

NEW HAMPSHIRE FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

MARCH 19, 2024 COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Location: NH Fish & Game Department, 11 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301.

Commissioners Present: R. Green, B. Temple, E. Stohl, S. Price, J. Titone, P. DeBow, M. Hodgson, J. Caveney & C. Hodgdon, & A.J. DeRosa.

Patrick McGonagle, Belknap County Commissioner, was present at the meeting to observe, as he is in the process of completing routine paperwork to become a voting member.

Commissioners absent/excused:

Executive Director Mason – Present

Chairman E. Stohl called the meeting to order at 1:25 p.m., immediately after the adjournment of the Commission Hearing. He informed the audience that the public is entitled to attend all Commission meetings and when recognized by the Chairman, the public may speak on any item on the agenda. The Chairman reserves the right to limit comment to the extent necessary for the orderly conduct of the meeting.

ACTION ITEMS:

1.) Commissioner C. Hodgdon moved to approve the February 20, 2024 Commission Minutes, as written, and Commissioner M. Hodgson seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

At this time, Chairman E. Stohl removed item 2a from the consent agenda and reported that they would heard separately.

Commissioner R. Green moved to accept consent agenda items 2b & 2c, as presented below, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded.

2b.) The Commission accepted the donation of \$400.00 from The Golden Child Back Lake Nationals & Vintage Showdown (Marco Philippon, Roy Oliver & Guy Philippon), for their appreciation of the Department’s presence at the February 24, 2024 Event in Pittsburg.

2c.) The Commission accepted the following donations made in memory of David Powers, Andover, NH, deposited into the Small Gifts & Donations Account:

Cynthia Albert, Houston, TX -	\$250.00
Huckleberry Propane & Oil, Boscawen, NH -	\$100.00
Clayton Miller, Elkins, NH -	\$ 50.00
Andrew Phelps, Dianne Miller & Tammie Jo Phelps, Danbury, NH -	<u>\$ 25.00</u>
	Total: \$425.00

The vote on consent agenda items 2b & 2c was unanimous in the affirmative.

3.) John Magee, Programs Supervisor, Inland Fisheries Division, came before the Commission seeking approval to expend up to \$30,000 from the Fisheries Habitat Account to conserve 140.3 acres in Hanover, NH.

Commissioner R. Green moved to deny the expenditure of \$30,000 from the Fisheries Habitat Account to conserve 140.3 acres in Hanover, NH and Commissioner M. Hodgson seconded.

Commissioner P. DeBow stated, "I was ready to approve this today."

Commissioner R. Green reported that his concern was that it was not specific that the Department would have control over the land.

Commissioner A.J. DeRosa stated, "We have a long history with this organization and they have granted us easements in the past and have promised to do so with this property, as well. I don't think anybody is trying to commit fraud, although, I appreciate the concerns, however, I feel there is great opportunity for hunting alone on this property."

Commissioner M. Hodgson stated, "I don't think fraud is being proposed here either." She stated that the Hanover Conservancy already acquired the land. She further stated that there seemed to be some risk with selling the house on the property, as they acquired it with loans and it is a large financial burden. She reported that the path forward was not clear as to what happens if the house does not sell for the asking price. She stated, "I think the \$30,000 could be better spent in a different way."

Commissioner R. Green stated that he asked to see the language in the agreement at last month's Commission Meeting.

Commissioner J. Caveney reported that he felt the Department was brought into this after the fact. He stated, "Regardless if Fish & Game is involved in this, Mink Brook will be protected, there are regulations in place and DES (Dept. of Environmental Services) can be called upon to enforce those regulations." He stated that going forward; it would be beneficial for the Commission to review the draft outline of the easements.

Mr. Matthews, Hanover Conservancy, reported that the house was currently under contract for \$550,000, including 3.6 acres surrounding it. He reported that they received a grant for \$115,000 and fundraising is moving along swiftly, however, there is still a gap of \$320,000.

Commissioner A.J. DeRosa stated that most Commissioners are concerned with the easement itself.

Mr. Matthews responded that he would be happy to include the 150 ft. riparian buffer language in the easement and in the management plan.

Commissioner B. Temple stated that it was not so much about the \$30,000, the real question the Commission has is whether there will be hunting, fishing, & trapping allowed on the property.

Mr. Matthews reported that the LCHIP Grant agreement ensures all those activities are allowed on the property.

