

SC DNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
Minutes, January 8, 2013
Styx Receiving Compound/Hunter Ed Classroom
Columbia, SC

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chair Mike Hutchins, Milton Brazell, Paul Bennett, John Troutman, Billy Hoole, Bryson Thomason, John Gramling, Stan Halliday

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Charles Howard, Cleve Smith

STAFF PRESENT:

Emily Cope, Ken Prosser, Tim Ivey, Tom Swaynham, Ross Self, Lynn Quattro, Billy Dukes, DuBose Griffin, Bryan Kyzer, Susan Johnson, 1st Sgt. Eddie Lee

Chairman Hutchins called the meeting to order and the minutes of the October 9, 2012 meeting were approved as submitted.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS:

Paul Bennett stated the fishing rodeo at the Cheraw Fish Hatchery held on October 13th was a success. There were 44 participants and they caught a total of 229 fish.

Chairman Hutchins encouraged committee members to attend a DNR fishing rodeo when the opportunity arose.

Emily Cope, Deputy Director of the DNR's Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Division (WFF), stated the WFF and Law Enforcement Divisions are creating a master list of all fishing rodeos planned throughout the state. Ms. Cope will provide committee members a copy of the list after it has been completed. She also encouraged committee members attend a fishing rodeo when one was planned in their area.

Bryson Thomason stated there seemed to be a lot of confusion regarding the free hunting days that occurred on January 4th and 5th. Chairman Hutchins stated a media outlet used a picture of a deer when advertising the free hunting days which contributed to the confusion. Ms. Cope stated at the upcoming wildlife biologists meeting, staff will review alternative dates for the next free hunting days to minimize potential confusion. She further stated DNR's news release relating to the free hunting days included a statement that "existing seasons, bag limits and methods of take still apply." Ms. Cope said staff intends to make changes prior to next year so it will be understood better by the public.

There were no constituents present.

LICENSING DIVISION UPDATE:

Bryan Kyzer, Program Manager for DNR's Boating and Licensing Section, distributed a comparison summary of license prices and sales over the last five years (copy attached to the original minutes). He stated in 2010 there was a considerable spike in the number of licenses sold due to the requirement of salt water anglers having to purchase a salt water recreational fishing license. Mr. Kyzer reported by 2012 the number of licenses sold trended down by approximately 20,000. He feels the opportunity to purchase 3-year fresh/saltwater/hunting licenses impacted this total. Overall, he reported licenses were on a decline at the end of fiscal year 2012, perhaps due to the economy and the three-year licenses now being offered.

Chairman Hutchins stated a few years ago he researched licenses sales revenue dating back to 1985. He reported approximately 95 percent of those now sold are at the same cost they were in 1985. After completing his research, Mr. Hutchins said he met with several members of the General Assembly to propose a license fee increase, but his proposal was met with opposition.

Mr. Kyzer updated the Committee on DNR's point of sale licensing system. To date, he said there are approximately 525 agents statewide, along with an internet call center, and participation on the state government website. Mr. Kyzer noted that DNR has been working with SC.GOV for several years in the development of an all-encompassing, web-based software program, to include all products offered by the agency, including recreational and commercial licenses, boat titling/registration, the draw hunt system, and aquaculture permits. He reported there have been three attempts to test the "live" mode of the program and due to complicated elements of commercial licenses and the draw hunt system, the projected date for going live is April 15th. Mr. Kyzer said the cost of SC.GOV has been minimal to DNR.

Committee Member Hoole commended Bryan Kyzer and Olin Jenkins of the Licensing Division for their job performance. Mr. Hoole noted that as a point of sale agent, he had encountered major problems with DNR's computer system. Mr. Kyzer asked Mr. Hoole if he had seen improvement in the past three years and Mr. Hoole stated the problems had become worse.

Ms. Cope said a 365-day license is looked upon favorably by most members of the General Assembly. She stated staff is discussing framework for such a license in terms of implementation and what the agency would need from the General Assembly to help fund implementation of the program.

Following a discussion, Committee Member Troutman made a motion that DNR pursue an increase on all licenses across the board. A second was received and the motion carried unanimously. Chairman Hutchins will carry the Committee's recommendation to the DNR Board at their January meeting.

FALCONRY:

In the absence of Derrell Shipes, Billy Dukes, DNR's Small Game Project Leader, updated the Committee on falconry regulations. He introduced Master Falconer Hansel Heart, who brought his Harris's Hawk.

Mr. Dukes stated current falconry regulations require a Federal permit, which lasts for three years and costs \$100.00. Federal regulations were revised in 2008 which (1) will remove the requirement for a Federal falconry permit (2) require states to have regulations and a permitting process in place by January 1, 2014 and (3) require South Carolina to adopt the Federal regulations, but still necessitate legislative approval through the regulations-setting process. Mr. Dukes reported the new state regulations will (1) try to accommodate existing Federal permittees by honoring those permits (2) provide appropriate definitions (3) establish the requirement for a state falconry permit (4) set a fee for the permit (likely to be \$100 for three years) (4) set a penalty for violations and (5) liberalize current state regulations by lowering age limits, allowing possession of more and different types of birds, and expanding the season.

