

Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
July 8, 2008 Meeting Minutes
Columbia, South Carolina

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Paul Bennett, Charles Howard, Billy Hoole, John Troutman, Cleve Smith

MEMBERS ABSENT: Chair Stephen Davis, Vice Chair Ed Muckenfuss, Milton Brazell, Bryson Thomason, John Gramling

DNR STAFF PRESENT: Breck Carmichael; Corbett Norwood, Lynn Quattro, Skip Still, Ross Self, Jay Butfiloski, Charles Ruth, Derrell Shipes, Tim Ivey; Monica Linnenbrink, Amanda Londo, Major Greg Smith, Susan Johnson

Jae Espey of Clemson University, facilitator of the Dog/Deer Stakeholders Group, and Caroline Pinckney, staff to the Senate Fish, Game and Forestry Committee, were also in attendance.

WFF Deputy Director Breck Carmichael chaired the meeting in the absence of the Chair and Vice Chair.

The minutes of the April 8, 2008 meeting were approved as submitted.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS:

Cleve Smith stated he is a member of the recently formed Dog/Deer Stakeholders Group, and has attended all three meetings held thus far. Smith stated the Group includes landowners as well as members of deer/dog clubs, and DNR staff members have attended to provide information and answer questions. Smith further stated one of the meetings included a representative of the Georgia DNR and a representative of the Georgia Hunting and Fishing Federation, and the Group was able to review how the issue of dog/deer hunting in Georgia has been handled. This was very informative. The Group's fourth meeting will be held on July 16th, and the Group will attempt to build a consensus as it relates to the Group's recommendations to DNR and the SC General Assembly.

Paul Bennett announced that John Hillian is the new 1st Sergeant in Chesterfield, Marlboro and Dillon Counties and is doing a very good job.

Billy Hoole commented that on June 30, it took him 30 minutes to process one hunting/fishing license at his place of business using the Point of Sale (POS) system. Hoole further stated in speaking with DNR's License Section he discovered the entire State is operating from only two servers with the POS system. Mr. Hoole stated he would like to hear from the License Section at a future Committee meeting with reference to the effectiveness of the POS system during periods of high volume license sales. As dove and deer seasons approach, Hoole is sure the same type of problems will occur due to the fact that so many hunters wait until the last minute to purchase a license. Carmichael stated the Information and Technology Section would be the appropriate section to address his request and he would check into it.

There were no constituent comments.

Carmichael introduced Lynn Quattro as the new Assistant Chief of Freshwater Fisheries.

UPDATE ON ALLIGATOR PROGRAM:

Derrell Shipes, DNR Chief of Statewide Projects, Research and Survey, recognized Jay Butfiloski as the Alligator Program Coordinator (in addition to the Furbearer Program Coordinator). Shipes briefed the Committee on the history and explained the alligator depredation, private lands, and hunting season programs. Shipes stated legislation now allows a person enrolled in the private lands program to shoot a free-swimming alligator during daylight hours (30 minutes before official sunrise to 30 minutes after official sunset). Although the law allows it, DNR recommends that any alligator be secured before shooting so the animal will be recovered, and the chance for ricochet of a round from a firearm will be reduced.

Shipes distributed copies of a "Draft SC Alligator Hunting Guide" (copy attached to the original minutes). Shipes stated recently passed legislation authorizes DNR to establish an alligator hunting season, and the first season will occur September 13 to October 11, 2008. A total of 250 permits will be issued by computer drawing in each of 4 alligator management zones (public or private lands, wildlife management areas excluded). DNR plans to have voluntary training sessions to cover harvest techniques, safety and other topics for individuals selected. There is an on-line (only) application which is available on DNR's web site and the deadline to apply for the hunt is July 15th. There is a \$10 non-refundable application fee. Shipes stated 1,000 individuals will be selected and will be required to pay a \$100 fee (on line) for an alligator permit and tag. As of this date, 1,031 individuals have applied.

UPDATE ON ROBUST REDHORSE CONSERVATION PROGRAM:

Self distributed a fact sheet on the Robust Redhorse (copy attached to the original minutes). Self stated the fish was discovered in the Yadkin River in North Carolina in 1869 and was not seen for approximately a 100 year period. However, the fish was rediscovered in the Oconee River in Georgia in 1991. The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) wanted to list the fish as an endangered species. Hence, South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia entered into an agreement with the FWS in an effort to recover the species in lieu of having it listed as a Federally Endangered Species. A Robust Redhorse Conservation Committee was formed and has been working since 1995 to improve the status of the species throughout its former range.

