

**South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
August 3, 2023, Minutes
Rembert C. Dennis Board Room
1000 Assembly St., Columbia, SC 29036**

Members Present:

Chairman Mike Hutchins, Vice Chairman Cleveland Smith, Stan Halliday, Martha Herbert, Jonathan Rabon, Titus Duren, Eddie Kinsey, Mac Baughman, Trey Watford

Members Absent:

Will Shirley, Sam Hiott

Members Attending via Teleconference:

None

Staff Present:

Robert Boyles, Emily Cope, Billy Dukes, Ross Self, Lynn Quattro, Will Dillman, Charles Ruth, Jay Cantrell, Jay Butfiloski, Bill Post, Janet Thibault, Ken Prosser, Sam Chappelle, Willie Simmons, Amy Tegeler, Susan Porter, Kelsey Huffstetler

Others Present:

There were no constituents present.

Chairman Hutchins called the meeting to order.

The minutes of the May 17, 2023, meeting were approved as submitted.

Bill Post, Diadromous Fishes Coordinator, gave a presentation on the confirmation of native Shortnose Sturgeon in the Edisto River. Shortnose Sturgeon have been endangered since 1967 and were historically overfished for their meat and caviar. Loss of habitat and water pollution also led to the decrease in population. Sturgeon research methods include capture with gill nets to tag and track with acoustic transmitters. Other than a few unverifiable claims from the 1970s and 1980s, there are no historical records for Shortnose Sturgeon on the Edisto River. SCDNR has sampled annually since 1994, with 301 Shortnose Sturgeon caught. 10.6% of captured Shortnose Sturgeon in the Edisto River were known remnants of a trial stocking program by the

USFWS and SCDNR in the Savannah River from 1988-1992. Known stocked fish comprise at least 10% of the captured adult population in the Edisto River, and young juveniles are now being captured. The ongoing objectives of the 3-year study are to better address the distribution/migration range of Shortnose Sturgeon, identify critical habitat, document the annual abundance, and potentially use genetics to differentiate river stocks and determine the degree the Edisto River stock is made up of stocked Savannah River Shortnose Sturgeon.

Janet Thibault, Coastal Bird Wildlife Biologist, gave an overview of the Coastal Bird team, and her time spent doing research in Churchill, Manitoba. The purpose of the Coastal Bird Program is to conduct research, protect habitat, survey and monitor, and provide outreach opportunities to the public. South Carolina's coastal regions provide important steppingstones for migrating coastal birds to stop in the Spring season during their journey to the Canadian nesting zones. Red Knots winter in South America, nest above the Arctic Circle, and 65% stop in South Carolina in the Spring, where they molt, and gain fat to provide energy for the migration. Biologists conduct research regarding roost site fidelity, foraging patterns, and migration patterns, by trapping the birds, and placing satellite transmitters on them. Janet spent two and a half weeks in Manitoba, assisting in breeding ground research, at the Churchill Northern Study Center. Field work included blushing birds in the tundra to locate incubating mothers, where researchers would then collect feather samples, band the birds, and outfit them with a satellite tag. During her time there, they located 20 nests, and placed 12 satellite transmitters. Research efforts are ongoing.

Jay Cantrell, Assistant Big Game Biologist, provided a summary of the recent public meetings pertaining to the decline of the wild turkey population. SCDNR held five public meetings across the state, to provide data and research, as well as obtain feedback from resident turkey hunters. Consistent statewide data confirms that the state is producing less birds than are being taken through harvest, or non-hunting methods. Harvest numbers have been on a downward trend since 2002, while hunter numbers and harvest opportunity continue to increase. Research indicates that most turkeys are killed in the beginning of the season. 8% of harvests are jakes, 9% are public land, 25% are in the afternoon, and 9% are non-resident hunters. 20% of hunters last year harvested one bird, 7% harvested two birds, and 3% harvested three birds. Data has shown that the timing of nest initiating varies very little across the southeast. The average hen in South Carolina lays her first egg around April 9th, which is after the majority of South Carolina turkey harvesting is being done. A study done at the Savannah River Site, an un-hunted research area, provides evidence that turkey decline is largely due to pressure from hunters. Suggested courses of action include shifting season starting dates, lowering bag limits, taking away afternoon hunting opportunities, limiting jake harvest, or raising the cost of turkey tags to provide additional funding for habitat improvement and/or incentive programs.

Susan Porter, SCDNR General Counsel, gave a presentation on annual board governance, and FOIA training. The objective of the presentation was to provide an introduction to some property law and related guidance pertaining to easements, licenses, encroachments/boundary

agreements, timber theft, road closure, liability, title insurance, and local planning and zoning, as well as to familiarize committee members with the guidelines under which they are to operate, in order to conduct and attend meetings under proper legal protocol.

Emily Cope, Deputy Director of WFF, provided legislative updates including budget requests for the next year, as well as legislative items for the upcoming session, including recent challenges related to wildlife rehabilitators, and turkey season changes.

Date, Time, and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee will be held at 10:00am on Thursday, November 2, at the range classroom at Styx.

Chairman Hutchins adjourned the meeting.