

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Thursday, June 16, 2021

**No Educational Session 9 a.m. Business Session
Buccaneer State Park, Waveland, MS**

9:00 a.m.

BUSINESS SESSION MINUTES

PRESENT: Commission Chairman Robert Taylor, Commissioners Clay Wagner, Scott Coopwood, and Bill F. Cossar. Commissioner William Mounger was present via Telecommunication.

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, Andre Hollis, Doug Mann, and Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General. Chairman welcomed guests attending the meeting.

OPENING PRAYER

Brian Ferguson, Director of Administrative Services, opened the meeting with prayer.

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Coopwood, the minutes of the May 12, 2021, Commission meeting were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar moved to approve the agenda for June 16, 2021, Commissioner Wagner seconded the motion and the motion carried.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Brian Ferguson presented the License Sales Report for the month of May 2021. The total revenue for the end of May is up 11% (\$1.8 million) from last year.

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident license sales – up 5%
 - Res Sportsman – up 7%
 - All Game – up 14%
 - Res WMA User Permit – up 15%
- Non-resident license sales – up 14%
 - NR Freshwater Fishing – up 18%
 - NR All Game – up 13%
 - NR Arch-Prim Weapons – up 19%
 - NR 3-day Freshwater Fishing – up 43%
 - NR Small Game Annual – up 10%
- Permit category – up 16%
- Lifetime License category – up 31%

Auto renewal customers increased by 15,000 users from last year for a total of 58,422 users. License Packages sold increased by 11,403 from last year for a total 23,606 licenses.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Three written comments were received during this past month:

- Turkey Season Comment - Requesting a later turkey season opening on all public lands in Mississippi, including WMA's, National Forest, Corps of Engineers, etc. like other southeastern states. Private lands would still open on March 15th, but the public lands would delay.

MDWFP response – Russ Walsh stated that the Wildlife Bureau is in the process of re-evaluating spring turkey hunting in Mississippi and for the past three years test studies have been in progress through several Wildlife Management Areas. In these tests the opening day was delayed until April 1st on a subset of WMAs while sister WMAs, with like characteristics, opened on March 15th. Wildlife staff are now in the process of analyzing the data and trends from these areas. Our plan is to use that evaluation to determine whether an April 1 framework should be expanded to other areas. An additional research study is also underway with the College of Forest Resources at Mississippi State University. MSU is using a voluminous dataset MDWFP has gathered through the years to predict how changes to the framework of our turkey season may affect the number of gobblers available to hunters. Consideration are also being given to a delayed opener, shorter season, reduced bag limits, etc. The outcome of these studies may be a spring or two away but in the best interests of hunters and the wild turkey resource.

- Alligator Draw Comment – Comment that he has registered for the draw every year since the program began and has never been drawn. His question was if the computer could be programmed to recognize hunters who have never been drawn or those who have been drawn multiple times.

MDWFP Response – This past year a 1,000 more people applied for permits than previous years with the same number of permits (960 permits) being issued. Therefore, the odds of being drawn are even less than in previous years. Commissioner Mounger stated that he has never been selected either in the random draw. The number of permits issued is based on safety for the number of boats and hunters in each area and protecting the resource.

- Board of Directors of the Rural Property Rights Association of Mississippi written comment in response to previous comment and response of MDWFP on dog deer hunting – Mr. Thomas Pitts, Rural Property Rights Association, Friends of the Desoto, came forward and asked the Commission to recommend to the Legislative Branch that authority to promulgate regulations under Section §49-7-31, which protect private property from trespassing dogs hunting deer.

Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General, stated that the Legislature is very specific on what is allowed on hunting deer with dogs. Section §49-7-31 states that 39 days of hunting deer with dogs is the current law. That is the only restrictive requirement. Anything other than that the Commission does not have authority. Laws on dog collar permits do not exist at this time. Chairman Taylor stated to both parties in the room that there will be no changes made until the Legislature gives authority to the Commission to do so.

The U.S. Park Service is set on their rules and regulations, too. Any changes to these rules are still pending.

Chairman Taylor thanked everyone for coming.

WILDLIFE

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

Rule 2.7 – Prohibition on Cervid Carcass Importation to Protect MS from CWD

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff, informed the Commission that there were no changes to the rule since the last meeting and no public comments were received. He recommended final adoption.

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

2021-22 Migratory Game Bird Framework Selections

The 2021-22 Migratory Game Bird Framework Selection staff recommendations were originally approved at the April Commission Meeting. After the April Meeting, many public comments were received requesting that the Dove Season opening day be changed back to thirty minutes before sunrise instead of noon. Due to public comment, MDWFP reversed the Opening Day back to thirty minutes before sunrise before the June Commission meeting because of a May federal framework deadline requirement for each state. A vote of the Commission ratifying this change is required.

