

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Wednesday, October 19, 2022

No Educational Session 1:30 PM Business Session
McHenry Shooting Facility, 1060 E McHenry Rd., Perkinston, MS

BUSINESS SESSION MINUTES

PRESENT:

Chairman Bill F. Cossar
Commissioner Leonard Bentz
Commissioner William Mounger II
Commissioner Gary Rhoads
Commissioner Scott Coopwood - via telecommunication

Among the MDWFP staff attending were Executive Director Lynn Posey, Lt. Col. Scottie Jones, Russ Walsh, Amy Blaylock, Jason Thompson, Brian Ferguson, Jerry Brown, Houston Havens, Josh Carver, Doug Mann, and Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General. The Chairman welcomed guests watching the live stream video and special guests attending.

Visitors recognized during the meeting were Henry Cochran, George County Board of Supervisors, District 5; Dale Bond, Retired Stone County Board of Supervisors; Representative Douglas McLeod, District 107; Senator Mike Seymour, District 47; C.T. Switzer, former Senator and currently a Member of the Board of Trustees of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College; and Leonard Bentz, Sr., father of Commissioner Bentz.

OPENING PRAYER

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

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Bentz, the Commission meeting minutes of September 13, 2022, were unanimously approved.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Coopwood and seconded by Commissioner Rhoads, the Commission meeting minutes of September 27, 2022, were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

The Executive Director informed the Commission that Joie West's name had been struck from the agenda under Law Enforcement - License Reinstatement Requests.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Rhoads and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the Commission unanimously approved the meeting agenda of October 19, 2022, as amended.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Tchoutacabouffa & Biloxi Rivers in Harrison County Public Comments:

- *Harry Lamey* – Over the past 60 years Mr. Lamey has been fishing the Tchoutacabouffa and Biloxi Rivers. During this time, he has witnessed a major loss of vegetation, as well as a loss of the structures along the rivers' edge due to the extensive removal of trees and debris following storms. He requested water quality tests to see if there is a reason and solution to these problems. Lamey also requested a reconsideration of daily catch quotas on each species of fish. Daily Bluegill limit is too high (100 fish per day per fisherman). He is retired and volunteered his services to the agency.
- *Larry Strohm* – Mr. Strohm requested a fish assessment on the Biloxi and Tchoutacabouffa Rivers.
- *Gene Dufrene* – Mr. Dufrene informed the Commission that the excessive removal of debris and vegetation close to the banks has removed natural spawning habitats, leading to the decline of fish population. The creation of new habitats will help assist with the natural spawning process. He requested wake zones be placed and enforced to stabilize the rivers. Passing boaters have compounded the issue of erosion.
- *Clay Guillory* – Mr. Guillory requested enforcement of fishing regulations by MDWFP. He has witnessed undersized fish being taken as well as people exceeding the limits of the larger fish. A request was made for water sampling/testing to answer questions on the disappearance of fish in these rivers. With the increasing number of homes being built along the river, fertilizer is being washed into the rivers causing algae blooms which in turn removes oxygen from the water. Barges send sediments down the river reducing oxygen and displacing fish of all kinds, too. Mr. Guillory is retired and offered his volunteer services to MDWFP.

Chairman Cossar thanked these gentlemen for coming and making the staff and Commission aware of these problems. The Chairman informed Mr. Lamey, Strohm, Dufrene, and Guillory that Mr. Jerry Brown, Director of Fisheries, would be available after the meeting to discuss these concerns with them.

Leaf River WMA Public Comments:

- *Phil Lechner* – Mr. Lechner requested that the Youth Squirrel Hunt (scheduled at Pascagoula WMA the second week in February) be changed to September, due to deer hunting season. He also informed the Commission that the last two weeks in February is overscheduled with everyone hunting at the same time – Hunting Hogs with Dogs, Rabbit Season, and Squirrel Season. He proposed moving the hog hunting season.

Mr. Lechner also had questions concerning the Deer Harvesting app. He suggested adding these categories to the app (weight, antler size, and whether milk is present). He also suggested a note for hunters on the app to check-in deer and extract jawbone at the WMA headquarters prior to leaving.

- *Eric Oehms* – Mr. Oehms was unable to attend the meeting.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Lechner for coming.

DeSoto National Forest Public Comments:

- *Tom Dupre* – Mr. Dupre requested assistance from the Commission on persuading the Legislature to place in the statute the same dog permit system for DeSoto National Forest that was developed for Homochitto National Forest. He also made a request to lower the deer season for hunting with dogs from 39 days to 30 days, since only 10-15% of deer hunters use dogs. The dogs cause stress and strain to the deer. Since the dog permit system was instigated at Homochitto, the number of deer have increased.
- *Senator Mike Seymour* – Senator Seymour did not share the same sentiments with Mr. Dupre on dog hunting. He stated that the National Forests are equal to all and do not discriminate to any one group. Dog hunter season is currently only 39 days out of the 128-day deer season.

