



ACTIONS

N.C. WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMISSION

May 21, 2015 at 9:00 am

NC Wildlife Resources Commission Headquarters
1751 Varsity Drive
Raleigh, North Carolina

Call to Order – *Commission Chairman* Jim Cogdell called the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. in the Commission Conference Room, 5th floor. He announced that the meeting was being recorded as a public record, with live audio streaming at www.ncwildlife.org. He requested that cell phones be turned off. Commissioners Michell Hicks and Mark Craig were absent.

Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation - *Commissioner* David Hoyle, Jr. led the Pledge of Allegiance. *Commissioner* John Coley gave the invocation.

Welcome and Mandatory Ethics Inquiry – Chairman Cogdell welcomed Ned Jones of Trout Unlimited. Cogdell read the ethics inquiry mandated in North Carolina General Statute 138A-15(e).

Minutes of March 5, 2015 Meeting - the Commission approved the March 5, 2015 Wildlife Resources Commission meeting minutes as presented in **Exhibit A**.

Minutes of March 18, 2015 Telephonic Meeting – the Commission approved the minutes of the March 18, 2015 telephonic meeting of the WRC, presented in **Exhibit B**.

Minutes of April 21, 2015 Telephonic Meeting – the Commission approved the minutes of the April 21, 2015 telephonic meeting of the WRC, presented in **Exhibit C**.

Financial Status Report - the Commission received a financial status report on the Wildlife Operating Fund as of March 31, 2015 and on the Wildlife Endowment Fund as of March 31, 2015 from Cecilia Edgar, *Budget Director*, presented in **Exhibit D**. The Operating Fund balance is \$14,570,466.75. The cash balance is restricted to twenty-five percent of the agency budget. At \$14 million the agency is under the \$19 million threshold. The Endowment Fund balance is \$112,686,466.26. Of that balance, \$20,685,550.81 is expendable interest.

WRC Meeting Schedule Change – the Commission approved a change in the 2015 Commission meeting schedule. The July meeting was moved from July 9 to July 16, 2015.

Fisheries Committee Report – *Committee Chair* Wes Seegars reported that the Fisheries Committee met on May 20, 2015. The committee received an update on the Mountain Heritage Trout Waters Angler Survey and community interviews. A summary presentation will be made at the July 2015 meeting. Bryson City has requested to be recognized as a Mountain Heritage Trout City and to have a 2.2 mile section of the Tuckasegee River designated as Mountain Heritage Trout Waters. Designation and licensing were discussed, with potential trout stocking in October.

Bob Curry, *Inland Fisheries Division Chief*, updated the committee about the vandalism at Armstrong Hatchery. Three men lifted the gate, releasing water and causing the deaths of 168,000 fish. The total estimated loss is \$340,000.00. Staff developed an effective restocking plan with purchase of eggs and fish from other states.

The Striped Bass harvest season in the Roanoke River Management Area (RRMA) was extended from April 30 through May 3. The Total Allowable Landings for the RRMA in 2015 was 68,750 pounds. As of April 30, approximately 17,000 pounds remained available for harvest, and during the season extension, anglers harvested approximately 9,000 additional pounds.

An economic impact analysis of fishing on the Roanoke River during the months of March through May is being conducted in collaboration with the Division of Marine Fisheries. Results will be available by early fall.

Small Game Committee Report – Garry Spence, *Chair*, reported that the Small Game Committee met on May 20, 2015. Dr. David Cobb, *Wildlife Management Division Chief*, and Chris Kreh, *Upland Game Bird Biologist* provided an overview of concepts for establishment of quail emphasis areas. Concepts, which would require rulemaking and additional scientific study before implementation, include nest predator control from March through May, supplemental feeding part of the year, and wild quail translocation to supplement areas with few quail. Emphasis areas would require at least 1500 acres with at least fifteen percent of the area in year-round quail habitat. Landowners would have responsibility for conducting fall covey counts, and detailed records of trapping, feeding and translocation.

Mark Jones, *Supervising Wildlife Biologist*, discussed an opportunity for Commissioners and staff to attend field inspections of quail management at Di-Lane Plantation Management Area, owned by the State of Georgia near Augusta. The 5100 acres have been intensively managed by changing the landscape to make it suitable for quail. The trip will be held on August 19, 2015.

