

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Thursday, October 12, 2023

10 AM Business Session

Buccaneer State Park, 1150 S. Beach Blvd., Waveland MS 39576

MINUTES – BUSINESS SESSION

PRESENT: Commission Chairman Bill F. Cossar, Commissioners Scott Coopwood, Leonard Bentz, William Mounger II, and Gary Rhoads.

Among the MDWFP staff attending were Mr. Lynn Posey, Executive Director; Curtis Thornhill, Deputy Executive Director; Larry Pugh, Brian Ferguson, Jason Thompson, Lt. Col. Scottie Jones, Andre Hollis, Houston Havens, Doug Mann, and Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General.

OPENING PRAYER

Jason Thompson, Director of Administrative Services, opened the meeting with prayer.

The Chairman asked the Executive Director to introduce guests attending the meeting. Posey welcomed two members of the Mississippi House of Representatives, Honorable Brent Anderson and Honorable Larry Byrd to the meeting. Posey also introduced the new Interim Executive Director of the Foundation for Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks, Clark Gordon; and members of C Spire Communications, Terrel Knight and Greg Grimes. Commissioner Bentz welcomed Tim Kellar, Hancock County Chancery Clerk; Jay Trapani, Mayor of Waveland; Sara Guice, Executive Director of the Land Trust for the MS Coastal Plains; and upon his arrival later in the meeting, Honorable Philman Ladner, member of the Mississippi Senate.

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Coopwood and seconded by Commissioner Bentz, the Commission meeting minutes of September 14, 2023, were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

ACTION: Commissioner Bentz moved to approve the agenda for October 12, 2023, Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the motion carried.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson presented the License Sales Report for the month of September 2023. The total revenue generated for the end of September was \$3,149,000, up \$21,000 from last year.

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident license sales – \$1,602,000
 - RES WMA User Permit – up 3%
- Boating & Fishing Guide Permits – 60 RES & 7 NR sold - \$45,670
- Non-resident license sales – up \$15,000
 - NR Small Game Hunting – up 7%
 - NR 7-day Small Game – up 25%
 - NR Deer Permit – up \$63,000
- Permit category – Alligator licenses – 2,316 sold (17 more than last year)
- Lifetime License category – down 9%
- License packages sold – 7,198 compared to 6,630 last year
- Autorenewal customers increased from 5,589 to 7,102

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No one came forward during the public comment period.

WILDLIFE

Wildlife Update

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff, presented the following proposed rule change.

40 MS Admin. Code Part 2, Chapter 1: Wildlife Management Areas PROPOSED Rule 1.23 – Sunflower WMA

A clerical error was made in the Sunflower WMA regulations on the season's ending date. The correct ending date for gun season with dogs, January 17, mirrors the statewide deer season. Primitive weapon season was also inadvertently omitted. Shown below is the corrected version.

Gun with dogs: December 24 – January 17

Primitive weapon: January 18 - 31

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Bentz and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the Commission unanimously approved the Proposed Rule 1.23 as presented by the staff.

2023 MDWFP Staff Recommendations – State Waterfowl Stamp Funds

Houston Havens, Waterfowl Program Coordinator, presented the 2023-2024 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.

Havens reported that for the third consecutive year we have had record sales of Duck Stamps, currently selling slightly over 50,000. The number of Duck Stamps sold is a good indicator of how many duck hunters we have in Mississippi.

<u>Project</u>	<u>Recommended</u>	<u>Project Description</u>
DU & DU Canada	\$125,000	Continue funding of Eastern Saskatchewan Breeding Habitat Project.
Delta Waterfowl	\$125,000	Continue funding of Adopt a Pothole Program in Manitoba.
MSU Research	\$ 30,514	To complete a study of waterfowl distributions and abundances using MS and AR long-term aerial waterfowl survey data.
WMA Wetland Management & Enhancement Projects	\$250,000	Funds for waterfowl habitat management, public waterfowl hunting enhancements, and wetland infrastructure. Water control structure replacement on Howard Miller and Mahannah WMAs.
Private Land Wetland Infrastructure Assistance Program	\$ 40,000	Continue a wetland habitat assistance program for Mississippi private landowners. Provide water control structures for landowners prioritized by competitive ranking criteria.
Aerial Waterfowl Surveys	\$ 31,000	Continue long-term monitoring of MS Delta winter waterfowl abundances. Delta Wildlife has contributed survey funding in the past years and may also continue to do so.
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	\$ 25,917	Annual dues to MS Flyway Council, annual contributions to MS Flyway banding, & other cooperative waterfowl projects.
Youth Waterfowl Hunting & Educ. Camp	\$ 8,000	For continuing the Youth Waterfowl Hunting and Education Camp at Muscadine Farms in partnership with Ducks Unlimited.
TOTAL	\$649,431	

Discussion followed. Questions were brought up concerning 40% of the Duck Stamp funds going to Canada. Discussion following resulted in the Commission requesting future presentation(s) by staff regarding the Eastern Saskatchewan Breeding Habitat Project and Adopt-a-Pothole Project in Manitoba. Commissioner Bentz thanked Houston Havens for his excellent job managing the duck program.

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger made a motion to approve the 2023-2024 Staff Recommendations for State Waterfowl Stamp Funds with a second by Commissioner Coopwood. The Chairman called for a vote, which ended with a split vote of two for the motion and two against. Voting against the motion were Commissioners Bentz and Rhoads. The Chairman made the deciding vote in favor of the motion and the motion carried.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law Enforcement Update

Lt. Col. Scottie Jones, Assistant Chief of Law Enforcement, reported 751 citations issued for the month of September with "Hunting Doves over Bait" being number one. The Dove Season Opening Report revealed 4,278 dove hunters were checked by law enforcement officers during the 3-day weekend, September 2-4, 2023. Dove baiting violations totaled 169 for the weekend. MDWFP cadets graduated in time to participate in the Opening Dove Season. Shooting range customer counts were: Mclvor – 479; Turcotte – 936; and McHenry – 464. Four Shooting Qualifier Events will be held at the ranges with the top shooters going forward to compete in the State Tournament next spring.