Reintroduction efforts began in South Carolina approximately 4 years ago in the Wateree and Broad Rivers using fish from the Savannah River. Self stated this effort had been quite successful. Self distributed a handout summarizing the Savannah River Robust Redhorse spring spawning efforts, stocking history in the State, and a 2008 recapture summary in the Wateree and Broad Rivers. The handout also illustrated the present range of wild and stocked Robust Redhorse populations. Self stated stocked fish are tagged and this past spring recoveries began to occur. Self predicts within the next year or two, these fish will be reproducing in the wild. A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service State Wildlife Grant provided funding for this recovery effort.

Freshwater Fisheries Chief Ross Self addressed Committee Member Howard's inquiry regarding the Northern Snakehead, and exotic fish species. Self distributed a handout (copy attached to the original minutes) with a color photograph of the Northern Snakehead, comparing its appearance to the Bowfin, for which it is most often confused. Self stated no Snakeheads have been found in South Carolina, but reports have been received by DNR from individuals reporting catching Snakeheads in the Lake Wylie

area and elsewhere. These reports that have been investigated have in fact been Bowfin. Snakeheads appear to be established in the Potomac River further north.

BLACK BEAR POPULATION STATUS: Region I Assistant Regional Biologist and Black Bear Specialist Skip Still distributed handouts (DNR Board approved South Carolina Human-Black Bear Encounters Procedures and Protocol and a SC black bear harvest, habitat and general information summary, copies attached to the original minutes). Still also provided a power point presentation on the status of black bear in South Carolina. Still emphasized that every indicator points toward the bear population growing in numbers and area. Scent line surveys, bear human contacts, highway kill, hunter harvest and research all indicate a growing and expanding population. SC maps were shown that indicate bear have been documented in 36 counties from 2004 to 2007 and have been documented historically in all but 2 counties. Still stated reproducing populations occur in 9 counties and this number is expected to increase.

Still pointed out that Deanna Ruth, a DNR Unit Wildlife Biologist in Region IV, has been instrumental in working with Outreach and Support Services staff on bear brochures and posters and that education is a high priority. Still stated people must learn to live with bear if bear are going to continue to be a viable species in the State. Breck Carmichael mentioned an expanded bear hunting season might be explored in the future.

MARKETING UPDATE: DNR Marketing Director Monica Linnenbrink introduced Amanda Londo as WFF's Public Information Coordinator. Linnenbrink provided a power point presentation to update the Committee on the agency's recent marketing efforts. Linnenbrink stated the agency has been implementing 3 marketing campaigns (awareness, hunting, and fishing) over past year. The Awareness Campaign has the goal to increase the awareness of what DNR does for the residents of the State. Part of this effort has resulted in TV station WPDE running regular news segments on DNR related topics in the Florence-Myrtle Beach area every Friday, the latest of which pertained to an artificial reef deployment. Other segments have featured the new Striped Bass regulations and the alligator hunting season. A DNR staff member is included in each segment.

The Hunting Campaign (launched in August 2007 through December 2007) was initiated to increase hunting participation using paid media and a direct mail piece to hunters within the Columbia media market. Additionally, DNR has received a Hunting Heritage Partnership grant to help fund the hunting campaign effort (funds matched by DNR).

The Fishing Campaign (launched in June 2008) was developed to increase fishing participation. Linnenbrink stated funds from the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation were received to promote DNR's fishing campaign (selling licenses to lapsed anglers) which is currently running via television/radio ads, bill boards, direct mail pieces, promotions at baseball games and other public relations events as well as promotion information on DNR's website.

Evaluations of each campaign are conducted to determine success of the initiative. Linnenbrink announced the traffic to DNR's website has increased 135% since 2005.

Evaluation results and focus groups were established (consisting of lapsed hunters and potential youth hunters) to make improvements to the campaign. The upcoming hunting campaign (August 08) will include direct mail targeting these two groups as well as television/radio ads and web banners.

Linnenbrink also stated she has been developing a Style Guide and Policy for the purpose of consistency in DNR's promotional and outreach materials.