Executive Director Gordon Myers welcomed members of the NC Trappers Association to the Small Game Committee meeting. Tony White, *President*, told the committee about part of Senate Bill 647 that will make trapper education mandatory in North Carolina. An advanced trapper education course has been developed by David Denton and includes trapping best management plans. The course is taught as part of the Hunter Education Program. Myers stated that SB 647 points out the important role of trapping in North Carolina. He appointed a work group led by Kris Smith, *Wildlife Education Division Chief*, along with Colleen Olfenbuttel, Travis Casper, and Chris Huebner, to collaborate with members of the NC Trappers Association.

Chairman Spence reminded everyone that the next Small Game Committee meeting will be held on Wednesday, July 15, in conjunction with the July 16 WRC meeting.

Land Use and Access Committee Report – Tom Berry, *Chair*, reported that the Land Use and Access Committee met on May 20, 2015. Chris Goudreau, *Hydropower and Special Projects Coordinator*, gave an overview of hydropower relicensing projects administered by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) in rivers in the Piedmont and mountains. The relicensing process assesses benefits and costs to the environment. Forty dams are administered under 21 FERC licenses that are issued for 30-50 years. Goudreau discussed WRC interests which include habitats and water quality for aquatic and terrestrial species and recreation opportunities such as boating and fishing, and requirements for access areas and maintenance. Governing documents include the FERC license, the 401 Water Quality Certificate administered by the State, fish passage, and optional settlement agreements. Associated with the FERC licenses are opportunities for land acquisitions, mitigation responsibilities, and restrictive easements.

Isaac Harrold, *Lands Program Manager*, reviewed six Phase I land acquisitions for consideration by the Commission later in the meeting. He then reviewed four Phase II tracts with a recommendation for the WRC to proceed with acquisition of the properties.

Erik Christofferson, *Deputy Director of Operations*, provided an update on a proposed shooting range in Burke County. Christofferson noted that the proposed site has opposition so other sites have been considered. Another site on the Johns River Game Land near the sheriff's shooting range may be feasible. Sound studies have been completed at two locations. At one of the locations with the use of a sound muffler, the sound is lower than at the sheriff's range. Public input meetings and an environmental assessment will be conducted. Christofferson announced that the Cleveland County shooting range project is twenty per cent complete. The site will be called the Foothills Public Shooting Complex of Cleveland County.

Christofferson reported to the committee that the assessment of the house at the Texas Plantation tract has been made. It is not feasible to attempt a conversion of that house into an office.

Migratory Birds/Waterfowl Committee Report – John Coley, *Chair*, reported that the Migratory Birds/Waterfowl Committee met on May 20, 2015. Doug Howell, *Waterfowl Biologist*, presented an overview of a Light Goose Conservation Order that would open in 2016, from February 15 to March 31, 2016. Expanded hunting methods will be allowed with no bag limits and no possession limits for light geese. Participants must be licensed and have a federal duck stamp. All participants must obtain a free permit and complete a harvest survey. Howell said that the agency website will be used as a portal, with a light goose season link. Permits will be available on September 1, 2016.

Executive Director Gordon Myers reported that he met with the Assistant Director of the US Fish and Wildlife Service about the migratory bird program regarding compensatory days for hunting migratory waterfowl. HB 640, with the provision for Sunday hunting on private lands, affects migratory bird hunting in North Carolina. Since the USFWS is not prepared to allow compensatory days for any migratory birds if hunting on Sunday is allowed, Representative Dixon amended the bill to disallow any migratory bird hunting on Sunday.

Habitat, Nongame and Endangered Species Committee Report – on behalf of *Chairman* Mark Craig, Commissioner Garry Spence reported that the Habitat, Nongame and Endangered Species Committee met on May 20, 2015. Cindy Carr, *Wildlife Action Plan Coordinator*, presented to the committee the Wildlife Action Plan Update, which will require approval by the Commission in August before submission to the USFWS by September 30, 2015. Carr distributed a timeline, showed Commissioners how to review the plan update on line, and announced that a question and answer session will be held at the July 15, 2015 committee meeting.

