

NEW HAMPSHIRE FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

FEBRUARY 18, 2025 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. Caveney, G. Chandler, D. Poole & A.J. DeRosa.

Commissioners absent/excused: J. Titone & P. McGonagle

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 January 21, 2025 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 E. Stohl seconded.

2a.) The Commission accepted the following donations totaling \$525.00 made to the Small Gifts & Donations Account:

TN Arch Trail Travelers Inc., Northfield, NH – in memory of Sumner Dole	\$250.00
Richard Colcombe, Hillsborough, NH -	\$100.00
RiverWoods Manchester, Manchester, NH -	\$100.00
Grappone Mgmt. Co., Inc., Concord, NH -	<u>\$ 75.00</u>
	Total: \$525.00

2b.) The Commission accepted the donation of \$50.00 from Stan & Sandy Holz, Bluffton, SC, in memory of Gary Allen of Jefferson, NH, made to the Hunter Education Program.

2c.) The Commission accepted the donation of \$100.00 from Frank Dubisz, Manchester, NH, made to the “Let’s Go Fishing” Program. Frank was a volunteer instructor for the “Let’s Go Fishing” Program.

3.) Commissioner A.J. DeRosa moved to accept the donation of \$5,000 made to the Search & Rescue Account from John Berry and Commissioner E. Stohl seconded. This donation was made to honor NH Conservation Officers & what they do during search & rescue missions. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

4.) Commissioner A.J. DeRosa moved to accept the donation of \$2,500 made to the Search & Rescue account from Duncan Sutherland and Commissioner E. Stohl seconded. This donation was made to honor and thank the responding Conservation Officers for assistance he received after suffering an injury and required assistance off Mt. Morgan Trail in Holderness, NH. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

5.) Andy Timmins, Game Programs Supervisor, came before the Commission seeking approval to enter into the formal rulemaking process for the draft initial game management rules.

Andy reported that he was before the Commission seeking approval to enter the formal process for wildlife related rules, season structure and method and manner of take.

He further reported that the draft proposals would be presented to the Commission at the March 18, 2025 Commission Meeting.

Director Simek added that we were going through the process with JLCAR (Joint Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules) now. She stated that if the Commission decides to approve, once completed, the draft rules would be posted online and shared with the Commission well in advance of the next Commission Meeting, with a formal presentation before the Commission at the March 18, 2025 Commission Meeting.

Commissioner A.J. DeRosa moved to enter the formal rulemaking process and Commissioner E. Stohl seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

INFORMATION ITEMS:

1.) Financial Statement – Kathy LaBonte, Chief, Business Division, informed the Commission that license sales are \$937,000 ahead of last year at this time.

Commissioner A.J. DeRosa inquired if she contributed it to the cold & snow this year.

Kathy responded that she believed it very well could be the reasoning for the increase.

In addition, Chairman R. Green asked that Commissioner B. Temple meet with Kathy LaBonte & Director Simek regarding the Commission’s budget.

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE:

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

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

Commissioner E. Stohl reported that the committee met the morning of the Commission Meeting.

The Commission took positions on the following legislation:

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to support HB-647, relative to Newborn Lifetime Licenses, and Commissioner A. J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to support the amendment to HB-655-FN (20250063h), relative to Fish and Game violations, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to support HB-655-FN, as amended, relative to Fish and Game Violations, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to support HB-698, relative to impersonating an officer, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to oppose HB-683, relative to expanding OHRV use on roads, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to opposed HB-720, relative to prohibiting out of state bait, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to opposed HB-105, relative to creating a new conservation license plate/cyanobacteria mitigation, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to support the amendment to SB-239, relative to general funds to cover F&G retirements, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to support SB-239, as amended, relative to general funds to cover F&G retirements, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to oppose SB-274-FN, relative to taking money out of the Hike Safe card to establish a 4-year pilot program with potential for statewide expansion to improve rail

trails in NH through federal, state, and private funding and making a bonded appropriation therefore, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to support SB-159, relative to the marine habitat fee, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to oppose SB-180, relative to Coos County Depressed County would need to check with County Commissioner prior to doing anything within the County, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to support SB-196, relative to exemption from competitive bidding requirements, certain state agencies, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to support SB-107, relative to enabling the state treasurer to invest in certain Fish and Game Funds, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to opposed SB-109, relative to Alteration of Terrain Permits, and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to oppose SB-235, relative to enabling funds from Pitt-Robertson Act to fund Threatened and endangered species and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded.

