

NEW HAMPSHIRE FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

JUNE 18, 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, J. Caveney, C. Hodgdon, P. McGonagle, M. Hodgson & A.J. DeRosa.

Commissioners absent/excused:

Executive Director Mason – Present

Chairman E. Stohl called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. 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 R. Green moved to approve the May 20, 2024 Commission Minutes, as written, and Commissioner C. Hodgdon seconded. The vote carried with 10 in favor, 1 abstention (M. Hodgson, as she was absent from the May Commission meeting).

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

2a.) The Commission accepted the donation of a hand forged-double long spring bear trap made to the Trapper Education Program from Dr. J.S. Sidwell, Boxborough, MA, in memory of Harry D. Thompson, Hall of Fame Trapper, and his wife, Dr. Doris Thompson. This trap will be on display at the Trapper Cabin at the Owl Brook Hunter Education Center, in Holderness, NH.

2b.) The Commission accepted the donation of \$25.00 from Maryann DeVeau, E. Hampstead, NH, in memory of Donald Martin, Danville, NH, for deposit into the Small Gifts & Donations Account.

2c.) The Commission accepted the donation of \$1,200 from Sally Merrill, for deposit into the Search & Rescue Account and utilized by the Law Enforcement Division to purchase an outer ballistic plate tactical vest carrier.

Chairman E. Stohl reported that Sally Merrill is the widow of Donald Merrill, former Sergeant, who was with the Law Enforcement Division for years.

The vote was unanimous in the affirmative to approve the above consent agenda.

INFORMATION ITEMS:

1.) Financial Statement – Kathy LaBonte, Chief, Business Division, answered a few questions from the Commission regarding the financial statement.

2.) Jim Oehler, Habitat Program Supervisor, came before the Commission and provided an update on potential changes to the Habitat Fee, which has remained at \$2.50 for 25 years (1999-2024). He reported that the Department is proposing to increase the fee to \$5.00. He compared the inflation adjustment equal to one turkey shot gun shell, one gallon of gas, one medium iced coffee, or one whoopee pie. (See attached for full presentation).

Jim reported that the Wildlife Habitat Program was celebrating its 25th Anniversary and provided some highlights of the program.

He briefed the Commission on RSA 214:1-f-Wildlife Habitat License purposes:

- (a) The development, management, preservation, conservation, restoration, and maintenance of wildlife habitat on both public and private lands;
- (b) Acquisition of land access;
- (c) Acquisition of easements;
- (d) Acquisition of private land;
- (e) Providing information to the public on the location of properties.

He reported that the habitat fee brings in approximately \$120,000 - \$140,000 annually to the Habitat Program, which supports conserving habitat, managing habitat, and stewarding lands. He further reported that the revenue from the habitat fee is not keeping up with expenses.

He reported that the Wildlife Management Area Inventory consists of the following:

- 94 parking areas
- 149 signs
- 131 gates
- 110 miles of access roads
- 175 stream crossings

In addition, Jim reported that a survey was conducted with 573 respondents, 315 hunters & trappers, with 65% supporting an increase of \$5.00 +. The \$5.00 increase would bring approximately \$240,000 - \$280,000 in to the habitat program annually.

Commissioner M. Hodgson stated that it was a good presentation and explanation as to what the habitat fee is used for and why the increase is needed. She inquired if there were fee increases in other programs being discussed and whether it made sense to increase fees minimally across the board for other use groups, as well.

Director Mason responded that the two fees associated with Wildlife Habitat Program and the Fisheries Habitat Program were a little different. He explained that the Wildlife Habitat Program is set up to allow the Executive Director the authority to go through the rulemaking process to change the fee. The Fisheries Habitat Program does not allow the Executive Director to change fees and requires approval by the legislature. He further reported that the Fisheries

Habitat Fee increase would be part of a legislative package going forward, however, not at this time.

At this time, Commissioner A.J. DeRosa moved to support the Executive Director raising the Habitat Fee and Commissioner S. Price seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

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 did not meet the morning of the Commission Meeting due to the lack of agenda items.

She further reported that Marty Mobley, Legal Coordinator, provided a handout with the rules & legislative schedule for July.

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 committee has met since the last Commission Meeting. He provided the Commission with a handout/outline of the work the committee has done over the last three months. He stated, "The Commission adopted the Strategic Plan goals over the winter, and with that, the committee has developed action items, which are before you today." He reported that these action items are what the agency would undertake over next 5 years, and if successful, would bring the Department closer to the goals everyone expressed.

He further reported that members of the committee would be reaching out to Commissioners & Division Chiefs seeking feedback on those action times, and after reviewing feedback, the committee will make any amendments and bring an actual Success Strategy Proposal before the Commission at the July 16, 2024 Commission Meeting.

