

**Waterfowl Advisory Committee**  
**February 13, 2024**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**NERR McKenzie Field Station**  
**15819 Bennetts Point Rd, Green Pond, SC 29446**

**Members Present:**

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

**Members Absent:**

Jerry Lee (excused)

**DNR Staff Present:**

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, Bear Island WMA (Unit 4C) Coordinator Daniel Barrineau, State Climatologist Dr. Hope Mizzell, GIS Manager Robert Clark, Social Science Coordinator Becky Brown, and Wildlife Section Administrative Coordinator Patty Castine.

**Guests and Constituents Present:**

Casey Moorer, Santee Cooper; Allen Stack, Santee Cooper; Joseph Dress, Santee Cooper; Carl Bussells, Santee Cooper; Jeff Dennis, Lowcountry Outdoors; and Marc Johnson

**Call to Order**

Chairman Perry called the meeting to order at 9:30AM, 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.

**Introductions and Constituent Comments**

Staff and constituents introduced themselves and provided their background and interests.

**Constituents who wished to speak:** Jeff Dennis, an outdoors writer and avid duck hunter, stated that Category II wood duck hunting at Donnelley was very good in December, but thin in January. He stated he heard there was an avian influenza (AI) report for Colleton County. He reported he didn't see any dead wood ducks, but requested from the Department any updates on whether AI is an issue and if it could be an issue in the future?

**Approval of Minutes**

Chairman Perry referenced the virtual Waterfowl Advisory Committee meeting that took place on December 20, 2023, stating that all members were present with the exception of Vice Chairman John Hilton who was sick. Jeff Dennis was the only constituent present for the meeting. Chairman Perry requested a motion to approve the minutes of the December 20, 2023, Waterfowl Advisory Committee meeting. Ernie Wiggers made a motion to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Stuart Cochran and passed with unanimous approval by the Committee.

**Comments from the Chair**

Chairman Perry referenced the Waterfowl Advisory Committee annual report being late to due to illness in his family and other health issues. The report is almost completely drafted and will be submitted to the members of the Committee for review and comment very soon. He stated he notified Representative Hixon and Senator Campsen regarding the delay.

Chairman Perry shared that at the request of SCDNR Board Chairman Norman Pulliam and SCDNR Director Robert Boyles, he attended the January 18, 2024, SCDNR Board meeting to address negative comments being made regarding management of Category I Waterfowl Areas and DNR staff. He stated he was strongly motivated to attend the meeting to correct the record and make sure everyone understands the Committee is more than willing to discuss bona fide issues at any time, but the Committee is not going to get into personal name calling and will not tolerate it.

Chairman Perry recognized and thanked Unit 4C Coordinator Biologist Daniel Barrineau for hosting the Committee on the scheduled afternoon tour of Bear Island WMA.

### **Comments from DNR Leadership**

Wildlife Section Chief Billy Dukes thanked Chairman Perry for attending the SCDNR Board meeting on January 18, 2024, to show his support for the DNR staff and the focus on the positive aspects of what DNR is doing and the progress DNR is making.

Chief Dukes wanted to make the Committee aware that there is a petition circulating among duck hunters. Dukes stated that DNR does not know the content of the petition. It is rumored that the intent is for the petition to be distributed to every member of the General Assembly. Dukes also noted that this is an attempt to circumvent and bypass the Waterfowl Advisory Committee, which is appointed by the Legislature to deal with waterfowl issues. He just wanted to make the Committee aware of the petition and noted that DNR will keep members of the General Assembly and their staff aware that that is coming so they will be prepared with a response if necessary. Vice Chairman Hilton asked if there is a particular group who is holding themselves out as sponsoring the petition. Chief Dukes responded that it is most likely the individuals who are responsible for the video and Chairman Perry stated he has been told it is the person responsible for the video.

### **Review of the 2023-24 Waterfowl Season**

Waterfowl Biologist Molly Kneece gave an update on her activities since the last WAC meeting and a summary of the 2023-2024 waterfowl season. Topics covered were media, outreach, and HPAI activities. She also assisted with Category 1 hunts at Sandy Beach, Santee-Delta, and Santee Coastal Reserve. The hunter season date preference survey, the Santee Coastal Reserve wetland review, the Samworth boat counts and wildlife management area duck counts were also conducted.

Chief Dukes gave an update on damage that has occurred on several Category I wildlife management areas that caused some hunt cancellations. In addition to the December 17<sup>th</sup> nor'easter, there were several rain events resulting in damage and flooding to Beaverdam. He stated staff responded extraordinarily in every circumstance. A few hunts were cancelled when necessary for the safety of the hunters. Permitting Biologist and Lottery Hunt Coordinator Emily Kears and the lottery hunt office quickly notified hunters of cancellations and fortunately there was no backlash. Chairman Perry stated that even though the DNR hears a lot of the negativity on social media, the Category I hunters are very positive.

