

THE MINUTES OF  
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL MEETING  
GOTOMEETING DECEMBER 15, 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 December 10, 2020 and delivered to the designated newspapers for the division, The Atlantic City Press and The Newark Star Ledger and published on December 11, 2020.

Roll call was taken in accordance:

Chairman Virgilio

Councilman Phil Brodhecker

Councilman Joe DeMartino -absent

Councilman Jim DeStephano

Councilman Dr. Rick Lathrop

Councilman Ed Kertz

Councilman Rob Pollock

Councilman Loren Robinson

Councilman Ken Whildin

Division employees included: D. Golden, L. Barno, G. Kopkash, C. Stanko, J. Hearon, S. Cianciulli, M. Monteschio, A. Ivany, 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 November 10 minutes.

**A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to approve the November 10, 2020 minutes, seconded by Councilman Kertz. Vote taken, two abstain (Whildin, Pollock); motion carried.**

Chairman Virgilio mentioned on behalf of the entire Fish and Game Council he would like to thank the Director of the Division of Fish and Wildlife and his entire staff for providing the citizens of New Jersey with quality goods and services across the state. Chairman Virgilio also mentioned there are a few agenda additions, following the review of public comments on the proposed amendments to the 2020-2021 Game Code we will have an adoption vote and we will also vote on the Fish Code recommendation change.

**Council Reports:**

**Agriculture:** No report

Dr. Reist reported the USDA confirmed COVID in a snow leopard in a zoo, also there was a meeting on deer being susceptible as well. African swine fever is back again in Europe.

**Farmers/ Sportsman Relations:** No report

**NJ State Federation of Sportsmen's Club:**

Councilman Robinson reported he attended Hunterdon and Somerset County meetings and discussed the bear hunt, Game Code changes, and the limited available butchers. He also attended the State Federation meeting where he presented the Council reports.

Chairman Virgilio reported he attended Gloucester County's virtual meeting and they are planning protocol for COVID. Cumberland County's meeting was indoor and spread out, they discussed COVID as well and they are all taking COVID very seriously.

**Finance Committee:** No report

**Fish Committee:** No report

**Game Committee:** No report, will discuss under New Business.

**Endangered and Non-game Species Advisory Committee:**

Councilman Lathrop reported they had a meeting in November and discussed the Wildlife Habitat Supporters Group and the DFW Land Acquisition Proposal presentations.

**Agriculture:**

Councilman Brodhecker reported that the farmers are preparing for snow and the animals are out in the crops.

**Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee:**

Councilman Brodhecker reported they are in the process of making the schedule for the new year.

**Law Enforcement:** No report

**Public Member:** No report

**Legislature:** Mary Monteschio gave a brief update on the legislature.

Director Golden mentioned the bear hunt will extend from Wednesday to Saturday due to the harvest rate being below management goal.

**Division Reports:****Freshwater Fisheries:**

Acting Assistant Director Barno reported this is a quiet time of year. Looking at 2021, three fisheries meetings are scheduled for January 23, 2021 in North Jersey, February 27, 2021 in South Jersey, and March 6, 2021 is the scheduled trout meeting. Work is complete on the Freshwater Digest and should be on shelves by January 6, 2021.

**Information & Education:**

Chief Ivany reported a few updates for Council. We are working on a new division website and are meeting regularly. We have taken the old website as far as we could and now is the time for new. The winter Garden State Outdoor Sports Show has been canceled and Deer Classic winners will be notified. Two principal biologist promotional positions were approved and filled for the Bureau. Michelle Smith will be overseeing the outreach section of the bureau which will include social media, events, and working with Supervising Biologist Linda DiPiano on outreach activities under the federal Outreach Grant administered by the Bureau. Karen Byrne will

oversee the education section including the Aquatic Education program and Pequest and Sedge Island Education Centers. A third promotion to fill the Hunter Education Administrator position was also approved and is pending.

### **Law Enforcement:**

Chief Cianciulli reported there are a lot of people using Wildlife Management Areas and enjoying them. Lieutenant Sutton had been working on a case of a previous violator for manufacturing firearms illegally and recovered an entire freezer full of ground venison, several deer quarters, two frozen deer heads, a turkey, and eight European whitetail mounts that were never registered.

