

THE MINUTES OF
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL MEETING
GOTO MEETING

May 11, 2021

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

The meeting was called to order at 10:15 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 May 4, 2021 and delivered to the designated newspapers for the division, The Atlantic City Press and The Newark Star Ledger and published on May 7, 2021.

Roll call was taken in accordance:

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

Division employees included: D. Golden, L. Barno, G. Kopkash, C. Stanko, J. Hearon, J. Cianciulli, M. Monteschio, A. Ivany, J. Heilferty, and D. Bajek.

There were numerous members of the public in attendance.

Chairman Virgilio asked if there were any changes or corrections to the April 13, 2021 minutes.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to approve the April 13, 2021 minutes, seconded by Councilman Whildin. Vote taken, all in favor; motion carried.

Chairman Virgilio wanted to take a moment and reflect on Jane Goodall and her Earth Day message for 2021. Named "**Sister to Mother Earth**" by the Cherokee Nation, Jane believed that we are part of and not separated from Mother Earth and that Mother Earth needs us all. Dr. Goodall's message delivered on Earth Day was a call to each one of us to work together, both government and the general public to make this a better world for people, animals, and planet Earth, not just on Earth Day but rather make every day an Earth Day. He would also like to highlight the work of Larry Niles, PhD., for his 25-year fight to save the red knots from extinction, along with the protection from commercial harvest of horseshoe crabs whose eggs the birds depend on in New Jersey. Finally, he would like to give a special thanks to the team of wildlife experts that work with Dr. Niles, including our very own Dr. Rick Lathrop.

Director Golden agreed that the Division also shares the same philosophy as Jane Goodall that we all need to work together to conserve wildlife and habitats. Update to Council, the Game Code revisions went into effect May 3 and we are happy to have that work behind us and we look forward to those new changes that will take affect this hunting season. The environmental justice legislation that was passed, the Department of Environmental Protection is forced to have all of its programs go through an initial assessment. The Division of Fish and Wildlife worked on that initial assessment the past two weeks and have submitted that proposal to our assistant commissioner for inclusion in Natural and Historical Resources. The assessments look to try to expand conservation inclusion into urban communities, so we put together an extensive proposal to move forward. Final assessments will come out within the next month. We had our senior management enroll in training called "The Power of Inclusion" with the thought that inclusion is the first step. Our bureau chiefs and assistant directors participated in the first training yesterday and another training this afternoon, with two more sessions next Monday and Tuesday.

Council Reports:

Agriculture:

Councilman Brodhecker reported he had a few sportsmen with questions and concerns about the urine lure ban and after explaining it there were no more issues. He stated there are a lot of deer on un-hunted lands, not state property but on land with zero access to hunt.

Councilman Kertz reported the same as Councilman Brodhecker as well as a lot of deer and roadkill.

Dr. Reist reported California reported rabbit hemorrhagic disease in wild animals. The USDA announced non-rule change, start RSID for livestock has been halted and they are being sued. They are going back to do a rule change.

NJ State Federation of Sportsman's Clubs:

Councilman DeMartino reported he attended the Ocean County meeting and they currently have two candidates as a replacement for him.

Councilman Robinson reported he attended in-person meetings at Middlesex, Monmouth, and Ocean, and virtual meetings at Union County, NJ Predator Hunters at North and Central, and the State Federation meetings. Discussions at north and central meetings were about the Game Code changes, wind energy, saltwater fisheries, saltwater and all-water licenses, link to saltwater registry for a direct link to donate, and morning stocking of pheasants. Union County had their crossbow hunt and harvested 270 deer at \$43 a deer. The county pays for corn and the butchering. He would like to thank Assistant Director Barno for contacting and responding to a sportsman club, also he would like to thank Chief Stanko for the quick response with the deer harvest numbers. He would also like to thank Conservation Police Officer Anderson and Senior Biologist James Sloan for their help with the turkey harvesting system

Councilman Whildin reported he attended Cumberland County's meeting where they discussed the Digest changes and the annual trash hunt which was a success and he should have the tonnage report soon.

Chairman Virgilio reported he attended Cumberland County, NJ State Predator, North and Central Region meetings. He also attended two virtual meetings, an R3 forum presented by the Council to Advance Hunting and Sport Shooting and the other was for responsive management put on by the NRA leadership on how to talk about hunting. He also attended a women's 3-day turkey hunt workshop.

Finance Committee: No report

Game Committee: No meeting

Endangered and Non-Game Species Advisory Committee:

Councilman Lathrop reported about the group concerned with migrating shorebirds and horseshoe crabs and the Endangered and Non-game Species Advisory Committee has been in the thick of that for a number of years. This past month they sent a memo to Director Golden expressing concerns about the lack of information concerning the biomedical collection of horseshoe crabs, especially the mortality rate. There is a committee meeting next week.

Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee: No meeting.

Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee: No report

Law Enforcement: No meeting

Legislative Update:

Attorney Mary Monteschio reported the Governor vetoed bill S441/A4810 which establishes a government efficiency and regulatory review commission. This will be removed from the list for next report. There are now 13 co-sponsors for RAWA, it is in the House but no Senate version yet.

Director Golden mentioned that the Division would receive \$15.5 million per year if the legislation passes.

Matt's Landing: we are in the process for approval for disposal process and are working with Tidelands on what's going on with the licenses. We are trying to get an updated appraisal.

Division Reports:

Central Services:

Assistant Director Kopkash reported we released our new web-based application "Places to Fish" which allows you to view the waterways and what sport fish is at each location. On turkey, the Division has been analyzing running reports and continues to monitor license and permit sales and compare them to the 2019 sales. As a result, we have noticed the sale of turkey permits has slowed down and not selling as many as we did this time last year. As a result, Barbara Stoff helped the I&E team send out an email as well as social media posts letting people know that there are permits still available. The Digest has had a big transformation and we are working with the editor and are in the process of modifying the text with the first real draft the week of May 24.

Freshwater Fisheries:

Assistant Director Barno reported it is the last week of Spring stocking and we are distributing the last of the 75,000 trout that were held over. We are still taking precaution due to Covid, so the waters that are stocked will be posted on the website in the afternoon after the stocking is completed. The waters that are being stocked are those that receive the weekly in-season stocking. Staff participated on April 26-28 in the Northeast Fish and Wildlife conference. The Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries held a symposium of aquatic conductivity. On April 22 at 7:00 p.m. was the public hearing for amendments to the Fish Code; there were nine members of the public present, three provided comments with one regarding access at Greenwood Lake, one supporting the catch and release season and the last had questions concerning the tracking of invasive fish species in NJ waters. None of the comments were specifically in response to proposed changes.

Public comment period is open through Friday May 14, 2021. To date, the Division has received 10 comments from the public, one opposed to all changes, and all the others are beyond the scope of the changes proposed. A number of the council members are also aware of the issues with access at Greenwood Lake, and the Division has been made aware of those concerns from various angling groups. As many know, there is no public ramp on the lake so access is only through private marinas, however in the past three years the marinas have been steadily

increasing their daily launch fees, with fees as high as \$50 for a single day have been reported. More recently marinas have been turning away the anglers that are looking for daily launch access. The Division has prepared a letter to the Greenwood Lake Commission to make sure they are aware of the issue and that letter was read onto the leading minutes at the commission's last meeting in April. The anglers also showed up to discuss the issue with the commission. It is important to note that the Greenwood Lake Commission does not have any regulatory authority over the private marinas, but it is hoped that it will begin discussions with local businesses to have them better embrace the benefits the local anglers bring to the local economy. As far as the stocking of muskies, walleye, channel catfish, smallmouth and largemouth bass that the division does regularly, the stocking of those fish are paid by the anglers through their license fees. If access issues continue for the general angling public then the continuation of these stocking programs may have to be revisited. The Commission has reached out to the Division and we will be setting up a meeting to discuss the situation further. We have had discussions with Parks for looking at potential access. This is going to be a long slow process in trying to rectify this. The state of NY has been made aware of the issue as part of the lake there and they are looking at and working on additional access. Pequest has a couple things going on, the replacement of the potable water line is still ongoing. The roof repairs were done on several of the maintenance buildings and the roof on the main building is being repaired and replaced in sections. We are working with Chief Hearon on the facility updates on the nursery building. Hackettstown stocked the yearling muskies averaging 11 inches, which went into Mountain Lake, Furnace Lake, Echo Lake Reservoir, Mercer Lake, Greenwood Lake, and Lake Hopatcong. We also provided surplus northern pike to Connecticut, Road Island and Virginia; these states started to count on us for their Northern Pike Program. In return, we received 2.5 million walleye eggs from the PA Fish and Boat Commission. There were over 100 thousand fathead minnows that were provided to ten county mosquito commissions for biocontrol.

