

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Wednesday, September 15, 2021

No Educational Session 8:30 AM Business Session

1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS

BUSINESS SESSION MINUTES

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

Among the MDWFP staff attending were Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director; Lynn Posey, Deputy Executive Director; Larry Pugh, Jennifer Head, Brian Ferguson, Col. Jerry Carter, Russ Walsh, Andre Hollis, Jerry Brown, Charles Knight, Doug Mann, and Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General. Chairman Mounger welcomed guests listening to the meeting by internet. Senator Mike Seymour and Representative Doug McLeod arrived after the greeting and were recognized later.

OPENING PRAYER

Jason Thompson, Director of License/Boat Registration Division, opened the meeting with prayer.

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Coopwood, the Commission meeting minutes of August 18, 2021, were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

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

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson presented the License Sales Report for the month of August 2021. The total revenue for the end of August is down 10% (\$139,000 difference from last year).

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident license sales – down 11%
 - Senior Exempt Lifetime – up 4%
 - 269 Exempt Youth licenses purchased by Foundation
 - Apprentice All Game Hunt/Freshwater Fishing – up 15%
- Non-resident license sales – down 7%
 - 3-day Freshwater Fishing – up 3%
 - Annual Freshwater Fishing is slightly up from last year
 - 7-day Small Game – license sales are about the same as last year
- Permit category – down 4%
- Lifetime License category – down 17%

License packages sold the past two months totaled 2,440 compared to 1,988 last year. Auto renewal customers now total 61,224 for FY21.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Roger Easley – Malmaison WMA

Mr. Easley came before the Commission requesting assistance concerning hunters on Malmaison WMA setting up too close to the adjacent private property line, adjoining the WMA. He gave a history of the problems and how this led to a lawsuit settlement and court order in 2015. The Final Decree in that action settled the location of the boundary and required the MDWFP to place NO HUNTING NEAR THIS LINE signs along the property line. However, the court did not establish the definition of “NEAR” which makes enforcing this mandate problematic for the MDWFP.

Discussion followed. Chairman Mounger stated that the Commission will take this under consideration.

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff, stated that he would comment on this matter further during the WILDLIFE portion of the meeting.

Davy Murrah – Friends of Pascagoula River WMA

Mr. Davy Murrah presented a handout for the Commission. He stated that his father, Herman Murrah, a former employee of the MDWFP, was instrumental in saving the Pascagoula River WMA in the 1970s. Davy lives in an area where the WMA surrounds his property. During the past 20 years Mr. Murrah has seen the WMA's beauty and luster fade. He brought to the Commission's attention one of the sandbars which was unreachable from the picnic/camping areas because of the underbrush. He has been advocating reform of the WMA for about a year and has formed a group called Friends of the Pascagoula River WMA with around 1,100 members. This group would like to work with MDWFP and bring back the WMA to its former glory.

The Executive Director, Dr. Sam Polles, stated that he would coordinate with Mr. Murrah to discuss this further.

Chairman Mounger thanked Mr. Murrah for appearing before the Commission today.

WILDLIFE

Waterfowl Update - Survey

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff, gave a PowerPoint presentation on the complete results of an on-line Waterfowl survey which was briefly reviewed last month. He thanked Houston Havens, Waterfowl Coordinator, for putting this survey together.

After reviewing the survey results with the Commission, Walsh did not recommend making any changes to the waterfowl hunting procedures at Malmaison WMA. According to the survey over 60% of private land hunters near the Scatters had no conflicts with WMA hunters. A majority of Malmaison hunters wanted to keep status quo or had no preference. Over 80% of Malmaison hunters plan to hunt there again this season. The survey showed there was no interest in mandating for draw hunts.

Hunters too close seemed to be a concern on both sides (private and public lands) in the survey. Regulations at Malmaison WMA (*40 MS Admin Code, Part 2, Rule 1.13*) have been put in place over the years to address a lot of these issues for safety. Listed below are the current regulations for the Scatters which Walsh addressed:

WATERFOWL:

- a. Waterfowl hunting closes at noon.
- b. The Greentree Reservoir and the state-owned portion of the McIntyre Scatters:
 - i. Parking areas and boat ramps are closed 1½ hours after sunset until 2 a.m.
 - ii. Access to these areas is prohibited prior to 4 a.m.
 - iii. Waterfowl hunters must be out by 1 p.m.
 - iv. Hunters are allowed no more than 25 shotshells per person.
 - v. No boats or waterfowl hunting gear are permitted on the area, except in camping areas or roadways, later than 30 minutes after sunset.
- vii. All boat access in the Greentree Reservoir is prohibited during the two weeks before the opening day of regular waterfowl season. During the regular waterfowl hunting season boat access in the Greentree Reservoir is allowed from 4 a.m. until 1 p.m. daily.
- viii. The WMA boundary lines in the McIntyre Scatters are marked. Lands adjacent to the WMA are privately-owned lands. Hunters are cautioned to stay on the WMA side of the posted boundary, and not trespass onto adjoining private lands. Crossing onto adjoining private lands, to include floating past the marked boundary lines in a boat or other floating hunting blind or apparatus, may subject the hunter to criminal liability for trespass. Additionally, placement of stands, blinds, or other hunting positions/apparatus on or near the boundary line, may place the hunter within shotgun range of hunters on adjacent private property. Therefore, hunters should set their hunting positions a safe distance from the line. Additional signs or markers are near the boundary line and in close proximity to active hunting areas