### **Wildlife Management:**

Chief Stanko reported a couple of promotions for Technician 2 passed through. The black bear extension that Director Golden discussed automatically kicked in Wednesday through Saturday. So far in Segment A and B combined for 2020, we are at 405 bears harvested compared to last year's 302 bears. We are up 34% without the four-day extension, however this year has a lower harvest rate. When they closed with the four-day extension last year we were at 15.3% and this year we are only at 13.4%. we are taking more bears, but the harvest rate of tagged bears is lower indicating an increase in population.

The deer hunt is going well so far. Six-day Firearm preliminary numbers are at 6,253 animals compared to last year's 4,850, but last year was a bad year due to the entire week being a washout. We expected to be up this year and are up 29% over last year. Year-to-date deer numbers at the close of six-day firearm this year we were at 39,246 animals compared to last year at 32,102. Year to date numbers are up 22% from last year.

Chief Cianciulli reported the bear warnings through October 2020: verbal warnings- 24, written warnings to individuals- 13, written warnings to businesses- 6, summons to individuals- 2 and summons to businesses- 1. Compared to last year, the numbers are up.

### **Land Management:**

Chief Hearon reported we are down to the last five days of pheasant and quail stocking. We are moving along with the range work at Stafford Forge and Colliers Mills. The concrete has been poured, steel framing is up and the ranges should be reopened in mid-February. We are also moving forward with the handicapped parking and access on the archery ranges, Tuckahoe is done, Millville is in progress, Winslow will follow in the southern region and we just received our purchase orders for Clinton, Black River, Pequest and Flatbrook Wildlife Management Areas. On boat ramps, we are having a design meeting this week for the Point Pleasant boat ramp and had our kick-off meeting for the Tuckahoe boat ramp replacement. The Camden County bike paths got rejuvenated and had a meeting with Camden County and let them know that we are not in support of the bike path. We just had our Lands Grant Management course training where we discussed the bike path and trails and it was apparent that we were a little bit out of bounds and risked our funding source for all the WMAs.

## **Old Business:**

### **Fish Code:**

Councilman Pollock asked for a vote for the Fish Code that was proposed with issues by the Office Legal Affairs for the provision of emergency closing notice. Within that code there was proposed language to be added that specifically says “the Fish and Game Council in coordination with the Director of the Division may also liberalize existing seasons and harvest regulations.” The concerns that were raised was that it was broad language and to be approved by Office of Legal Affairs and DAG it would be subject to many restrictions and limit the effectiveness of the proposed changes. The primary reason we were proposing the changes was for setting the season dates for 2022-2025 trout season. Councilman Pollock recommends we remove the change from the proposal.

**A motion was made by Councilman Whildin to remove the changes to the 2022-2025 fish code as stated by Councilman Pollock, seconded by Councilman Robinson. Vote taken; all approve, motion carries.**

### **Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy Updates:**

Chief Stanko reported we are working the rewrite with the Game Committee. They will redirect us on the rewrite of the policy.

Director Golden mentioned we will be discussing the policy revisions with the Game Committee and a follow up presentation on Black Bear Management will be at the January or February meeting.

## **New Business:**

### **Review of Public Comments on Proposed Game Amendments**

Chief Stanko gave a brief presentation on the amendment comments received as of December 5, 2020:

There were a lot of comments this year, but this was one of the most misconstrued Game Code proposals that she has seen.

Total comments received as of December 5, 2020: we had 10 oral, 616 electronic, 9 letters, and 118 postcards. We had 747 individuals who commented; 333 commenters philosophically opposed to lethal wildlife management. This year we tried a different methodology, the division put up an app to make it easier for people to comment. It was a drop-down menu for each amendment that you could click on to choose that amendment and then a blank field where you can fill in your comments. Fifty-six individuals using this system did choose a specific amendment but then left the comments blank, so it is unknown if they are opposed or in support

of that amendment, so they are not counted in the numbers above. We had a various number of groups make comments as well as four NJ legislators, USDA, and the Humane Society of the United States.

The misconception that a lot of people had was to choose to comment on the bear hunt even though changes to the bear hunt were not part of the proposals; 352 commenters opposed a bear hunt, 1,060 commenters supported a bear hunt. Chief Stanko went through all of the Game Code changes and what the comments were to each one.

