

NEW HAMPSHIRE FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

DECEMBER 17, 2024 COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

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

Commissioners Present: R. Green, B. Temple, C. Hodgdon, E. Stohl, J. Titone, J. Caveney, P. McGonagle, G. Chandler, D. Poole & A.J. DeRosa.

Commissioners absent/excused:

Rockingham County Commissioner seat: vacant

Executive Director Simek – Present

Chairman R. Green 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 E. Stohl moved to approve the November 19, 2024 Commission Minutes, as written, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

2.) Consent Agenda - The following items were grouped together and were noticed as consent agenda items to expedite action on routine matters, which may not require public discussion. The Commission voted to approve these matters as presented. Commission members may remove certain items if further public input or discussion is deemed necessary.

Commissioner A.J. DeRosa moved to accept consent agenda items 2a & 2c, as presented below, and Commissioner B. Temple seconded.

2a.) The Commission accepted the donation of two generators and accessories, valued at \$2,256.93, from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, for use on an electrofishing raft.

2b.) The Commission accepted the following donations totaling \$39.00 made to the Small Gifts & Donations Account:

Margaret Kilrain, Manchester, NH -	\$20.00
Barbara Derr, Royal Oak, MI -	\$15.00
Cameron St. Pierre, Richmond, NH -	<u>\$ 4.00</u>
Total:	\$39.00

2c.) The Commission accepted the following donations totaling \$575.00 made to the Search & Rescue Account

Stephen Wheeler -	\$450.00
John Collins -	\$100.00
Jaffrey Woman's Club - on behalf of Autumn Lewis	<u>\$ 25.00</u>
	\$575.00

3.) Commissioner A.J. DeRosa moved to accept the donation of an underwater camera, viewing screen and Dell laptop and Commissioner P. McGonagle seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

INFORMATION ITEMS:

1.) Financial Statement – Kathy LaBonte, Chief, Business Division – there were no questions.

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE:

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

Commissioner Stohl, Chair; Commissioners: Caveney, DeRosa & McGonagle.
Staff members: Director Simek, Kevin Jordan & Marty Mobley.

Commissioner E. Stohl reported that the committee met the morning of the Commission Meeting and had an informational meeting and discussed an AOT (Alteration of Terrain) issue, which took most of the meeting.

He further reported that the committee would be meeting prior to the January 21, 2025 Commission Meeting, at 10:00 a.m., in the east conference room.

Chairman Green announced that legislation was the priority right now over other committee meetings, and asked that committee Chair's to plan their meetings around the Legislative Committee Meeting schedule.

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

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

Chairman R. Green reported that the committee did not meet.

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

Commissioner Hodgdon, Chair; Commissioners: Caveney, DeRosa & Stohl.
Staff member: Director Simek.

Commissioner C. Hodgdon reported that the committee did not meet.

He reported that the committee received Director Simek's feedback on the Draft Strategic Plan and would be meeting in early January to review that feedback and bring a final draft of the plan before the Commission at the January 21, 2025 Commission Meeting.

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

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

Commissioner A.J. DeRosa reported that the committee would be meeting immediately following the adjournment of the Commission Meeting to review a specific infrastructure list by county.

He further reported that Commissioner P. McGonagle would be taking over this committee as Chair.

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

Commissioner DeRosa, Chair; Commissioners: McGonagle & Temple.
Staff members: Dan Bergeron, Kevin Jordan & Cheri Patterson.

Commissioner A.J. DeRosa reported that the committee met the morning of the Commission Meeting to select the Commission Award winners. He reported that each Commissioner had a list in front of them containing the recommended award winners.

At this time, Commissioner P. McGonagle moved to accept the committee's award selection list and Commissioner B. Temple seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

SEACOAST REPORT: Commissioner J. Titone.

Commissioner J. Titone reported that the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission met on December 13, 2024 and that the Northern Shrimp Section decided to maintain its current moratorium on fishing for Northern Maine Gulf of Maine shrimp through 2025. This marks the 11th consecutive year of no commercial shrimp fishing for NH fishermen. The continuation of this moratorium is due to low levels of shrimp biomass in the Gulf of Maine. He further reported that there would be a pilot sampling program which will run through March of 2025, allowing the harvesting of 58,000 pounds of shrimp. Representatives from Maine, New Hampshire and Massachusetts will determine a start date and the participants for this sampling program.

LAKES MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Commissioner P. McGonagle.

Commissioner P. McGonagle reported that the next meeting of the committee would be on January 16, 2025.