Commissioner A.J. DeRosa stated, "I only seconded this motion to start conversation regarding this bill. This bill is giving us tools in our tool box to not leave grant money on the table, and is unique to NH. Now more than ever we need support this, it's a reasonable ask and will help the department. If we oppose this, we will be met with conflict when we ask for money down the road."

Commissioner R. Green stated that he would be opposing this bill, as it was too vague. He stated, "This is very confusing, as it appears it would take the money and use it towards nongame or other purposes that the PR monies were not intended for".

Commissioner J. Caveney stated, "I beg for more information. I really would like to have more information about this and do a little more research prior to having to make a decision."

Mike Marchand, Nongame & Endangered Species Coordinator, stated, "This would give us flexibility, as NH is the only state in the country that has this restriction."

Commissioner G. Chandler reported that it was too vague for him, as well, too many unanswered questions for him to support it.

Commissioner B. Temple stated that in the Strategic Plan, it states we are supposed to be seeking out more sustainable funding, therefore, I am in support of this bill.

Commissioner C. Hodgdon questioned how much money we are leaving on the table.

Randy Curtis, Federal Aid Coordinator, reported that the department has not reverted any monies as of yet, however, it has been close at times. He reported that it take 2 years to get the monies obligated. Further, he reported that it would be hard to inject new monies without adding more staff, although it does give the department another management tool.

Commissioner E. Stohl reported that he would support this bill, if he has Director Simek' s word that she would inform the Commission as to where the monies are spent.

Director Simek agreed to do so.

The motion to oppose SB-235, relative to enabling funds from Pitt-Robertson Act to fund Threatened and endangered species failed with 2 in favor 7 opposed (B. Temple, J. Caveney, D. Poole, C. Hodgdon, A.J. DeRosa, E. Stohl and P. McGonagle).

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to support SB-235, relative to enabling funds from Pitt-Robertson Act to fund Threatened and endangered species and Commissioner A.J. DeRosa seconded. The motion passed with 7 in favor, 2 opposed (R. Green & G. Chandler).

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

Commissioner DeRosa, Chair; Commissioners: Temple, Poole, Caveney & Titone.

Staff member: Cheri Patterson.

Commissioner A.J. DeRosa reported that the committee met last month and reviewed the Commission Handbook. He reported that the committee had some recommended changes.

He further reported that the committee would be compiling a Roberts Rules of Order outline for the Commission to adopt, after further discussion amongst the full Commission.

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

Commissioner Hodgdon, Chair; Commissioners: Caveney, DeRosa & Stohl.

Staff member: Director Simek.

Commission C. Hodgdon reported that the committee met the week prior to the Commission Meeting to review final feedback received from the Senior Staff, which is included in the handouts distributed to the Commission.

He reported that there were two documents, Strategic Plan Core Tenants and Strategic Plan Focus Areas & Success Strategies.

He reported that these documents were the same as the ones emailed to the board last week. He further reported that the plan was basically the same as the one sent to the board in September, however, readability and clarity updates were made.

He identified the two additions made to the document:

- Core Tenants – look at as a value statement for Department and Commission, including ways we intend to conduct ourselves and the values we hold; adding protection, conservation and responsible management language.
- Adaptability – a new call out- we need to be flexible in our approach to meeting new challenges we are confronted with in the coming year.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to adopt the Strategic Plan Core Tenants Document (values statement), as written, and Commissioner R. Green seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner E. Stohl moved to adopt the Strategic Plan Focus Areas & Success Strategies Document (goals), as written, and Commissioner A. J. DeRosa seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

He further elaborated that the Strategic Plan would be put on the website, which includes information about the department’s structure, funding, etc., and would help the public understand the agency better as a whole.