ACTION: Commissioner Coopwood moved to ratify the Dove Season Opening Day sunrise change in the Migratory Game Bird Framework Selections, seconded by Commissioner Cossar, and the motion carried.

PARKS**Parks Update**

Andre Hollis, Director of Park Operations, stated that Parks' revenue is currently ahead \$1.3 million. Highlights of his report include:

- Flooding at three parks from rainfall this month:
 - Hugh White
 - LeFleur's
 - Cossar
- Golf Cart Revenue - collected over \$20,000 this month.
- Campground revenue - \$722,000 (including \$192,000 generated from new rates)
- Park app – 3,000 downloads
- Reservations - 59% from app, 1% call center, 40% in person
- Renovation projects underway:
 - Percy Quin – Construction completion date - July 30
 - Buccaneer – Campground improvements & waterpark forthcoming
 - J. P. Coleman – Office/motel – completed.
 - Dock B – Completion - Sept. 16 (delay due to material shortage)
- AmeriCorps – Helping out at Percy Quin, LeFleur's, & Cossar beginning in August

Phase I – Renovation & Restoration of State Parks

Jennifer Head, Communication and Outreach Director, and Brian Ferguson updated the Commission on Phase I progress:

- Staff currently touring all five Phase I parks.
- Meeting with engineer and architect this Tuesday at Paul B. Johnson
- Identifying specific needs for each cabin with contractor.
- Plans will be submitted to the Park Commission at the end of this month.

COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH

Communication & Outreach Update

Jennifer Head presented a handout for the Commission. Highlights of her presentation included:

OUTREACH

- MSSP Tournament April 30-May1. The overall champion was an 8th grader; he shot an impressive 199 out of 200.
- Database testing for Events Management System – Go Live June 13
- Michelle Carter met with Jackson Academy, Wiggins, & Vancleve for MSSP recruitment. A map was furnished showing 36 counties are now participating in MSSP.

MARKETING

- Met with IMG/Leerfield Network for marketing proposal during Ole Miss & MSU coverage of football, baseball, & basketball games
- Met with The Focus Group for advertising on the Shooting Ranges, as well as Stay.Play.Shoot campaign.
- Social Media/Web Content Specialist to start July 1.
- Planning Meeting with Foundation for the MS Outdoor & Agriculture Expo, Aug. 6-8

OUTREACH

- Continue to work with Children's Museum on activities for the walking trail at Lefleur's Bluff State Park.
- Partnering with Keep MS Beautiful & MSU Inland Cleanup Program to "Adopt a Campground" for beautification, cleanups, and outreach events (7 parks participating initially)
- Designing campaigns for R3 – Recruitment, Retention, Reactivation
 - "Women in the Outdoors"
 - Employee Opportunities
- Presentation on Corporate Sponsors is forthcoming

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Officer Recognition

Col. Steve Adcock, Chief of Law Enforcement, stated that on April 21, 2019, one of the largest turkey poaching busts occurred in Mississippi with over 100 pieces of evidence collected. Three teams of MDWFP officers approached three separate residences with search warrants in Copiah County. Following interviews with state and federal officials, several Mississippi hunters were charged with state and federal violations, allegedly killing more than 100 wild turkeys. After an 11-month investigation, the state issued about 280 wildlife violations to 15 people.

To show the magnitude of this case, Col Adcock presented a 12 ft. necklace of all the turkey spurs which the accused had illegally shot and reportedly crossed state lines to bring their trophies home to Mississippi. MDWFP officers spent around 4,500 man-hours leading to the prosecution of these cases.

Col. Adcock wanted to recognize the MDWFP officers involved in this case. He called each one to come forward: M.Sgt. Sheila Smith, Corp. Jake Guess, M.Sgt. Randy Cooley, and Capt. Kallum Herrington. Certificates were handed out to each officer and applause followed.

Ben Bryant, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, came forward to commend MDWFP officers for their professionalism and outstanding job in the line of duty. Applause followed.

Law Enforcement Update

Adcock reported a record 985 citations issued for the month of May with 255 "No License", 123 "No Boat Registration", 106 "PFC Violation"; 86 "No Boating Certificate"; and 63 "Trespassing" violations. During Memorial Day Weekend, law enforcement detail checked 2,829 registered boats and 422 canoes, kayaks, etc. Officers issued a total of 392 citations related to boating enforcement. Officers assisted Neshoba County Sheriff Dept. with a manhunt. The subject was found in the woods and taken to jail. Boating safety interview was recorded for media use. Children's camps also enjoyed officers discussing boating safety in Chickasaw County. The bid process is currently ongoing for the McHenry Sporting Clay Trail with an award set for July. Nuisance alligators were relocated by officers in various locations. Shooting range customer counts are: McIvor – 420; Turcotte – 477; and McHenry – 413.