PARKS

Parks Update

Brian Ferguson, Parks Chief of Staff, gave a quick update on projects around the state. A handout was distributed to the Commission with details on the \$60 million dollar improvements. Highlighted were three campgrounds currently closed down until 2024 for improvements at Percy Quin, Paul B. Johnson, and Roosevelt. Cabins are currently being renovated at Natchez, Paul B. Johnson, Percy Quin, Roosevelt, and Clarkco. A new East section of Buccaneer is being developed to add 14 new campground pads and walking trail.

Mr. Ferguson introduced Park Administrators and Executive staff in attendance. A new administrative branch was established by Ferguson to facilitate Legislative funding involving key park elements for purchasing and budget requirements, strategic planning, modern technology, environmental wastewater, statewide park events/historic interpretations, and retail merchandising spaces.

A PowerPoint presentation on the economic impact of national and local parks was presented. On the business side, state parks bring a lot to the state of Mississippi. State and local parks bring over \$1 billion into Mississippi in total transactions and employ 7,322 jobs and \$301,297,647 in labor income. A study at the University of Southern Mississippi in 2021 showed that Paul B. Johnson generated \$20 million dollars in tax revenue to that area. Ferguson is looking forward to seeing how well these figures improve over the next five years.

Critical components to increase Mississippi State Parks' economic impact on Mississippi will be:

1. Capital Improvements
 - a. Campgrounds
 - b. Facilities and Grounds
 - c. Utility Infrastructure
 - i. Upgrade Electrical
 - ii. Wastewater & Sewage
 - iii. Wireless Internet
 - iv. EV Charging Stations
 - d. SaaS
 - i. Reservation
 - ii. Event Management
 - iii. Volunteer Management
 - iv. Economic Analysis
 - v. Online Retail
2. Equipping
 - a. Heavy Equipment
 - i. Renovations
 - ii. Repairs
 - b. Ground Care Equipment
 - i. Compact tractors
 - ii. Landscaping Equipment
 - iii. All-terrain vehicles
 - c. Emergency Backup
 - i. Generators
 - ii. Bulk Fuel Storage
3. Training
 - a. Organizational
 - b. Team
 - c. Individual
4. Building Partner Capacity
 - a. Friends Groups
 - b. State Park Foundation
 - c. Private Businesses
 - d. City and County Governments
 - e. Other State Agencies

Ferguson thanked the mayors of the City of Waveland and City of Bay St. Louis for hosting events in the area. These events greatly enhance the economic support and growth of Buccaneer. The campsites and water park at Buccaneer also enhance the economic structure for the Cities of Waveland and Bay St. Louis.

Wi-Fi at Buccaneer State Park

Wi-Fi has become a very important expectation in today's world. Campers rely on Wi-Fi to search local businesses for food and supplies, as well as, conversing with family and friends about their travel experiences. Campers feel it is needed for their children and for staying connected with their jobs. Presently, our park conference centers stay empty because businesses cannot conduct meetings without Wi-Fi connections. On average, campers extend the duration of their stay by 10.8 days where Wi-Fi is available. Staff also need reliable Wi-Fi to fulfill their duties.

Ferguson invited C Spire to come and give a presentation to the Commission on their recent installation of Wi-Fi capabilities at Buccaneer State Park, which is the pilot park for Wi-Fi connection in the state.

Terrel Knight, Vice President of Government Development, introduced two members of C Spire who were present: Greg Grimes, Sr. Systems Engineer, who oversaw the Buccaneer installation project, and Cassie Wilson, Account Executive, who created the business plan for MDWFP. C Spire was contacted in January 2023 to provide Wi-Fi for Buccaneer. Knight requested that MDWFP visit Joe Wheeler State Park in Alabama and get first-hand feedback on their Wi-Fi installation by C Spire. Alabama gave a 100% approval rating for their C Spire Wi-Fi installation. Even so, Knight stated that the Buccaneer network outshines state parks anywhere, even Alabama. The managed fiber running throughout the park gives easy access, along with unlimited data and band width which can be increased or decreased by MDWFP personnel as needed.

Paul B. Johnson and Roosevelt State Parks are the next parks scheduled for W-i-Fi capabilities depending upon Legislative funding for Wi-Fi connection for 2024.

Greg Grimes, with C Spire, explained the state-of-art wireless design, Wi-Fi 6, engineered for Buccaneer's 200+ RV campsites spread out all over the park. Installation included 32 wireless access points: 29 outdoor to cover RV pads, manager's home, administration building, six wave pool cabanas, and a switching network. The design has future flexibility so that gates and cameras can be added and operated remotely.

C Spire has also surveyed and designed a wireless network for five other Mississippi state parks: Paul B. Johnson, Roosevelt, Percy Quin, Clarkco, and Natchez.

Commissioner Bentz wanted to thank Andre Hollis for all the years he held Parks together on a shoestring budget before all this money was given to Parks. Everyone applauded.

OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was presented.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Date: Thursday, November 16, 2023
Location: 1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS
Time: 9 a.m. Educational Session
10 a.m. Business Session

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Chairman asked if there was a need for an Executive Session. Executive Director Posey stated that there was no need for an Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

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



Bill Cossar, CHAIRMAN



Date



Scott Coopwood, VICE CHAIRMAN

Date