

**Waterfowl Advisory Committee**  
**May 14, 2024**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**SC Forestry Commission**  
**39 General Henderson Rd, Newberry, SC 29108**

**Members Present:**

Chairman Bob Perry, Vice Chairman John Hilton, Stuart Cochran, Bill Mace, and Ernie Wiggers

**Members Absent:**

Jerry Lee (excused)

**DNR Staff Present:**

Deputy Director Emily Cope, Chief of Wildlife Billy Dukes, Assistant Chief of Statewide Projects Will Dillman, Assistant Chief of Wildlife (Regions 1 & 3) Willie Simmons, Assistant Chief of Wildlife (Regions 2 & 4) Sam Chappellear, Statewide Waterfowl Biologist Molly Kneece, Region 2 Coordinator, Sam Stokes, Jr, Biologist Jake Oates, Region 3 Coordinator, Barry Kesler, and Senior Administrative Assistant Kelsey Huffstetler.

**Special Guests:**

Jake Razor, SCDNR Board Member, and Dr. Phil Lavretsky, University of Texas at El Paso

**Constituents Present:**

David Mabry, Derrell Shipes, Buford Mabry, Billy Warren, Lew Tocci, David Wielicki, Thomas Ragsdale, Greg Culler, Evan Inabinet, Robin Inabinet, Bob Harkins, Paul Taylor, and Marc Johnson.

**Call to Order**

Chairman Perry called the meeting to order at 9:28AM, 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. Chairman Perry introduced Assistant Regional Forester Brad Bramlett with the SC Forestry Commission who gave a brief overview of the SC Forestry Commission and house rules of the facility. Chief Dukes thanked Brad for hosting.

**Introductions and Constituent Comments**

Committee members, staff and constituents introduced themselves and provided their background and interests. No constituents wished to speak.

**Consideration and Approval of Minutes**

Chairman Perry requested a motion to approve the minutes of the February 13, 2024, Waterfowl Advisory Committee meeting. Chairman Perry requested that the location on the footer of the minutes either be deleted or corrected. Vice Chairman Hilton made a motion to approve the minutes as amended. The motion was seconded by Ernie Wiggers. None opposed. Motion passed.

**Comments from the Chair**

Chairman Perry welcomed everyone present.

**Comments from DNR Leadership**

Wildlife Section Chief Billy Dukes welcomed everyone and gave a brief overview of Waterfowl Biologist Molly Kneece's accomplishments since the last Committee meeting.

### **DNR Waterfowl Program Video**

The DNR Waterfowl Program video was presented. Chairman Perry was pleased with the video and commended those responsible for putting it together. Other Committee members had positive comments. Chief Dukes recognized Assistant Chief Sam Chappellear for his work on the video and Assistant Chief Will Dillman for narrating. There was discussion of damage from weather events and the length of time it takes to make repairs beyond what staff can do themselves and the red tape that is involved with contracting vendors.

### **Update on WMA Repairs and Habitat Management**

Chief Dukes introduced Assistant Chief Sam Chappellear who gave a recap on Category I waterfowl management areas in Region 4. He provided updates on Santee-Delta, Santee Coastal Reserve, Bear Island, Sandy Beach, Bonneau Ferry, Ramsey Grove, and Samworth. Assistant Chief Willie Simmons gave updates on Beaverdam and Clemson waterfowl areas in Region 1.

### **Mallard, Black Duck and Mottled Duck Genetics – Dr. Phil Lavretsky**

Dr. Phil Lavretsky from the University of Texas – El Paso gave an overview of mallard genetics in the Atlantic Flyway and presented his findings from samples collected in South Carolina. Results indicate that captive-reared mallard genes occur throughout the Flyway in varying degrees. There is concern over Eastern Wild Mallard genetic impacts as demonstrated by Dr. Lavretsky's research.

### **Conceptual Development of Sanctuaries – Marc Johnson**

Marc Johnson, private landowner and waterfowl enthusiast, presented his vision for establishing a system of waterfowl refuges throughout the state with the hopes of maintaining and increasing site fidelity and wintering populations of mallards. Genetics information from Dr. Lavretsky's studies would be used to help determine strategic locations for locating sanctuaries. Ideally, sanctuaries would be located on lands already in the public domain to avoid the up-front cost of purchasing land.

### **Update Draft 2024-24 SC Waterfowl Status Report**

Waterfowl Biologist Molly Kneece gave an overview of the 2023-24 SC Waterfowl Status report. She has been working on the report for the last month and a half. However, with her other responsibilities and duties, she does not have a proposed completion date. The report will provide updates of her activities from the past year as well as research project updates, outreach activities, habitat property updates for the 2023 season and several other topics such as survey data, harvest data and trends, including harvest data from the past season as well as long term average data.

### **Proposed 2024-25 Duck Stamp Budget**

Chief Dukes presented the 2024-2025 duck stamp budget request. After some discussion, Chairman Perry requested a motion to approve the budget as presented. Stuart Cochran made a motion to approve the budget. The motion was seconded by Bill Mace. None opposed. Motion passed.

### **2024 South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Council Decision**

Chairman Perry noted that reports from lakes Marion and Moultrie indicated waterfowl utilization was higher than in past winters offering increased opportunity. Chairman Perry discussed the Aquatic Plant Management Council recommending a stocking of grass carp in Lakes Marion and Moultrie pursuant to an increase in hydrilla coverage of approximately 2.9% of the surface area of the lakes. He stated 70% of the public comments were against grass carp stocking. He shared with the Committee that he participated in the Council meeting virtually representing himself and requested Council be as conservative as possible and relayed that the proposed number of carp to be stocked was not a conservative recommendation. However, the Aquatic Plant Management Council unanimously approved the proposed stocking. Chairman Perry noted that among the members of Council there are no advocates speaking for

the waterfowl resource. There was discussion regarding the changes of agencies merging and the change in who is represented voting on the committee that make the decisions regarding stocking.

### **Other, Old and/or New Business**

Stuart Cochran asked for an update on his concerns regarding issues at Potato Creek and Hickory Top. Assistant Chief Simmons said he spoke with DNR law enforcement, and they confirmed that there are violations that occur at Hickory Top, but the numbers and types of infractions are not unusual. Typically law enforcement checks people going in and out of the properties; however, there are multiple ways to access the property and they are not able to cover all routes, or when they show up after a call the individuals are no longer in the area. Chairman Perry asked if staff had any recommendations to what could be done or should be done. Chief Dukes responded that the plan going forward is to survey hunters in person through and exit survey and ask them about a couple of very small suite of options for the hunting regime. Results of the survey will be used to inform a decision regarding any future changes to the hunt regime at Hickory Top.

Vice Chairman Hilton asked the staff to continue to work to find an upland site near Samworth to establish an upland impoundment in that area for the inevitable change with the climate and water levels and just the fact that it would be good diversity and would provide a very rapid increase in the number of ducks that are being harvested at Samworth and would quell a lot of criticism associated with that.

Chairman Perry asked staff to continue to follow the work of Dr. Hope Mizell and her staff and encouraged everyone to continue to think on proactive strategies to address sea-level rise.

**Field Review:** The planned field review of Broad River WMA was cancelled due to inclement weather.

**Additional Agenda Item:** Due to the cancelled field trip, Biologist Jake Oates gave a presentation about Broad River WMA.

### **Date, Time, and Location of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Waterfowl Advisory Committee will be held at 9:30 AM, Tuesday, August 13, 2024, at the Dennis Center Office, Bonneau, South Carolina. Tentatively, a field trip will follow the meeting to inspect Sandy Beach and/or Bonneau Ferry WMAs.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 1:46 PM.