

**South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
February 29, 2024, Minutes
Styx Classroom
2762 Wildlife Lane, West Columbia, SC 29172**

Members Present:

Vice Chairman Cleveland Smith, Stan Halliday, Martha Herbert, Jonathan Rabon, Titus Duren, Will Shirley, Mac Baughman

Members Absent:

Chairman Mike Hutchins, Eddie Kinsey, Trey Wilson, Sam Hiott

Staff Present:

Robert Boyles, Emily Cope, Ken Prosser, Billy Dukes, Sam Chappellear, Charles Ruth, Becky Brown, Jason Bettinger, Ross Self, Kelsey Huffstetler

Others Present:

Tiffany Rollins (USFWS)

Vice Chairman Cleveland Smith called the meeting to order.

The minutes of the August 3, 2023, meeting, and the November 6, 2023, teleconference meeting were approved as submitted.

Jason Bettinger, Region 3 Fisheries Coordinator, presented on the seasonal distribution and summer habitat use of striped bass in the Edisto River. Striped Bass are a cool water species, and the state fish of South Carolina. They can complete their entire life cycle in freshwater and were stocked into reservoirs throughout the Southeast to control pelagic forage and create pelagic sport fishery. In 2015, they were listed as a species of conservation need because of habitat changes such as siltation, water temperature changes, and hydrologic modification. Despite habitat issues, the Edisto population is currently self-sustaining and genetically robust. Research objectives are to identify season distribution of adult striped bass and identify areas that provide thermal refuge during summer. During winter and early spring, striped bass occupy the tidally influenced area of the lower river, then in May/June they ascend the river and occupy the forks during the summer months. In late September fish vacate the tributaries and return to the tidally influenced area of the lower river. Future directions and remaining questions include determining thermal tolerance of

coastal striped bass populations, summer habitat selection of striped bass in the Edisto River, and the impact of water withdrawals and climate change on thermal refuges.

Becky Brown, Social Science Coordinator, reported on the results of the duck hunter season preference survey. Objectives of the survey were to compare hunters' preferences for dates of season segments and splits, measure importance of weekend days in timing of segments, determine where SC duck hunters hunt, and measure support for a statewide youth day. Survey links were distributed to anyone with an email address on file who had purchased a South Carolina waterfowl permit in the last 5 years. Initial distribution was done through GovDelivery, Survey Monkey, and individual links, and the survey was open for three weeks. Respondents were 98.1% male, and 1.1% female. Of those surveyed, 695 hunted private land, and 511 hunted public land, with the majority of private land hunters in the PeeDee region, and the majority of public land hunters in the coastal region. Survey results indicated that most duck hunters supported a statewide youth day. In summation, results indicated that most hunters prefer the season in its current form.

Billy Dukes, Chief of Wildlife, outlined the proposed 2024-2025 Migratory Bird Season staff recommendations. The committee made a motion to accept staff's recommendations, and the motion carried with unanimous approval.

Emily Cope, Deputy Director of WFF, reported on legislative updates, including the outcome of recent budget hearings, as well as the status of new and current bills. Budget recommendations will go to the House floor by next week. Two deer processing bills have been introduced, one to allow processors to use discarded parts for dog treats is awaiting ratification, and one to allow processors to take additional deer for venison was approved in the House and is on the way to the Senate. A bill to protect sensitive species information is awaiting ratification. Proposed turkey legislation was introduced and is on the way to the House floor. A bill adding hybrid bass to striped bass regulations is on the way to the Senate floor. A bill prohibiting possession and take of the Robust Redhorse is on the way to the Senate floor. There is an upcoming subcommittee hearing for the captive wildlife bill. Bills on the House calendar include hook size restrictions on the lower Saluda, aerial hunting of hogs, dog collar/e-collar removal restrictions, and coyote/hog management.

Date, Time, and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee is tentatively scheduled for 10:00am on Thursday, May 16, at the classroom at Styx.

Vice Chairman Smith adjourned the meeting.