Chairman R. Green reported that Commissioner P. McGonagle had not been confirmed to this committee as of yet.

NH RIVERS MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Commissioner C. Hodgdon.

Commissioner C. Hodgdon reported that the next meeting of the committee would be on January 16, 2025.

Chairman R. Green reported that as of yet, Commissioner C. Hodgdon had not been confirmed to continue to serve on this committee.

Chairman R. Green stated that he would contact the Governor's Office regarding these two committees to find out the status of the appointments.

OLD BUSINESS:

NEW BUSINESS:

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 J. Titone reported that a team from the Army Corps of Engineers visited Seabrook Harbor last week to review the issue of the continuous shoaling at the northern entrance to the harbor. This situation has caused the harbor entrance to be almost unnavigable at low tide where depths can be as shallow as three feet. This is making it difficult for both the recreational and commercial fishing fleets from launching or landing in Seabrook and is impacting their businesses.

He further reported that a zoom conference sponsored by UNH and the NH Food Alliance was held on December 6, 2024 to discuss how to better promote locally caught seafood within the state. Currently 90% of the seafood landed in NH goes out of state for processing and distribution. Areas of improvement include improving infrastructure where seafood can be processed here in New Hampshire for local consumption, less middlemen and distributors involved means lower seafood prices, and educating the public on the benefits of the not so popular species of fish, such as Pollock, hake, cusk and monkfish.

Commissioner E. Stohl reported he and Commissioner G. Chandler attended the CT Lakes Citizen Advisory Committee and discussed the roads on the tract.

He further reported that Representative Ouellet has sponsored legislation to extend the closing date of the OHRV trails on the Connecticut Lakes Headwaters property from September 30 to Columbus Day. He reported that the Commission was opposed to this, as was law enforcement. He elaborated that the trail systems is not totally on state property, some of the trail system is on private property and the passing of the legislation would make it a state law and mandatory for private property owners to keep their land open for ATV use. He stated, "I hope we oppose this when the time comes."

DIRECTORS REPORT:

Director Simek reported that it was a busy month.

She reported that there were two (2) big events this month that occurred and detailed them below:

- On December 13, 2024 the department hosted a groundbreaking event for the New Hampton Hatchery Modernization Project. She gave a special thanks to Governor Sununu, Councilor Kenney, Representative Ploszaj, and our Fish and Game Commissioners that were able to attend (Commissioners Stohl, McGonagle, Temple, and Caveney), former Director Mason, and the New Hampton town officials that made time to attend the event.
- On December 14, 2024 the department hosted Shop Wild Saturday, which was well attended. She thanked those that came out to support the event and did a little holiday shopping. In addition, she thanked authors Jack Pool, Eric Orff, rehabilitator Maria Colby, the Wildlife Heritage Foundation, and Fish & Game staff that made it a successful event.

She provided the below updates from the Divisions:

Inland Fisheries

- In addition to the New Hampton Hatchery groundbreaking, the Inland Fisheries Division is hosting a Town Meeting to update the community of New Hampton on the timeline and processes of the Hatchery Modernization Project.
- The Inland Fisheries Division also wrapped up fall data collection and closed the Bass Tournament Lottery. Winners are being determined.

Wildlife

- The Wildlife Habitat Program participated in ranking and approving applications for conservation grants from the Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) and the Moose Plate Grant program.
- The Nongame & Endangered Wildlife Program continues work on the NH Wildlife Action Plan. Over 1,200 participants participated in the on-line survey. Results will be analyzed in the coming month.
- Also, the Nongame & Endangered Wildlife Program launched their fall special funding campaign. The Nongame Program relies in part on private contributions, and to raise matching funds required for state and federal grants.
- As the hunting seasons come to a close, Game Program staff are collecting, organizing, and entering harvest and hunter effort data for a to prepare for subsequent data analysis.
- On December 2, 2024, they launched a survey to nearly 32,000 NH residents to solicit their opinions regarding deer, moose, bear, and turkey in NH. Also, a new page was created on the Department's website where up-to-date information and timelines related to the planning process are posted.

Law Enforcement

- Conservation Officers have responded to numerous search and rescue calls for assistance. Many of which were noted in news casts across NH and Massachusetts.
- These operations included rescue and recovery efforts of hikers
 - Officers also responded to assist Mt. Washington State Park personnel with a disorderly hiker.
 - 2 hunting related injuries that officers responded to – one was for a dislocated hip and one was for a tree stand failure and fall. Both parties were treated and recovered.
- Several Conservation Officers began intensive training on how to use a new forensic mapping system from Total Station Mapping. This equipment and subsequent training will advance investigations of OHRV and Snowmobile accidents as well as hunting incidents with forensic mapping. The training and equipment were made possible through private donations from the OHRV and hunting communities.

