

# **MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS**

**Wednesday, February 15, 2023**

**10:00 AM Educational Session      11:00 AM Business Session**  
**1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211**

## **EDUCATIONAL SESSION**

### **PRESENT:**

Chairman Bill F. Cossar  
Commissioner Scott Coopwood  
Commissioner William Mounger II  
Commissioner Gary Rhoads

### **ABSENT:**

Commissioner Leonard Bentz

Among the MDWFP staff attending were Executive Director Lynn Posey, Curtis Thornhill, Larry Pugh, Brian Ferguson, Jason Thompson, Col. Jerry Carter, Angel Rohnke, Charles Knight, Russ Walsh, Amy Blaylock, Jerry Brown, Jennifer Shows, Doug Mann, and Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General.

### **Turkey Program Update**

Adam Butler, Turkey Program Coordinator, wanted to thank Dr. Dana Morin, Professor of Wildlife Ecology at Mississippi State University, for coming to the meeting. Dr. Morin was one of the principal investigators of a new wild turkey research project conducted by MSU and MDWFP over the past two years. Dr. Morin put together data from previous studies along with the current study so that MDWFP could make data-driven management decisions for the future of wild turkeys. Butler reviewed in detail all current and historical data by means of a PowerPoint presentation.

In summary, the findings were:

- Demand for turkey hunting is increasing. Mississippi's turkey population is not.
- Illegal exploitation of the turkey resource is a problem.
- Changes to the spring season have minimal influence on turkey populations. However, they may affect hunt quality.
- To improve turkey numbers, we must help the hens.

MDWFP staff suggestions were:

- Mandatory Tagging System
- Wild Turkey Stamp (requires Legislative action)
- Retain current spring 3-bird bag limit.
- Return to old spring framework (Saturday opener & Youth week during Spring Break)

- Suspend fall season (hen survival pinpointed as the most important demographic)

A letter from the Mississippi Wild Turkey Federation (MWTF) Board of Directors was handed out to the Commission showing their full support for all the staff suggestions and offered to lend their support to the Commission and the Department in getting this program enacted.

Discussion followed.

A formal 2023 Wild Turkey Management Plan will be presented at the April Commission meeting for Commission action.

**MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS****Wednesday, February 15, 2023****10:00 AM Educational Session      11:00 AM Business Session****1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211****BUSINESS SESSION****PRESENT:**

Chairman Bill F. Cossar  
Commissioner Scott Coopwood  
Commissioner William Mounger II  
Commissioner Gary Rhoads

**ABSENT:**

Commissioner Leonard Bentz

Among the MDWFP staff attending were Executive Director Lynn Posey, Curtis Thornhill, Larry Pugh, Brian Ferguson, Jason Thompson, Col. Jerry Carter, Angel Rohnke, Charles Knight, Russ Walsh, Amy Blaylock, Jerry Brown, Jennifer Shows, Doug Mann, and Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General.

The Chairman welcomed guests watching the live stream video and special guests attending.

**OPENING PRAYER**

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

**MINUTES**

**ACTION:** Upon motion by Commissioner Coopwood and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the Commission meeting minutes of January 25, 2023 were unanimously approved.

**AGENDA**

The Chairman asked if any changes to the agenda were needed. Executive Director Posey stated that there was a need to discuss the potential purchase of land by the Department during Executive Session.

**ACTION:** Upon motion by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Coopwood, the Commission unanimously approved the meeting agenda of February 15, 2023, as amended.

### PUBLIC COMMENTS

No public comments were presented.

### LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, License/Boat Registration Division Director, presented the License Sales Report for the month of January 2023. Thompson reported that total revenue this past month is up 5%.

Highlights of his report are listed below which compare January 2023 with January 2022:

- Res license sales up \$5,000
- Res WMA User Permit up 3%
- Res Sr. Exempt up 7%
- NR license up 4%
- NR 7-day Small Game up 8%
- NR WMA User Permit up 3%
- NR Deer Permits up \$943,680
- Lifetime License up 2%
- Permit category up 6%

### LEFLEUR'S COMPLEX

#### LeFleur's Complex Update

Angel Rohnke, Director of LeFleur's Complex, informed the Commission that the playground had received a total of 121,034 visitors since its opening in December 2021, averaging 1,984 visitors a week.

