

SC DNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee Meeting
Minutes
July 9, 2013
Rembert Dennis Building, Columbia, South Carolina

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chair Mike Hutchins, Vice Chair Cleve Smith, Paul Bennett, Billy Hoole, Charles Howard, John Gramling

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Milton Brazell, Bryson Thomason, Stan Halliday, John Troutman

STAFF PRESENT:

Emily Cope, Ken Prosser, Ross Self, Tim Ivey, Derrell Shipes, Lynn Quattro, Billy Dukes, Willie Simmons, Patty Castine, Susan Johnson

Chair Hutchins called the meeting to order. The minutes of the April 23, 2013 meeting were approved as submitted.

There were no constituents present.

UPDATE ON STATE FISH HATCHERIES AND DIADROMOUS FISH PROGRAM:

Fisheries Chief Ross Self distributed a statistical sheet (copy attached to the original minutes) on the hatcheries and reported the St. Stephen fish lift had been down most of the fish passage season due to repairs. He noted a total of 495,993 fish passed through the lift, which is slightly below the normal average. Mr. Self said American Shad passage was up and Blueback herring passage was down. He stated he was optimistic about the next fish passage season and said improvements to the visitor's area are currently underway, which will include displays for outreach and educational material.

Mr. Self provided the 2013 American Shad production summary, which reflected production of almost three million Shad.

Mr. Self distributed the 2013 Striped Bass production/stocking summary and noted a total of 3,186,452 striped bass were stocked in various lakes and rivers in the State. An additional 115,070 hybrid bass were stocked in Lakes Hartwell and Thurmond, bringing the grand total of striped/hybrid bass stocked to 3,301,522. Mr. Self stated the extended period of cool weather in the spring had a significant adverse impact on survival and growth in hatchery ponds across the State; hence the total numbers were down by a few hundred thousand. Mr. Self said he hopes to have pond production back on line at the Cohen Campbell Hatchery next year.

Deputy Director Emily Cope commended staff on their hard work in coordinating fish stockings across the State and noted a number of legislative delegation members attended various stockings. She said Freshwater Fisheries received \$300,000 in state appropriated funds for the hatchery program, which she felt was a direct result of legislators seeing the

connection between DNR hatcheries and the public waters their constituents utilize to fish. Mr. Self announced the General Assembly recently passed a law that included a redirect of 25% non-resident fishing license fees to hatchery operations, which will amount to approximately \$150,000. Those funds would normally have remained in the county game and fish fund. Mr. Self stated the funds will initially be used for deferred maintenance issues, equipment, etc., and noted staff is currently developing a plan for the utilization of these funds.

CHANGES TO DRAW HUNT PROGRAM: Derrell Shipes, Chief of Statewide Projects, introduced Patty Castine, of the WFF Division. He stated Patty is the face and voice of the draw hunt program. Mr. Shipes distributed a copy of a letter being mailed to all deer lottery hunt participants (copy attached to the original minutes).

Mr. Shipes reported an on-line interface has been created that will allow persons to apply for the hunt and pay the fee on the DNR website. While paper applications will be allowed this year, in the very near future, all applications will be made online or at the walk-up windows at one of the four DNR regional offices.

Mr. Shipes announced a “non-draw” option on the application will allow a person to apply and acquire a preference point, but not be considered for selection. Those who will not be available for a hunt in the current year will be able to maintain their preference history the following year. Additionally, the resident temporary WMA permit that has been offered to all lottery hunters will now only be offered for the ½ day hunts for waterfowl and turkey. Only the primary applicant will be notified of the lottery results rather than each individual listed on an application.

Going forward, Mr. Shipes stated SCI will handle the application and payment process and then transfer the data to DNR, who will conduct selection and notification. The deer hunt on-line application should be on DNR’s website by the end of the week.

EARLY SEASON MIGRATORY BIRD RECOMMENDATIONS:

Mr. Shipes distributed copies of 2013-2014 Migratory Bird Early Season Framework (provided by the US Fish and Wildlife Service) and the 2013-2014 Early Migratory Bird Hunting Seasons Staff Recommendation (copies attached to the original minutes). The framework allows an early teal season of September 1 – September 30, with 16 consecutive days allowed during that period, and a maximum daily bag limit of 6 and a maximum possession limit of 18. Mr. Shipes stated staff recommends an early teal season of September 14 – September 29, a daily bag limit of 6 and a possession limit of 18 with shooting hours from sunrise until sunset. Mr. Shipes pointed out a change in possession limits for all migratory birds is going from two times the daily bag to three times the daily bag.

Mr. Shipes reported USFWS frameworks for the early Canada Goose season of September 1 – September 30 with a daily bag limit of 15 and maximum possession limit of 45. Staff recommends an early Canada Goose season of September 1 – September 30, a daily bag limit of 15 and a possession limit of 45 with shooting time of one half hour

before sunrise until sunset. Mr. Shipes briefed the committee on frameworks/recommendations for various other species, which are listed on handouts.

Mr. Shipes said this year is unusual in that dove season cannot open prior to September. Since September 1 falls on Sunday this year, dove season will open on Monday, September 2, which is Labor Day. Staff recommends the following for the 2013 dove season: September 2 – October 5 (Monday through Saturday will be hunting from noon to sunset only) November 23 – November 30, December 19 – January 15.