### **Status Updates on All Projects**

Assistant Chief Sam Chappellear (Regions 2 & 4) gave an update on Category I WMAs referencing damage to various areas such as Santee-Delta, Bear Island and Santee Coastal (The Cape) as well as equipment damage that occurred. There will be a total renovation of Cedar Island this summer once the engineering section has completed the specifications and sends them out for bid. Assistant Chief Willie Simmons (Regions 1 & 3) gave updates on the damage to Beaverdam and Clemson Waterfowl areas. Both areas suffered significant damage, mostly Beaverdam.

### **Results of Category I Hunter Satisfaction Surveys**

Assistant Chief Dillman gave a presentation regarding results of Category I hunter satisfaction surveys. (Handout provided).

### **Results of Duck Hunter Season Preference Survey**

Chief Dukes discussed the hunter season preference survey introducing Social Science Coordinator Becky Brown who gave an informative presentation. Results of the survey indicated support for the current season framework which has been in place for a number of years.

### **2024 South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Council – Casey Moorer, Santee Cooper**

Casey Moorer from Santee Cooper gave a presentation on Santee Cooper's invasive species and submerged aquatic vegetation monitoring and their proposed recommendation to the South Carolina Aquatic Plant Management Council regarding control options. Monitoring has indicated an increase in coverage of hydrilla and Santee Cooper is proposing an increase in maintenance grass carp stocking to bring the total sterile grass carp population up to the corresponding number of fish per vegetated acre.

### **Climate Variability – Dr. Hope Mizzell**

Dr. Hope Mizzell gave a presentation on changes in the frequency and severity of severe weather events, notably coastal storms and increased frequency and amplitude of higher-than-normal tides. She presented data demonstrating the realized and potential effects of those events. Following Dr. Mizzell, GIS Manager Robert Clark gave a presentation regarding an application that predicts the effects of sea level rise and impacts to DNR facilities and infrastructure.

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

Marc Johnson gave an update on the S.C. waterfowl genetics study being conducted by Dr. Phil Lavretsky and presented his proposal for a network of waterfowl sanctuaries throughout the state.

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

The next meeting of the Waterfowl Advisory Committee will be held at 9:30 AM, Tuesday, May 14, 2024, at the South Carolina Forestry Commission office located at 39 General Henderson Road, Newberry, South Carolina.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:25 PM.

### **Field Tour:**

A field tour of Bear Island WMA was conducted immediately after the meeting adjournment.

One truck consisting of 9 people, including WAC committee members John Hilton, Stuart Cochran, Bill Mace and Ernie Wiggers participated in the tour. The tour was led by Wildlife Biologist Danniell Barrineau, Bear Island WMA (Unit 4C) Coordinator.

Dr. Wiggers provided a summary of the Bear Island field tour which is included below.

### **Observations:**

- Due to time constraints most of the tour focused on the east side of Bear Island.
- We were impressed the dikes were passable given the area received >1.5" of rainfall the night before. Dike conditions looked very good but there was some erosion around a few water control structures which will need in-house attention this year.

- Daniel mentioned they just received their new Marsh Master machine, and he is excited about how it will help in their management operations.
- Daniel mentioned the changes made this past season which allowed him greater flexibility in what parts of Bear Island hunters could be placed was very beneficial, both for his staff and for the hunters.
- 12 Swans and 1 Snow Goose along with a few American Egrets were using the first impoundment bordering Bennetts Point Rd.
- Some impoundments were already drawn down to sheet water level and several hundred GW Teal with some BW Teal were observed along with a good # of Avocets, Egrets, and Glossy Ibis among many other species of wading and shorebirds.
- Saw some smaller flocks of Mottled Ducks and Gadwall.
- 2-3 very large flocks of ducks seen in distance that were not identified.
- 1-2 thousand Pintails flying and resting in in one impoundment, very impressive!
- The flooded ponds we saw looked good and still had food as evident by the number and variety of birds seen.
- Some ponds were pulled down in preparation to be burned.
- One impoundment with islands containing pine trees had been burned to accommodate snipe hunters.
- Other upland grassy areas had mowed paths through them to accommodate rabbit hunters.
- Daniel is trying to keep vehicle traffic off his dikes to both protect the dikes and limit bird disturbance.
- Access by the public can be obtained by walking or using electric bicycles.
- Based on what we saw Bear Island is being managed very well and is a huge asset to the DNR wetland management program.
- The passion Daniel has for the resource he is responsible for was very evident and nice to see!