

THE MINUTES OF
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL MEETING
GOTO MEETING NOVEMBER 10, 2020

The regular meeting of the Fish and Game Council was held on the above date.

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m. by Chairman Virgilio.

Chairman Virgilio read aloud the following notice: In accordance with P.L.1975, c. 231 notice of this meeting was filed with the Office of the Secretary of State on November 8, 2020 and delivered to the designated newspapers for the division, The Atlantic City Press and The Newark Star Ledger and published on November 9, 2020.

Roll call was taken in accordance:

Chairman Virgilio
Councilman Phil Brodhecker
Councilman DeMartino
Councilman DeStephano - Absent
Councilman Dr. Rick Lathrop
Councilman Ed Kertz
Councilman Rob Pollock - Absent
Councilman Loren Robinson
Councilman Ken Whildin - Absent

Division employees included: D. Golden, L. Barno, G. Kopkash, C. Stanko, J. Hearon, S. Cianciulli, M. Monteschio, L. DiPiano, T. McBride, and D. Bajek.

Also present was Assistant Commissioner for Natural and Historic Resources, Ray Bukowski.

There were numerous members of the public in attendance.

Chairman Virgilio asked if there were any changes or corrections to the October 13 minutes.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to approve the October 13 minutes, seconded by Councilman DeMartino. Vote taken, all in favor; motion carried.

Chairman Virgilio thought it only fitting today on the 245th anniversary of the United States Marine Corps to mention his friend George Howard, who was a marine.

George died peacefully at home on Sunday; he was 95! George was a strong-willed man who began his: “years of service before self” in the United States Marine Corps, enlisting at 17. He saw action in the World War II Pacific Theater. That is where he developed the motto Semper Fi always faithful. George worked for the New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife for 40 years (from 1950 until 1990), starting as a wildlife worker then working his way up through the ranks; Wildlife Management Supervisor, Bureau Chief, and finally Director of New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife. He served on the New Jersey State Fish and Game Council for 11 years from 1990-2001. George was an avid sportsman, dedicated to the conservation of wildlife. He was actively involved in many organizations, including the NJ State Federation of Sportsmen’s Clubs, serving as their executive director. George was a friend and he will be missed. Due to Covid -19 restrictions, all services will be held privately by the family at this time.

Director Golden wanted to start by going through some meeting logistics. This is the first Fish and Game Council meeting where the public has the link and can view the presentations. We will be covering Black Bear information. A few updates: the Division is excited that we are starting to see some on HR action that have been stalled for the past nine months and we had three move forward already. We had a successful Opening Day of Pheasant season this past weekend and the weekend prior we had a successful Youth Hunt. Also, to let the Council know we are still on track for a December rollout of our Wildlife Habitat Supporter Program, the Wildlife Management Area Stamp. He had a meeting with the commissioner and got her final approval to move forward.

Council Reports:

Agriculture:

Councilman Brodhecker reported a lot of action in the fields, seeing bears while combining, deer are foraging the hay fields and geese are in the wheat fields. This will affect our coverage going into the winter.

Dr. Reist reported on an international level that mink in Denmark have a mutated Covid virus that seems to spread from humans to the mink and in some instances from the mink back to the humans. The mutated version is a little harder for the immune system to fight. USDA moving all ID’s for animals to RFID by 2023. In the last week, Idaho announced the finding of a new Yellow Star Thistle, a foreign plant that has issues for livestock and wildlife.

Farmer/Sportsman Relations: No report

NJ State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs:

Councilman Robinson reported he attended the virtual State Federation meeting, Middlesex had a meeting since our last council meeting and the Youth Pheasant Hunt at the Clinton WMA was very successful and a beautiful day. There were around 40 kids and nine dog handlers in attendance. Hunterdon County Federation provided sealed food and drinks for all attendees. Colliers Mills also had a successful day with over 50 kids attend the event. Comments at the meetings he attend are all about bear, public comment about the Game Code, the Wildlife Habitat Supporter Program, a lot of people would like to donate even if they are already buying a license, they would like to give an additional donation and mentioned the NJ State Federation Convention will be April 23-25, 2021.

Councilman Virgilio reported he attended a couple meetings, one being an in-building for Burlington County. This meeting was set up in one of the best ways with everyone being spread out through the American Legion Hall. He also attended the Youth Pheasant Hunt in Millville; it was a good day with great participation. He wanted to point out the high level of professionalism in the Division staff.

Finance Committee: No report

Game Committee:

Chairman Virgilio reported they will have a presentation on what their meeting covered on Comprehensive Black Bear Management.

Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee:

Councilman Lathrop reported they have a meeting planned for next Wednesday.

Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee: No report

Chairman Virgilio stated that there is a large push on increase of the waterfowl stamp through legislation and looks like movement on stamp increase.

Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee: No report, scheduling meetings for 2021.

Law Enforcement Committee:

Councilman Robinson reported they had a meeting this morning and will discuss later today with license restorations.

Legislative:

Mary Monteschio reported that there has been a change in format, anything that is a law she dropped off, anything red is new, and only other update since report was done is that a gentleman from the shellfishery council was proposed on October 22 and on Oct 29 they voted. Unfortunately, she does not know the result of vote.

