

SC DNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
November 10, 2015
Rembert Dennis Building, Columbia, SC

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chair Mike Hutchins, Vice Chair Cleve Smith, Stan Halliday, Sam Hiott, Jonathan Rabon, Stephen Thomas, Bobby Garmany

MEMBER ABSENT:

Martha Herbert

STAFF PRESENT:

Emily Cope, Ken Prosser, Susan Johnson, Billy Dukes, Derrell Shipes, Sam Chappellear, Tom Swaynham, Ross Self, Lynn Quattro, Michael Hook, Michael Small, Dean Harrigal

OTHERS PRESENT:

Titus Duren

Chair Hutchins called the meeting to order and the minutes of the August 18, 2015 meeting were approved. Committee Members were asked to submit their constituents' dove survey forms at the meeting.

Emily Cope updated everyone on Committee Member Herbert's recovery after a tractor accident during the summer. She is making remarkable progress, but Mrs. Cope said she has a long way to go and asked everyone to continue to keep her in their prayers. To follow Ms. Herbert's recovery, you can do so on Face Book's "Martha Herbert Health Update."

Chair Hutchins introduced Titus Duren as a potential new Committee Member, taking the place of Mr. John Gramling.

Capt. Robert McCullough, Chief of DNR's Media and Outreach Section, updated the Committee on DNR's smartphone app. He reported that while the app is working, there is a problem locating it on the Apple store. Discussions are ongoing with Pocket Ranger staff and hopefully the situation will be resolved in the next month or so.

Mrs. Cope reported the agency has the potential to send out "e-blasts." After some discussion, Chair Hutchins requested staff utilize this capability and send the dove survey to hunters enrolled in DNR's Harvest Information Program.

DISCUSSION OF WATERFOWL LOTTERY HUNT APPLICATION/SELECTION PROCESS:

Derrell Shipes, Chief of Statewide Projects, stated he and Committee Member Stephen Thomas have been in discussions for several months about the waterfowl lottery hunts. He reported selection notices were emailed to all waterfowl lottery hunt applicants yesterday afternoon and added there are some details that need to be worked out in the online process. DNR has to depend on a third party vendor (SCI) to write the application platform and there are some database issues that need resolving. Mr. Shipes reported there was a 16.9% increase in the number of applicants from 2014/2015. A total of 4,180 individuals applied for the 2015/2016 waterfowl hunts (3,574 applied in 2014/2015). The number of slots (guns) for these hunts increased from 978 to 1,047, which was a 7% increase. Four percent of

that increase was the result of the opening of Wateree River Heritage Preserve. A total of 87 waterfowl hunts on 8 individual properties are scheduled during the 2015/2016 season.

Mr. Shipes stated once he summarizes the lottery hunt results, he will email his report to Committee members. He indicated with the new application rate, a hunter will be selected once per 3.99 years. Because of the attrition rate, it shouldn't take that long.

Mr. Shipes reported due to recent rainfall and flooding, staff had been unsure as to whether or not DNR would be able to provide some of these hunts. He commended staff on their work during the flooding.

Committee Member Stephen Thomas stated his interest in obtaining and analyzing data reflected a downward trend in the lottery hunt process, making it more difficult to be drawn, precipitating his involvement in the process. Mr. Thomas reported DNR's waterfowl lottery hunts are world-class hunts with good ducks in great numbers being harvested.

Emily Cope, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Deputy Director, stated in the future, staff will meet with each waterfowl area property manager to review whether additional waterfowl hunt opportunities can be added while maintaining the quality of the hunts.

UPDATE ON STORM/FLOOD DAMAGE:

Mrs. Cope commended the agency for their remarkable work during the flood. The Law Enforcement Division conducted over 900 rescues. WFF staff was in the field monitoring and assessing DNR's wildlife management areas and state lakes. Staff spent a significant amount of time determining where to close deer season within river drainages to protect the animals from exploitation. Mrs. Cope stated staff tried to be extremely conservative with the closures and they were very well accepted.

Mrs. Cope reported a conservative statewide estimate for flood damage is \$3 to \$3.5 million. There was minor overall flooding in DNR Regions 1 and 2. However, there was significant damage to roads within Wateree River Heritage Preserve. There were significant issues on multiple properties in DNR Region 4, which will require road, dike and spillway repairs. Erosion occurred at the new canal road at Congaree Creek. Also, there was some co-mingling of fish within different ponds at the Dennis Wildlife Center. Lake Ashwood has been closed due to significant erosion and a high risk of dam failure.

