

# MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

**Monday, February 21, 2022**

**No Educational Session     9 AM Business Session**

**Quail Ridge Conference Center**

**7811 Highway 397, Louisville, MS 39339**

**9:00 AM**

## **BUSINESS SESSION MINUTES**

**PRESENT:** Commission Chairman William Mounger, Commissioners Bill F. Cossar, Leonard Bentz, and Gary Rhoads. Commissioner Scott Coopwood was present via telecommunication.

Among the MDWFP staff attending were Deputy Executive Director Lynn Posey, Larry Pugh, Col. Jerry Carter, Russ Walsh, Jerry Brown, Jason Thompson, Doug Mann, and Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General. The Chairman welcomed Secretary of State Michael Watson, House WFP Committee Chairman Bill Kinkade, and guests watching the live stream video of the meeting.

### **OPENING PRAYER**

Chairman Mounger opened the meeting with prayer.

### **MINUTES**

**ACTION:** Upon motion by Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Bentz, the Commission meeting minutes of January 19, 2022 were unanimously approved.

### **AGENDA**

Mr. Posey informed the Commission that Food Service needed to be added under "OTHER BUSINESS" on the agenda.

**ACTION:** Upon motion by Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Bentz, the Commission unanimously approved the meeting agenda of February 21, 2022 as amended with the addition of Food Service to "OTHER BUSINESS".

### GUEST SPEAKERS

***Representative Bill Kinkade, House Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks Committee Chairman -***

The Honorable Bill Kinkade presented an overview of items remaining on the 2022 MS Legislative Session agenda:

- HB 258 – Mandatory Harvest Reporting – Mississippi is the only state which does not mandate harvest reporting.
- HB 606 & HB 1064 – Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund. Senate has parallel bill. Both House and Senate believe in this fund.
- HB 944 – Organ Donor on Hunting/Fishing Licenses
- HB 1035 & SB 2507 – Special Hunting Permit for Velvet Hunting Season
- SB 2010 – Air Gun
- SB 2164 – Tourism Reorganization Act

Chairman Mounger thanked Chairman Kinkade.

***Secretary of State Michael Watson*** – As the Mississippi Land Commissioner, the Honorable Michael Watson, created the Conservation Task Force last year, comprised of conservation specialists from all branches to come together in a team effort to protect Mississippi's natural resources and ensure future generations will be able to enjoy our great outdoors. In the past, MDWFP had a conservation plan, and the Department of Marine Resources had a plan; however, no one had a holistic plan for the whole state. Protecting our resources requires a team effort and this way everyone can bring forward best practices for habitat management and creative approaches and research can be shared. Watson thanked the Commission for their hard work.

Chairman Mounger thanked Secretary of State Michael Watson for coming.

### LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, License/Boat Registration Division Director, presented the License Sales Report for the month of January, 2022. The total revenue for the end of January is up around \$220,000 (1.5%).

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident license sales – down 1.5%
- Res WMA User Permits – up 3.8%
- Res Senior Exempt Lifetime – up 9%

- Res Duck Stamp – up 7%
- Non-resident license sales – up by \$385,000 (4.5%)
- NR All Game Hunting – up 5%
- NR 3-day All Game Hunting – up 8%
- NR 7-day All Game Hunting – up 10%
- NR Freshwater Fishing – up 2.5%
- NR WMA User Permit – up 3%
- NR Duck Stamps – up 2%
- Other Licenses – down 1%
- Lifetime License category – down 11%

Autorenewal licenses are up, and license packages sold are up.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

No additional public comments were brought forward by the public for the Commission.

### **WILDLIFE**

#### **2022 Youth Squirrel Hunts & Youth Waterfowl Camp**

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff, gave a handout to the Commission with pictures of the Youth Squirrel and Waterfowl Hunts. Five squirrel hunting events were held at WMAs with 52 participants and 18 squirrels killed. The group saw some good dog action and it was a great event for dads and sons/daughters to bond.

The Youth Waterfowl Camp is always held at Muscadine WMA. The attendees learned how to hunt, waterfowl habitat management, processing the game, dog handling, and much more. It was a well-rounded event. Twelve campers from around the state attended, with 40 ducks harvested. Three attendees harvested their first wild game.

