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NJ Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes

February 10, 2012

NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife
Central Region Office – Assunpink WMA
Robbinsville, NJ

ATTENDEES

COMMITTEE: Donald Bonica, Phillip Brodhecker, Lisa DeLambert, Harriet Forrester, Tracy Leaver, Erica Miller, Diane Nickerson and Kelly Simonetti,

Absent: None

STAFF: Dave Chanda, Paulette Nelson, Susan Predl, Amy Wells

GUESTS: Kathleen Hendrick, Steven J. Corodemus (Giordan, Halleran & Ciesla), Salvatore Roccaro, Pamela Knauer (Giordan, Halleran & Ciesla), Ron Jones, Bill Sleight, Virginia Andresen, and others.

The meeting was called to order at 10:12 a.m.

Notice of the meeting date and location was: posted on the DFW website; distributed to the public via the DFW ListServe; and e-mailed to all wildlife rehabilitators, apprentices and subpermittees.

Welcome

NJDEP Division of Fish and Wildlife Director Dave Chanda welcomed the new members, thanked them all for willingness to participate as members of an advisory committee, and reflected on the good working relationship between DFW and wildlife rehabilitators in the past. Director Chanda noted his appreciation for the work rehabilitators do for Division and the public, and defined WRAC is an effort to make a good program better and an avenue to get more people involved in wildlife rehabilitation.

Introductions

Introductions and a brief background of the new members were conducted:

Avian Representative: Don Bonica, Founder and Director of Toms River Avian Care. Mr. Bonica has over 30 years experience rehabilitating avian species and has treated over 50,000 birds to date.

Mammal Representative 1: Tracy Leaver, Founder and Director of Woodlands Wildlife Refuge. Ms. Leaver has over 25 years experience rehabilitating wildlife. Her facility accepts and treats both mammals and reptiles. Ms. Leaver is the Founder and current President of the New Jersey Association of Wildlife Rehabilitators and past Director and Chair of the NJWRA Standards Committee.

Mammal Representative 2: Diane Nickerson, Director Mercer County Wildlife Center. Ms. Nickerson has over 18 years experience rehabilitating avians and mammals and held a permit to rehabilitate wildlife in Pennsylvania for 8 years prior to rehabilitating in NJ. Ms. Nickerson is the current secretary and past vice president for the NJ Wildlife Rehabilitators Association. Ms. Nickerson has also served as the past vice president of the National Wildlife Rehabilitators Association (NWRA) and currently serves as chair of the NWRA Education Committee.

Mammal Representative 3: Kelly Simonetti, Founder and Director of Antler Ridge Wildlife Sanctuary. Ms. Simonetti has over 10 years of experience accepting and treating mammals.

Reptile Representative: Harriet Forrester, Founder and Director of Turtle Rescue of New Jersey. Ms. Forrester has over 12 years of experience treating chelonians.

NJ Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee: Erica Miller, DVM serves as the Public Health/Veterinary representative for the NJ Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee. Dr. Miller has over 23 years of experience and is employed by Tri-State Bird Rescue and Research (TSBRR) which specializes in oil spill responses and rehabilitation of endangered species. Prior to working for TSBRR, worked at 2 wildlife rehabilitation facilities for both avians and mammals. Dr. Miller served on the NWRA Board of Directors for 16 years.

NJ Fish and Game Council: Phil Brodhecker serves on NJ Fish and Game Council (FGC) as a representative of northern New Jersey farmers. Mr. Brodhecker manages several hundred acres utilized for the production of both livestock and crops, and holds degrees in both animal husbandry and agricultural economics.

Other State Agency: Lisa DeLambert, is an animal health technician for NJ Department of Agriculture (NJDA). Ms. DeLambert conducts animal health testing on various agricultural and wildlife species located throughout the State, provides the public with information on testing procedures and biosecurity concerns. Prior to her employment with the NJDA, Ms. DeLambert was a biologist for Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife.

Purpose and Composition of WRAC

Dave Chanda and Paulette Nelson reflected on the creation of the new Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee, noting discussions started about 1 year ago. On December 22, 2011, NJDEP Natural and Historic Resources Assistant Commissioner Amy Cradic signed a Policy Directive defining the new Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee. A letter was sent to all rehabilitators requesting participation on this Committee. The DFW received 9 resumes and was able to fill 8 seats as defined by the Policy Directive.

