

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

**Thursday, December 14, 2023**

**9:30 AM Business Session**

**1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS, 39211**

## **MINUTES – BUSINESS SESSION**

**PRESENT:** Commission Chairman Bill F. Cossar, Commissioners Leonard Bentz, William Mounger II, and Gary Rhoads. Vice-Chairman Scott Coopwood attended via phone.

Among the MDWFP staff attending were Mr. Lynn Posey, Executive Director; Curtis Thornhill, Chief of Staff; Larry Pugh, Deputy Director; Angel Rohnke, Deputy Administrator; Jason Thompson, Director of Administrative Services; Jeremy Bass, Director of Marketing and Communications; Charles Knight, Director of the MS Museum of Natural Science; Col. Jerry Carter, Chief of Law Enforcement; Doug Mann, Executive Staff Officer; and Drew Malone, Special Assistant Attorney General. Special Guests: Senator Mike Seymour and Kris Godwin, USDA.

## **OPENING PRAYER**

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

The Chairman welcomed guests Senator Mike Seymour and Kris Godwin of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Chairman Cossar also welcomed Hollie Hilton, Executive Assistant to the Executive Director, who will serve as the new Commission Secretary.

## **MINUTES**

**ACTION:** Upon motion made by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Rhoads, the Commission meeting minutes of November 16, 2023, were unanimously approved. Commissioner Bentz was not present for this vote.

## **AGENDA**

Executive Director Posey announced an agenda change to include an Executive Session. He also stated that Commissioner Bentz would arrive at the meeting shortly.

**ACTION:** Commissioner Rhoads moved to approve the agenda for December 14th, 2023. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the motion carried. Commissioner Bentz was not present for this vote.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Chairman Cossar introduced Randy Coleman, representing several private landowners from Grenada and Yalobusha Counties, where the MS Fox Hunter's Association field trials are held. Mr. Coleman Stated he would like to inform the Commission of the "other half" of the story presented by participants in the MDHA field trials during the Public Comments portion of the November 16<sup>th</sup> Commission meeting.

Commissioner Bentz joined the meeting while Mr. Coleman addressed the Commission.

Mr. Coleman stated that he is upset about coyotes and hundreds of dogs released during the field trials which enter his property while he and his family are hunting. He added that the year-round fox hunting events have caused a series of problems that he outlined in five points before the Commission:

- 1) Conservation concerns – Mr. Coleman said he noted from the November meeting that revenue was the focus of the MDHA rather than the negative impacts the hunts have on wildlife.
- 2) Dogs roaming free on public land – He said he believes GPS collars have improved this problem; however, he stated the collars do not prevent hunting, dogs near homes, and injury or death to livestock and pets.
- 3) Road safety – Mr. Coleman explained the dangers presented when dog hunters ask commuters to slow down or stop their vehicles due to dog judging.
- 4) Trespassing – He expressed that hunters using the excuse of trying to recover a dog should not override "no trespassing" signs.
- 5) "Bad apples" – Mr. Coleman informed the Commission that most of the hunting complaints reported to MDWFP come from Magnum Hunting Club, which leases 13,000 acres of land. He stated that several entities have pulled their land from the club because of the practices of the MDHA.

Mr. Coleman thanked MDWFP law enforcement for their work, and said he'd like to ask the Commission to reconsider the release of coyotes and to "crack down" on trespassing, road-hunting, poaching, and blocking of roadways and driveways during the hunts.

Chairman Cossar thanked Mr. Coleman for his comments.

### **LICENSE SALES REPORT**

Jason Thompson presented the License Sales Report for the month of November 2023. The total revenue generated for the end of November was \$10,267,000; down \$49,000 from last year. The number of licenses sold is down 5% from November 2022.

