

**South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
November 19, 2019 Meeting
Rembert Dennis Building, Room 335
Columbia, South Carolina 29201**

Members Present:

Chairman Michael Hutchins, Sam Hiott, Stephen Thomas, Titus Duren, and Martha Herbert.
Member Robert S. Garmany attended the meeting via teleconference.

Members Absent:

Vice Chairman Cleveland Smith, Stan Halliday and Jonathan Rabon.

Staff Present:

Emily Cope, Ken Prosser, Shelley Ivester, Billy Dukes, Will Dillman, Charles Ruth, Jay Cantrell, Ross Self, Tom Swaynham, Sam Chapplelear, Molly Kneece, Van Whitehead, and Kaley Lawrimore.

Others Present:

There were no constituents present.

Chairman Hutchins opened the meeting.

The minutes of the August 28, 2019 meeting were approved as submitted.

SCDNR Policy Overview

Van Whitehead, SCDNR Assistant Chief Counsel, provided Advisory Committee training. The following subjects were covered: Policies and Guidelines for DNR Board and Committees; Agency Complaint Procedure; Sexual Harassment Policy; Freedom of Information Act and the State Ethics Act. A hardcopy of the above policies were provided to all members present and will be sent to those absent.

Deer Season Dates

Emily Cope, SCDNR Deputy Director of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division, informed committee members that there has been discussion at the SCDNR Board level regarding deer season dates; whether it should be a longer season, or if the season should start later. The Board recommended that this subject be brought to the WFF Advisory Committee for their input and comments. Charles Ruth, Deer and Wild Turkey Project Leader, provided a regional history of current deer season dates. Upstate regions, game zones 1 and 2 are 93 days, while coastal regions, games zones 3 and 4 are 140 days. A deer season was first introduced over 100 years ago, with season dates changing over time and by region. Factors used to determine season dates include reproduction and antler cycles. If the season were prolonged, it would

have the potential to overlap other hunting seasons. Committee members agreed on a regional date change in Region 1, possibly adding a day to the season. The talk was tabled, but will be reviewed again after Deputy Director Cope talks with General Assembly members. Ms. Cope will report back to the committee.

SCDNR Interim Director Robert Boyles stopped by the meeting to extend a word of thanks for all the hard work and service provided by the Committee.

Blue Catfish and Striped Bass Updates

Ross Self, Chief of Fisheries, provided an update on blue catfish limits in the Santee system and an update on striped bass. The current blue catfish regulations sunsetted in June 2018. Regulations will be brought up in legislation in January 2020 to revert back to the original personal limits, with a studies overview to be presented in January 2025. Striped bass in lakes Hartwell and Thurmond have experienced die-offs and a lack of big fish, primarily due to oxygen levels in the lakes.

Mottled Duck Research

Molly Kneece, SCDNR Biologist at Samworth WMA, gave a presentation on mottled ducks. Mottled ducks are related to black ducks. The South Carolina population came from the Western Gulf Coast and is 95% genetically pure. SC population numbers are steady, given that conditions have to be just right for the ducks to nest. Mottled ducks prefer managed brackish wetlands and are very particular about breeding and nesting conditions. DNR radio transmitters marked 173 female ducks but only found 3 during a three-year period. The best method to find nesting sites was to beat the grass in areas known for breeding and thrush out the birds. Over 4 years DNR found and monitored 72 nests. The ducks do not like artificial housing or nests; they prefer managed tidal impoundments and small islands as opposed to levees. They may nest one year, but not the next. If South Carolina did not have managed tidal impoundments we would not have mottled ducks. The current population of male and female mottled ducks in South Carolina is between 15,000 and 25,000.

SC Piedmont Deer-Coyote-Feral Pig Interaction Study

Jay Cantrell, Assistant Big Game Program Coordinator, gave a power point presentation on the on-going Piedmont Deer-Coyote-Feral Pig Interaction Study on private land in McCormick County, South Carolina. This study is in conjunction with Clemson University, with support from QDMA and the Forest Service. The study began in January 2019, with 2 additional field seasons for trapping and collaring in 2020 and 2021. It is a unique collaborative study, with GPS collars on predators and prey concurrently, studying fawn/coyote mortality, and feral pig/coyote predation study. There is a large camera array (93 cameras in a grid) and field experiments, and the ability to study three large species at the same time in the same place. Field studies to also include:

- Studying doe/fawn interaction and how it relates to fawn survival.

- What role do coyotes play with other small animals on the property, foxes and bobcats in particular.
- What is coyote predator role in the Southeast?

Legislative Update

Emily Cope gave the legislative update for the season beginning in January 2020. SCDNR will be presenting information to update the current reptile and amphibian regulations, and the blue catfish regulations that sunsetted in 2018.

Committee member Sam Hiott extended his thanks for the opportunity to serve on the WFF Advisory Committee. This was Mr. Hiott's last meeting, as he served the maximum amount of terms allowed. Chairman Hutchins presented Mr. Hiott with a duck decoy to commemorate his many years of service.

Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held Tuesday, February 18, 2020 at the Wateree Range, with a vehicle tour of the Love Farm WMA/Nat Love Special Youth Hunt Area to follow.

Chair Hutchins adjourned the meeting.