SHAD/RIVER HERRING UPDATE: DNR Fisheries Biologist Corbett Norwood presented an overview of the Shad and Herring fishery. Norwood stated the fishery is an important commercial and recreational fishery in South Carolina. Shad license sales have remained steady for the last 10 years and every major river system in the State contains a population of shad. Norwood further stated coast-wide landings are down in almost every state, but most South Carolina rivers have remained steady. However, the Edisto River is a concern to the DNR and the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC) since the overall landings are significantly lower than in past years. Public meetings were conducted to discuss recommendations for changes in regulations pertaining to the fishery. According to Norwood, regulations are set by the ASMFC and amendments to the regulations will be considered based on recommendations received from staff and public comments.

Norwood also reported herring fisheries commercial landings have dropped drastically coast-wide in the past twenty years, while South Carolina's landings have remained highest on the East coast in recent years. The ASMFC is also reviewing a draft amendment to regulations as a result of the river herring decline.

DOG/DEER STAKEHOLDERS GROUP UPDATE: Deer/Turkey Project Leader Charles Ruth stated Committee Member Smith's earlier comments on this topic summarized the process very well. Ruth stated the Stakeholder Group will meet for the fourth time next week to discuss suggested ideas that would be applicable to South Carolina.

Jae Espey, who is facilitating the Dog/Deer Stakeholders Group, stated he is optimistic about the stakeholder process as a result of the positive results of the Striped Bass Stakeholder Group process. Espey feels the dog/deer group will require several more meetings than the Striped Bass group, and now that the General Assembly has adjourned there will be more participation from members of that body.

Carmichael invited Committee Members to attend the stakeholder group meetings if they desire.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE: Carmichael distributed copies of DNR's end-of-the-year legislative report (copy attached to the original minutes) and outlined the following legislation:

S.452 passed authorizing DNR to establish an alligator hunting season as previously mentioned in the meeting.

S.691 passed allowing game zone conforming and cleanup changes. This legislation also re-defined archery equipment to include crossbows during archery seasons. The bill also allows for a state-wide night shining law.

H.3202 would place a Constitutional question on the fall election ballot that would guarantee SC citizens the right to hunt and fish (and use traditional methods for traditional species). Although DNR supported the bill in concept, passage of the legislation as it was written had the potential to prevent DNR from making changes in hunting and fishing regulations, therefore, DNR was opposed to the bill. The bill did not make any movement and Carmichael stated he is not sure if the bill will re-surface during the next legislative session.

H.4547 passed and makes technical changes in the law to allow for the electronic sale of the state duck stamp.

H.4548 passed and allows DNR to make catch/length limits pertaining to Striped Bass in the lower Santee Cooper River system during specified periods.

H.4862 would allow changes in the turkey baiting law. The bill was recommitted to the House Ag and Natural Resources Committee, killing the bill.

H.4952 passed and prohibits the introduction of a fertility control agent or chemical substance into any species of wildlife, with the exception of compounds used to control rodents, without a permit from DNR.

S.706 would have regulated hunting deer with dogs. Debate was adjourned in the Senate Fish, Game and Forestry Committee, killing the bill. DNR has established a facilitated stakeholder group to discuss this issue (previously covered in the meeting).

S.925 related to surface water withdrawal regulations was debated in the Senate Ag and Natural Resources Committee, but received no action.

S.953 a bill to move DNR's Law Enforcement Division to the Department of Public Safety received no action.

S.996 passed and on July 2009 the South Island Ferry will no longer be operated by the Department of Transportation. DNR will have to find a way to operate the ferry if management of the Tom Yawkey Wildlife Center is to continue.

S.1150 passed and allows individuals within the State to raise and sell grass carp that are certified by the DNR as sterile.

H.4497 passed allowing for the removal of White Perch from the list of game fish in SC.

H.4785 was a bill that would require 25% of the proceeds from the sale of timber on DNR lands to go to the country from where it was harvested. This legislation would put DNR out of compliance with the US Fish and Wildlife Service Federal Aid regulations governing Program Income, and would require the DNR to replace those funds with non-Federal dollars. This legislation did not receive any action.

OTHER OLD/NEW BUSINESS: None.

TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING: October 14, 2008 is the date scheduled for the next meeting; however, Carmichael will not be able to attend due to an out-of-state conference. Carmichael stated Chairman Davis may change the date to October 7 or October 21, 2008. The location of this meeting is likely to be scheduled out of the Columbia area as well.