

Waterfowl Advisory Committee
December 6, 2022, Minutes
SCDNR Clemson Office
311 Natural Resources Dr. Clemson, SC 29631

Members Present:

Chairman Bob Perry, John Hilton, Stuart Cochran, Bill Mace

Members Absent:

Jerry Lee

DNR Staff Present:

Billy Dukes, Willie Simmons, Will Dillman, Molly Kneece, Alicia Farrell, Tammy Waldrop, Pat Cloninger, Chris Gravely, Bob Miller, Matt Norris, Greg Lucas, Kelsey Huffstetler

Constituents Present:

There were no constituents in attendance.

Chairman Bob Perry called the meeting to order at 10:33 AM, and Billy Dukes, Chief of Wildlife, introduced Region I waterfowl staff.

The minutes of the November 8, 2022, meeting were approved with an amendment recognizing Rep. Phillip Lowe.

Molly Kneece, Waterfowl Program Manager/Biologist, provided a general update on meetings, projects, and activities that she has been involved in recently. Kneece attended her first Aquatic Plant Management Council meeting, where she discussed research objectives moving forward for waterfowl-based questions and concerns. Kneece met with private landowners to coordinate efforts for a mallard research project that DNR is involved with in cooperation with the Atlantic Flyway Council, to monitor mallard movement by placing geolocators and satellite transmitters on mallard hens in South Carolina. Kneece and Dukes met with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff about making changes to the goose hunting closure zone in Clarendon and Orangeburg counties, and potentially opening the area back up for goose hunting in the future. Following her general update, Kneece gave a presentation on Category 1 waterfowl area harvest results. Overall, harvest numbers for the first split of waterfowl season have been satisfactory. Total harvest numbers to date for the first split of the waterfowl season are 390 ducks harvested, 96 hunters with a 3.3 duck per hunter average, and 1700 shots fired. Historically, the most harvested species across all Category 1 Waterfowl Areas have been Gadwall, followed by Green Winged Teal, and Blue Winged Teal.

Willie Simmons, Assistant Chief of Wildlife (Regions 1 and 3), reported on habitat conditions at Beaverdam Creek Waterfowl Area, Clemson Youth Waterfowl Area, and Wateree River Waterfowl Area. Significant infrastructure issues at Beaverdam Creek include water level control problems at the main

impoundment, and frequent storm events and high waters causing damage to dikes and hunter access concerns. A NAWCA habitat restoration project is scheduled to begin in February 2023 to make necessary repairs and improve the ability to dewater the impoundment following flood events. Significant infrastructure issues at Clemson Youth Waterfowl Area include compromised dikes, and over wash events that result from flash flooding of 18-mile creek. A new riser pipe was installed in 2021 and the spillway was reworked. Wateree River recently underwent the 3rd step of the peer review process, and the report is presently being drafted. Significant infrastructure issues at Wateree include challenges pumping water into impoundments due to low water levels in the river and compromised dikes. Plans to repair dikes in the green-tree reservoir and establish a more reliable water source are underway, and leaking dikes are being cored and repaired as needed.

Alicia Farrell, Regional Coordinator (Region 4), reported on habitat conditions at Broad River Waterfowl Area, Bear Island, Springfield, Bonneau Ferry Youth Waterfowl Area, Donnelly Youth Waterfowl Area, Samworth, Sandy Beach, Santee Coastal Reserve, and Santee Delta. Significant infrastructure issues at Broad River include flooding, and pumping challenges. Renovation plans for Spring of 2023 are underway to improve dewatering capability, as well as potentially raise the dike height. Bear Island has no significant infrastructure issues, and the East and West portions have both been in a “fresh” cycle. Springfield has no current infrastructure issues, but dike problems are anticipated. Early flooding in preparation for Hurricane Ian presented difficulties in drying the area afterward, but plant species composition has a positive outlook. At Bonneau Ferry, significant infrastructure issues in Lake Emily will be renovated to improve water movement and depth management, and new fencing on corn areas have led to lasting production into waterfowl season. There are no infrastructure issues at Donnelly, and staff are continuing work to smooth out bed levels. Significant infrastructure issues at Samworth include breaches due to Hurricane Ian, and prevalent white marsh in impoundments. Quarter drain implementation will continue in the spring, and breaches are being repaired. There are no significant infrastructure problems at Sandy Beach, and the area will undergo renovation to create better water depth management. There are no significant infrastructure issues at Santee Coastal, but efforts to control phragmites are still underway. Santee Delta is not flooded and is under major renovation, which is scheduled to be completed in August 2023.

