

THE MINUTES OF
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL MEETING
GOTO MEETING March 9, 2021

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 February 25, 2021 and delivered to the designated newspapers for the division, The Atlantic City Press and The Newark Star Ledger and published on March 3, 2021.

Roll call was taken in accordance:

Chairman Virgilio
Councilman Phil Brodhecker –(late-11:12)
Councilman Joe DeMartino
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, P. Winkler, J. Cianciulli, M. Monteschio, A. Ivany, 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 February 9, 2021 minutes.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to approve the February 9,2021 minutes, seconded by Councilman DeStephano. Vote taken, one abstention (DeMartino); motion carried.

Chairman Virgilio would like to start by thanking the passionate people working for the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife. They are making a difference in the long-term sustainability of our state's wildlife populations.

In the months to come, he would like to ask the Division to prepare a few presentations that will preview the work of the Division especially in the non-consumptive areas, such as environmental review, mosquito control, and fish and wildlife health, to name a few.

Additionally, he would like to mention the New Jersey Audubon's podcast series: Coffee at New Jersey Audubon. This month's feature, A Conversation with Dave Golden, where he speaks about the importance of land stewardship and providing access to natural habitats for all in a crowded New Jersey. This podcast can be viewed at njaudubon.org, and I encourage its viewing.

Director Golden reported there is a lot going on this time of year such as trout season and moving along with the Game Code and Black Bear Comprehensive Management Policy. Next week marks one year we have been working from home due to the pandemic and he would like to acknowledge the Division of Fish and Wildlife staff for their ability to adapt to the new platforms we need to work on and have been working on. We have been nearly seamlessly running council meetings, committee meetings, and public meetings on a virtual platform that was unfamiliar to our staff and they did a really nice job. He would like to thank the Fish and Game Council, Marine Fishery Council, Shellfish Council, and Endangered and Non-Game Advisory Committee for their ability to also adapt and to keep business going this past year. We are looking forward to a time where we all can be back in-person.

Council Reports:

Agriculture:

Councilman Kertz reported farmers are getting ready for the next season. The county board is working on a virtual meeting.

Dr. Reist reported APHIS requested extension for comments for the CWD rule, they will accept comments until May 4, 2021. There are a number of unapproved vaccines coming from China we are working on trying to stop. The first COVID vaccine in animals was given to great apes in the San Diego Zoo.

NJ Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs:

Councilman DeMartino reported they are working on a date for the Duck Stamp meeting.

Councilman DeStephano reported he attended the virtual trout seminar over the weekend and the Division did a great job.

Councilman Robinson reported he attended two Game Committee meetings this month on the CBBMP and wanted to thank the Division, they did a great job. He attended two virtual Hunting Digest Stakeholder meeting, the NJ Predator Hunters virtual meeting, the State Federation meeting, and Union County held an in-person meeting. All meetings discussed the upcoming changes in future Game Codes, trout season, bear season, and pheasant stocking on WMAs.

Councilman Whildin reported the Cumberland County meeting was canceled due to snow.

Chairman Virgilio reported he attended the trappers meeting where they discussed issues with fox and coyote reporting. He also attended the Gloucester County meeting, State Federation meetings, and Digest Stakeholder meetings.

Finance Committee: No Report

Fish Committee:

Councilman Pollock reported on trout season changes and complimented the Division and catch and release is a huge hit.

Game Committee:

Chairman Virgilio reported they met on Wednesday March 3 and voted unanimously out of committee a completely updated draft of CBBMP and this will be discussed later in this meeting.

Endangered and Non-Game Species Advisory Committee:

Councilman Lathrop reported they will be holding their meeting next week and they will be discussing freshwater mussels.

Public Member:

Councilman Pollock reported there were a significant number of questions about the semi-wild hunting issue.

Legislature:

Mary Monteschio reported RAWA working on draft document, the transportation and reauthorization bill it sounds like they are going to be insisting on considerations for animal crossings.