Shannon Deaton reported that six nominations were received for recipient of the 2015 Thomas L. Quay Wildlife Diversity Award. The Nongame Wildlife Advisory Committee recommended Jeff Bean. The Commission approved the nomination. The award will be presented at the July 16, 2015 WRC meeting.

Committee of the Whole Meeting Report – *Chairman* Jim Cogdell reported that the Committee of the Whole met on May 20, 2015. Dr. David Cobb presented an overview of the revised Chronic Wasting Disease Response Plan. Cobb explained that if a bill is passed transferring farmed cervid management to the Department Agriculture, some parts of the plan will have to be revised. Dr. Cobb reported that state-wide deer management forums will be held in June.

Executive Director Myers stated that the new agency Internal Auditor conducts independent consulting activity to insure financial integrity and process improvement. The position is required by law. An audit charter is being developed. Since the Auditor reports to Myers, audit findings will go to the Commission Chairman.

Myers gave a legislative update to the committee. He mentioned the Trapping Bill (SB 647) which is a compromise bill for types and placement of traps. The Outdoor Heritage Act, HB 640 has passed the House. The bill was amended to require a distance from a residence of at least 500 yards for hunting on Sunday. Counties could opt out of Sunday hunting by ordinance after two years. HB 736 would remove license requirements for American Indians to hunt and fish. The resulting recurring impact to the WRC would be 100 to 300 thousand dollars. Myers mentioned HB 760, the Regulatory Reform Act of 2015 and possible impacts relative to search and seizure and allowable inspections by law enforcement. Senate Bill 513, the NC Farm Act, would transfer cervid farm oversight to the Department of Agriculture. The bill will be sent to the House.

Myers reported on the House budget, noting that agency reliance on the General Fund has decreased 55 percent. However, non-recurring cuts have reduced the agency budget by several million dollars and the agency anticipates a significant reduction in Pittman-Robertson funds. Myers stated that the agency will request that the Senate revise the proposed three million dollar cut to two million dollars in light of the reduction in other financial resources. Chairman Cogdell thanked Myers and staff for their work with the General Assembly.

Agency Spotlight – Aquatic Nuisance Species: What Role Does the Commission Play? – the Commission received a report from Christian Waters, *Fisheries Program Manager*, about aquatic invasive and aquatic nuisance species. Waters reported that invasive species have moved outside their historic range and are likely to cause impacts to native species. Nuisance species have moved outside their native range and do cause ecological and economic impacts. Translocation of nuisance species can occur from bait, aquariums, pets, and hitchhiker releases from fishing activities. Nuisance species compete for food, nutrients, cause predation, parasites, interbreeding, and may interfere with human use of waters. Once introduced, they are almost impossible to eradicate.

Waters stated that the role of the WRC is to regulate invasive and nuisance species through prohibition, manner of take, stocking and transport, permits and aquaculture, to conduct research and monitoring, management and control, public education, and coordination with many partners.

Waters stated that hydrilla, an aquatic grass, is a major problem in state waterways. It was introduced in Wake County in the 1980s. Now it is found from the mountains to the coastal plain.

A North Carolina Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plan is being drafted. The public comment period is open. The General Assembly is becoming aware of some nuisance species, especially hydrilla. The Division of Water Resources has been provided with funding by the General Assembly, matched with local budgets. The WRC is partnering with the Division of Marine Fisheries in some areas.

Inland Fisheries Update – the Commission received an update on the inland fisheries and outreach activities from Bob Curry, *Inland Fisheries Division Chief*. Curry mentioned the Mountain Heritage Trout Waters Angler Survey and community interviews. A Trout Angler Opinion Survey and Landowner Survey and Economic Impact are underway. Angler expenditure data is being collected on the Roanoke River. Kerry Linehan is collaborating with NC Division of Marine Fisheries staff to estimate the economic impact during March – May. Results will be available in the late summer/early fall. Curry mentioned the flathead catfish study on the Cape Fear and Waccamaw rivers and grass carp movement studies on the Eno River and Blewett Falls Pee Dee River below Lake Tillery. Curry discussed the vandalism at the Armstrong Hatchery and the loss of 168,000 fish.