Billy Dukes, Chief of Wildlife, reported on the budget requests for the Migratory Waterfowl Permit funds. For Fiscal Year 2023, Staff requested \$110,000 for the Wood Duck Box Project, \$30,000 for the Wood Duck Nest Box Recruitment Project, \$30,000 for Waterfowl Abundance and Habitat Quality Surveys for Waterfowl Management Areas, \$6,000 for Migration Ecology and Demographics of Eastern Mallards, \$68,563 for NAWCA Matching Funds for Beaverdam Waterfowl Management Area, \$11,500 for Atlantic Flyway Council Banding Assessment and Dues, \$40,000 for Control of Undesirable Vegetation, \$79,700 for Piedmont Habitat Management and Infrastructure, \$10,00 for Midlands Habitat Management, and \$15,000 for Coastal Habitat Management. The 2023 budget request comes to a total of \$400,763. Additionally, Dukes summarized the current and upcoming outreach efforts to waterfowl hunters. Currently, extensive outreach efforts are being done for the Lottery Hunt Program, as well as regular social media posts, news releases, and email blasts. There are plans in place to create and share

a series of short videos highlighting Category 1 Waterfowl Areas, to give hunters a better idea of conditions at each individual property.

Tammy Waldrop, Region 1 Biologist, provided an overview of Clemson and Beaverdam Creek Waterfowl Areas. The Clemson Waterfowl Management Area consists of approximately 20 acres of agricultural fields that are planted in the summer and flooded in the late fall to provide waterfowl hunting opportunities. It is comprised of an earthen dike that runs parallel to Eighteen Mile Creek, a flashboard riser system, and an emergency spillway. When the flashboards are placed in the riser, approximately 14-16 acres of the fields are impounded in water that is 1-3 feet in depth. Category 1 Waterfowl Draw Hunts are held on Saturday mornings from mid-December until early February, with an average of 7-8 youth hunts each year. Approximately 14 acres are cultivated on the site with waterfowl-desirable crops. Annual crops consist of a combination of special short variety corn, Chiwapa millet, and Japanese millet. Wood duck boxes, dikes, the emergency spillway, and the riser system are checked and maintained throughout the year. The Beaverdam Creek Waterfowl Management Area consists of approximately 30 acres of agriculture and mixed bottomland habitat that are partially planted in the summer and flooded in the late fall. The area houses an end dike, cross dike, emergency spillway, and flashboard riser which divides the impoundment into 2 pool areas. Approximately 20 acres of the main area and 10 acres in the sub-impoundment are impounded in water that is 1-3 feet in depth during the waterfowl season. Category 1 Waterfowl Draw Hunts are held on Saturday mornings from mid-December until early February. There are 6-7 adult hunts and 1 youth hunt each year. Approximately 8-10 acres are cultivated on site with waterfowl-desirable crops. Annual crops consist of a combination of special short variety corn, Chiwapa millet, and Japanese millet. Wood duck boxes, dikes, the emergency spillway, and the riser system are checked and maintained throughout the year.

The Committee discussed a plan to provide a year-end report to the General Assembly by the December 31 deadline. Tentatively, the report will include a summary of the legislation, an explanation of previous and current budgets, general information about the Category 1 Waterfowl Areas, common issues surrounding the waterfowl areas, and plans to provide additional outreach to waterfowl hunters.

Date, Time, and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Waterfowl Advisory Committee will be held at 10:00am, on Tuesday, February 7, 2023, at Samworth Wildlife Management Area, located at 420 Dirleton Rd. Georgetown, SC. A tour of the property will be provided upon the conclusion of the meeting.

The meeting was adjourned by acclamation at 12:46 PM.

The meeting concluded with a tour of the Clemson and Beaverdam Creek Waterfowl Areas by all Committee members and several Region I staff. Committee members obtained significant background information on both areas and made observations. Most importantly, the Clemson waterfowl area is too open and needs vertical structure. Committee members were satisfied that the planned work at Beaverdam is conceptually sound and will look forward to hearing more when construction begins.