Division Reports:

Freshwater Fisheries:

Assistant Director Barno reported they have an emerging issue on the Freshwater Fisheries front, last Friday we were notified by the USFWS that a clerk in a Seattle Washington Petco found zebra mussels embedded in a moss ball. They were very proactive and pulled all products off the shelves. Zebra mussels are the most invasive species. They clog pipes, disturb water quality, are prolific spawners and adults can live without water for several days. Moss balls are sold under the name of Betta buddy, mini marina moss balls and were tracked back to one supplier who is now in quarantine. We are working with Bureau of Information and Education (I&E) sending out GovDelivery notices to alert hobbyists and pet stores in NJ.

Trout season begins Monday, there will be an accelerated schedule, signs are being posted along the streams and messages have been sent via GovDelivery to anglers that waters will be closing a week early. I&E has been extremely helpful in updating information on the website as well as in the online and PDF version of the Fishing Digest. A virtual Trout Meeting was held Saturday March 6 and was well attended, maxing out the GoToMeeting platform at 150 attendees. Anglers blocked out were quick to figure out to use the phone and call in. There were some concerns in the meeting chat over the catch and release due to fish mortality. A week prior was our Warmwater Fisheries Forum where 132 anglers attended. The proposed Fish Code changes will be published in the March 15 NJ Register, that begins the 60-day public comment period which will end on May 14. There will be a virtual public hearing on April 22 at 7:00 p.m.

Information and Education:

Chief Ivany reported they worked on getting the word out about zebra mussels and we are working on a news release to get out to the press office today. We are working on our Spring promotions. Hunter Education live-fire begins this Sunday, March 14. There were 641 students that passed the on-line course as of the end of February. This past Friday we had a shed hunting webinar with 188 people registered and 108 people attended. The webinar included discussions about deer biology as well as the legality of shed hunting with a Conservation Police Officer. March 26 we will be doing a NJ trout fishing on-line seminar called NJ Trout Fishing: Terrain, Tactics and Techniques and April 11, 18, and 25 we will be doing virtual turkey hunt workshops as part of the Outdoor Women of NJ Program. The R3 programs are up and running and we are trying to get the word out as best we can and keep these programs going all within the confines of the Governors guidelines regarding Covid.

Land Management:

Peter Winkler reported staff statewide are working on trout season, working on access as well as stocking and getting the vehicles ready. We are working with Forestry doing prescribed burns. In the north, Round Valley boat ramp is opened. In Central Region the covered shooting stations at Stafford Forge and Colliers Mills are scheduled to open March 29. Central Jersey Pistol Club land swap, there are two meetings for that on March 31 and April 15. Ducks unlimited awarded a

\$96,000 grant. In the South the ranges, we have handicap shooting stations and parking pads. Holly farm field creation project is underway and should be completed by the middle of next week. Staff are installing several new gates on the WMA's in the south.

Law Enforcement:

Chief Cianciulli reported Detective Brice Paey has been named the Conservation Police Officer of the Year will be recognized at the northeast chief association meeting. The decriminalization of marijuana legislation that was signed by the governor has severe implications for how our officers conduct their daily business on Wildlife Management Areas. Part of the legislation is reform that reduces the contact officers can have with juveniles and individuals under 21-years old. We are trying to get some clarification from the Attorney General's Office on whether we can enforce our regulations on the WMAs. This will be a significant deviation from the way we always conducted our law enforcement work. Thanks to the I&E staff for getting the word out on Zebra mussels through social media and email response. Chief Cianciulli would like to also thank his staff as we approach 1-year of living and working with COVID restrictions They did not miss a beat as they continued to perform all of their law enforcement functions and deal with the general public.