LeFleur's Park was recently nominated for "Attraction of the Year" by *Visit Jackson* and "Best of MS 2023: Best Park" by *Mississippi Magazine*. Rohnke was recognized by the Jackson hospitality industry as a "Visit Jackson Hometown Hero" for her part in helping boost tourism through the planning and administration of new projects at LeFleur's Park. Applause followed.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held on Tuesday, February 7 to kick off construction on a new joint entrance for the Mississippi Children's Museum and Museum of Natural Science. The joint entrance and Museum Connector Trail Phase 2 (connecting LeFleur's Bluff State Park to Lakeland Drive) should be completed by July. A new colorful mural will be added to the Den

outer wall in April. After all the construction is completed in Phase 2, plans are to enhance the picnic area with four new pavilions, new sidewalks, renovate the concession stand and bathrooms, and landscaping.

Revenue generating from new improvements are listed below:

- Concessions : Revenue since opening - \$12,567.79. Profit - \$5,870.39
- Den Rentals: \$200/2 hours. Total rentals – 11. Total Revenue - \$7,200.  
Birthday parties and community events, such as Egg Hunts, 5K Walks, Cancer Walks, & “Moonlight Music & Meteors” with the Jackson Symphony & local astronomy club in April
- Regals Landing: \$500/3 hours
- Spotters Adventure Club: \$100/1<sup>st</sup> child; \$50/additional children. Begins March 1, 2023.  
Different adventures each month.

The MDWFP Internship Program was activated February 1. A copy of the internship program requirements and application were presented to the Commission. Summer applications are currently being received through March 15.

Rohnke also directs the MDWFP's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiative and serves as the Mississippi Minorities in Natural Resources Conservation representative for the Southeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (SEAFWA). She discussed Mississippi House Bill 1048 which would establish an adult-size changing tables installation grant program.

## **PARKS**

### **Parks Update**

Brian Ferguson, Parks Chief of Staff, informed the Commission that a new Parks reservation system will go live on March 1<sup>st</sup>. Customers will be able to set up an on-line account and reserve faster and easier on their computers. There is also a marketing tool installed which will allow Parks to use this data for marketing purposes and to correspond directly with the customer.

Other updates:

- Received bids on January 31<sup>st</sup> for Percy Quin restoration on 9 of their 27 cabins.
- Awaiting MS Department of Archives and History approval to renovate 66 historic Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) cabin structures in six different parks.
- Working with utility companies on installation of Wi-Fi statewide. Plans for Buccaneer State Park to receive Wi-Fi are being finalized.

## **FISHERIES**

### **State Fishing Lakes Update**

Jerry Brown, Director of Fisheries, introduced the new State Lake Coordinator, Josh Howell. Howell came forward to present a PowerPoint presentation on the State Fishing Lakes. Highlights of his presentation are listed below:

- MDWFP operates 20 state fishing lakes ranging from 55 to 882 acres each.
- FY23 revenue is still strong.
- Calling Panther Lake leads the other lakes in revenue, mainly from camping; Mary Crawford, second; and Neshoba, third.
- Lakes under renovation are Simpson County (reopening in 2023 after campground/utility upgrades); Lake Bogue Homa (spillway renovation); Holmes County State Park Lake, and Elvis Presley Lake (new restroom facility was completed in 2022).
- Each State Fishing Lake maintains a list of record fish. Fishermen who catch a state lake record fish will receive a certificate from MDWFP and a copy of the certificate will be on display at the lake's office. Potential record fish must be verified by a member of the Fisheries Bureau staff.

Current challenges are:

- Funding for large projects
- Inflation/fuel prices
- Filling vacancies

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

### **Law Enforcement Update**

Col. Jerry Carter, Chief of Law Enforcement, reported for the month of January there were a total of 2,057 citations issued with "No License" being first on the list, "Hunting from a Public Road" second, "Trespassing" third, "No Hunter Orange" fourth, and "Supplemental Feeding" fifth. During December officers issued a total of 55 citations for supplemental feeding.

SRT members were requested by Tate County to search for a missing person. Officers searched the property and were able to locate the subject. Temperatures were frigid and officers used their training to stabilize the individual until medical personnel could arrive.

Three juveniles were involved in a headlighting case made in Marion County. A call was made that someone was shooting at night. Two deer were killed and the officer waited for the violator to return to pick up the deer.