In closing, he reported that for those that are not familiar with track changes, the black text are the goals, which the Commission adopted over the winter and the red text are the action items, which have not yet been approved by the Commission.

Commissioner S. Price recognized that extensive work that went into this and thanked the committee for their work.

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.

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 has not met, however, reported that the committee would be meeting in the near future to review the award nominations and would bring the committee recommendations before the Commission at the July 16, 2024 Commission Meeting for consideration.

SEACOAST REPORT: Commissioner J. Titone.

Commissioner J. Titone reported that NE Fisheries Management Council conducted a scientific survey assessing cod stocks within the Gulf of Maine & George's Bank. He reported that there were currently two designations of cod stocks, the Gulf of Maine and George's Bank. He reported that the scientific data now indicates that there should be four distinct biological stocks, those being, eastern Gulf of Maine stock, western Gulf of Maine stock, George's Bank and the southern New England cod stock. He further reported that the implications for New Hampshire would be that each biological stock could have its own set of allocations for quotas, which could affect recreational, as well as commercial cod fishing in the western Gulf of Maine, which is exploited by NH recreational and commercial fishermen.

He further reported that he attended a meeting put on by the NH State Parks regarding the Hampton Beach Feasibility Study. He reported that it was a great presentation and that Brendan Clifford, Wildlife Biologist, provided an update on the status of the piping plovers on Seabrook Beach & Hampton Beach. He reported that there is an extensive section of Hampton Beach blocked off for plover nesting, with some residents being less than pleased with those beach

restrictions. He reported that Brendan did a great job explaining how important protection strategies are to protect the endangered bird.

LAKES MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Commissioner Price.

Commissioner S. Price reported that she was unable to attend the last meeting, however, reported that the committee had a review of cyanobacteria updates and a review of the year's legislation.

NH RIVERS MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Commissioner Hodgdon.

Commissioner C. Hodgdon reported that the committee met to review legislative outcomes for the year and further reported that the committee's recommendations/positions seem to align with the Department's positions.

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

Commissioner M. Hodgson reported that the committee has made great progress on the Executive Director search. She reported that the committee narrowed down the pool of applicants and offered interviews to six individuals. She further reported that after the interviews, the committee narrowed it down to two candidates, who will have a second interview. She reported that one candidate is internal to the State of New Hampshire and the other candidate is from out of state. In closing, she reported that the goal was to have the process completed by the July 16, 2024 Commission Meeting. She reported that the committee has been very engaged and that the interviews have gone very well. She stated that there were some great questions and thanked the committee for all their work.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE: Commissioner C. Hodgdon, Chair; Commissioners: Caveney & Titone.

Commissioner C. Hodgdon reported that the committee would query the full Commission as it relates to their desire to run for a Commission Office and provide feedback at the July 16, 2024 Commission Meeting.

OLD BUSINESS:

NEW BUSINESS: Commissioner J. Caveney inquired about the PD3 Zoning Discussion that has begun with Fish & Game and the unincorporated townships in the North Country.

Director Mason responded that Coos County was unique in that they have a County Planning Board to deal with planning issues in the unincorporated townships. He reported that there has been a regulation on the books since the 1990's that dealt with these PD3 areas and that new Planning Board members were concerned, as they feel the rule language was not clear, with discussion leaning toward doing away with the rules. He reported that staff members attended a meeting and had discussion with the Planning Board, who will modify the rules to set up

standards for PD3 lands. He further reported there are 5 major landowners in the area, which the department has a history of working with for many years. He further reported that the Department will not regulate tree cutting, however, will have a strictly advisory role and will have an opportunity to comment on proposed cuts and how it may affect critical habitat areas, in addition to making suggestions/recommendations to landowners on how to best manage their lands.

Commissioner J. Caveney inquired as to how he could learn more about this.

Director Mason responded that the next meeting would be taking place tomorrow night, Wednesday, June 19, 2024, in Lancaster, NH. He recommended visiting the Coos County Planning Board website to learn more and to get on a public email list to receive meeting announcements.

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.

Commissioner S. Price reported that she attended a Public Hearing on June 5, 2024, regarding changing a 1993 petition to change the rafting rules on Braun Bay on Lake Winnepesaukee. She reported as the Carroll County Commissioner she supported the decision to move to the 150 ft. rafting rule and supported it as a resident of Wolfeboro, as well.

She further reported that the Daniel Webster Council's Sporting Clay Class Fundraiser she reported on last month was postponed and would take place on September 6, 2024.

Commissioner R. Green reported that he had a follow up meeting with Colonel Jordan and Major Walsh regarding the Poaching Bill. He reported that they came up with some guidelines and he was hopeful to submit the bill language to the Commission at the July 16, 2024 Commission Meeting.