The current state permitting process requires: (1) application (2) testing (3) inspection of the facility (4) issuance of a permit and (5) an annual report to the state and to the US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) regarding the number and status of birds. Currently, an apprentice falconer has to be at least 14 years old. The new regulations will be at least 12 years old. A general falconer requires a 16 year age minimum with 2 years as an apprentice and a master falconer requires 5 years experience as a general falconer. An annual report to the state and the FWS regarding number and status of birds is required.

Master Falconer Hansel Heart entertained questions from the Committee and allowed everyone to see his hawk at the close of the meeting.

SEA TURTLE STATUS AND RESEARCH:

DuBose Griffin, DNR's Sea Turtle Coordinator, distributed DNR's recent redesign of its sea turtle specialty license plate. She provided an information sheet detailing Florida's net state revenue from the sale of their sea turtle specialty license plate, which is over \$1 million annually.

Ms. Griffin provided a power point presentation regarding DNR's sea turtle program and provided a number of handouts (copy attached to the original minutes). She reported there are four sea turtle species in South Carolina, which are the Loggerhead, Green, Leatherback, and Kemp's Ridley, with the Loggerhead being the most common. Ms. Griffin reported all of these species are endangered or threatened and are protected by state and federal laws. She stated the SC Marine Turtle Conservation Program began in 1977 with beach management research. The program further developed in the early 1980s with the formation of the nest protection and stranding volunteer networks along the SC coast. Ms. Griffin said nesting surveys and nest protection measures are carried out by a variety of public agencies and there are 1,100 volunteers statewide, who are private citizens. Presently, the program encompasses research, management, monitoring and education within the local, regional and international communities.

Ms. Griffin stated South Carolina has six index beaches that conduct standardized ground surveys for loggerhead nests since 1982, which are South Island, Cape Island, Light Island, Edisto Beach State Park, Edisto Beach and Fripp Island. She said daily nesting beach surveys begin in May and continue through August. Ms. Griffin reported during the 2012 nesting season, 4,604 sea turtle nests were laid on SC beaches (4,596 loggerhead nests, 7 green turtle nests and one leatherback nest. Further, loggerhead nesting in 2012 topped the previous two years and was also the highest year on record since 1982. Ms. Griffin stated strandings have decreased, two identifiable causes of mortality are watercraft interaction and disease.

Ms. Griffin announced SC DNR, along with Georgia DNR and North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, are participating in a genetics research project with the University of Georgia to answer several basic loggerhead sea turtle nesting questions. This mark and recapture initiative will help biologists better understand how the loggerhead population. She said samples from nests have been collected from South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia and a DNA identification code has been successfully assigned to many of them. Volunteers enter nesting information in a centralized, on-line data base, connecting the sample with the nest data. Ms. Griffin noted an example of one SC nesting loggerhead reflects she laid six nests on five beaches within South Carolina. A complete summary of DNA results is available on DNR's website (www.dnr.sc.gov/seaturtle/genetics.htm)

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

Ms. Cope announced DNR had two pre-filed bills. The first, introduced by Senator Gregory, proposes striking the prohibition of baiting deer in Game Zones 1 and 2. Ms. Cope stated should this make it through the legislative process, it will become legal to bait deer and hunt deer over bait statewide. The second bill relates to Chapter 13 fishing regulations, which will clarify several changes made last year.

Ms. Cope reported Senator Chip Campsen is the new chair of the Senate Fish, Game and Forestry Committee and he has approached staff about expanding the Private Lands Alligator Season. Staff has also been approached about modifications to the present turkey season to make it more consistent statewide and possibly change bag limits. Ms. Cope also reported DNR will continue to pursue changes to comprehensive deer management through the legislature.

No old/new business was brought forward.

SASSAFRAS MOUNTAIN UPDATE:

Tom Swaynham, Wildlife Region 1 Coordinator, stated DNR has been through a long process to acquire title to all of Sassafras Mountain, the highest point in the State at 3,553 feet and located in Jocassee Gorges. Swaynham reported an improvement project is now underway to construct an observation tower that will give visitors a 360-degree view of the mountains of Georgia, North Carolina and Tennessee. He stated other amenities will include new trails and public-use facilities such as a picnic area and

restrooms. Besides DNR, partners in the improvement project include Pickens County, Clemson University, The Conservation Fund, The Highpointers Club, Duke Energy, the Foothills Trail Conference and the Harry Hampton Memorial Wildlife Fund. Mr. Swaynham said they are seeking donations from any individual or corporate party to help fund the project. He added Clemson University Associate Professor Daniel Harding has completed a conceptual design of the tower and an architectural firm will be selected to work with Clemson on the final design.

Mr. Swaynham asked Committee Members to let him know if they have contacts that might be able to help with fund raising efforts. Donations for engraved brick pavers are being offered in the amount of \$100, \$500 and \$1,000 that will be placed on the tower pavilion. Special recognition will be provided for large donors. Donations are now being accepted and can be made via DNR's website or by contacting Tom Swaynham at DNR's Clemson office.

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

Tuesday, April 23, 2013, 11:00 at Donnelley WMA Lodge

At the conclusion of the meeting, Committee Members were invited to participate in a tour of Cohen Campbell Fish Hatchery.

BASED ON DISCUSSIONS FOLLOWING THE MEETING, THE LOCATION FOR THE APRIL 23, 2013 MEETING WILL MOST LIKELY BE HELD AT THE DENNIS WILDLIFE CENTER IN BONNEAU.