Highlights of his report are as follows:

- Resident license sales – \$3.9 million
- Resident waterfowl stamps – 156 more sold this year
- RES WMA User Permit – 56 more sold versus last year

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- Boating & Fishing Guide Permits – 72 total; 65 RES & 7 NR sold - \$46,000
  - Non-resident license sales – up \$70,000
    - 7-Day All-Game Hunting – up 2%
    - NR 7-day Small Game – up 22%
    - NR Deer Permit – up \$465,000; (total number of permits purchased is down 1,200 due to fee increase)
  - Permit category – up 3%
  - Lifetime License category – down 2%
  - License packages sold – 18,270 compared to 17,787 in 2022
  - Autorenewal customers increased 15,000 from 12,000 in 2022

Mr. Thompson reported that as of December 13, 2023, license revenue totals were up \$112,000.

Commissioner Mounger asked how Arkansas' increased fee prices compare to that of Mississippi.

Mr. Thompson stated that AR's hunting license fee increased to \$410 in July and includes an archery/primitive weapon fee, compared to \$400 for MS, which includes a deer permit fee. Commissioner Mounger also inquired about AR's turkey permit fees versus MS's fees. Mr. Thompson answered both states cost \$350.

Commissioner Mounger asked how MS fees rank compared to other Southern states. Mr. Thompson said MS has the highest fees, but if archery/primitive weapon fees are included, AR is most expensive.

Mounger also asked whether out-of-state hunters could purchase a Lifetime License. Mr. Thompson responded that a \$1,500 "Native Son" license was an option for non-residents born in MS.

## **WILDLIFE**

### **Wildlife Update**

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff, provided a CWD update, reporting that 244 CWD-positive cases have been identified since February 2018. He informed the Commission that out of 3,089 samples received this season, there were 37 positive cases.

Mr. Walsh announced that in November of 2023, a CWD-positive deer was harvested on private land in Harrison County, MS. The two-and-a-half-year-old buck was confirmed CWD-positive on November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023, after being tested three times. Mr. Walsh stated that the deer was tested at the MSU Diagnostic Lab in Pearl, MS, where it was deemed "suspect positive," with further confirmatory IHC testing at the National Veterinary Services Laboratory in Ames, IA. An additional test was conducted on tissue from the deer's skull. Mr. Walsh added that the deer tested positive for CWD each time.

Mr. Walsh proposed a CWD Zone be established around the positive case in Harrison County, based on the recent amendment to the CWD Management Plan. He provided maps and information for the Commission on this proposed zone.

He explained that the CWD Zone proposal states that a 10-mile radius is to be established around the CWD-positive case on roads and county/political boundaries, which would include the following: *All portions of Harrison County west of Highway 49; all portions of Hancock County east of Highways 53, 603, and 43; and all portions of Harrison County east of Nicholson Avenue above the Gulf coastline.* The zone would also include all areas south of Harrison and Hancock County lines.

Mr. Posey suggested the recommendation for the CWD Management Zone establishment be effective February 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024, rather than the initial proposed date of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

Mounger asked Mr. Walsh to inform the Commission of what current CWD regulations entail.

Mr. Walsh answered that there would be a ban on supplemental feeding and regulations on carcass transport outside of the zone, which includes whole deer, deer heads, and capes. He added that harvested deer must be cleaned and quartered prior to transport.

Chairman Cossar asked the time of the scheduled CWD Public Meeting on the coast.

Mr. Walsh announced that on Wednesday, December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023, at 6:00 pm, a CWD Public Meeting will be held at the West Harrison High School Gymnasium in Gulfport, MS, for MDWFP to provide an update and answer questions regarding the CWD Zone.

Mr. Mounger asked how many samples had been received from Harrison County. Mr. Walsh reported that nine samples had been received in 2023, which is an 11% prevalence rate. He said he hopes more taxidermists become involved in helping to identify cases.

Commissioner Bentz asked if MDWFP pays taxidermists for their participation in identifying cases, and whether it was mandatory for taxidermists and hunters to submit samples. Mr. Walsh responded that taxidermists are paid \$10 per sample for their time and materials, and that sample testing is not mandatory and is at the discretion of the hunter/taxidermist.

**ACTION:** Upon motion by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Rhoads, the Commission approved to establish the proposed CWD Zone for Harrison County effective February 16, 2024. Commissioner Bentz voted against the motion.