Division Reports:

Freshwater Fisheries:

Acting Assistant Director Barno reported things are wrapping up on the fisheries front. Winter trout stocking coming up is the final distribution for the year. We will have over 14,000 rainbow trout measuring over 14-16 inches going out on Nov. 23-24 into 18 lakes. We will not release the stocking schedule and the stocked waterbodies will not be posted until the end of each day. Hackettstown Hatchery is also wrapping up its 2020 production cycle, with ponds being drained and the last of the fish being distributed. A total of 4,325 landlock salmon ranging in size from 12-16 inches were stocked in four lakes. We also placed an additional 3,000 salmon outside in a concrete pool, 1,325 of these fish were collected. We did our fall stocking of muskies, we did 4,263 10-inch fingerlings, and 12-inch yearlings went out into nine waterbodies. Hackettstown is now shutting down its system for the winter. Staff will be in periodically to maintain the building. Harmful Algae blooms, for 2020 there were 44 water bodies confirmed with active blooms and there are still 30 that are ongoing due to the mild weather. We due anticipate the number of active blooms to decline substantially over the next month, provided our temperatures also drop significantly. We are working on the Freshwater Digest for 2021, and just returned the first pass back to Cindy Kuenstner, our Digest editor, and we are still waiting for the schedule from the publisher but anticipating an early January shelf date. Update on the dredging project for Brainerd Lake: it has been delayed to 2021.

Information and Education:

Linda DiPiano gave an update on hunter education. Since we went with the free online program in July, we have had 4,419 students complete the program. Just in the last month, we had 1,323 complete it. It is still predominately male but hopefully the number of females will rise as we continue to do R3 events and get women only activities available in the coming months. Within the 4,419 students that took the online portion, 3,938 students actually completed the live fire to complete their full hunter education with 30 classes in the north, and 25 in the south. Compared to 2019, we had 3,963 in total for the whole year complete hunter education and now we had 3,938 in the last three months complete it. We are looking to do a survey to see why we had the same amount of students' complete hunter ed in the last three months as we did the entire year

for 2019. Take a Kid Pheasant Hunt was held October 31 and was a beautiful day and we got great feedback. We had eight WMA participate with a total of 230 youths participate and 98 dog handlers/ mentors that were helping the children. Linda wanted to thank Land Management for all their help stocking and their help during the event. There were 120 birds stocked for each of the guided hunts at the WMAs and then stocked again at noon so families could go out and hunt again. Winslow Wildlife Management Area received 60 birds because it is smaller. Glassboro and Flatbrook were also stocked with 240 birds each for unguided hunts. Trout in the Classroom Program, has forty-nine schools participating and all received eggs on October 20 for Egg Day. HOFNOD training video that we are doing to recruit new instructors is about halfway done filming and we will have it put up in about two months. We have extended the logo contest for a new HOFNOD logo until December 31.

Land Management:

Chief Hearon reported this is a busy time of year and staff continues to stock trout. We stocked 2,280 birds across the state for Youth Hunt Day and it went off without a hitch. Park counts are up roughly 8% and every year we do a car count on Opening day. Last year we were at 2,331 cars across the state, this year we are at 2,537. Overall, we are seeing increased use on all fronts. Boat ramps have seen heavy use and staff are doing their best to manage it all. In an attempt to help the Division coordinate across the board, Land Management is participating in monthly meetings with Law Enforcement to help address issues from the increased use.

Law Enforcement:

Chief Cianciulli reported they are having meetings with Land Management and are moving in the right direction. Update on our recruits, they are progressing very well and moved into the second phase of field training and are getting a little more hands on and controlling the dialogue during inspections. The committee met this morning and started to discuss the legalization of marijuana and are trying to stay in front of this with respect to our wildlife management area regulations. We currently restrict the use of alcohol on our properties and will be looking into that with the respect of marijuana as well.

Wildlife Management:

Chief Stanko reported deer numbers are still doing very well this year. From opening day through yesterday, we are at 23,041 deer as compared to last year we were at 19,956 so we are up 15.5% over last year and the weather has been great. We had the Game Code public meeting on November 4 and expected a larger turnout. We had twelve commenters and their comments will be posted with all the other comments. Comment period closes on December 4, 2020 and you can find that comment link on our website, we will not be receiving comments on the Game Code today.

Old Business:

Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy Update:

Tony McBride gave a brief presentation on post-Segment-A data and updates on implementation of 2015 CBBMP. October 12-17 was the first segment of the season which is 6 days of archery and the last three days are either archery or muzzleloader. Every year in preparation for the bear season bears are trapped and tagged to help form the population estimate.

Range Construction Update:

Chief Hearon reported most of the projects are completed across the state. Colliers Mills and Stafford Forge are finishing up now. Today, they are hoping to pour the footings at Colliers Mill and Thursday or Friday at Stafford Forge. We are looking to have these ranges opened back up by February 21.

