

THE MINUTES OF
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL MEETING
GOTO MEETING JULY 13, 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 July 7, 2021 and delivered to the designated newspapers for the division, The Atlantic City Press and The Newark Star Ledger and published on July 8, 2021.

Roll call was taken in accordance:

Chairman Virgilio
Councilman Phil Brodhecker –(absent)
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: L. Barno, G. Kopkash, C. Stanko, J. Hearon, S. Cianciulli, M. Monteschio, A. Ivany, T. McBride, R. Risher, K. Clark, and D. Bajek.

There were numerous members of the public in attendance.

Chairman Virgilio asked if there were any changes or corrections to the May 11 minutes.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to approve the June 8, 2021 minutes, seconded by Councilman Kertz. Vote taken; motion carried.

Chairman Virgilio welcomed everyone to the meeting. Council would like to thank Governor Phil Murphy along with the DEP Commissioner Sean La Tourette and Assistant Commissioner Ray Bukowski for recognizing the importance of black bear management in our state by adding a \$1.5 million appropriation in the state's budget dedicated to black bear for fiscal year 2021.

Director Golden will be working with the Commissioner's office and Division personnel to develop strategies for using the \$1.5 million in critical areas like outreach and additional boots on the ground for bear incident response. As the Division of Fish and Wildlife works at expanding conservation inclusion into underserved urban communities, the Council asked the question 'are people of color at the table making decisions related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in our underserved urban communities?'

Council Reports:

Agriculture:

Councilman Kertz wanted to bring attention to the killdeer who makes their nest on the ground and usually get destroyed or run over. This year he had three nests that hatched three birds. He just wanted people to be aware and try to avoid the nests if possible.

Dr. Reist reported receiving sick bird calls, and whenever there is a call, it gets shared around with DEP and the Department of Health. In the last couple of weeks, we have been in discussion about some movement of NJ deer, captive reindeer. This gentleman wants to sell out his herd and move them to Pennsylvania. The issue is all the states in the union for captive cervids have the requirement for them to be enrolled in the CWD program and in NJ there is no such thing, so anyone who wants to move deer out of NJ would not be able to do that. We have also been receiving a bunch of calls about swans in South Jersey that are supposed to be handled by USDA Fish and Wildlife, which will be addressed later in this meeting.

NJ State Federation:

Councilman DeStephano reported no meetings and things have been pretty quiet.

Councilman Robinson reported he attended an in-person meeting at Hunterdon County, a virtual meeting at Somerset County, a Fish Committee meeting, and two Game Committee meetings.

Councilman Whildin attended the in-person Cumberland County meeting, and two Law Enforcement meetings where they discussed the closures at some of the Wildlife Management Areas. He also attended the virtual Fish Committee meeting.

Chairman Virgilio attended the in-person Cumberland County meeting and they put on their Trash Hunt, this year was a huge success even with COVID and not a lot of advertising. We collected 12 ¼ ton of trash, 3 1/3 tons of tires and a 16-foot boat across all areas in Cumberland County. He wanted to thank some of the participating clubs and sporting organizations as this is an enormous undertaking.

Finance Committee: Meeting to be scheduled before next Council meeting.

Fish Committee:

Councilman Pollock reported they met to discuss the Greenwood Lake public access concerns and will report on this later in the meeting.

Game Committee:

Councilman Robinson reported they met to discuss Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy. Director Golden and Chairman Virgilio met with Commissioner Shawn LaTourette on July 9th to discuss Black Bears and the management of their growing population. The Commissioner expressed his concerns for public safety with NJ growing bear population and he appreciates the Division's response to problem Category 1 bears, and this specific category of bears is growing faster than the less problematic categories of bears. He is willing to grant 1.5 million dollars to hire law enforcement, and wildlife biologists and technicians to deal with bear response and explore non-lethal alternatives and is open to filling an anticipated vacancy in the Division quickly. The Chairman will be meeting with the Commissioner at the end of August to discuss the Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy.

Endangered and Non-Game Species Committee:

Councilman Lathrop reported they have a meeting next week. He wanted to follow up on the killdeer and a lot of the ground nesting birds taking a hit and it comes down to people being observant and willing to go out of their way to protect them.

Waterfowl Advisory Committee- no report

Law Enforcement Committee: no report

Public Member:

Councilman Pollock had received a question regarding a fisher cat in their neighborhood.

Legislative Report:

Mary Monteschio reported that the waterfowl fee increase has been approved by both houses and is on the Governor's desk. It was extremely busy at the end of June because of the election, so you will see a number of updates. Restoring America's Wildlife Act now has 84 co-sponsors, there is still no senate version out.