OTHER BUSINESS

Election of Commission Officers

Chairman Taylor called for Commission officer nominations for the 2021-22 year.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar nominated Commissioner Billy Mounger as the new Commission Chairman and Commissioner Clay Wagner as Vice Chairman. Commissioner Coopwood seconded the nominations. There were no other nominations. The Commission voted unanimously to approve Billy Mounger as Chairman and Clay Wagner as Vice Chairman, beginning July 1, 2021.

CWD Discussion

Commissioner Cossar informed the Commission that part of his district is in a CWD ZONE, which, in turn, has caused supplemental feeding to be banned in this area for three years. Based on the CWD regulations, the only way to bring supplemental feeding back is through more CWD testing to determine if additional CWD-positive white-tailed deer are present or not. CWD testing

of free-range deer decreased by approximately 1,600 deer from the 2019-2020 to the 2020-2021 season.

Commissioner Cossar presented a possible solution to both problems with the use of deer processors. Every county should have several deer processors. He proposed that for a small fee the deer processor could cut the head off and remove the glands or show the client how to do this procedure. This is a ten-minute procedure. Cossar called the Department of Agriculture and they do not have any regulation over deer processors. However, deer processors do have to get approved by the Department of Health to process meat. The Department of Health may be able to provide us with a list of deer processors.

Chairman Taylor asked MDWFP staff to review Cossar's recommendation and report back to the Commission.

Executive Order

The Commission was advised that an Emergency Order was implemented by Executive Order on June 11, 2021. This order would suspend/close recreational boating activity during temporary high-water emergency at Wolf Lake, Yazoo County, Mississippi, until further notice. Several public comments were received concerning this closure.

In order to clarify that the Executive Director was acting on behalf of the Commission, a vote ratifying the Executive Order was required to be spread upon the minutes for posterity.

ACTION: By motion of Commissioner Wagner and seconded by Commissioner Cossar, the Commission unanimously ratified the Executive Order to close recreational boating activity at Wolf Lake. A signed copy of the Executive Order, as ratified by the Commission, has been appended to the minutes.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Date: Thursday, July 15, 2021
Location: 1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211
Time: 9 a.m.

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 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 strategy with regard to current and pending litigation and discussion regarding the prospective purchase of land. Commissioner Cossar 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 Cossar 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 pending litigation and strategy on how to proceed. Discussion followed and the Commission indicated that they supported counsel's strategy on how to proceed with the current litigation. No action was required of the Commission at this time.

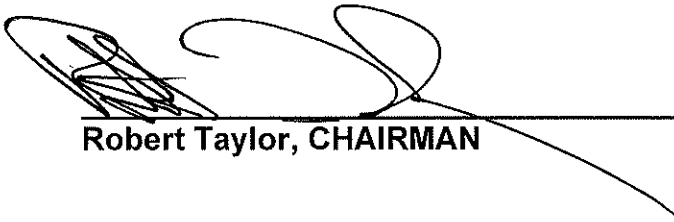
Dr. Polles updated the Commission on certain tracts of land which have been identified as being for sale, the purchase of which would benefit existing WMAs in the areas where the properties are located. Discussion followed. No action was required of the Commission at this time.

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

7/15/21

Date



Billy Mounger, VICE CHAIRMAN

7/15/21

Date

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

In Re: Suspension/Closure of Recreational Boating activity during temporary high water emergency.

EXECUTIVE ORDER

PURSUANT to the authority set forth in MISSISSIPPI CODE ANNOTATED §59-21-111, the Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, with the approval of the Commission, has ordered the suspension of all recreational boating activity on the lake or lakes listed below, due to emergency flooding and high water resulting from unusually heavy rainfall events. This suspension of privileges applies ***ONLY*** to recreational boating and not to any boating activity that must be employed for the safe transportation of persons to and from a home or dwelling or other legitimate purpose. Any boating activity during the suspension period shall be conducted in a reasonable manner, minimizing any wake created, or otherwise conducted to minimize any negative effects on surrounding property. The lake or lakes set forth below shall remain closed to recreational boating only, until further notice:

LAKE: Wolf Lake, Yazoo County, Mississippi

IT IS THEREFORE ORDERED, That the lake or lakes listed above shall be closed to recreational boating activity, in order to protect the health, safety and welfare of the general public, until further notice. Any boating shall be conducted according to a "Dead Slow; Leave No Wake," standard. Failure to comply with this order may subject an individual to criminal liability.

SO ORDERED, this the 11th day of **June, 2021**.



Sam Polles, Ph.D.
Executive Director