

**South Carolina Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
September 11, 2025 Minutes
SCDNR Headquarters Board Room
260 D. Epting Lane, West Columbia, SC 29172**

Members Present:

Chairman Mike Hutchins, Vice Chairman Cleve Smith, Stan Halliday, John Butler, Titus Duren, Mac Baughman

Members Attending Virtually:

Martha Herbert, Will Shirley

Members Absent:

Trey Watford, Jonathan Rabon

Staff Present:

Will Dillman, Jay Cantrell, Jay Butfiloski, Ross Self, Lynn Quattro, Sam Chappellear, Ken Prosser, Willie Simmons, Stacy Scherman, Hunter Stewart, Leo Rose, Jennifer Kindel, Kevin Ryan, Kelsey Huffstetler

There were no constituents in attendance.

Chairman Hutchins called the meeting to order

The minutes from the February 13, 2025, and March 18, 2025 Meetings were approved as submitted.

Jay Cantrell, Assistant Chief of Wildlife, provided a harvest update on the 2025 Turkey Season. Significant legislative changes were made prior to the 2025 season, including a reduced bag limit from 3 to 2 birds, prohibiting the harvest of Jakes, reducing the season by 9 days, increasing tag fees, banning reaping on private land, and an additional post-season youth weekend. The total harvest reported was 8,877 birds, which was down from the 2024 harvest of 9,752 reported birds. 8.5% were harvest on public lands, 21% were harvested after noon, and 9% of hunters that shot did not kill or recover their birds. There was reported total of 41,805 hunters, averaging 7 days afield. 10% of the reported harvest was from non-residents, with top-producing counties being Bamberg, Marion, Colleton, Spartanburg, and Florence. 89% of successful hunters reported their harvest through the

Go Outdoors app, with 6% using the website to report, 4% calling in their harvest, and 1% texting to report. Due to the legislative changes, there was a 16% decrease in turkeys harvested from the previous year.

Jennifer Kindel, State Bat Biologist, provided an update on Statewide Bat Projects, including accomplishments and program goals for the future. South Carolina is host to 15 total species of bats, with 10 of those roosting in colonies, and 5 roosting alone. Bats have proven to be beneficial in insect suppression, pest suppression, and the reduction of pesticide use. Since 2006, over 6 million bats have been killed by White-nose Syndrome (WNS). Losing bat populations to white-nose syndrome has resulted in an estimated value of losses between \$426-\$495 million per year to agriculture in eastern USA. Currently, WNS is present in 10 counties in South Carolina, and has affected 5 species, with Northern Long-Eared bats and Tri-Colored bats being the most affected species. Current research efforts include monitoring Hibernacula in the Upstate during the winter, and NABat acoustic monitoring, netting, radiotracking, and monitoring maternity roosts statewide, during the spring, summer and fall. SCDNR partners with SC State Parks to monitor the largest Rafinesque's maternity colony in SC, located at Hampton Plantation, as well as SCDOT-funded programs to survey transportation structures and provide "Bats in Structures" training. Conservation goals include avoiding, minimizing, and mitigating the take of federally listed bats, providing further education to the public on humane exclusion and the beneficial nature of bats, as well as precluding the need for FWS take permits on DNR-owned properties.

Leo Rose, Hatchery and State Lakes Coordinator, gave a presentation on how to use AI to predict ovulation time for Striped Bass, and objectives related to furthering research for the program. 15 million striped bass fry are produced at Bayless Hatchery, which are sent to 8 grow-out facilities, 5 of which are in South Carolina, and 3 that are in Florida, Missouri, and North Carolina. 4.5 million fingerlings are produced in South Carolina, across 47 locations in 11 waterbodies. The maximum period between ovulation and deterioration of the egg quality for striped bass is 15 to 30 minutes. The fish being used to train the AI models are injected with hormones after capture and prior to release, to control ovulation time. The categorical model uses photos of the fertilized eggs and decides which category they fit into. The pros of the categorical program include being easier to train, and requiring fewer photos for training, while the main con is that prediction is not as specific as desired. The regression model predicts time-to-event (ovulation) using regression, but is less predictive than the categorical model, and needs more complex model training, requires more photos, and relies on support from DOA to train the model. The STRIPE (Striped bass Time-based Reproductive Intelligence Prediction Engine) is an integrated application, in

which biologists work with the program. The user submits an image, which AI then evaluates to make predictions with actionable timestamps. Next steps for the programs include DNR IT staff working with Azure AI Custom Vision platform and Azure Machine Learning Studio, DOA staff porting the existing models and application to SCDNR, and SCDNR Fisheries staff gathering additional photos and data, training the models with this season's data, and exploring new models.

Will Dillman, Deputy Director of WFF, reported on legislative updates. SCDNR currently has three WFF-related bills awaiting action by the legislature when they return in January. This includes S. 337: Blue Catfish, H. 3937: Venomous Reptiles, and H. 4100: Captive Wildlife. S. 337 would amend South Carolina state law regarding blue catfish regulations by modifying daily possession limits. H. 3937 creates the "South Carolina Venomous Reptiles Act", which establishes comprehensive regulations for the possession, housing, and transportation of venomous reptiles within the state. H. 4100 creates a regulatory framework for captive wildlife in South Carolina by establishing a new Chapter 17 in Title 50 of the state code.

Date, Time, and Location of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee will be on Thursday, November 20, 2025, at 10:00AM in the SCDNR HQ Board Room, at 260 D. Epting Ln. West Columbia, SC 29172.