In addition, he reported that the committee would discuss a timeline for implementation and give an update at the March 18, 2025 Commission Meeting.

Further, Commissioner Hodgdon thanked the committee and the Commission for their efforts and patience during the time it took to create the Strategic Plan.

On behalf of the Commission, Commissioner E. Stohl thanked Commissioner C. Hodgdon for his dedication and the extensive time he spent taking on the huge task of heading up the creation of the Strategic Plan. He stated, “You did an excellent job with dry subject matter and I thank you for carrying this ball forward.”

Chairman R. Green echoed Commissioner Stool’s comments and thanked Commissioner C. Hodgdon for taking on this difficult and tedious task.

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

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

Commissioner P. McGonagle was absent from the meeting.

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 would be meeting at 9:00 a.m., prior to the March 18, 2025 Commission Meeting, to review the 2024 Commission Award of Excellence Nominations and would be providing a list of the committee’s recommended winners to the full Commission that same day for a vote.

SEACOAST REPORT: Commissioner J. Titone.

Commissioner J. Titone was absent from the meeting.

LAKES MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Commissioner P. McGonagle.

Commissioner P. McGonagle was absent from the meeting.

NH RIVERS MANAGEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Commissioner C. Hodgdon.

Commissioner C. Hodgdon reported that the meeting focused around the Instream Flow Program at DES, which determines how we manage our 19 DES Rivers during periods of low flow. He inquired if there was any interest in having an in-depth presentation before the Commission of the Instream Flow Program, and if so, to please let him know.

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 E. Stohl commended Colonel Jordan for taking on the legislative role in Marty Mobley’s absence. He reported that he believed this to be the smoothest year the Department & Commission has had so far at the State House. He stated, “It’s nice to have a competent person in that lead and I believe he has done a fine job!”

Chairman R. Green echoed the good job Colonel Jordan has done and thanked him, as well.

He further reported that the Commission has been very involved at the State House with the Legislature recently and has witnessed the pressure on staff when testifying. He commended Dianne Timmins, Chief, Inland Fisheries Division, and Dan Bergeron, Chief, Wildlife Division, on their testimony and stated, “I was very proud of the both of them!”

DIRECTORS REPORT:

Director Simek thanked the Commission for the collaborative work on the Strategic Plan.

She acknowledge Senior Staff and the extra work they have been doing at her direction.

She reported on the following activities with the Department:

Wildlife Division:

Habitat Update:

Wildlife Habitat Program's Technical Assistance Biologists provided on-the-ground technical assistance to 8 landowners/ land managers incorporating wildlife habitat into their forest management and property plans. This work directly influenced >2,000 acres of timber harvest and non-commercial habitat improvement projects in Coos County.

Nongame Program Update:

The Nongame & Endangered Wildlife Program initiated work on the Spring Annual Fund Campaign and began to draft letter and other materials. The Nongame Program relies in part on private contributions to accomplish its work, and to raise matching funds required for state and federal grants. Learn more at www.wildnh.com/nongame.

Game Program:

Wildlife Biologist over the moose, deer, turkey, and bear projects are formulating draft population management goals and objectives as part of the 10-year Big Game Management Plan revision.

Inland Fisheries:

The Great Meredith Rotary Fishing Derby, our only statewide derby, recently took place on February 8 and 9th, with favorable ice conditions this winter, which resulted in a higher rate of participation, with over 5,600 tickets were sold during this year's charitable event. This was the highest level of participation level in the last 20 years. Inland Fisheries biological staff were stationed at the derby headquarters on Meredith Bay to provide outreach to anglers and the public throughout this event.

Inland fisheries staff meet with the various Chapters of Trout Unlimited during their meeting on February 8th.