2022- 2025 Fish Code Proposal:

Acting Assistant Director Barno wanted to give a brief update, she received comments back on the Fish Code proposal document from the Office of Legal Affairs and Division of Law. There are some questions with changes relative with the emergency closure subsection, which provides council the authority to restrict or close waters. The changes proposed are to expand the subsection to allow the liberalizations of the existing regulations. In the round of reviews, there are questions concerning if the changes as proposed are in compliance with APA rules. Assistant Director Barno will be circling bac with legal affairs and the DAG's office and then back with fish committee members and will have that information at the December Council meeting.

2021 Fish and Game Meeting Schedule:

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to accept the meeting schedule.

A motion was made by Councilman kertz to accept the 2021 Fish and Game meeting schedule, seconded by Councilman Robinson. Vote taken; motion carries.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to reschedule the December 8 Fish and Game Meeting to December 15 due to shotgun week.

A motion was made By Councilman DiMartino to reschedule the December 8, 2020 meeting to December 15, 2020, seconded by Councilman Kertz. Vote taken' motion carries.

New Business:

Rockport Barn- DFW Lease:

Chief Stanko reported that we have been in the process of decommissioning the farm, it is a larger undertaking than we anticipated. There is one structure that is on the main road at the top of the farm which is an old barn. We are entering into a lease agreement with the Township of Mansfield, which is where the farm resides. We are going to have a 5-year lease with the opportunity to do three additional 5-year lease for a total of 20-years. The lease has already been through the State House review and is now with the Township of Mansfield for their review. We anticipate it to be finalized this month. Staff is also working on pen removal, we have 36-acres in outdoor pens there. We have already removed the top netting in house, which Land Management has done. Chief Stanko will be putting out a request shortly for the pen removal.

Lunch: 11:48 – 12:15

Community Based Deer Management Application Review:

Jodi Powers gave a review of the following applications for Community Based Deer Management.

Bernards Township:

Bernards Township has applied for Community Based Deer Management permit. The Township's application requested that two hunting clubs consisting of sixty-eight members participate in a six-week extension of the hunting season on Township and County properties (ending on March 31, 2021). The goal is to reduce the number of deer-vehicle accidents to 40-50 accidents per year. Based on the number of deer-vehicle accidents, Fish and Wildlife recommended the Council approve this application.

A motion was made by Councilman DiMartino to approve the CBDM permit, seconded by Councilman kertz. Vote taken; all in favor, motion carries.

Essex County:

Essex County has applied for Community Based Deer Management permit. The Township's application requested to allow fourteen volunteer sportsmen to cull deer on Tuesdays and Thursdays during an eight-week period starting January 12, 2021 and ending March 4, 2021. Should bad weather require re-scheduling another date, another weekday during this period will be chosen. Essex is also asking that their volunteer agents be permitted to use unplugged guns. In an effort to increase the number of deer culled, Fish and Wildlife is supporting that request.

A motion was made by Councilman Lathrop to approve the CBDM permit, seconded by Councilman DiMartino. Vote taken; motion carried.

Princeton Township:

Princeton Township has applied for a Community Based Deer permit. The Township would hire White Buffalo Inc. to cull deer through March 31, 2021. Princeton is proposing to allow White Buffalo to cull deer using silenced bolt-action .223 centerfire and .22 rim-fire rifles on nine private and six township properties. To accomplish the goal of increasing cull numbers, White Buffalo will attempt to acquire access to new and/or more properties and implement the use of the net and bolt management tool. The Division of Fish and Wildlife is not recommending approval of .22 rim-fire rifles

A motion was made by Councilman Kertz to approve the CBDM permit, seconded by Councilman DiMartino. Vote taken; motion carries.

License Restoration:

Jonathon DiModica - Present

Captain Quirk read aloud the statement for the revocation appeal for Mr. DiModica who was present. Mr. DiModica was convicted of a violation on August 1, 2017 for N.J.S.A. 23:3-71.1 Littering while taking wildlife. A second violation on January 9, 2020 for N.J.A.C. 7:25-5.23(n) Fail to display fluorescent orange on/above ground blind

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to open the floor for discussion.

A motion was made by Councilman Brodhecker to open the floor for discussion and seconded by Councilman Kertz. Vote taken, all in favor; motion approved.

After council discussed Mr. DiModica's violations, Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to close the floor for discussion.

A motion was made by Councilman Lathrop to close the floor for discussion and seconded by Councilman Kertz. Vote taken, all in favor; Motion carried.

Chairman Virgilio stated that the council has three options: reinstate, continue with the revocation, or delay for additional information. If there is a motion to reinstate, for the record justification is needed.

Councilman Robinson made a motion Not to reinstate Mr. DiModica's license, seconded by Councilman Lathrop. Vote taken; one abstention (Kertz); motion carried.

Public Comment:

Barbara Sachau - feels this council needs to include people who believe in animal protection and respect for animal lives. She also wanted to inform the Division that it was very difficult to phone into the Game Code meeting.

Janet Pizar- had questions on the Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy. She also would like to know how many violations were written on the garbage feeding ban over the last five years.

A motion was made by councilman Lathrop to adjourn the meeting at 1:09 pm, seconded by Councilman Kertz. Vote taken; motion carried.