## **LAW ENFORCEMENT**

### **Law Enforcement Update**

Colonel Jerry Carter, Chief of Law Enforcement, reported 1,166 license/compliance check citations issued for the month of November, with the top five as: "No License" (164 citations); Hunting from a Public Road (97); No Hunter Orange (72); Supplemental Feeding (70 citations); and Trespassing (38 citations).

Colonel Carter announced that on November 25, 2023, the MDWFP canine unit was requested to assist in an investigation on Mahannah WMA for illegal duck hunting activity. The investigation revealed five “undrawn” duck hunters who shot 32 ducks while on the WMA, later leaving them on the riverbank. Seventeen of the ducks were seized and 26 citations issued. Colonel Carter recognized Sergeant Larry Primeaux, head of the MDWFP canine unit, and commended him on his work in the investigation.

Colonel Carter also provided a case update from South Mississippi, where Officer Heath Hulon received a call from a landowner reporting someone hunting on his land in Jones County. Officer Hulon arrived on the scene and located two people deer hunting with guns in a shooting house. Officer Hulon charged the individuals with hunting out-of-season, supplemental feeding, no hunter orange, and no hunting license.

Shooting range customer counts for November were as follows: Mclvor – 820; Turcotte – 1,327; McHenry – 837.

The following officers were recognized by Colonel Carter and presented a certificate for their outstanding achievements and life-saving efforts performed above and beyond the call of duty:

2023 MS SEAFWA Officer of the Year – Sergeant Larry Primeaux

MS National Wild Turkey Federation Officer of the Year – Lieutenant Jason Blaylock

MS Waterfowl Officer of the Year – Corporal Bailey Jones

Lifesaving Awards:

- Lieutenant Ricky Barry
- Master Sergeant Steven Poff
- Master Sergeant Jackie Stanton
- Private Zach Adams
- Private Jakoby Richards

Commissioner Bentz asked when the next cadet class would be. Colonel Carter answered that the next class would begin in April or May and would consist of about 20 cadets. Colonel Carter added that the application process would be from January 10<sup>th</sup> through February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

**OTHER BUSINESS**

Mr. Posey stated the importance of MDWFP's relationship with the MS Legislature, and introduced the agency's new Budget Director, Josh Kastner.

Mr. Kaster addressed the Commission, stating he comes from the State Auditor's office and hopes to utilize his skills to help the agency in every manner possible. He began his job on Monday, December 11<sup>th</sup>.

**NEXT MEETING DATE**

Chairman Cossar announced the next Commission Meeting date information.

Date: Thursday, January 25, 2024

Location: The Cotton House, Donelson Room, Cleveland, MS 38732

Time: 11:00 AM Business Session – NO Education Session

**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

Director Posey announced that an Executive Session for the Commission was necessary.

**ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Bentz to close the meeting to determine the need for an Executive Session and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the Commission voted unanimously to close the meeting. The meeting was closed.**

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 a matter involving potential litigation.

**ACTION: Commissioner Bentz made a motion to enter into Executive Session to discuss potential litigation. 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 potential litigation.

Discussion followed. No action was taken by the Commission.

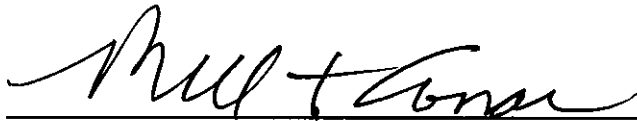
**ACTION: There being no further items for discussion in the Executive Session, Commissioner Bentz made a motion to open the meeting. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the Commission voted unanimously to open the meeting.**

The attorney announced to the public that the meeting was now open and that during Executive Session the Commission discussed a matter involving potential litigation.

December 14, 2023

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Commission, Commissioner Bentz made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Commissioner Rhoads. The Commission voted unanimously in favor and the meeting was adjourned.



Bill F. Cossar, CHAIRMAN

1/25/2024  
Date



Scott Coopwood, VICE CHAIRMAN

1/25/24  
Date