Staff is currently working through FEMA and will hopefully receive some reimbursement for the work. Staff is also working with the General Assembly to potentially obtain some state appropriated funds to help with repairs as well. A copy of Mrs. Cope's storm report is attached to the original minutes.

Committee Member Thomas stated he has collected raw data from the inception of Carr Creek at Samworth Wildlife Management Area. He reported while serving on the Waterfowl Advisory Committee, a peer review was conducted on Samworth and the public navigable waters to restore the area to the level of productivity it had in the past. Mr. Thomas distributed copies of his data results (copy attached to the original minutes) and stated data obtained during the Carr Creek closures indicates limiting the days of hunting and classifying the area as a Category II should be revisited. He stated hunters use Carr Creek as a throughway. In doing so, they pass through an area with a 25 shell limit, while outside the WMA hunters can use more shells. Law Enforcement has resolved this issue. Committee Members and DNR staff will review the data Mr. Thomas provided and further discussions will be held at the February 2016 meeting.

PUBLIC DOVE FIELDS/OPENING DAY RESULTS:

Small Game Project Leader Michael Hook distributed copies of Public Dove Field Opening Day Results for 2015 (copy attached to the original minutes). He also delivered a power point presentation (hard copy attached to the original minutes and will be mailed to committee members). A total of 3,548 hunters (188 youth) participated on 45 public dove fields (8/youth fields). Participants harvested 9,773 doves with an average of 2.75 doves per hunter and an average of 6.80 shots per dove. Dove wings were collected (3,500 plus) and will be used in age ratio and population models. Mr. Hook reported overall, these numbers correspond closely with numbers in the past 5 or so years.

Mr. Hook introduced Dr. Michael Small as the newest addition to the Small Game Project. Previously, Dr. Small was the agency's Region 3 Heritage Preserve Coordinator, but spent a major part of his career working with doves in Texas.

Mrs. Cope stated DNR's public dove fields are a true example of the agency providing youth a great opportunity to hunt.

RECENT COLLABORATIVE STOCKING OF CAROLINA HEELSPLITTER:

Ross Self, Chief of the Freshwater Fisheries Section, distributed copies of a recent report (copy attached to original minutes) of DNR's assisting in stocking of the Carolina Heelsplitter, an endangered freshwater mussel on the brink of extinction. DNR has been working with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the NC Wildlife Resources Commission on mussel propagation and recovery programs. On October 19th, 131 adult Carolina Heelsplitters were stocked to augment a known heelsplitter population in Lancaster County. Each of the mussels stocked contained an individual tag that allows researchers to return to the site to evaluate success.

Mr. Self's handout also contained photographs of a trout recently caught in the Chauga River. According to the Fish Health Center in Georgia and the Southeastern Fish Disease Center, the trout displayed textbook symptoms of Whirling Disease. Staff has not been able to collect samples in the Chauga River due to high water levels. As soon as the water levels drop, staff plans to collect samples and send them to Auburn's Southeast Fish Disease Center and the Fish Health Center in Georgia for diagnostics. Hopefully, staff will have additional information in the next few weeks.

Mrs. Cope reported there are steps staff can take to protect trout under emergency regulations should it become necessary. Mr. Self said if results from the Chauga River test positive for Whirling Disease, staff may promulgate an emergency regulation to stop all imports of trout into South Carolina. This emergency regulation would carry a 90-day term. Once that regulation expires, staff will follow with another emergency or permanent regulation that would require incoming trout to have a disease certification, allowing commerce to continue under certain conditions.

Chair Hutchins commended Mr. Self and staff on their efforts in handling this serious situation. Chair Hutchins asked Mr. Self to update the Committee on DNR's work with Trout Unlimited on local rivers over the past few years. Mr. Self will provide that update at the February 2016 meeting.

COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS:

Committee Member Thomas stated at the next meeting duck season be discussed since that will be the only meeting before rules are established for the 2016/2017 season. Mr. Shipes reported all migratory bird seasons will be set in February and March of 2016.

Committee Member Hiott commended staff during the recent flooding crisis.

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

February 2, 2016 at 10:00 AM, Hunter Education Classroom at Styx Receiving Compound. The location will be confirmed at a later date.

**The Hunter Education Classroom is not available on February 2, 2016. Location to be announced.*