

# MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Thursday, January 25, 2024

11:00 AM Business Session

The Cotton House, Donelson Room  
215 Cotton Row, Cleveland, MS 38732

## MINUTES – BUSINESS SESSION

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

Among the MDWFP staff attending were Mr. Lynn Posey, Executive Director; Curtis Thornhill, Chief of Staff; Larry Pugh, Deputy Director; Brian Ferguson, Chief of Staff of State Parks; Jason Thompson, Director of Administrative Services; Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff; Andrew Arnett, Alligator Program Leader; Jeremy Bass, Director of Marketing and Communications; Col. Jerry Carter, Chief of Law Enforcement; Doug Mann, Executive Staff Officer.

## OPENING PRAYER

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

The Chairman welcomed guests Ron Selby with Delta Wildlife and Ed Coleman from Cleveland; MS. Chairman Cossar also welcomed Tom Janoush of the WFP Foundation Board of Directors.

## MINUTES

**ACTION:** Upon motion made by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Vice-Chairman Coopwood, the Commission meeting minutes for January 25th, 2024, were unanimously approved.

## AGENDA

Director Posey announced that there were no proposed changes to the meeting's agenda.

**ACTION:** Commissioner Mounger moved to approve the agenda for January 25, 2024. Commissioner Bentz seconded the motion and the motion carried.

## LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson presented the License Sales Report for the month of December 2023. The total revenue generated for the end of December was \$14,337,000—an increase of \$276,000 from last year. The number of licenses sold is down 4% from December 2022.

Highlights of his report are as follows:

- Resident license sales – \$5.1 million.
- RES WMA User Permit – 547 more sold versus last year.
- Boating & Fishing Guide Permits – 1 sold in December; 73 total; (65 RES and 8 NR).
- Archery/Primitive Weapon Permits – up 5% from last year.
- Non-resident license sales – up \$366,000.
  - NR 7-day Small Game – up 7%.
  - NR Deer Permit – up \$754,000; (total number of permits purchased is down 1,200 from last year due to fee increase).
- Permit category – up 3%.
- Lifetime License category – up 1%.
- License packages sold – 24,302 compared to 23,537 in 2022.
- Autorenewal customers increased to 19,481 from 15,715 in 2022.

Commissioner Mounger asked whether there were updates on the non-resident public land turkey draw hunt.

Mr. Thompson stated that the application process for non-residents began January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, and that as of January 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024, a total of 1041 applications had been received.

Commissioner Mounger asked what the deadline would be for applying for the draw hunt. Mr. Thompson answered February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Director Posey added that the WMA turkey draw hunt application process would begin for residents and non-residents on January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024, with a deadline of February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

Commissioner Mounger inquired whether autorenewal status means everything except the federal duck stamp. Mr. Thompson responded yes, due to the federal duck stamp being seasonal. He added that the only other exception would be trip licenses.

Commissioner Mounger said the federal duck stamp has the potential to be electronic next year, and that MDWFP should consider implementing that capability.

Mr. Thompson stated that the agency currently has an electronic stamp for a limited time only, but that he will research the matter further to determine what the agency could do next year.

## WILDLIFE

### Wildlife Update

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff, introduced Andrew Arnett, the agency's new Alligator Program Leader, who presented an update on the 2023 Pelahatchie Bay Alligator Season.

Mr. Arnett announced that for the 2023 season, there were 1,669 draw hunt applications, of which 718 individuals were eligible for the draw. He said that of the 24 permits drawn, all 24 were purchased.

He stated that from a total of 48 alligators eligible for harvest, 21 were harvested during the special season last year.

Mr. Arnett said that in early January 2024, MDWFP received approval from the Pearl River Valley Water District (PRVWSD) Board for a second Pelahatchie Bay Alligator Season. He said the purpose of the second season is to target breeding-age adults to reduce alligator populations and mitigate complaints from residents on Pelahatchie Bay.

Mr. Arnett presented the Commission with 40 Miss. Admin. Code, Part 2, Rule 5.4. He proposed striking the rule reference to the year of "2023," in order to prevent having to change the calendar year each year that the season is approved.

**ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Bentz, the Commission unanimously approved the recommendation to strike the calendar year "2023" from 40 Miss. Admin. Code, Part 2, Rule 5.4.**

Commissioner Mounger asked Mr. Arnett what the largest alligator measured that has been harvested from Pelahatchie Bay.

Mr. Arnett answered that the largest harvested from the area was a 12'3" male.

Commissioner Cossar asked from a total of 1,669 applicants, why only 718 were eligible to be drawn for the hunt.

Mr. Arnett stated that there was a two-part application with two partners, and both had to meet eligibility requirements to be selected for the hunt.

Chairman Cossar asked Mr. Arnett to explain the location of Pelahatchie Bay to meeting attendees. Mr. Arnett provided the location details of Pelahatchie Bay and the alligators' nesting area.

Commissioner Bentz congratulated Mr. Arnett on his new role with MDWFP, and Chairman Cossar thanked him for his presentation.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

### Law Enforcement Update

Colonel Jerry Carter, Chief of Law Enforcement, reported 1,438 license/compliance check citations issued for the month of December, with the top five as: "No License" (193); Hunting from a Public Road (110); Supplemental Feeding (87); Trespassing (77); and No Hunter Orange (71).

Colonel Carter presented the Commission with details of an investigation involving "Canine Ricky" from the MDWFP canine unit, who led officers to a dead doe hidden near the base of a tree at the Pascagoula WMA following a call received by law enforcement for suspicious activity. The doe was seized by the officers and the hunters were cited for unlawful possession, killing a doe out of season, failure to check-in the deer, and no WMA permit. Colonel Carter stated that

Officer Mounter was the arresting officer in the case. He commended the canine unit for their work.

