

Waterfowl Advisory Committee
December 20, 2023
Meeting Minutes
Virtual Meeting via Microsoft Teams

Members Present:

Chairman Bob Perry, Stuart Cochran, Bill Mace, Ernie Wiggers

Members Absent:

Jerry Lee, John Hilton (excused absence)

DNR Staff Present:

WFF Deputy Director Emily Cope, Chief of Wildlife Billy Dukes, Assistant Chief of Wildlife (Regions 2 & 4) Sam Chappellear, Statewide Waterfowl Biologist Molly Kneece, Regional Coordinator (Region 4) Alicia Farrell.

Constituents Present:

None

Call to Order

Chairman Perry called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM, with notice that the date, time, and place of the meeting was posted on the DNR website in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act and that a quorum was present to conduct committee business.

Approval of Minutes

Chairman Perry requested a motion to amend minutes of the November 14, 2023, meeting to reflect a committee conversation regarding climate change and waterfowl area resilience. Ernie Wiggers made a motion to amend the minutes accordingly. Motion was seconded by Bill Mace and approved unanimously by the committee. Chairman Perry then requested a motion to approve the minutes as amended. Bill Mace made a motion to approve the minutes. Stuart Cochran seconded the motion and the motion was approved unanimously by the committee.

Comments from DNR Leadership

Chief of Wildlife Billy Dukes gave a brief update on the coastal storm of December 17, 2023 which resulted in significant damage to many coastal waterfowl areas. A brief written report on storm damage was forwarded to all committee members in advance of the meeting. Dukes mentioned that Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza has resulted in die-offs of wood ducks in at least four locations in SC, and committee members should be aware. DNR and SCPRT hosted the Outdoor Dream Foundation for a youth waterfowl hunt at Ramsey Grove Plantation. Six youths harvested a total of 17 ducks in a very successful event.

Samworth WMA Status and Legislative Concerns

Chairman Perry mentioned the online video which conveyed outdated and inaccurate information on the status of Samworth. He noted that notified the originator of the video that the information was inaccurate and asked him to remove the video. It is unknown if that ever occurred. Fallout from the video resulted in concerns from several legislators who stated that they had received numerous e-mail inquiries from constituents and requested help in drafting a response. On December 7, 2023, Dukes provided the committee with a comprehensive accounting of work done at Samworth during calendar year 2023. Chairman Perry complimented to work of staff and noted that aerial photos included in the December 7 report indicate that significant and effective preparation took place prior to flooding at Samworth.

Chairman Perry offered to draft a response on behalf of legislators for them to send to constituents and to forward to the committee and DNR staff for review prior to sending. He encouraged the use of DNR platforms to publicize challenges and accomplishments of DNR waterfowl management staff.

Other, Old and/or New Business

Dukes gave an overview of storm response and thanked Chappellear, Farrell, Kneece and Region 4 staff for timely storm response and for compiling an initial damage assessment. Next steps are further assessment, prioritization of tasks, assessment of costs and funds available, and implementation of repairs. Upper Coastal Waterfowl staff have been stretched thin with four vacancies currently and duties associated with duck season.

Deputy Director Cope noted that the NAWCA grant application for the Big Field repair and renovation at Samworth was not approved, but the agency has submitted a legislative budget request for Samworth repairs.

Date, Time, and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Waterfowl Advisory Committee is planned for 9:30 AM, Tuesday, February 13, 2024, at the National Estuarine Research Reserve (NERR) McKenzie Field Station in Bennett's Point, South Carolina. The Committee will hope to tour Bear Island and Springfield WMAs after the meeting. Administrative Coordinator Castine will contact MRD staff to check on availability and will reserve the NEER Station facility, if so.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:28 PM.