Information and Education:

Chief Ivany reported the Division's Outdoor Women of NJ program held its first mentored turkey hunt for nine women May 3-4. Four gobblers were harvested. HOFNOD Youth Fishing Challenge is June 5, 2021, currently we have 28 sites in 16 counties in NJ with 11 sites being new. The Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament is May 23, and this will be the 30th year. 335 anglers pre-registered for this event. There will not be an awards ceremony, but winners will receive their prizes. Hunter Education as of the end of April had 604 students which is just shy of being doubled from April 2018 and 2019. The website redesign is moving forward, and we are meeting regularly with Oxford Communications. Our Instagram account has hit 10,000 followers which is more than double the amount we had in March 2020. Paul Tarlowe, who is our webmaster will be retiring July 1, 2021. Thank you, Paul, for all your hard work and we wish you well.

Land Management:

Chief Hearon reported staff has been busy with trout stocking and Spring planting. This week paving is being done at the Assunpink Conservation Center as well as the boat ramps and Trails

Grant money was put towards the projects. The camera system has been installed in the conference room at the Assunpink Center so Council can now broadcast. We are working with Law Enforcement, trying temporary cameras in the central region at Colliers Mills and Stafford Forge and they will be placed at ranges to try to help get additional coverage when no one is available. This is also being offered through a grant. Staff continues to move forward with facility projects across the state. We are still moving forward with the Holly Farm renovations and habitat initiatives. Land Management has been working with Forest Fire this Spring and so far, this year on Wildlife Management Areas across the state there have been 142 burns over 5,086 acres; of that, 2,700 acres have been forest burns and another 2,300 have been field burns.

Law Enforcement:

Chief Cianciulli reported we had 23 additional law enforcement officers trained in black bear response last month and this month we were able to add another 14 officers who have received the training. The increased unauthorized use of some of our wildlife management area property has caused certain areas to become difficult for enforcement to patrol and as a result we will be closing six localized areas in five wildlife management areas to protect officers, the public and the habitat.

Wildlife Management:

Chief Stanko reported we had our youth turkey hunt day on April 24. Participation was really good with a harvest of 108 birds, which is up from 100 birds in 2020 and 86 birds in 2019.

Council's regulatory change enacting a ban on any deer derived lure was done out of abundance of caution along with other regulatory precaution measures like banning the importation of whole deer carcasses to prevent Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) from entering the state of NJ.

CWD is a highly contagious and always fatal disease of all members of the deer family. The Division's main priority is to keep CWD from entering the state. We have been testing wild and symptomatic captive deer since 1998 with no positive results to date. It is known that the disease-causing agents of CWD, called prions, are present in all cervid body tissue and fluids. While the exact concentration of prions needed to potentially cause infection is not known, research indicates that there is no safe level of exposure. Once CWD has entered NJ there is no getting rid of it, it persists in the soil where it continues to infect healthy deer and is taken up by plants as well. Once it is here, it is here to stay and states that have CWD for decades show a decline in cervid population over time. While there is a claim that urine from USDA certified herds is safe to use, the fact is that the state of PA alone has found CWD in 10 captive certified herds to date. Additionally, there are partial or complete bans on urine lure usage in 18 states and Canadian provinces with several other states considering a ban at this time.

Endangered and Non-Game Species:

Chief Heilferty reported the migratory and shorebird work that is being done is very important. We have biologists looking to resight birds with light bands, that helps us do the population estimates and track the population trends for that species and for others. We also do horseshoe crab egg surveys along with aerial flights to try to help access the size and distribution throughout the Delaware Bayshore of our migratory bird populations. Birds are just starting to come into the bay now, our timeframe for restricting access to some of the Delaware Bay beaches is May 7- June 7. We will remove some of those restrictions as soon as we can. If a majority of the migratory birds are departing, then we will remove those restrictions. In all cases, when we do have access points, we will make a small area available to people to observe and enjoy the birds. Equally important this time of year is the arrival of beach nesting birds and colonial nesting birds on the Atlantic shore, those efforts primarily revolve around our concern on the Piping Plover. Last year the Piping Plover numbers dipped a little bit and we are hoping they improve this year.

Old Business:

CBBMP:

Director Golden mentioned they are in the works of a meeting with the Commissioner.

New Business:

Mosquito Control Activities:

Chief Crans gave a brief presentation on mosquito activity in NJ.

DFW Facilities Plan:

Director Golden gave a brief presentation on the Division's Facilities.

Public Comment:

Janet Pizar wanted to address the issue of deer hunting and its effect on the NJ deer population.

Barbara Sachua – she would like to see the farmers on the council take some non-violent steps towards animals. She is against the Game Code that was just passed and believes the people that are not hunters are not heard.

A motion was made by Councilman DeStephano to adjourn at 12:45 pm, seconded by Councilman Lathrop. Vote taken, motion carries.

Next meeting: June 8, 2021 at 10:00 am. Location to be determined.