Ms. Cope reported this information would be presented to the Waterfowl Advisory Committee (WAC) the following day and to the DNR Board for approval at their July 24th meeting.

REGION 3 WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA/HERITAGE PRESERVE ACTIVITIES:

Willie Simmons, unit biologist in DNR's Region 3, updated Committee Members on activities on several WMAs and HP's by delivering a power point presentation. Mr. Simmons highlighted Peachtree Rock, Aiken Gopher Tortoise, and Congaree Bluffs Heritage Preserves. Wildlife Management Areas highlighted were Belfast, Hickory Top, Santee Cooper and Santee Dam. Mr. Simmons provided deer and waterfowl harvest totals for several years, public use information and activities on each property, information on youth hunts, and land management activities/practices on the properties. Mr. Simmons' presentation also included information on Canada Goose Management, including depredation permit information for geese and nuisance alligators occurring in Region 3. Further, he reported on feral hog issues and urban wildlife problems.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

Emily Cope distributed copies of SC DNR's 2013 Legislation Review (copy attached to the original minutes). Ms. Cope reported the year had been extremely successful for the agency regarding legislation budgetary matters. Ms. Cope highlighted several bills that had been passed during the 2013 General Assembly as follows: Baiting for deer on private land in Game Zones 1 and 2 will now be allowed; the private lands alligator program season has been extended (September 1 through May 31); and a 365-day hunting and fishing license has been approved with salt water licenses taking effect January 1, 2013 and others becoming effective January 1, 2015. Ms. Cope noted antlered deer may now be hunted on private land in Game Zone 1 with archery equipment and firearms beginning October 11 and ending January 1. A joint resolution passed defining falconry and making it lawful to engage in falconry in SC following approved regulations. Ms. Cope stated there were also changes in several freshwater fishing regulations: on the lower reach of the Saluda River, only one trout of a possession limit of five may be more than 16 inches in total length. Hook sizes were reduced in certain rivers and will now allow constituents to target flathead catfish. Gill net distances were reduced on the Pee Dee river upstream of Punch Bowl Landing.

OTHER OLD AND/OR NEW BUSINESS:

Committee Member John Gramling inquired about Billy Dukes' recent presentation to the DNR Board regarding the draft management plan for Northern Bobwhite Habitat Restoration in South Carolina. Mr. Dukes, former Small Game Project Leader and now Assistant Chief of Wildlife was in attendance and distributed a copies of the draft plan (copy attached to the original minutes).

Mr. Dukes reported quail are declining throughout South Carolina and much of their range. Past efforts directed to restoration of bobwhite quail habitat targeted individual private landowners, often resulting in minimal habitat improvement or improvements too small to impact quail populations significantly. He also stated limited technical assistance, lack of financial incentives for grassland restoration and a lack of public appreciation for grassland habitats all contributed to limited success in quail restoration efforts. To achieve meaningful and measurable gains in the quail population, quail must be managed on a geographic scale that assures long-term viability. A focal area approach presented in the plan is one way to achieve that goal.

Mr. Dukes stated South Carolina's plan is based on tools, products and principles from the National Bobwhite Conservation Initiative. The plan is intended to provide strategic guidance to achieve objectives related to increased technical assistance capacity, improved habitat in agricultural and forested landscapes, increased public awareness and public appreciation of quail and early successional habitats, as well as improved coordination of research and monitoring efforts for quail. Mr. Dukes announced success of the plan and any subsequent efforts at quail recovery and restoration of grassland/shrub habitats will require cooperative projects with all agencies and private entities involved in land management or providing technical assistance to landowners.

Additional information regarding objectives and strategies can be obtained from the draft plan. (Please contact Susan Johnson if you would like to obtain a copy). Please refer to the draft plan for a more in-depth outline of the objectives and strategies.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

Paul Bennett stated Chris Page of DNR's Aquatic Nuisance Species Program, Land and Water Division, will be spraying for aquatic weeds in Goose Pond at the H. Cooper Black Field Trial Area (weather permitting). Mr. Bennett also noted the National Retriever trials will be held at H. Cooper Black in November.

Mr. Bennett asked if fishing rodeos are still a priority for the agency. Chair Hutchins and Emily Cope stated indeed they are. Mr. Bennett asked if a fishing rodeo would be scheduled at the Cheraw Fish Hatchery in the fall. Ross Self stated he will speak to Hatchery Manager Rick Slack to discuss when a fishing rodeo can be held.

John Gramling asked Emily Cope when she will know if the agency will receive funding for positions to carry out the quail restoration initiative. Ms. Cope stated approximately one year from now. By that time, she said a new person to fill Billy Dukes' previous position as the Small Game Project Leader will be in place. Ms. Cope stated Breck

Carmichael with DNR will be taking the lead in implementing the Northern Bobwhite Habitat Restoration Plan in South Carolina, in conjunction with the small game project leader. Staff is hopeful about receiving funding for the position from the General Assembly. Mr. Gramling asked to receive a copy of DNR's actual request for funding for the position so he can contact members of the General Assembly supporting DNR's request and asked other committee members to do so as well.

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

October 8, 2013, 10:30 AM, Donnelley Wildlife Management Area, Green Pond, SC