Division Reports:

Central Services:

Assistant Director Kopkash reported June was a busy month for our staff. The mosquito unit has been out assisting counties and throughout the state with the control of mosquito population with all the rain. We met with our federal and state team fiscal members and are trying to come up with the spreadsheets to analyze our budget. We usually don't have those numbers till the end of July, which is why scheduling a meeting has to happen after we receive those numbers. Things are looking pretty good with the Division from both a federal and state fund perspectives. License sales are up over all when you compare all the different license, we are up around 8% overall compared to 2019.

Freshwater Fisheries:

Assistant Director Barno reported we are currently reviewing the plans and designs for two dam removal projects. Staff also continue to monitor the channel changes through the old lakebed at Columbia and will continue to do that in upcoming years to document the response to the channel modifications that result once you remove a dam. We are also reviewing the feasibility report for the removal of the Warren Glen dam, which is a division-owned dam. Staff have been out to Roaring Rock Park, which has a C1 trout production stream, Brass Castle Brook. There is an ongoing forest management project there and we received concerns from anglers and residents. Staff found no immediate concerns with the project relative to the stream and the riparia area. Pequest is still working on and should be finishing up this week on the roof replacement and the water line replacement also continues. Hackettstown is focusing their efforts on Hybrid Striped Bass.

Information and Education:

Chief Ivany reported that Paul Tarlowe retired July 1,2021 after 36 years of service. Paul did a fantastic job with our website, and you wouldn't find anyone who is more topnotch with customer service than Paul. We were fortunate to bring on Doug Rizio, who is in a temp position and now currently overseeing our website updates. Doug has a degree in Visual Art and a

certificate in web system development. From January 1 to June 30, we have distributed over 42,000 pieces of bear related literature, 2,400 Tyvek “Be Aware of Bears” signs, and some social media posts. The Tyvek bear sign is being updated and we will be producing another 6,500 copies and these will be distributed to managers of state, federal, municipal properties for trailheads and kiosks. The signs will also include a QR code with information linking them to our division and website. Our R3 staff have been working with the Division’s Office of Information Systems and are working on a how-to presentation for the hunting and trapping explorer app. Currently a script is being developed that will address how to navigate the interactive map to identify locations, regulations, etc. The first video will be a beginner’s overview of the map and the goal of completion is prior to the early deer season. After the beginner video our R3 staff will also plan a more in-depth instructional video that will get into the finer points of the app.

Land Management:

Chief Hearon reported heavy use on our Wildlife Management Areas like we had during COVID. Most staff are maintaining and upkeeping facilities, WMAs, and boat ramps. Across the state we are continuing with the push for new offices. We are at the end of our fiscal year, so we will wait for that money to come in for new projects to begin. There has been ongoing issue with complaints of graffiti on rocks at Wildcat Ridge and he’s pleased to announce that with the help of Assistant Director Barno they have made some progress there. We are working to mitigate the sound complaints from the Clinton Wildlife Management Area range with a sound survey that was done on the area, which produced some recommendations. There will be evergreen trees planted in a wall scenario and sound abatement placed on the ceilings of the shooting stations, which should help reduce the sound coming from the range. This should take place sometime in the Fall.

Law Enforcement:

Chief Cianciulli discussed the six areas in the Wildlife Management Areas that were closed. Early indications seemed to point towards a positive impact for both the areas themselves and protecting the public and officers. If you looked at the Council report, the number of summonses compared to this time last year are down dramatically, roughly a third of the violations, which we support. We have been discussing the requirement to have all sworn officers in the state wear body cameras. We are testing and evaluating a system that is on the state contract and it’s proving to be more difficult to use than our original cell phone option we had tested and evaluated. We will go through the full 30-day trial and the jury is still out as to what we will have to use or implement for the bureau. Chief Cianciulli will be retiring September 1, 2021, so this will be his last council meeting. He would like to thank the Council for the support they show the officers in the Bureau of Law Enforcement and all the support they have given him.

He thanked the Council for their volunteerism, their support for the Division of Fish and Wildlife and our natural resources.

Wildlife Management:

Chief Stanko reported we are in the process of hiring three new biologist trainees for our bureau and she is happy to announce that a new biologist trainee will be starting this Monday for the migratory bird project, and we are moving forward with two biologist trainees for the deer project as well. A wild swan in Brick Township that was living on a canal there being fed by residents became aggressive. USDA did respond but in the interim before we could capture the swan, Popcorn Park came in because there were reports that it had a fishing line wrapped around its beak. Popcorn Park is a zoo and also a wildlife rehabilitator, so he will have his wings clipped and will live in captivity. Our wildlife veterinarian is working on the mystery bird illness which has been found in several states. As soon as we found out about it in NJ, we contacted all our wildlife rehabilitators and also put out posts to the public to report any sick birds with the symptoms we were looking for, such as infected eyes and mucosal involvement, usually in juvenile birds. We have been getting around 50 emails a day so far and we have tested a total of 30 birds to date for a multitude of bacteria, viruses, pesticides/insecticides but as of yet no cause has been found. We are working closely with the University of New Hampshire and their veterinary diagnostic lab to do specialized screening for any DNA or RNA from viruses, bacteria, or fungus and hope to have those results in the coming weeks and compare them to other state results to try to narrow down the cause of this illness.