DFW noted despite notifying the NJ Veterinary Medical Association of the formation of WRAC and the availability of a veterinary position, the DFW did not receive a letter of interest from any private veterinarians. Discussions continued and the Committee determined it will seek out a representative in the future. In the mean time, Dr. Miller can provide comment on Veterinary issues.

The Committee reviewed the composition of WRAC noting current representation includes 3 mammal representatives and 1 avian representative while avians make up more than 50% of the

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annual total statewide wildlife intake. After further discussions, the Committee decided that since Dr. Miller and Diane Nickerson also rehabilitate avians, the make up of the Committee to include just 1 avian representative is fine for now. In the future, should the composition of the Committee change, the Committee may want to reconsider this issue.

Dave Chanda introduced former Assemblyman Corodemus was part of discussions with Assistant Commissioner Amy Cradic and efforts to form a committee. Mr. Corodemus gave his congratulations to the new Advisory Committee and wished the Committee good luck.

Administration

Chair - After a review and discussion of expectations and roles of a Chairperson, Kelly Simonetti volunteered to serve as Chair.

A motion was made by Tracy Leaver, seconded by Dr. Erica Miller, for Kelly Simonetti to serve as Chair. All in favor, none opposed, the motion was approved.

Terms – terms are defined as 3 years and will expire on January 1 according to the following schedule:

“Initial” Appointment Schedule:

Mammal representative 1 (Tracy Leaver) – Term expires in 1 year

Mammal representative 2 (Diane Nickerson) – Term expires in 2 years

Mammal representative 3 (Kelly Simonetti) – Term expires in 3 years

Avian representative (Donald Bonica) – Term expires in 3 years

Reptile representative (Harriet Forrester) – Term expires in 3 years

ENSAC representative (Dr. Erica Miller) – Term expires in 1 year

Fish and Game Council representative (Phillip Brodhecker) Term expires in 3 years

Other State Agency representative (Lisa DeLambert) – Term expires in 2 years

Thereafter, all terms will be for a period of 3 years and be subject to the outlines provided in the Policy Directive.

Meeting Schedule and Locations – the WRAC Policy Directive defines the meeting schedule as meeting at least twice a year; however the Chair can choose to meet more often if needed. Discussions pertaining to meeting location, member and facility requirements/availability continued. The Committee determined there was a need to meet before the coming baby season and scheduled a meeting for Wednesday April 25, 2012 at 10:00am at Assunpink WMA.

Future dates and meeting locations will be determined at a later date.

Compensation and Reimbursement for Expenses

DFW staff noted WRAC members are not entitled to compensation, but members are eligible for reimbursement of travel expenses. Copies of the required forms for submitting requests for reimbursement for travel expenses were distributed. DFW will provide lunch for members at future meetings.

Prioritization of Issues for Future Meetings

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Wildlife Rehabilitator Written Examination - Dr. Miller referred to past efforts to implement a standardized written exam and requested WRAC discuss re-initiating that effort. The test was designed to identify a person's knowledge and areas where a potential rehabilitator might be lacking. Discussions continued noting training efforts could then be focused on a specific area rather than all areas of rehabilitation and there would be no limit as to how many times a person can take the exam. Members noted there may be a need to form a sub-committee to address this issue and identified the need to contact/survey all rehabilitators to see what the licensed rehabilitators want. Dr. Miller will reach out to all permitted rehabilitators and report to the Committee at the next meeting.

Career Development Institute – Basic Training for Wildlife Rehabilitation (BTWR)

Paulette Nelson reported 25 people attended the first 5-day / 40 hour BTWR course at Raritan Valley Community College. The course provides a basic groundwork of required licenses, laws, and permits, as well as basic information pertaining to zoonotic diseases, mammals, avians, reptiles, wound management, etc. NJDFW has agreed to substitute 40 hours of course work for 40 hours of apprenticeship.

Discussions continued noting: while the BTWR course is excellent for providing basic information, it is not equivalent to 40 hours of hands on experience; the final decision to recommend an apprentice for wildlife rehabilitation is still in the hands of the mentor (licensed rehabilitator); there exists a need for standardized apprenticeship program/materials and an understanding that mentoring is a long term commitment for both mentor and the apprentice and both parties have an obligation to fill.