Law Enforcement Division:

Conservation Officers attended the Penguin Plunge event along the coastline, an Ester Seals Fund Raising event, with the dive team acting as the safety officers. Officers also worked the annual Rotary Ice Fishing Derby, having teams of officers to check and monitor fishing activity and have teams and equipment staged to respond to traumatic events like clod water submersions and OHRV accidents that can occur at these events.

Conservation Officers attended the annual Easter Seals Ride In event. We had our Honor Guard Team present for the opening ceremonies and had officers present all three days for the event. Great success and the event raised a total of \$105,000.

Rescues this past couple of weeks included two separate tragic suicides located by our officers. Our K-9 Teams were involved along with our Conservation Officers. Our teams were called in after other law enforcement agencies unsuccessfully attempted to locate the individuals. The victims were located by our teams.

Officers participated in a grueling search at the summit of MT Washington on February 2nd for two female hikers who were in distress off trail in the extreme cold. This search was conducted during wind-chill that reached 20 to 30 below zero. These two hikers were located, body temperatures warmed up and hiked down the Jewel Trail to the Cog railway base station where they were treated for cold weather injuries.

Officers also rescued two lost snowmobilers in North Stratford who were unable to find their way back to where they had started out earlier and were suffering from cold injuries.

Officers responded to 8 separate snow machine accidents and ATV accidents at various locations across the state. Victims were recovered and brought out to waiting ambulances and the accidents were investigated for causation factors.

Public Affairs Division:

Division wrapped up our 2025 Wildlife Calendar sales, selling all 6,000 calendars printed. Total revenue generated equaled among all sale types was \$31,890. Total profit was \$25,131.

In 2024, our Wildlife Steward volunteers gave 85 presentations across the state reaching 1,600 adults at organizations such as libraries, conservation commissions, garden clubs, and retirement communities. The four choices of topics are: black bears, moose, bobcats, and brook trout. The volunteers play a vital role in educating the public about the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration (WSFR) grant, wildlife life history, and ongoing WSFR-funded research in New Hampshire.

Business Division:

The Business Division's Licensing Section deployed a newly added feature of our online licensing system which prohibits customers from purchasing hunting and fishing licenses if they are under suspension from any state. This is a requirement as part of the Interstate Wildlife Violators Compact.

Business Division Financial staff are currently undergoing an audit of some Fish and Wildlife grants. This audit was determined to be necessary as we exceeded the threshold (0.3%) under the Federal Uniform Guidance.

Human Resources:

Human Resources has been busy submitting waivers following Governor Ayotte's Executive Order for approval to post positions internally and externally. We have had several approved.

Marine Division:

Marine Division are conducting smelt surveys in Great Bay and Tributaries.

Continue attending many council and management group meetings.

Worked with ME, MA, and ASMFC to organize and select participants for an industry- based Northern Shrimp Research Set Aside study.

Worked with DES:

Oiled-wildlife and bird rescue and rehabilitation, training, and preparedness services RFP

Geographic Location Descriptions

Great Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve (GBNERR):

Hosted a Coastal Conservation Commission Roundtable meeting about "stewarding town owned conservation lands", which was attended by 25 people, primarily Conservation Commissioners, and representation from 8 municipalities.

NOAA six-month progress report submitted.

Sea Grant Research Symposium- GBNERR staff presented on blue crab research.

Ran a virtual workshop for 20 Reserves on automated data analysis and visualization tools for tidal marshes

Began recruitment for 2025 volunteer trainings. We have 4 major trainings coming up in March and April, and recruitment is a long process working with local partners, local community resources, and social media and website visibility.

Director's Office:

Environmental Review Coordinator has been working with the Facilities & Lands Division to secure a new contract for engineering and survey services for the Statewide Boat Access Program. Interviews will occur on February 27th and the contract will be awarded shortly after.

Federal Aid Grants Coordinator has been working on finalizing audits, reporting requirements, and other grant related tasks while monitoring ongoing federal government actions that may impact funding.

Working with Commission and Fish and Game staff on Legislative bills and testimony at Committee meetings.

Met with COGE liaison for Governor Ayotte's efficiency improvement efforts.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC:

No public comments were heard.

At 2:39 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