Commissioner M. Hodgson stated, "I want to be clear, I think it's an amazing piece of property and I'm happy that you purchased it and are managing it and such, I support that. We saw the balance in the Fisheries Habitat Account and talk about funding in our Strategic Planning Committee Meetings. The question is whether this is worth \$30,000 of Fisheries Habitat Funds or could it be better spent on something that is not already preserved."

Director Mason reported that it was not abnormal for F&G to participate as the host organization and asked Jim Oehler to speak to the land buying process. Jim Oehler, Habitat Programs Supervisor, reported that the department collaborates all the time with organizations to conserve lands. He reported that often partners buy land for the department because landowners don't want to wait, as it takes the department two years to buy land. In closing, he stated that it would be unreasonable for the department to request an easement over \$30,000.

Mr. Matthews assured Commissioner R. Green that hunting, fishing, and trapping would be allowed on the property. He stated that he would send a copy of the easement to the Commission for their review.

The vote on the motion to deny the expenditure of \$30,000 from the Fisheries Habitat Account to conserve 140.3 acres in Hanover, NH, failed with 2 in favor (R. Green & J. Caveney), 8 opposed (A.J. DeRosa, J. Titone, C. Hodgdon, P. DeBow, E. Stohl, M. Hodgson, S. Price & B. Temple).

Commissioner A.J. DeRosa moved to approve the expenditure of \$30,000 from the Fisheries Habitat Account to conserve 140.3 acres in Hanover, NH and Commissioner P. DeBow seconded.

Commissioner A.J. DeRosa withdrew his motion and Commissioner P. DeBow withdrew his second.

Commissioner A. J. DeRosa moved to approve the expenditure of \$30,000 from the Fisheries Habitat Account to conserve 140.3 acres in Hanover, NH, with a grant agreement protecting Fish & Game's interests and to meet certain milestones, if not met, the money will be returned to the Department, Commissioner P. DeBow seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

At this time, Chairman E. Stohl introduced Patrick McGonagle, recently confirmed as the Belknap County Commissioner, and invited him to sit with the Commission, as a non-voting

member, as he is in the process of completing the required paperwork to become a voting member.

The Commission welcomed Patrick.

4.) Jim Oehler, Habitat Programs Supervisor, came before the Commission seeking approval to expend approximately \$20,779.75 from the Wildlife Habitat account to purchase a mini-excavator with bucket and mulching head to aid in maintaining property infrastructure such as woods roads, stream crossing, signs, and parking areas on Fish & Game Wildlife Management Areas across the state.

Commissioner R. Green moved to approve the expenditure of approximately \$20,779.75 from the Wildlife Habitat account to purchase a mini-excavator with bucket and mulching head to aid in maintaining property infrastructure such as woods roads, stream crossing, signs, and parking areas on Fish & Game Wildlife Management Areas across the state and Commissioner M. Hodgson seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner M. Hodgson stated, "You really keep us well informed with the information you send us and the videos you share, I think it's great. Thank you!"

2a.) was heard at this time:

Colonel Jordan came before the Commission seeking approval of the following donations made to the Search & Rescue Account:

George Tombarello, in memory of retired District 5 Lieutenant, Scott F. LaCrosse -	\$12,000.00
Paul & Patricia Bisset, for use by the Advanced Search & Rescue Team -	\$5,000.00
Matthew & Alicia Emsley, in support of the Hike Safe Program -	\$50.00
Red Oak Hill Farm, LLC, honoring NH Conservation Officers -	\$30.00
	<u> </u>
	Total: \$17,080.00

Colonel Jordan reported that these donations would be used to purchase a Total Station, a total work station is an electronic, optical instrument used in surveying and can be used to reconstruct accident or crime scenes with computer technology. This donation will also allow Conservation Officers to get the proper training to operate the equipment.

Commissioner R. Green moved to accept the above donations made to the Search & Rescue Account and Commissioner M. Hodgson seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

INFORMATION ITEMS:

1.) Financial Statement - Kathy LaBonte, Chief, Business Division.

Kathy clarified a few things on the financial statement for Commission C. Hodgdon.

2.) Jim Oehler, Habitat Programs Supervisor, came before the Commission and provided an overview of the process for acquiring lands and easements for NH's Wildlife and its citizens. Jim stated that by conserving healthy forests and waters, the Wildlife Habitat Program provides places for the state's wildlife to thrive and its citizens to enjoy their outdoor traditions. (See attached presentation).