Introduction of New Division Chief and Division Update – *Chief Deputy Director* Mallory Martin introduced Kris Smith, the newly appointed *Wildlife Education Division Chief*. Smith gave an update on the reorganization of the Division, including marketing, communications, IT, hunter education, outdoor skills, shooting sports, and education. Smith introduced the new Social Media Director, Thomas Harvey. The agency has 40,000 likes on Facebook. There were 599 participants at the Youth Hunter Education Skills Tournament in Ellerbe. Smith mentioned current magazine articles including ones on mussel propagation, shooting ranges, a family dove hunt, and a retrospective about Duane Raver. Artwork for the 2016 calendar has been chosen. Smith said that *Becoming an Outdoors Woman* had 112 participants. Thirty-five of them purchased licenses. Jenny Harris, *Marketing Director*, has created a new branding tent. The trout license plate direct marketing information is being mailed. There will be a yearlong display about the WRC at the Raleigh Convention Center.

Wildlife Management Update – the Commission received an update about the activities of the Division of Wildlife Management from Dr. David Cobb, *Wildlife Management Division Chief*. Dr. Cobb reported that Deet James, *Hunting Heritage Biologist*, presented expanded turkey hunting seminars to 1400 people. He directed Commissioners’ attention to copies of the *Upland Gazette* and stated that the agency will transition to an insert of the magazine in the spring and fall guides, reaching 40,000 readers. Preliminary results from the first year of banding Canada geese show that there are more than 155,000 resident Canada geese in North Carolina. During the annual trapper survey otter and bobcat carcasses are being collected to study fecundity and nutrition. Cobb reported on the Urban Bear Study around Asheville. Twenty dens have been identified. Ninety-four females produced an average of 2.65 cubs. Seventy-five percent are ground dens, twenty percent tree dens, and one under a front porch. The Box Turtle Connection, a long-term study with other universities, is ongoing at forty sites across North Carolina. Radio telemetry is being used to study three golden eagles. Cobb reminded everyone of the public Deer Management Forums in June across the state. The goal is to engage hunters about current deer populations.

Chronic Wasting Disease Response Plan – the Commission adopted the revised Chronic Wasting Disease Response Plan presented in **Exhibit E**. Dr. Cobb noted that if the bill to transfer management of farmed cervids becomes law some sections will have to be revised in collaboration with the NC Department of Agriculture.

Phase I Land Acquisitions – the Commission approved requests presented by Isaac Harrold, *Lands Program Manager*, for agency staff to begin working with the State Property Office and funding partners to develop acquisition plans for the following properties presented in **Exhibits F-1, F-2, F-3, F-4, F-5, and F-6**:

- Johns River Tracts – Burke/Caldwell County
- Caldwell Tract – Haywood County
- Morrison Tract – Wilkes County
- Murphy Tract – Burke County
- Myrtle Head Tract – Brunswick County
- Stolting Tract – Richmond County

Phase II Land Acquisition – the Commission gave final approval to proceed with acquisition of the following properties presented in **Exhibits G-1, G-2, G-3, and G-4**:

- Phillips Tract – Ashe County
- EBH-H&V Tract – Alleghany County
- Teachey Tract – Pender County
- IP Chowan Tract – Gates County

Boating Safety Check Decal Pilot Program – as an addition to the agenda, Colonel Jon Evans, *Enforcement Division Chief*, reported that a pilot boating safety check program has been initiated to reduce multiple inspections of vessels. Ten thousand decals have been printed. The Enforcement Division is working with the Marine Patrol. The owner of a vessel is given a decal that may be placed on the starboard side of the forward bow after the vessel safety equipment is checked. Pre-launch safety inspections can be made so that safety checks do not have to be conducted on the water.

Comments by the Chairman – Chairman Cogdell thanked the Land Use and Access Committee and agency staff for developing that committee, with analysis of potential land acquisitions and stewardship costs.

Cogdell reminded the assembly that the next meeting of the Wildlife Resources Commission will be Thursday, July 16, 2015.

Comments by the Executive Director - *Executive Director* Gordon Myers reported that the House budget probably will go to the Senate next week. Myers is working with members of the Senate about the proposed recurring cuts to the agency budget in light of declining receipts. Myers reported that there have been significant increases in agency outreach that are skill-based. Myers met with the Director of the NC Museum of Natural Science. They are studying state-wide citizen scientist programs with school children.

Adjournment - the meeting was adjourned at 10:50 a.m.