Wildlife Management:

Chief Stanko reported deer season closed on February 20 with preliminary numbers at 54,980 deer, which is up 20% over last year's number of 45,650 deer. We are up 9,330 deer from last year and this is our highest harvest since 2010 when we took 55,404 deer. The weather and Covid contributed to the increase in deer harvests. The Game Code is going through the process and as of right now the adoption document is in attorney review and we should be finishing up in the next week and hopefully going on to the Commissioner's office. Part of the amendments that were included were a multi-zone regulation set permit, which would enable hunters for the price of two regular antlerless permits to hunt all zones within regulation sets 7 or 8 where we have our highest deer densities and are trying to lower numbers in case CWD comes into the state. Chief Stanko has been working with Barbara Stoff on the logistics in the license system and also working with I&E staff to be able to promote that new permit to hunters. There were no positive CWD tests this year on deer tested in NJ, we do this annually though our deer project and pathology office. We tested over 700 deer, which was a very good number considering all the complications due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Endangered and Non-Game Species:

Chief Heilferty reported they are getting ready for field work for the Spring season. Two changes from last year, we were not able to Black Rail survey last year because the season started very early and we were figuring out the Covid guidelines. We are planning on doing those surveys this year.

We are going to hire a seasonal to survey the Saltmarsh Sparrow. Forest management project is underway at Sparta Mountain. We are seeking the Advisory Council's advice and opinion on the proposal where one of our stakeholders start releasing hatchery reared freshwater mussels that were reared out of state into NJ for the purpose of water quality benefits and we are going to talk about the effects and disease of out of state reared mussels could potentially have on our water. Another project we had to review involved a proposal to fully remove the county line dam in Stillwater township. We have a couple of different species of freshwater mussels there including two State threatened and one species of special concern and unfortunately despite our best efforts we had some difficulty arriving at a compromise design to full removal of that dam which would preserve the habitat and minimize or avoid the impacts to freshwater mussels, so we unfortunately had to take a position where we could not endorse the full removal of the dam. We will continue to work with them the best we can and look for alternatives for them to reconsider, such as notching the dam.

Business Office:

Assistant Director Kopkash reported there were some issues with printing licenses from agent locations, we worked with a contractor and the issues have been resolved. We are hearing that some agents are telling customers that the license system is down when it is not, if you hear any agent say this please report it by emailing to the license system at NJdfwlicenses@dep.nj.gov.

Old Business:

CBBMP Update and Related Information:

Tony McBride gave a brief presentation on the Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy. There was an addition to education recommendation, that the DEP and DFW will continue to expand municipal/county outreach efforts to better customize, expand, and the enhance educational messages throughout New Jersey.

Public Comment:

Barbara Sachau mentioned she does not like how the Division keeps bear numbers secret.

Director Golden wanted to clarify that all bear incident data is posted on the website on a monthly basis.

A motion was made by Councilman Kertz to accept the proposal as stated, seconded by Councilman Robinson. Vote taken, all in favor; motion carries.

Update on 2021 Hunting Digest:

Assistant Director Barno reported they held two stakeholder meetings with the Digest stakeholder team. A virtual meeting was held February 25, and another was held March 4. To make sure we had sufficient time for all the participants to weigh in, we divided it up into three species for each meeting. We received a lot of great feedback from the participants. They came well prepared; they went through all the charts that the staff had prepared. Chief Stanko's staff is working on integrating comments into the regulations charts and start to flesh out a layout of the digest.

New Business:

Extension of Semi-Wild Season:

Chief Stanko reported that we have a lot requests for this extension. The season normally closes on March 15 but the Game Code at section 5.2(g) allows the Director with the approval of the Council to extend the season for up to 20 days, and that would put us at April 4. We are recommending the full 20 days given the weather conditions of this winter.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to accept the extension as stated, seconded by Councilman Whildin. Vote taken, all in favor; motion carries.

Waterfowl Status and Emerging Issues:

Ted Nichols gave a brief presentation on the waterfowl status and emerging issues.

Public Comment:

Barbara Sachau asked where the Division reports are located. She is against logging on public land.

A motion was made by Councilman Whildin to adjourn the meeting at 12:06 p.m., seconded by Councilman Lathrop. Vote taken; motion approved.

Next meeting will be April 13, 2021, at 10:00 a.m. Location to be determined.