On behalf of the Commission, Chairman E. Stohl thanked Jim for the informative presentation.

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE:

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE: Public policy development & recommendations, as well as Commission advocacy before legislature.

Commissioner Price, Chair; Commissioners: Caveney, DeBow, Hodgson & Green.
Staff members: Kevin Jordan & Marty Mobley.

Commissioner S. Price reported that the committee met the morning of the March 19, 2024 Commission Meeting and repositioned the Commission's position on three bills, as follows:

Commissioner S. Price moved to support HB-1494, as amended, relative to and Commission P. DeBow seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner S. Price moved to support SB-542, as amended, relative to and Commissioner P. DeBow seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner S. Price moved to withdraw the Commission's position on HB-1521, after amended, as it is an unrelated issue for the Commission and Commissioner P. DeBow seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

In closing, Commissioner S. Price reported relative to Commissioner R. Green's recent discussion relative to poaching and the lack of severe penalties. She reported that Director Mason agreed to work with Law Enforcement to create legislation, to include jail time and an increase in fines. She reported that the Director would provide an update to the Commission in July. In addition, the Commission agreed that Commissioner R. Green would be involved in those meetings on behalf of the Legislative Committee.

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE: Commission professional development, education & policy recommendations related to Commission conduct & activities.

Commissioner Caveney, Chair; Commissioners: Temple, Hodgson & Titone.
Staff member: Cheri Patterson.

Commissioner J. Caveney reported that the committee did not meet.

SUSTAINABILITY & STRATEGIC PLANNING: Agency funding, development & oversight of strategic plan.

Commissioner Hodgdon, Chair; Commissioners: Caveney, DeRosa, Hodgson & Titone.
Staff member: Scott Mason.

Commissioner C. Hodgdon reported that the committee met on March 8, 2024 at Fish & Game HQ and started to take the focus areas and make them into proposals for the strategic plan. He reported that the committee would be meeting again on April 3, 2024 to finish. He reported that he anticipates having a draft to share for the next Commission Meeting.

RESOURCES & INFRASTRUCTURE: Policy recommendations related to agency infrastructure; including facilities, public access, habitat & wildlife.

Commissioner Green, Chair; Commissioners: Caveney, DeRosa & Temple.
Staff member: Dianne Timmins.

Commissioner R. Green reported that the committee did not meet. He further stated that he would like to see the computer cable issues fixed in the east conference room.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & EDUCATION: Engagement, partnership, awards, public recognition & education strategies for the public & interest groups.

Commissioner DeRosa, Chair; Commissioners: DeBow, Hodgdon & Price.
Staff members: Dan Bergeron, Kevin Jordan & Cheri Patterson.

Commissioner A.J. DeRosa reported that the committee did not meet.

SEACOAST REPORT: Commissioner J. Titone.

Commissioner J. Titone reported that on March 4, 2024 the NE Fisheries Management Council held a Herring scoping meeting to discuss Amendment 10 to the Atlantic Herring Plan, with the purpose of reducing the use of conflicts within the fishery, to support the rebuilding of the herring stock, and support ongoing coast wide restoration of herring and shad.

He reported that on March 15, 2024, BOEM (Bureau of Ocean Energy Management) announced the final wind energy area for wind turbines in the Gulf of Maine, expecting to cover approximately 2 million acres. He further reported that the transmission plan to be released within the next few weeks.

In closing, he reported that there would be a coastal trap clean-up day on April 15, 2024, with the bulk of the clean up being done by commercial fishermen.

LAKES MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Commissioner Price.

Commissioner S. Price reported that the committee did not meet.

NH RIVERS MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Commissioner Hodgdon.

Commissioner C. Hodgdon reported that the committee has not met.

SEARCH COMMITTEE: Commissioners: M. Hodgson, Chair: Commissioners: E. Stohl, R. Green, J. Caveney & C. Hodgdon.

Chairman M. Hodgson reported that the committee has not met since she last reported. She reported that the Executive Director Supplemental Job Description is posted and that the closing date for applications is April 15, 2024. She further reported that after the deadline, the committee would meet and review resumes.

