloads & 500 Android downloads
- Golf Cart Fees – Just starting charging \$10 permit fee on May 1st and received \$2,100 the first week at Buccaneer, Lake Lowndes, Paul B Johnson, John Kyle, and Percy Quinn. Plans are to expand to other parks.
- Premium campsites - \$50,000 revenue the first week (May 1 – 8) and an additional \$13,000 due to the \$4 increase in the premium campsite charge.

Clarkco State Park Update

Toney Fleming, Manager of Clarkco State Park, prepared a handout for the Commission. Highlights of his presentation include:

- Clarkco's 83rd birthday this year
- Guests can enjoy 21 cabins, 43 RV pads, 3 pavilions, splash pad, swimming, hiking, fishing, 9-hole golf, future mountain bike path (currently under construction) and lodge.
- AmeriCorps will be coming back later this year.
- Events planned this year: June 12 5K Lake Run; Sept. 11 Trail Run; Sept. 18 Kids Fishing Rodeo; and October 23 Second Annual Bluegrass Festival
- Friends of Clarkco established in 2017 – Friends have raised money through events and by selling benches in memory of loved ones. They have also furnished materials for improving RV pads and refurbishing cabins. Friends have also provided meals for volunteers working at the park.

Chairman Taylor suggested inviting all Friends of the Park groups to meet together where ideas may be shared and the passion for the beauty and enjoyment of the parks could be spread among potential corporate sponsors and everyday citizens.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law Enforcement Update

Col. Steve Adcock, Chief of Law Enforcement, thanked the members of the Commission for attending the Fallen Officer Memorial earlier that day.

Adcock reported that 361 citations were issued for the month of April with "No License" being the number one violation, "Supplemental Feeding" was second, "Trespassing" third, and "No WMA Permit" was fourth.

Officers assisted with the MSSP State Shoot at Turcotte, assisted disabled hunters, documented evidence in a baiting case in Newton County; handled nuisance alligators; conducted a career fair in Grenada County; and assisted where needed during several storms in April. Customer counts at our shooting ranges are: 228 at Turcotte; 372 at McIvor; and 313 at McHenry.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Date: Wednesday, June 16, 2021

Location: Buccaneer State Park, 1150 S. Beach Blvd, Waveland, MS 39576

Time: 9 a.m.

OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was presented.

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 pending litigation 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 of pending litigation and discussion regarding the prospective purchase of land. Commissioner Coopwood seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to close the meeting.

Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General, announced to those present that the meeting was now closed to determine the need for Executive Session to discuss pending litigation and the prospective purchase of land.

The meeting was closed, and the room cleared. Discussion was held to determine the need for executive session to discuss pending litigation and the prospective purchase of land.

ACTION: Commissioner Wagner made a motion to enter Executive Session to discuss to pending litigation and the prospective purchase of land. Commissioner Coopwood seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to enter Executive Session.

Mr. Malone announced to those present outside the meeting room that the Commission had entered Executive Session to discuss pending litigation and the prospective purchase of land.

During Executive Session Drew Malone discussed that the pending litigation discussed at the last Commission Meeting had been settled and discussed the settlement terms and conditions surrounding the settlement. Discussion followed and the Commission indicated that they supported counsel's settlement. No action was required of the Commission at this time.


Dr. Polles updated the Commission on certain tracts of land which have been identified as being for sale, the purchase of which would benefit existing WMAs in the areas where the properties are located. Discussion followed. No action was required of the Commission at this time.

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

Mr. Malone announced to those individuals located outside the Commission Room that the meeting had re-opened.

ADJOURNMENT

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



Robert Taylor, CHAIRMAN

6-16-2021

Date

Billy Mounger, VICE CHAIRMAN

Date



MISSISSIPPI HUNTING DOG ASSOCIATION, INC.

David Smith
42 M.K. Lane
Poplarville, MS 39470

April 25, 2021

Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks
1505 Eastover Drive
Jackson, MS 39211

MDWFP Commissioners,

This letter is written in response to the proposed 2021-2022 Wildlife Management Area (WMA) regulations released at the April 2021 Commission Meeting. Of particular note were the proposals to ban the use of buckshot throughout Ward Bayou WMA and ban small game hunting with dogs in the still hunting area of Ward Bayou WMA. Both proposals are contrary to the long standing practices of allowing both on Ward Bayou WMA and the Mississippi Hunting Dog Association (MHDA) would like to request that the MDWFP Commission reconsider these proposals for the following reasons:

1. **Buckshot:** The prohibition of the use of buckshot, especially in the deer hunting with dogs area, is of particular concern. The terrain is such that the use of shotguns with slugs, rifles, etc. is not suitable for hunters standing on the ground. The WMA consists of thickets and sloughs, which result in close range encounters with deer and hogs. When asked why this ban was being proposed, it was stated by a MDWFP biologist that the land is owned by the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and that it is prohibited on USACE property. It should be noted that Ward Bayou is primarily an undeveloped tract of land in comparison to other USACE properties and that this 'rule' prohibiting buckshot was not provided by the MDWFP biologist and could not be found in an effort to research.
2. **Small Game Hunting with Dogs:** A MDWFP biologist stated that the proposal to ban the use of small game hunting with dogs in the still hunting area was due to a designation of this area as a protected area for a certain species of frog. It was also stated that small game hunting with dogs would still be allowed in the deer hunting with dogs area. What studies have been conducted that indicate the use of hunting dogs would be detrimental to this frog? As stated earlier, small game hunting with dogs has been a long standing tradition in this area. The loss of this area would be detrimental to those who have historically hunted with their small game dogs there.

It is also important to note that both of the banned items being proposed in Ward Bayou WMA are allowed in the same capacities on the Pascagoula River WMA which is the same river system, just a few miles to the north. If you have any questions or would like to discuss or any issue with me further, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Smith
President, Mississippi Hunting Dog Association