Marine Division

- Staff attended the New England Fisheries Management Council and associated committee mtgs. They also attended the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission & Striped Bass meeting – yesterday. In preparation for that meeting they had a meeting with the Coastal Conservation Association- NH on December 12th to listen to Striped Bass concerns ahead of December 16th meeting.
- Staff have attended various offshore wind meetings and remain actively involved
- Working with DES-Coastal Zone Management on developing a Geographic Location Description (GLD) for NOAA approval, anticipated to be a 2 year project.
- Hosted a public hearing on river herring and lobster rule changes.
- Staff are wrapping up dive projects for:
 - Oyster population and disease assessment and lobster larval settlement.
- Staff reviewed aquaculture requests/applications, will be setting up public hearings in 2025 for the applicants to present aquaculture project plan in a public hearing format.

Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve

- Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve-Staff are various interests groups, including scientists, non-profits, towns, restoration practitioners to identify places and projects that can help salt marshes persist in NH.
- Great Bay Reserve training program staff recently launched a fully accredited course for realtors on Living with Water that included guidance on wetland rules and flood risk maps.

Public Affairs Division:

- Two staff members attended the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA) Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation (R3) meeting to discuss with other states ways to recruit and keep hunters, anglers and trappers engaged with their sports.
- Both Hunter Education and Trapper Education classes have wrapped up for the year with 156 courses offered through the state that resulted in the certification of 2,431 new hunters and 145 new trappers.

Federal Aid Update:

- Federal Aid staff worked on the review and submission of several performance reports required under various federal assistance grants that fund Department activities, and also worked with project staff of the Wildlife Division to prepare two new Applications for Federal Assistance to support activities of the non-game program.
- The Department has received its preliminary notice of Federal FY25 funding under the Wildlife Restoration (Pittman-Robertson) and Sport Fish Restoration (Dingell-Johnson) Act. The amount of the Final Apportionment received from each program will be determined in early 2025.

Legal Coordinator:

- Department requested legislative bills have been sponsored and all are projected to be filed.

Statewide Public Boat Access Program:

- Completed repairs of storm-water erosion on the gravel approach to the concrete plank ramp at the Department's boat access site on Gorham Pond in Dunbarton, NH.
- Finalizing public bid documents to build a two level ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessible platform for boaters at the Department's boat access site on Newfound Lake, within the Wellington State Beach property in Bristol, NH. Construction to take place in 2025.

Facilities & Lands Division:

- Installed a dry well at the Berlin Fish Hatchery. In addition, plans are in place for the roof replacement project at the Berlin Fish Hatchery.
- Completed the action plan for the Twin Mountain Hatchery to meet fire code.
- Staff have started roof replacement project at the Milford Fish Hatchery.

Director's Office:

- Met with several agency leaders, including DNCR, DES and other partners and stakeholders. Meetings continue and will likely progress into January.
- Met Governor-elect Ayotte and her transition team.

Director Simek recognized staff members receiving longevity awards of 20 years and greater:

20 YEARS

Kathy Galvin - Public Affairs Division
Jessica Hamel - Licensing Division
Matthew Carpenter – Inland Fisheries Division
Jason Carrier – Inland Fisheries Division
Jared Irwin – Inland Fisheries Division
John Magee – Inland Fisheries Division
Ben Nugent – Inland Fisheries Division
Lt. William Bordeau – Law Enforcement Division
Lt. Bradley Morse – Law Enforcement Division
Sgt. Heidi Murphy – Law Enforcement Division

25 YEARS

Mark Beauchesne – Public Affairs Division
Lisa Collins – Public Affairs Division
Linda Verville – Wildlife Division

30 YEARS

Colonel Kevin Jordan – Law Enforcement Division

35 YEARS

Tom Flynn – Public Affairs Division
Laura Ryder, Public Affairs Division
Vikki Leonard – Inland Fisheries Division

At this time, Commissioner E. Stohl thanked Director Simek for attending the Shop Wild NH event. He stated, “After the Shop Wild event, Director Simek went upstairs for several hours and worked on an assignment for me and I want to thank her, as that shows dedication.”

CALL TO THE PUBLIC:

No public comment was heard.

At 1:40 p.m., Commissioner E. Stohl moved to adjourn and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Ray Green, Chairman
NH Fish & Game Commission