OLD BUSINESS: Swanzey Lake:

Commissioner J. Caveney reported that there was a meeting with Law Enforcement and Marine Patrol regarding Swanzey Lake and the 850-foot inflatable slalom ski course. He reported that they discussed the affects it has on the trout fishery and other users of the 106-acre body of water. He reported that Marine Patrol took the discussion seriously and stated that they would review that individual's permit application this year and share it with the Commission. Marine Patrol assured all parties that safety was their number one priority, as well as water quality, environmental issues, and erosion. In closing, he reported that Marine Patrol would forward the permit to Colonel Jordan, who will in turn, will share with the Commission. There will be another meeting in two to three weeks to follow up on the issue.

NEW BUSINESS: Commissioner S. Price reported that there would be an Easter Ham/Skeet Shoot held at Major Waldron's Sportsmen's Club in Barrington, NH, on March 23, 2024, at 9:00 a.m.

COMMISSIONERS REPORTS: Commissioners will report on their recent activities as it relates to Fish & Game Commission duties and responsibilities. This is an informational item only.

DIRECTORS REPORT:

Director Mason reported that the Department has had four fatalities on snowmobiles this season. He reported the below statistics over the last six years:

- Averaged one fatality per year.
- 38% of accidents caused by inexperience.
- 22% were due to unsafe speed.
- Only 20% of the accidents involve rental machines.
- Less than 4% were due to alcohol or drugs.

He further reported that this year's issues were:

- Poor trail conditions due to lack of snow and rain causing trails to be icy.
- The lack of open trails across Eastern U.S.
- Weather patterns may limit the use of snowmobiles in the future.
- Inexperienced operators.
- Increase use of rental machines.

He reported that he would be working with the Trails Bureau, Dealers Association, Manufacturers, and Snowmobile Club Association to have discussion on what could help reduce these tragedies.

He further reported that the Hatchery Modernization Project was moving forward and that the Department of Public Works has received four bids from interested contractors looking to become the Project Manager.

The Hatchery Modernization Presentations have gone well, with two public meetings, one in Concord and one in Lancaster. He reported that he and Dianne Timmins, Chief, Inland Fisheries Division, presented before the Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee, The House Fish, Game and Marine Resources Committee, The Legislative Capital Projects Oversight Committee, and the NH Trout Unlimited State Council. He further reported that to date the link to watch the hatchery presentation received 8,100 hits.

He announced that April 20, 2024 is Discover Wild NH Day, and invited all Commissioners to attend.

He reported that the dock in New Castle, NH, was on hold, as the Department may be receiving some FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) money to help offset the cost of the repairs.

In closing, he reported that the Solar Eclipse would be happening on April 8, 2024, and that the Department has been working with Homeland Security for the agency's role in backcountry rescue. The State is expecting a rather large influx of tourists for this event.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC:

Weldon Bosworth, Gilford, NH, welcomed Patrick McGonagle, newly appointed Belknap County Commissioner.

He spoke to the Wildlife Action Plan and the Game Management Plan and stated that he was somewhat bothered that there is not one chapter on predators or furbearers. He stated that as an ecologist, those are the most important components of wildlife in New Hampshire.

Jim Oehler, Habitat Programs Supervisor, reported that it was the 25th Anniversary of the Habitat Program, which receives the \$2.50 fee from hunting & trapping licenses. He reported that he was working on communications to inform constituents what the Department is doing with that money, via social media posts, videos, and promoting it a Discover Wild NH Day. In addition, he reported that there would be a celebration at a Governor & Council Meeting, where the Department would receive a proclamation signed by the Governor.

Steve Angers, Conway, NH, reported that he recently spoke about habitat monies at the last Commission Meeting. He stated that he is aware that there are currently two “deadbeat” dams that are going to be replaced by DES, of which he heard nothing about at any Commission Meetings. He inquired is this was standard operating procedure for them to take action without input from the Commission. He stated, “If this is the case, I would ask that the Resources & Infrastructure Committee make looking at these dams one of their topics for review, as I feel the Commission should know what kind of money is being spent on these dam replacements.”

He further stated that if the Commission is unable to stop this from happening, that they ask Director Mason to look at having more restrictions and regulations. He stated, “Boundary Pond was a remote pond that you had to work to get to, thus making it a great fishery, now it will be accessible to anyone.”

At this time, 3:17 p.m., Commissioner R. Green moved to adjourn and Commissioner P. DeBow seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Eric Stohl, Chairman
NH Fish & Game Commission