Chairman Cossar asked how many canines were in the MDWFP fleet. Colonel Carter stated the agency currently has four, with hopes of adding more in the future.

Colonel Carter informed the Commission that 53 headlighting citations were issued in December 2023, with a total of 90 issued since October.

Colonel Carter announced that MDWFP's Law Enforcement Bureau is currently hiring 20 cadets and that applications are available online until February 13<sup>th</sup>. Colonel Carter said interviews are scheduled to begin in March.

MDWFP Shooting Range customer counts for December 2023 were as follows: Mclvor – 712; Turcotte – 1,133; McHenry – 1,362.

Commissioner Mounger asked Colonel Carter to explain the difference in the classes of violations to the meeting attendees.

Colonel Carter outlined violation classes and examples as follows:

Class 1 – \$2,000 to \$5,000 fine, with a possibility of license revocation or suspension. Example is headlighting.

Class 2 – \$200 to \$500 fine. Examples are killing an animal out-of-season, illegal harvest, and supplemental feeding.

Class 3 - \$25 to \$100 fine. Example is no license.

Chairman Cossar asked how trespassing would be classified. Colonel Carter replied that trespassing would be a Class 0 or 2, depending on the nature of the offense.

Director Posey stated he would like to add that to graduate 20 cadets, MDWFP would likely have to recruit in excess of 30. He noted that the men and women undergo a rigorous 24-week training period, which includes 12 weeks at both MLEOTA and MCOTA, and stated that MDWFP's law enforcement are some of the highest-trained in Mississippi.

Director Posey said efforts would be made to obtain additional funding from the Legislature for salary increases for MDWFP's law enforcement officers.

Commissioner Bentz stated that it is beneficial and imperative that MDWFP increase the salaries of its law enforcement officers to avoid the risk of losing them to other agencies. He added that he stands committed to these efforts.

Colonel Carter stated that because of funding issues, officer back-up is limited, which results in officers occasionally facing violators alone.

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**OTHER BUSINESS**

Chairman Cossar asked Vice-Chairman Coopwood to present the Outstanding MS Sportsman Award recognitions.

Vice-Chairman Coopwood announced that periodically, the agency recognizes Mississippians who contribute to the outdoors in a variety of ways. He honored the following three individuals with framed certificates with a brief description of how they have accomplished the mission of MDWFP.

**1). Dr. Todd Davis** (Cleveland, MS) – Dr. Davis serves as the Outdoor Program Director at Delta State University (the first of its kind in the state). Originally from Idaho, he is a former helicopter rescue swimmer and aviation survival technician for the U.S. Coast Guard. Dr. Davis served many years in the Idaho educational system, and now introduces Mississippi students to the outdoors through hiking, mountain climbing, canoeing, camping, white-water rafting, etc. He currently oversees several outdoor workshops at Delta State University.

**2). John Phillip Land** (Cleveland, MS) – A graduate of MSU and avid duck hunter, Mr. Land serves as chairman of MS Ducks Unlimited, previously serving as Bolivar County chairman, Delta District chairman, and DU state treasurer. A former DU “Volunteer of the Year” in 2019, Mr. Land was also DU’s 2020 District Chairman of the year.

**3). Pemble Davis** (Merigold, MS) – A farmer whose grandfather was the founder and namesake of Merigold Hunting Club, as well as maker of the famed Pemble turkey calls, Mr. Pemble is a fervid hunter, having hunted in Africa more than 25 times. He has also introduced several Delta residents to African hunting and has been interviewed by various media on the sport. He has written many articles on hunting and has consulted several authors of hunting books.

Mr. Pemble briefly addressed the Commission and recognized Stephanie McGarr for her involvement in hunting. He also recognized his wife for her involvement in African safari hunting, as well as Guy and Hannah Whittle. The Whittles lead one of the largest wildlife conservancies in Africa and are devoted advocates of conservation in the state and abroad.

Chairman Cossar thanked the recipients for their work and dedication to the outdoors.

Chairman Bentz addressed the Commission, stating that due to challenges with the WFP Foundation over the past few months, he’d like to make a motion to either suspend the agency’s relationship until plans are in order, or sever the relationship with the WFP Foundation entirely.

**ACTION: With there being no second to Commissioner Bentz’ motion to either suspend or sever MDWFP’s relationship with the WFP Foundation, the motion failed.**

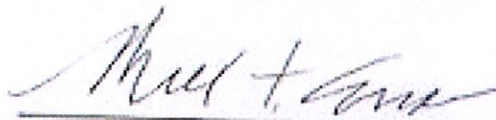
NEXT MEETING DATE

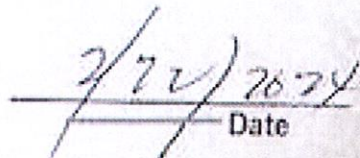
Director Posey announced the next Commission Meeting date information.

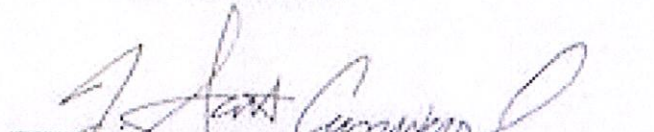
Date: Thursday, February 22nd, 2024  
Location: Black Prairie WMA  
1350 Fire Tower Road  
Crawford, MS 39743  
Time: 10:00 AM Education Session  
11:00 AM Business Session

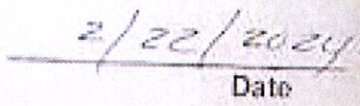
ADJOURNMENT

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

  
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Bill F. Cossar, CHAIRMAN

  
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Date

  
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Scott Coopwood, VICE CHAIRMAN

  
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Date