Endangered and Non-Game:

Kathy Clark reported the Red Knot peak count in May was one of the lowest counts at around 7,000 birds compared to a normal count of 20,000 at a peak count. The counts of Red Knots were also lower than normal at other migration stop overs in South America as the birds move up towards the Arctic, which probably reflects on the poor nest effects in the breeding season of 2020 in the Arctic. This is a serious setback to be at such a low point as we are working so hard towards recovery for that species. A lot of the action this time of year is with the beach nesting and coastal nesting birds. A multi-day arial survey was completed of the marsh islands from Mantoloking to Cape May, which is very intensive and only done every 2-years. We do not have those results in yet but is one of our major surveys and has been done since the seventies. The Memorial Day weekend nor'easter storm was particularly disruptive towards the beach nesting birds, about 2/3 of the known nesting pairs lost nests and chicks due to the sustained winds, flooding and below average temperatures. The majority of pairs have attempted to reneest, but when you get reneesting it puts them later in the season and we tend to have more predator problems and that is what's happening now. Staff is now working on monitoring additional reneesting that has happened as a result from the storms and predation problem, so they are having a very long season. Despite the issues with the storms and predation pair numbers for Piping Plovers have increased this year, but nest success is low.

Old Business:**CBBMP Update:**

Chief Stanko reported the policy was submitted to the Commissioner on March 11, 2021, and we have not heard anything in return as of yet.

Chairman Virgilio mentioned he had a meeting with the Commissioner, and he is looking at it and would discuss the policy towards the end of August. He intends to look deep into the policy and hopefully for the September meeting will have some information to bring to the Game Committee.

Hunting Digest Update:

Assistant Director Kopkash reported that the digest was revamped and a lot of the information that was in a narrative format is now in a table format. This year's digest has had a tremendous amount of scrutiny by division staff members. They have all met to go through all the pages and gave our editor over 1,000 comments on the digest. Our editor Cindy Kuenstner did a fantastic job of going through those edits and supplying them to the publisher. We are still moving through it and are hopeful to get a version of the digest this week.

Greenwood Lake:

Assistant Director Barno gave a brief presentation of information from the recent Fish Committee meeting on the public access issue on Greenwood Lake.

Councilman Pollock reported the Fish Committee did meet and supports the Division to working in conjunction with whoever needs to be involved to build a ramp at Browns Point.

Councilman Pollock made a motion to council to support the Division working towards building a ramp at Browns Point as proposed by Assistant Director Barno, seconded by Councilman Robinson; vote taken, all in favor; motion carries.

New Business:**Bobcat Population Data:**

Tony McBride gave a brief presentation on the population study data on Bobcats.

Apprentice License Survey Results:

Ryan Risher gave a brief presentation on the apprentice license survey results.

Public Comment:

Lou Martinez wanted to thank the entire Council for all their hard work to make the public launch at Greenwood Lake a possibility. We got a letter from the 24th legislative district, he made it very clear that he would like to see the public launch and thinks it is overdue.

Barbara Sachau thinks calling hunting outdoor recreation is wrong because it is killing animals. She also feels the climate is being negatively affected by the agency logging in so many Wildlife Management Areas.

Janet Pizar showed a photo of a raccoon that was missing his two legs down to the bone on one side of its body. This picture was sent to a rehabber, and she believes that the animal chewed off his own leg from being caught in a trap and euthanasia was recommended for this animal. She wanted Council to see the consequence of trapping.

Chief Stanko wanted to address the allegation of this racoon being stuck in a trap and say we do not have any traps legal in the state of NJ that would do that to racoon. All leg hold traps were banned, and no trap would ensnare both legs on one side of the animal, and that the injury was probably due to a vehicle strike.

Dave V. is a retired teacher of biology, and along with friends they drafted the petition to get a launch ramp on Greenwood Lake. He would like to thank the Council for all they do.

Paul Schmidt President of Northeast Bass Masters, he represents over 500 anglers that on a regular basis used to use Greenwood Lake as a source of recreation to fish and to run bass

tournaments on. It is sad that this year we are hard pressed to find a place to launch our boats. Thank you for your support to build a ramp at Browns Point.

Councilman Lathrop made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 12:44 pm, seconded by Councilman Whildin. Vote taken, all approve, motion carries.

Next meeting will take place on August 10, 2021, at 10:00 am. Location to be determined.