on the adjacent private lands, to make WMA hunters aware of those active sites. Stands, blinds, or other hunting positions should be placed so that the WMA hunter does not shoot across any boundary line and onto or over adjacent private property. All rules of safety and proper hunting etiquette shall be observed at all times. A violation of this provision may also subject the hunter to charges for a violation of these WMA hunting regulations, and possible loss of hunting privileges on this WMA, as provided in 40 Miss. Admin. Code, Part 2, Rule 1.1.E.

Malmaison WMA Public Comment

Discussion followed on Mr. Easley's Public Comment earlier in the meeting concerning enforcement by MDWFP of safe distance for WMA hunters shooting next to his property line.

Mr. Walsh stated that the Wildlife WMA Regulations comply with the instructions set forth in the court's order.

Discussion followed on whether the Commission had authority to define "near" or "safe distance."

The Commission Chairman stated that the Commission will take this under consideration. No action was taken by the Commission at this time.

Alligator Season Update

Ricky Flynt, Wildlife Alligator/Furbearer Coordinator, gave a preliminary report on Alligator Hunting Season this year. The season has ended for public lands but is still on-going for private lands until September 20th. Hurricane Ida came onshore on the 3rd & 4th day of the season, which had a negative impact for a couple of days. COVID has also had an impact with some participants unable to participate.

No new potential record-breaking alligators have been reported. The longest alligator reported at the time of the report was a 13 ft. 5 in. (787 lb.) alligator from the WC Zone (Yazoo River).

Alligator hunting license sales were up from 3,041 in 2020 to 3,297 in 2021. Private land resident permits were down from 120 in 2020 to 84 in 2021. Revenue generated from the alligator permits totaled \$291,825.

PARKS

Parks Update

Andre Hollis, Director of Park Operations, stated that Hurricane Ida hurt revenues a whole weekend in August and caused a lot of damage to Percy Quin State Park.

Hollis also presented a report comparing Parks revenue in August, 2021 with August, 2020. The total revenue for the month of August, 2021 is up by \$18,317 from last year for a total of \$686,697. Entry and special fees were down by \$23,974. Reservations for RV camping and cabin rental decreased from 15,129 in 2020 to 14,732 in 2021; however, \$64,411 more revenue was generated than last year due to rate increases. Year to date Gross Revenue for FY22 is up \$406,989 from last year for a total of \$1,857,999.

State Park Events during September

Roosevelt - Sparkz & Restoration Car Show (75 cars) generated \$1,000 in revenue

Clarkco – Cross Country Run (120 runners participated)

LeFleur's Bluff – Boy Scouts volunteered to clean up

Trace State Park – Weapons of Grass Destruction (Disc Golf Tournament)
(100-150 participants)

Lake Lowndes – Community Workday – 45 volunteers

All State Parks – Bike Your Park Day – Sept. 25

Girl Scouts worked at a couple of parks

Park Partnership Plans:

- AmeriCorps
 - Percy Quin – 10 volunteers helped clean up after hurricane
 - Natchez State Park – working here after Percy Quinn
- Nucor Steel (new partnership)
 - LeFleur's Bluff – Workday on October 2 (50-60 people)
- Yalobusha County Board of Supervisors & AmeriCorps
 - Cossar State Park

MUSEUM OF NATURAL SCIENCE

Museum of Natural Science (MMNS) Update

Charles Knight, Director of MMNS, presented an Admissions & Revenue Report for the Museum. A handout was provided. Highlights of his presentation included:

- Museum admission sales and gift shop sales dropped back down due to COVID surge.
- There is a sharp increase in school group reservations workshops, facility rentals, camps, generating more revenue than pre-COVID. Facility rentals are generating more income, so plans are to promote this as a way to generate more revenue.
- Playground artificial turf installation began September 5 and will take about a month and a half to two months to complete.
- Lefleur's District Museum weekend this coming weekend. This is usually a big event, and we are trying to do more outside and spread everyone out due to COVID.

