

**South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
February 28, 2022 Minutes
Dennis Building, 1000 Assembly St. Columbia SC 29202**

Members Present:

Chairman Mike Hutchins, Vice-Chairman Cleve Smith, Eddie Kinsey, Martha Herbert, Jonathan Rabon, Titus Duren, Mac Baughman, Trey Watford

Members Absent:

Stand Halliday, Will Shirley, Sam Hiott

Staff Present:

Emily Cope, Billy Dukes, Ken Prosser, Sam Chappelle, Ross Self, Morgan Hart, Jay Butfiloski, Kelsey Huffstetler

Constituents Present:

There were no constituents in attendance.

Chairman Mike Hutchins called the meeting to order.

The minutes of the August 11, 2022 meeting were approved as submitted.

Jay Butfiloski, Furbearer and Alligator Program Coordinator, gave a presentation on the coyote harvest update. Lethal coyote control tactics include an open hunting season, depredation permits, night hunting, and a 100-yard exemption rule. The law allows coyote hunting at night on registered properties using night vision, lights, infrared scopes, bait, and electronic calls. Registration ends annually on December 31, and anyone with legal access to the property can participate with a hunting license. A property owner may trap or shoot furbearing animals within 100 yards of their residence without a license or permit, under the 100-yard exemption. A coyote incentive program was implemented in 2016. Under the program, 112 coyotes have been tagged and released, and to date, 49 of those have been reported. Coyote harvest appears to be trending downward, which could be due to multiple factors including reporting issues, and new inputs into coyote take.

Ross Self, Chief of Freshwater Fisheries, presented an overview of the Black Bass Genetics Project. Traditionally, South Carolina's most commonly found species of bass have been the largemouth bass, redeye bass, smallmouth bass, and spotted bass. There are now 19 total bass species/subspecies across the country, with 9 of those existing in the state. The ongoing goals of the project are to determine genetic characterization of black basses in the South Carolina reservoirs and major rivers, determine rates of hybridization, and characterize proportion of Florida bass ancestry within largemouth bass populations. In Summer 2022, field collections were processed from lakes Hartwell, Keowee, Wylie, Wateree, Marion, and Moultrie. 424 of the samples were successfully genotyped. Field collections are currently being processed in the Cooper River, Lake Greenwood, Fishing Creek, and Lake Murray. 100

samples were taken out of each waterbody and were either electro-fished or angler caught. Tissue samples indicated that the majority of presumed spotted bass were in fact Alabama bass. All sampled fish contained a percentage of Florida bass DNA, and no fish sampled were pure largemouth bass. Future field collections are to take place statewide during Spring 2023, and Spring 2024.

Morgan Hart, Alligator Project Leader, presented an overview of the Alligator Program, including harvest numbers, research projects, population control methods, and general alligator information. There are currently approximately one-hundred thousand alligators statewide. Alligators were protected under the Endangered Species Act up until 1987, when they were removed from total protection. They are now federally, and state managed. Alligators can be found in any aquatic habitat in South Carolina below the fall line, and typically hatch in August/September. Removal methods in the state include public lottery hunts, in which 1000 hunters receive 1 tag to use on public waterways, as well as private lands hunts in which permits are issued to large landowners to receive a number of tags based on property size. The private lands alligator season begins September 1 and ends May 31. The final removal method is the Nuisance Alligator Program, which aims to mitigate and manage conflict caused by alligators who have lost their fear of humans, and/or may cause harm to people or property. An estimated 9000 alligators have been harvested since 2010 by various removal programs. Current research methods include eyeshine surveys, used to determine abundance, size distribution, and health, as well as satellite telemetry, used to collect data on habitat use, seasonal movement corridors, hibernacula, and breeding congregations, and finally, mark-recapture studies used to document movements, growth, longevity, and age at maturity.

Billy Dukes, Chief of Wildlife, provided an overview of the frameworks and staff recommendations for the 2023-2024 migratory bird season. Chairman Cleve Smith made a motion to approve as submitted, committee member Mac Baughman seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously.

Emily Cope, Deputy Director, reported on legislative updates, including the status of new and current bills. There are currently bills in the House to require mandatory watercraft insurance and boater education, as well as to ban transportation of live swine, and to modify the coyote management program. Electronic harvest reporting for deer has passed in the House.

Date, Time, and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Committee will be held at 10:00 am, May 17, 2023, in the Dennis Building board room at 1000 Assembly Street, Columbia SC.

Chairman Hutchins adjourned the meeting.