- Name change to Disease Surveillance Area - 9 in favor and 230 opposed.
- Enable the Division to designate a Disease Surveillance Area if a wildlife disease of concern is found up to 20 miles outside the State border - 8 in favor and 234 opposed.
- Give the Director, in consultation with the F&G Council, the authority to modify existing hunting/trapping regulations within a Disease Surveillance Area as deemed necessary - 8 in favor and 448 opposed.
- Ban the rehabilitation of susceptible animals within the DSA - 7 in favor and 486 opposed.
- Close the hunting season for Ruffed Grouse statewide - 417 in favor and 10 opposed.
- Separate the Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy from the Game Code - 14 in favor and 435 opposed.
- Remove King Rail from the Game species list/Game Code - 285 in favor and 7 opposed.
- Reduce the daily bag limit for Common Gallinule from 10 birds to 1 bird - 227 in favor and 3 opposed.
- Ban the importation of any living member of the deer family - 231 in favor and 0 opposed.
- Ban the importation of deer semen - 231 in favor and 2 opposed.
- Ban the importation of whole cervid carcasses and intact heads from any jurisdiction - 226 in favor and 3 opposed.
- Ban the possession and use of natural deer-derived lures - 226 in favor and 15 opposed.
- Surrender of CWD-positive meat upon request to ensure proper disposal - 211 in favor and 8 opposed.
- Add an early Fall Bow season to DMZ 37 - 8 in favor and 227 opposed.
- Add extended Winter Bow Season to DMZ 53 - 5 in favor and 226 opposed.
- Add future ML dates for DMZ 37 and 53 - 5 in favor and 223 opposed.
- Create a Regulation Set Permit for Reg Sets 7 and 8 - 8 in favor and 203 opposed.
- Add future SG dates for DMZs 37, 39, 53, and 66 - 3 in favor and 224 opposed.
- Increase SG permits for DMZ 66 - 6 in favor and 221 opposed.

- Incorporate Forsythe NWR into surrounding DMZs - 3 in favor and 212 opposed.
- Decrease bow permits for DMZ 66 - 208 in favor and 8 opposed.
- Incorporate Permit Bow dates for DMZs 37 and 53 into Reg Set 4 - 4 in favor and 77 opposed.
- Add future SG and ML dates for DMZ 38 - 5 in favor and 216 opposed.

Barbara Sachua - mentioned she could not phone in on the original public hearing. She believes there is an overwhelming amount of people who do not like hunting and think the animals do not have a fair chance to live in NJ.

Janet Pizar- in reference to the large number of oppositions to the proposals on a philosophical basis, she believes the general public is becoming much more sophisticated in recognizing that hunting is not for wildlife management, wildlife management is for the hunters. More people are recognizing that game animals are not there for the pleasure of hunters.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to adopt the Code as proposed.

**Councilman Robinson made a motion to accept the Code as proposed, seconded by Councilman Kertz. vote taken; all approve, motion carries.**

**Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to accept the Division to start work at accelerated pace on revised Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy with emphasis on Non-lethal controls of black bear.**

**Councilman Robinson made a motion to accept the Division to start work at an accelerated pace on revised Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy with emphasis on Non-lethal controls of black bear, seconded by Councilman Kertz. Vote taken, all in favor; motion carries.**

#### **Digest Accuracy Review Protocols:**

Director Golden reported that the Hunting Digest had a number of errors on dates due to COVID, working from home, and not being able to work in groups. We are adding a chain of command structure to make sure the review process is done correctly and have multiple eyes on it before it goes to print.

Chairman Virgilio recommended that Law Enforcement have a part in the review process since the Digest is predominantly regulatory to ensure its accuracy.

**HOFNOD Update:**

Chief Ivany wanted to follow up on what Chief Hearon reported about the ranges. We are developing a range brochure. We have a first draft and are going over the review on that now.

The HOFNOD logo contest submissions, we have six so far and it has been extended to end of this month. The Youth Fishing Challenge, there were eight new locations with a total of 246 youths. We are also working on a training video for HOFNOD staff (trainers) to take on online module before getting back in the field. The number of teams are the same statewide as last year with 22 teams in 14 counties.

**Public Comment:**

Barbara Sachua - was disappointed that the council voted to approve the Game Code even though there was a lot of comments opposing it.

Janet Pizar- wildlife is a publicly owned resource and 1% of the population are hunters and 99% of stakeholders are not, yet the Fish and Game Council is overrepresented by hunters and dramatically under represented by people who are ethically and philosophically opposed to recreational hunting.

**A motion was made by Councilman DeStephano and seconded by Councilman Kertz to adjourn the meeting at 11:43 a.m. Vote taken; motion carries.**

**Next Fish and Game Council meeting will be held on January 12, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. Location to be determined.**