Senator Seymour stated that the real issue is depredation. Due to the lack of rain in Mississippi, crops are stressed, and farmers are struggling to furnish food for their vendors. Nuisance hogs and overpopulation of deer are causing further problems with crops being eaten and destroyed. Senator Seymour suggested adding a “DOE HUNTING DAY” to thin out deer and providing food provisions for deer in the National Forests as possible solutions.

Senator Seymour also brought to the attention of the Commission an invasive species called Apple Snail which eats vegetation and is causing an erosion problem on the Lower Pearl River. He requested MDWFP to send a biologist to investigate this.

Senator Seymour requested assistance for acquiring Outdoor Stewardship funding for a boat ramp in George County. Discussion followed.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, License/Boat Registration Division Director, presented the License Sales Report for the month of September 2022. Thompson reported that total revenue this past month is up 11%.

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident license – up 3%
- Sportsman license – up 2%
- 3-day freshwater fishing – up 4%
- Non-resident license sales – up 23%
- NR Small Game Hunting – up 16%
- NR All Game – up 22%
- Other Licenses – up 6%
- Lifetime License category – up 9%

The New 2-day Deer Velvet Season brought in \$80,000.
WMA permits – up 4% with an increase of 548 permits

WILDLIFE

FINAL 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 2, Chapter 1: Wildlife Management Areas

- **Rule 1.12 – Mahannah WMA Regulations**
- **Rule 1.46 – Phil Bryant WMA Regulations**

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff, presented changes to Rules 1.12 and 1.46 last month to establish Senior Adult WMA Draw Hunts for the 2022-2023 Hunting Season. No public comments were received, and Walsh recommended approval by the Commission.

Application Period: November 1-15 (may apply with a partner)

Hunt Dates: Thursday & Friday, January 19-20, 2023

Locations: Mahannah and Phil Bryant WMAs

Legal Weapons: Weapon of choice

Bag Limit: 1 legal buck and 1 antlerless deer

This will be a draw hunt for 125 hunters, they may bring a non-hunter with them.

ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Bentz and seconded by Commissioner Rhoads, the Commission unanimously approved FINAL Rule 1.12 - Mahannah WMA Regulations and Rule 1.46. – Phil Bryant WMA Regulations.

2022-23 State Waterfowl Stamp Projects

MDWFP STAFF 2022-2023 STATE WATERFOWL STAMP FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Houston Havens, Waterfowl Program Coordinator, presented the 2022-2023 State Waterfowl Stamp funding requests and staff recommendations for distribution of proceeds for the full amount requested with a stipulation that we will designate by line item how the funds are to be spent. Conservation reports from Ducks Unlimited, Delta Waterfowl, and Mississippi State University were distributed to the Commission

<u>Project</u>	<u>Recommended</u>	<u>Project Description</u>
DU & DU Canada	\$125,000	Continue funding of Eastern Saskatchewan Breeding Habitat Project. Last year 5,454 acres of Habitat lands were protected.
Delta Waterfowl	\$125,000	Continue funding of Adopt a Pothole Program in Manitoba.
MSU Research	\$ 38,771	Continue study on wood duck nest box production and female wood duck recruitment.
WMA Wetland Management & Enhancement Projects	\$250,000	Funds for waterfowl habitat management, public waterfowl enhancements, and wetland infrastructure special projects on Malmaison, Charlie Capps, Mahannah, & Sky Lake WMAs and other WMAs as needed.
Private Land Wetland Habitat Assistance	\$ 40,000	Fund a wetland habitat assistance program by providing water control structures to private landowners. Provide water control structures for landowners prioritized by competitive ranking criteria.
Aerial Waterfowl Surveys	\$ 31,000	Continue monitoring of MS Delta waterfowl abundances and distributions: Delta Wildlife also potentially providing funding.
Waterfowl Program Travel	\$ 9,000	Funding for MDWFP staff to attend regional and national meetings & workshops related to waterfowl and wetlands (as needed).
Waterfowl Trapping and Banding Supplies	\$ 5,000	Items related to trapping and banding of waterfowl (as needed).
Mississippi Flyway Council Dues & Cooperative Projects	\$ 28,799	Annual dues to MS Flyway Council, annual contributions to MS Flyway banding, & other cooperative waterfowl projects.
Youth Waterfowl Camp - DU	\$ <u>7,000</u>	For continuing the Youth Waterfowl Hunting and Education Camp at Muscadine Farms in partnership with Ducks Unlimited.
TOTAL	\$659,570	

ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Bentz, funds for the 2022-2023 State Waterfowl Stamp projects were unanimously approved as recommended by staff, contingent upon further discussion with the recipients about, and the recipients' acceptance of, any restrictions on how the funds are to be spent.