Standardized Apprenticeship Materials

Tracy Leaver provided a brief background on the history of the NJ Association of Wildlife Rehabilitators, its educational programs and materials including the Apprenticeship Training Program (ATP) manual. The ATP is a learning tool for both mentors and apprentices, which includes information gathered from reputable rehabilitators nationwide. Discussions continued noting DFW has adopted IWRC/NWRA Minimum Standards for caging and that after further review, the WRAC may want to recommend the ATP be used as standardized materials for rehabilitators (mentors) and their apprentices. Members noted a need for the materials in the BTWR course to complement the ATP program and vice versa.

DFW requested:

- WRAC provide a recommendation on how to equivocate the 40 hours of BTWR toward the required 200 hours apprenticeship requirement.

WRAC requested:

- NJAWR provide WRAC members with a copy of the ATP manual
- DFW provide feedback on the ATP manual.
- DFW notify CDI that a "Finances" section should be added to the BTWR training course
- WRAC members review the ATP for consideration as standardized materials for apprentices and mentors.

A1533 – Wildlife Rehabilitation Act

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Paulette Nelson reported Bill A1533, known as the "Wildlife Rehabilitation Act" defined as "establishes Wildlife Rehabilitation Board in, but not of, DEP; and establishes continuing education requirements and permit program for wildlife rehabilitators" has been re-introduced and referred to the Assembly Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee.

Ms. Nelson noted while letters from individual rehabilitators to the Assembly may be acceptable, Ms. Nelson does not recommend WRAC take a position on this topic at this time as the Committee is newly formed. Discussions continued noting this Bill is now redundant and while there are some problems with the current program, this Committee is best able to address the issues at hand; creating more bureaucracy is not warranted and there are enough people with enough experience to move the program forward.

Tracy Leaver and Kelly Simonetti requested Dave Chanda confirm if the Legislature had been notified of the creation of WRAC, and if not, take the appropriate channels to ensure the Legislature is advised accordingly.

Public Comment

Beechwood Mayor Ron Jones (Ocean County) complimented the members for their volunteerism and questioned if WRAC is mandated to have open public meetings. Mayor Jones was informed this Committee is purely advisory and therefore public notice is not mandatory. However, public participation is welcome and the DFW will be making public notice via the website. Mayor Jones noted NJ is the most densely populated state in the nation. When an animal becomes injured, the police are often called upon to take charge and a police officer must maintain his or her position with these animals until a qualified person arrives and discharge occurs. This means all other police calls for service are placed on hold. Mayor Jones finds this unacceptable and dangerous.

Bill Sleight questioned if WRAC would be taking a position on Bill A1533. The Chair restated the previous discussions noting while individuals may comment on the bill independently, WRAC will not be taking a position on Bill A1533 at this time. Mr. Sleight then questioned if there was any truth to the rumor that any baby animal brought in to rehabilitation which is currently not able of feeding itself will be euthanized. Ms. Nelson advised Mr. Sleight there is no truth to the rumor and there is no such DFW Policy requiring any baby animal brought to a rehabilitator, that is unable to feed itself, be euthanized.

Kathy Hendrick, a resident of Monmouth County, suggested WRAC include a representative from the public sector. Ms. Hedrick explained she is a lover of wildlife, has a background in business operations and organization planning and would like to join the Committee. Ms. Nelson will take her comments back to the administration as a suggestion for consideration.

Mr. Corodemus congratulated the members on their amicability and noted it would be helpful if the DFW also: posted the minutes on the website; distributed the meeting schedule via the ListServe; included questions pertaining to the adequacy of apprenticeships and available training on the Rehabilitator survey; have the Committee research how to solicit more licensees and apprentices to get better coverage for wildlife without placing undue stress on any one licensee; noted the CDI-BTWR course (and continuing education) is costly and time consuming and asked if any trainings were available electronically such as webinars. Ms. Nelson noted

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WRAC's meeting schedule, agenda and minutes would be available on the website and will look into the other concerns as well.

A motion was made by Don Bonica, seconded by Phillip Brodhecker to adjourn the meeting. All in favor, none opposed, the meeting was adjourned.