#### **First Mississippi Wild Turkey Summit**

The first Wild Turkey Summit will be held on February 24, 2022 at the Farm Bureau building in Jackson. Guests have been invited to discuss what makes Mississippi turkey hunting special, what challenges we face, and how our state can move forward. This summit will bring together MDWFP constituents and partners.

#### **CWD Update**

Walsh informed the Commission that deer season ended, as of February 21, 2022, with 48 positive-CWD deer. There are 600 samples on hold at the lab awaiting the shipment of testing

kits. A total of 6,000 samples have been received. It has been a very good year for samples. Taxidermists were solicited this year to provide samples and the quality of their samples were significant due to their stock being mature bucks. Alabama and Louisiana both had their first CWD positive deer this season.

## FISHERIES

### FINAL – 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 3, Chapter 3 – Regulations Regarding Commercial Fishing

- **Rule 3.1 Regulations regarding Commercial Fishing**

Jerry Brown, Fisheries Bureau Director, stated that no public comments had been received over the past 30 days and he recommended approval of Rule 3.1.

**ACTION: Commissioner Cossar moved to approve FINAL Rule 3.1 as recommended by staff. Commissioner Bentz seconded the motion and the motion carried.**

### Fisheries Update

Brown stated that fishing permits are down 8% but are steadily climbing back since Crappie season opened. Camping permits are up 15% and total revenue at the state lakes are up 8%. Three lakes have been closed for renovations: Simpson County Lake, Holmes County State Park Lake, and Elvis Presley Lake. Pictures of renovations at each lake were provided in a handout.

Simpson County Lake plans to reopen in 2023. The lake has been filled and stocked. Campground upgrades will soon be underway.

Holmes County State Park Lake plans to reopen in 2024. Both lakes have been filled and Bream stocking is complete. Largemouth bass will be stocked this Spring 2022. New boat ramp and piers have been completed.

Elvis Presley Lake will be reopened in 2024. The lake has started to fill. Plans to stock Bream in February and Largemouth bass in Spring 2022. The old public restrooms will be replaced this year. The shoreline will be deepened, Bream beds added, and youth fishing area created.

## PARKS

### Parks Update

Andre Hollis, Director of Park Operations, presented the following update on Parks:

- Overnight revenue up \$67,000
- Day use revenue up \$54,000
- Gross monthly revenue for January 2022 up \$121,437

- July 2021 – January 2022 revenue up \$1,180,755
- Roosevelt – cabin renovation bid opening was held on Feb. 11<sup>th</sup>. Hope to start renovation in March or April.
- Tishomingo – working on 25 campsites
- Buccaneer – working on splash pads and campsites. Hope to have campsites up before summer.
- 1<sup>st</sup> Day Hike on January 1 – 221 hikers participated

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

### **Law Enforcement Update**

Col. Jerry Carter, Chief of Law Enforcement, reported 1,302 citations issued for the month of January with "No Hunting License" being number one and "Hunting from a Public Road" was number two. Officer detail included speaking to a pre-k class in Itawamba County, posting "No Wake Zone" signs at the Scatters, and checking for duck bag limits, hunting over bait, and possession of waterfowl illegally.

Cadets have now completed seven weeks of the Basic Class at MLEOTA. Graduation exercises will be held in April. Advertisement for the next cadet class is underway. The next class is scheduled to begin in May.

A list of violations at the Scatters was given to the Commission for their review. Officers checked 814 hunters at the Scatters and issued 113 citations. "No federal waterfowl stamp" was listed as the number one violation at the Scatters.

Shooting range customer counts are: McIvor – 475; Turcotte – 547; and McHenry – 533.

Col. Carter also handed out a printout of newly selected law enforcement supervisors and coordinators within the state. All vacancies are now fully staffed in MDWFP Law Enforcement Offices.

### **CEO-Chairman Award Presented to MDWFP Law Enforcement Officers by the National Wild Turkey Federation**

The National Wild Turkey Federation presented the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks' officers - Lieutenant Sheila Smith, Master Sergeant Randy Cooley, and Sergeant Major Jake Guess - with the inaugural NWTF CEO/Chairman Award at their Convention held in Nashville, Tennessee on February 18, 2022.