Officers assisted with a successful youth squirrel hunt on Copiah WMA.

The shooting range customer counts for December were:  
McIvor – 304; Turcotte – 408; and McHenry – 340.

### License Reinstatements

Col. Carter presented three license reinstatement requests. The violators were asked to come forward and state the circumstance of their arrest before the Commission.

- **Garrett Beasley, Brandon, MS**

In November 2021 Garrett Beasley and two friends headed out to spotlight deer after playing high school football earlier that evening. Five deer were shot. One deer was cleaned and the other four were left in the pickup truck overnight and the meat spoiled. They decided to dump the deer carcasses on Cornerstone Road in Brandon. Someone posted this incident on snapchat, which led law enforcement to the violators. Beasley was fined \$2,500.

The Commission decided to hold off on a decision until the next violator, Peter Dooley, came forward with his statement since he was one of the boys in the truck.

- **Peter Dooley, Brandon**

Dooley explained that Garrett Beasley and another boy were in his truck following the high school football game and they hunted around Trickhambridge Road in Rankin County. It was hot, around 85 degrees that evening and the next morning the meat smelled rancid so that is why they did not finish cleaning the deer. He was not the one who posted this information on snapchat, but he was involved in the shooting and dumping of the deer. Dooley said that there was nothing he could say that would justify their actions. He admitted that this was stupid, and someone could have gotten hurt by the shots after dark. He promised that he would never do it again. Dooley was fined \$2,500.

Questions were presented by the Commission to the young men and discussion followed. A motion was made for both violators as follows:

**ACTION: By motion of Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Rhoads, both Garrett Beasley and Peter Dooley had their licenses reinstated by unanimous consent. The Commission asked the violators to spread the word to other friends of the seriousness of hunting after dark.**

- **Colton Frith, Mize, MS**

Frith and a friend, Alan Sullivan, decided to go spotlighting in November 2021. Sullivan was driving the truck and shining the light. Frith shot two deer and loaded them into the truck. Frith promised to never do this again. He has 24 hunting dogs and stated that he could not even collar them this year. He was fined \$2,600. Alan Sullivan was also present at the meeting but had not completed all the requirements to be reinstated.

**ACTION: By motion of Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Coopwood, Frith's license was reinstated by unanimous consent.**

Col. Carter wanted to express thanks to the law enforcement officers who follow up on these leads and the public who call in violations which lead to the arrest of violators.

### OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

### NEXT MEETING DATE

Date: Thursday, March 23, 2023

Location: 1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211

Time: 9:00 AM Educational Session; 10:00 AM Business Session

### EXECUTIVE SESSION

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

**ACTION: Commissioner Rhoads made a motion to close the meeting to determine the need to go into Executive Session. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to close the meeting.**

The attorney announced to those present that the meeting was now closed to determine the need to go into Executive Session.

The meeting was closed. Discussion was held and it was determined that there was a need to enter into Executive Session to discuss the prospective purchase of land.

**ACTION: Commissioner Rhoads made a motion to enter into Executive Session to discuss the prospective purchase of land. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to enter Executive Session.**

The attorney announced to those present that the Commission had entered into Executive Session to discuss the prospective purchase of land.

Art Kennard, MDWFP Lands Coordinator, updated the Commission on tracts of land that were being considered for purchase. Discussion followed.

**Upon motion by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Rhoads the Commission unanimously voted to authorize Art Kennard to obtain the necessary appraisals to determine if the Department could purchase the land in question.**

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



The attorney announced to the public that the meeting was now open and that during Executive Session the Commission voted to authorize staff to obtain the necessary appraisals to determine if the Department could purchase the land in question.

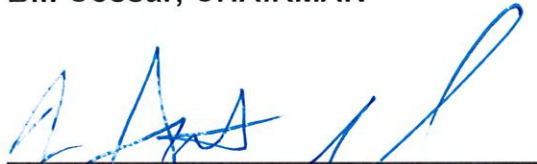
### ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Commission, Commissioner Coopwood moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Mounger, and the motion carried.

Chairman Cossar gaveled the meeting into adjournment.

  
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Bill Cossar, CHAIRMAN

  
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Date

  
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Scott Coopwood, VICE CHAIRMAN

  
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Date