Commissioner P. DeBow reported that he visited the Lower Shaker Village WMA in Enfield, NH, with Jim Oehler, Habitat Supervisor, and stated that it was a big, beautiful piece of land. He reported that the access road was washed out and that he got a first-hand look at how the different resources from other agencies assist on projects, as there was equipment from other agencies being used on the access road to put down gravel, replace culverts, etc. He thanked Jim for inviting him.

He further reported that he attended the Sig Sauer event where there was a demonstration from Northeast Air Guns and their effectiveness in hunting big game. He reported that he suspects there could be legislation down the road to use this as a legal method of take.

DIRECTORS REPORT:

Director Mason reported that the Commission's travel budget has been steadily growing this year and that that we have exhausted the budgeted monies, leaving Kathy LaBonte, Chief, Business Division, to use funding from other areas to cover costs. He recommended that the

Governance Committee meet to develop a travel policy for the Commission, to include language to the affect “travel reimbursements will be made quarterly or you will forfeit reimbursement.” In addition, he recommended that the policy include the Chairman’s approval for all non-Commission activities prior to attending. He stated, “These are just some ideas that may help curtail some expenditures.”

Chairman E. Stohl agreed to have the Governance Committee take this up.

Director Mason reported that the Hatchery Modernization Project was progressing, with HDR completing their 30% plan. He reported that the interviews for the three finalist for the Construction Manager Position would take place in the near future, after which, the Department of Public Works will send the recommended firm to the Governor & Executive Council, and after approval, it will become public information.

In addition, he reported that he expects the Department to meet all of the deadlines & requirements of the GOFERR (Governor’s Office for Emergency Relief and Recovery) funding the Department received. He further stated that he thought it was a good time to sit down with the Resources & Infrastructure Committee to discuss additional projects we would like to accomplish at other hatcheries.

He reported that on Friday, June 14, 2024, he swore in the newest Conservation Officer Trainee, Nate Superchi, of Landaff, NH. He reported that Nate would be starting his training period and that the agency was happy to have him. He further reported that there were currently 8 Conservation Officer Trainees.

In closing, he stated that as Director you participate in license suspension appeals, where an individual can come before the Executive Director, Colonel, and the summoning officer, to plead their case and ask for a shorter license suspension. He reported that he recently experienced a case where an individual took 2 bucks in NH, one in the North Country and the other in the southern part of the state, in Unit M, where he was supposed to take a doe and accidentally shot a buck. In trying to cover his tracks, the individual registered the buck he took in Unit M in the State of Massachusetts, via online. Director Mason reported that he believed this to be the first interstate online registration of an illegally taken game animal.

In conclusion, NH charged him with the taking a second deer and communicated the situation to the State of Massachusetts, who charged him with falsifying documents there, as well. The issue being that in the past, crossing state lines without registering an animal is a \$10,000 fine enforced by the Federal Government. He reported that he raised the question/situation to the USFWS (U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service) and NEAFWA (Northeast Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies) and hopefully they will look at it and have future discussion on this.

Commissioner M. Hodgson inquired if the Commission could have a copy of the Commission’s budget and expenses.

Director Mason responded that he would send her a copy.

Commissioner R. Green inquired as to why the Commission is not involved in the Commission budget.

Chairman E. Stohl recommended budgeting \$20,000 vs. \$12,000 for the Commission budget and if not used, return the monies.

It was suggested that Kathy LaBonte send the Commission monthly account/expense updates, which was mutually agreed upon.

Commissioner M. Hodgson inquired about volunteer time being used as federal match and whether Commissioners time were eligible. She stated that she would happy to track her time if was beneficial to the department.

Director Mason responded that volunteer match is very specific to programs, such as pheasant stocking, the hunter education program, etc.

Commissioner M. Hodgson responded that she was asking as it relates to mileage/budget issues. She stated, "Commissioners are volunteer and are very engaged, going around the state and doing various things, so being reimbursed for our mileage is very important."

Commissioner R. Green agreed that Commissioners travel & activities should be pre-approved by the Chairman.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC:

Kristina Synder, Chester, NH, spoke to her disappointment with law enforcement as to the handling of an issue regarding videos of raccoon hounding. She reported that she filed a complaint about the videos taken of hound hunters shooting raccoons out of a tree and encouraging their dogs to maul and shake the raccoons. She reported that to her knowledge, a Conservation Officer visited the hound hunters and encouraged them to remove the video, to which was done temporarily, only to have another video uploaded which kept playing the mauling in succession. She stated, "Law Enforcement did not do enough and should have made an example out of this incident, clearly showing that the department will not tolerate this behavior."

In closing, she stated, "The Department has the power to make some sort of difference here. Please do something. Make New Hampshire a state I am proud to live in."

At this time, 2:22 p.m., Commissioner R. Green moved to adjourn and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Eric Stohl, Chairman
NH Fish & Game Commission