PARKS

Parks Update

Brian Ferguson, Parks Chief of Staff reported that the overall revenue was down \$206,050 but this is really a plus in the long run, because sales are down now due to 100 campsites being closed for renovations. When completed, these campsites will be generating income for parks. Ferguson wanted to thank Mississippi's leadership again for the funding granted to state parks at the last session.

Phase I Parks Capital Improvement Projects:

- 25 campsites at Buccaneer are near completion
- Sewer/water infrastructure bids going out for 300 RV sites
- Percy Quinn & Natchez – bid openings for cabin renovations on Nov. 17
- Roosevelt and Paul B Johnson – pending bid date for cabin renovations
- Clarko in Schematic design phase

Marketing:

- Internal marketing – State Parks Facebook page, Twitter page, & Instagram
- Shared Services – Fisheries & Wildlife Department personnel joined Parks staff for a work week at Roosevelt. Over 100 people cut and burned trees, while biologists and forestry services worked to improve habitat.
- Short-Term and Long-Term Business Plans for State Parks is in the making. Researching how to improve tourism. Stakeholders for each state park are being engaged to help create improvements and attractions for tourists.

Next Month:

- New Fee Structure will be presented.
- Pictures of two new cabins at Roosevelt will be revealed. Plans are to duplicate these cabins at other parks as revenue and funds increase.

FISHERIES

Wounded Warrior Bass Tournament Request

Mr. Jerry Brown, Director of Fisheries, presented a letter received by the Covich County Baptist Association requesting MDWFP to waive fishing license requirements for 15-16 Wounded Warriors during Bass Tournaments planned for October 28 at Calling Panther Lake and October 29 at Lake Lincoln State Park. Brown also requested that the lake user permits be waived for the Wounded Warriors participating in the tournaments at Calling Panther and Lake Lincoln.

ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Bentz and seconded by Commissioner Rhoads, the Commission unanimously approved to waive fishing license requirements and lake user permits for Wounded Warrior participants at the Bass Tournaments on October 28 and 29 at Calling Panther Lake and Lake Lincoln State Park.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law Enforcement Update

Lt. Col. Scottie Jones, Assistant Chief of Law Enforcement, reported for the month of September, there were a total of 549 citations issued with "No License" being number one, "Unlaw Possession" was number two, "Unplugged Gun" was third, "Hunting Dove over Bait" number four, and "No Duck Stamp" number five.

Other Updates:

- Cadet Graduation is set for November 1st at 10 AM at Roosevelt State Park. An invitation was extended for everyone to attend. Advertising for the next cadet class will begin in November and classes should start sometime in April, 2023.
- MSSP qualifiers begin in November at McIvor and McHenry Shooting Ranges. Over 1,000 students will be participating.

The shooting range customer counts for August were:
McIvor – 804 ; Turcotte – 910; and McHenry – 681.

License Reinstatements

Lt. Col. Scottie Jones, Assistant Chief of Law Enforcement, presented four license reinstatement requests. The violators were asked to come forward and state the circumstance of their arrest before the Commission.

- **Jamie Brassfield, Houston, MS**

Brassfield stated that he had a flashlight and spotted a deer with it. His friend fired his gun but did not kill the deer. A few months later a game warden asked them what happened, and they told the truth. His fines were around \$2,500.

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

- **Johnny Williamson, Collinsville, MS**

Williamson and his friend had been hunting and were just a few miles from his house when he held a light while his friend shot at a deer and missed. A neighbor called law enforcement and reported the incident. He was fined \$2,400. His friend lost his license as well.

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

- **William Smith, Pope, MS & Atkins Elliott, Batesville, MS**
Smith and Elliott were asked to come forward together since they were together at the time of the incident. On December 8, 2020 Smith and Elliott were riding around together after dark, spotted a deer, and fired a gun in that direction. They never found the deer, so they assumed that they missed the deer. Fines were around \$2,500 each.

ACTION: By motion of Commissioner Bentz and seconded by Commissioner Rhoads, William Smith’s license and Atkins Elliott’s license were reinstated by unanimous consent with the stipulation that they will serve the entire three years for a second offense.

OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was presented.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Date: Thursday, November 17, 2022
Location: 1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS
Time: 9:00 AM Business Session

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Executive Session was not needed.

ADJOURNMENT

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




Bill Cossar, CHAIRMAN



Date



Scott Goopwood, VICE CHAIRMAN



Date