This award was created to recognize a significant national or regional contribution to the conservation of the wild turkey, habitat management, public awareness, policy work or hunting heritage. The award is not an annual award and will be awarded at the discretion of the NWTF CEO and Chairman of the National Board Directors.

The Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks officers were presented with the prestigious award for their involvement in what is regarded as the largest wild turkey poaching arrest in history, dubbed Operation Longbeard.

After thorough investigation with over 100 pieces of evidence, it was determined that federal wildlife violations had been discovered in three states (Mississippi, Kansas, and Nebraska), leading to arrest warrants for 15 Mississippi residents, four of whom were charged with Federal Lacey Act violations. Moreover, the poachers were found to have trespassed on 15 different properties in Mississippi. Nearly 100 wild turkeys were killed in the spring 2019 season.

Through the dedicated and thorough investigations of Smith, Cooley, and Guess – approximately 3,500 man-hours in the investigation and prosecution of the case – 286 wildlife state-related charges along with 12 federal charges were filed.

Commissioner Bentz stated that this was a great testament to all the officers at MDWFP and he was proud to be at the ceremony and watch Smith, Cooley, and Guess receive their awards.

## OTHER BUSINESS

### Communication & Outreach Update

Josh Carver, Communication & Outreach Manager, presented the following updates:

- Guided and photographed a duck hunt for Delta Waterfowl University Hunts Program at Muscadine Farms WMA
- Built Tentr landing page on MDWFP.com to direct future customers to reservation page
- Planning inaugural High School Kayak Fishing Tournament with Fisheries Bureau to be held at Percy Quin State Park April 9<sup>th</sup>
- Coordinated Spring Expo staffing and booth layout with agency bureau staff
- Distributed promotional materials for multiple youth events attended by MDWFP biologists and conservation officers
- License Page Marketing – page views (56,137); Transactions (1,477); Revenue (\$35,634)
- Monthly Newsletter – 213K opens (up 14%) and \$16.4k trackable revenue (up 55%)
- Facebook – 92K followers; 1,677 net new followers; 4k links clicked; 567k people reached
- Instagram – 10,120 followers; 8k accounts reached; 78K impressions; 243 website visits
- We try to drive the traffic to more than 30 ways to purchase licenses
- Our photography is used as posts on social media and in our magazine.

### Buccaneer State Park – Food Service

Commissioner Leonard Bentz informed the Commission that vendors had indicated an interest in hosting a Food Truck or Other Food Service at Buccaneer State Park. He addressed the staff how to start this process. The attorney stated that the prospective vendors should contact Stu Rayburn, Buccaneer Park Manager, and Stu will get them the proper information to move forward. Bentz stated that all he wanted was what was financially best for the park.

### **Live-Stream Commission Meetings**

The Deputy Executive Director informed the Commission that from this point forward all Commission meetings will be live streamed on the MDWFP website and posted on YouTube.

### **State Park Management RFP**

The Deputy Executive Director informed the Commission that proposals in response to the Request for Proposals for the management of several state parks, are due on February 23, 2022.

### **NEXT MEETING DATE**

Date: Wednesday, March 16, 2022  
Location: 1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211  
Time: 2 p.m. Educational Session & 3 p.m. Business Session

### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

The Chairman asked if there was a need for an Executive Session. Deputy Executive Director stated that there was a need for an Executive Session.

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

The meeting was closed, and the Commissioners moved to an adjoining room. Discussion was held and it was determined that there was a need to enter into Executive Session to discuss personnel matters involving job performance of specific employees in specific positions, the prospective purchase of land and pending litigation.

**ACTION: Commissioner Bentz made a motion to enter Executive Session to discuss personnel matters involving job performance of specific employees in specific positions, the prospective purchase of land and pending litigation. 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 into Executive Session to discuss personnel matters involving job performance of specific employees in specific positions, the prospective purchase of land and pending litigation.

Deputy Executive Director updated the Commission on various personnel matters within the Department. No action was required of the Commission at this time.

Chairman Mounger brought forward a discussion on honoring Dr. Sam Polles for his service as Executive Director in recognition of his recent retirement. From prior discussions among staff and the Commission, a request to the Legislature that the Department's state headquarters building, located at 1505 Eastover Drive, be named after Dr. Polles, was discussed. Deputy Director Posey presented a resolution of the Commission making this request, that had been prepared by staff. Discussion followed.