COMMUNICATION & OUTREACH

Communication & Outreach Update

Jennifer Head, Director of Communication and Outreach, presented a handout for the Commission. Highlights of her presentation included:

MS SCHOLASTIC SHOOTING SPORTS (MSSP):

- On-line instruction videos were created and posted for MSSP School/Coaching Database training.
- Met with Rankin County parents and students
- Held MSSP Coaching Certification classes at Turcotte
- Ramped up social media promotion for August – National Shooting Sports Month

OUTREACH

- Bi-weekly meeting with the Children's Museum & MMNS on activities for the walking trail that will connect the two museums
- Participated in Mississippi Ag & Outdoor Expo
- Women's Outreach proposed timelines:
 - Landing page launch on MDWFP webpage – September 7
 - Hunter & Boat Ed Classes/Handgun Classes – September/October
 - Home page launch on MDWFP webpage – November 15

MARKETING

Shooting Range Campaign

- Shooting range video
- Facebook ads
- YouTube

During Alligator Season marketing added an interesting fact each day on social media and created a lot more interest and hits.

Instagram followers have increased. Once 10,000 followers are reached, MDWFP will receive many more benefits.

FISHERIES

Fisheries Update

Jerry Brown, Director of Fisheries, reported that the number of people fishing at state lakes has grown even more this year than last year due to COVID. Revenue has increasingly grown over the past two years. State Lake revenue is also up as follows:

Total revenue	\$572,069 (+ 5% from FY20)
Fishing revenue	301,054 (+ 4% from FY20)
Camping revenue	253,529 (+ 8% from FY20)
Pavilion revenue	6,744 (+35% from FY20)

Annual lake permits purchased on-line have become very popular. Bogue Homa and Lamar Bruce have been the top two fishing revenue producing lakes for the past few years due to tournaments. Neshoba, Calling Panther, and Kemper produced the top camping revenue. Prentiss Walker, Neshoba, Bogue Homa, and Claude Bennett were the top pavilion rentals.

Pictures were shown of a new dam and metal equipment building at Simpson County Lake. Holmes County State Park Lake just completed the construction of a new spillway. Elvis Presley Lake was recently drained and plans are for new piers and a new bathroom facility to be added.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law Enforcement Update

Commenting on earlier remarks regarding the McIntyre Scatters, Col. Jerry Carter, Chief of Law Enforcement, stated that law enforcement is making strides to minimize or defuse situations that arise, and if it involves adding extra manpower our office will find a way to make that happen. Our office will enforce what is stipulated in the court order, regulations, and statutes and we will do everything we can, with all parties involved, to resolve problems in order to eliminate any altercations or confrontations and to ensure safety for everyone.

Col. Carter reported 531 citations issued for the month of August with "No License" being number one. The month of August found officers looking and checking for illegal dove fields. A family was escorted to safety after their vessel suffered motor issues during day 25 of their trip from Minnesota to New Orleans on the Mississippi River. SRT members were requested to assist in a search for an elderly man in Carroll County. In less than two hours of their mission, the gentleman was found and returned to safety. SRT members were deployed as Hurricane Ida approached the Gulf Coast. Officers assisted with wood duck banding program. Currently 183 ducks have been banded in Central Mississippi. Shooting range customer counts are: McIvor – 598; Turcotte – 718; and McHenry – 439.

License Reinstatement Request

Col. Carter presented two license reinstatement requests. Each violator was asked to come forward and state the circumstances of his arrest before the Commission.

- **Jesse Brown, Lucedale, MS**

Brown stated that he was bored and decided to go hunting one night in November, 2018. He did not actually shoot a deer but had intention. This cost him approximately \$2,700 in fines and fees.

Col. Carter recommended the Commission restore his license at this time; however, if he receives another citation, he will serve the full three years for a second offense.

ACTION: By motion of Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, Jesse Brown's license was reinstated by unanimous consent with the stipulation that he will serve the entire three years for a second offense.

- **Brantley Brown, Houston, MS**

Brown stated that he was headlighting in 2019 with a friend. He and a friend were driving down the road and spotted a deer. They stopped and both got out of the car. His friend shot at a deer, but they could not find it. The friend's father turned them in to the authorities. His friend came before the Commission last month. This cost Brown around \$3,000 in fines and fees.

Col. Carter recommended the Commission restore his license at this time; however, if he receives another citation, he will serve the full three years for a second offense.

ACTION: By motion of Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, Brantley Brown's license was reinstated by unanimous consent with the stipulation that he will serve the entire three years for a second offense.

OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Date: Thursday, October 14, 2021

Location: 1505 Eastover Drive

Time: 9 AM Educational Session; 10 AM 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.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar made a motion to close the meeting to determine the need for Executive Session. 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.

The meeting was closed, and the room cleared. Discussion was held and it was determined that there was a need to discuss personnel matters involving job performance of specific employees in specific positions, and the prospective purchase of land.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar made a motion to enter Executive Session to discuss job performance of specific employees in specific positions, 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 job performance of specific employees in specific positions, and the prospective purchase of land.

Dr. Polles updated the Commission on personnel matters within the Department. 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 Coopwood 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 Cossar moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Coopwood, and the motion carried. Chairman Mounger gavelled the meeting into adjournment.



Billy Mounger, CHAIRMAN



Date

Clay Wagner, VICE CHAIRMAN

Date