**ACTION: Commissioner Coopwood made a motion to adopt the resolution as presented and forward it to the Legislature. Commissioner Cossar seconded the motion, and the Commission voted unanimously to adopt and present the resolution. A copy of the resolution will be appended to these minutes.**

Mr. Malone advised the Commission on the status of the litigation involving the Wildlife Federation. No formal action was required of the Commission at this time.

Mr. Malone advised the Commission on the applicable statutes pertaining to the selection and qualifications for a new MDWFP Executive Director. Discussion followed. No action was required of the Commission at this time.

The Deputy Executive Director 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.

**ACTION: Commissioner Bentz made a motion to authorize the Deputy Executive Director to enter discussions with the landowners for the potential purchase of the described land, and to obtain the necessary appraisals required to move forward with the purchase of the land if the appraisals and available funds will support such action. Commissioner Cossar seconded the motion. The Commission voted unanimously for the MDWFP to move forward on the potential purchase of the properties discussed. Commissioner Rhoads abstained from voting on a tract that is currently owned by the Rankin/Hinds Flood Control District due to a possible conflict of interest.**

**There being no further items for discussion in Executive Session, Commissioner Bentz made a motion to open the meeting. Commissioner Cossar seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to open the meeting.** The Commissioners returned to the main meeting room.

Mr. Malone announced to those individuals located outside in the adjoining room that the meeting was now open and that during Executive Session the Commission authorized the



Deputy Executive Director to enter discussions with certain landowners regarding the purchase of certain properties.

ADJOURNMENT


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

  
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Billy Mounger, CHAIRMAN

  
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Date

  
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Bill Cossar, VICE CHAIRMAN

  
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Date

**BEFORE THE MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON  
WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, AND PARKS**

**In Re:           A request to the Mississippi State Legislature to designate 1505 Eastover Drive  
as the “Sam Polles State Office Building,” and for related purposes.**

**RESOLUTION**

**WHEREAS**, Sam G. Polles, Ph.D., has served the State of Mississippi as Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (“MDWFP”) for over twenty-nine (29) years, making him the longest-serving executive director of a state executive branch agency;

**WHEREAS**, During his tenure as Executive Director of the MDWFP, the agency has experienced many noteworthy achievements, to include, but not be limited to: enhancing educational requirements to become a conservation officer, as well as salaries; development and implementation of a career ladder that provides for advancement of conservation officers; improved training and state-of-the-art equipment; and elevation of MDWFP conservation officers into the status of First Responders and an integral part of the State’s Emergency Response apparatus.

Additionally, educational requirements (and salaries) for wildlife biologists have been improved, and State Parks continue to offer affordable opportunities for outdoor recreation and related amenities. By capitalizing on available Federal grant monies, the MDWFP has been able to make significant purchases of land, more than doubling the amount of public lands held in trust for natural resource conservation and outdoor recreation. All of these accomplishments have come while enduring challenging economic times and pressure to reduce the size of the agency without reducing services.

**THEREFORE**, at its regular meeting of February 21, 2022, the Commission voted unanimously to request that the Legislature honor Dr. Sam Polles, by resolution set forth below, before the end of the 2022 Regular Legislative Session.

**BE IT RESOLVED:** That the Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks finds that Sam G. Polles, Ph.D., has faithfully served the people of the State of Mississippi for over twenty-nine (29) years as Executive Director of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks. In recognition of Dr. Polles's service, the Commission requests that the Legislature, whether by concurrent resolution or general bill, designate the state headquarters/offices of the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks (MDWFP) located at 1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, Mississippi 39211 (within the Capitol Complex Improvement District), as the "Sam Polles State Office Building."

**SO RESOLVED**, by unanimous vote of the Commission, this the 21<sup>st</sup> day of February, 2022.



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Billy Mounger, Chairman  
Mississippi Commission on Wildlife,  
Fisheries, and Parks

**CERTIFICATION**

I, **Lynn Posey**, hereby certify that the Resolution set forth above, is a true and correct Resolution of the Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries and Parks, as authorized by a vote taken and spread upon the minutes of the meeting of the Commission, dated February 21, 2022, as duly noticed and conducted by law.



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Lynn Posey, Deputy Executive Director  
Mississippi Department of Wildlife,  
Fisheries, and Parks