

THE MINUTES OF
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL MEETING
GOTO MEETING MARCH 8, 2022

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 March 2, 2022, and delivered to the designated newspapers for the division, The Atlantic City Press and The Newark Star Ledger.

Roll call was taken in accordance:

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

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

There were numerous members of the public in attendance.

Chairman Virgilio asked if there were any changes or corrections to the February 8 minutes.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to approve the February 8, 2022, minutes, seconded by Councilman Jones. Vote taken; all approved, motion carried.

Chairman Virgilio welcomed everyone to the meeting and mentioned that during this National Women's History Month, take the time to recognize the amazing women in our lives and our

midst. On diversity, let's continue to build upon the Division's work at removing barriers in our Black, Indigenous, and people of color communities. We must ensure easy access to our division-sponsored programs and events by guaranteeing that overburdened communities are provided timely information through our Division's outreach programs.

Assistant Commissioner Golden shared that today, March 8, is the 130th anniversary of Fish and Wildlife and our roots extend back to 1892 when three Fish and Game Commissioners were appointed, and the first salaried Fish and Game Protector was hired. Today is International Women's Day, and he would like to thank all the women of Fish and Wildlife. He wanted to let the Council know that we are closing a small 40-acre portion of Sparta Mountain Wildlife Management Area around Edison Monument for habitat work. Also, the Administrative Order that Council voted to support making Director to Assistant Commissioner has been signed by the Commissioner.

Council Reports:

Agriculture:

Councilman Kertz had no report but mentioned with the high cost of fuel and fertilizer, it is not looking good for farmers this year.

Councilman Jones reported they had the State Agricultural Convention. He presented some policy resolutions to Chief Stanko and Chairman Virgilio which they will discuss at the Farmer-Sportsmen Relations Committee meeting.

Dr. Reist reported Avian Influenza was found in commercial flocks all over. NJ may be one of the few states left that have not gotten it yet in commercial bird facilities. A Canadian research paper that came out last week, claiming to identify the first instance of a deer transmitting Covid to humans through some genetic work, has been written but that paper has not been reviewed yet.

Farmer/Sportsman Relations: a meeting is scheduled for later this month.

NJ State Federations of Sportsman's Club:

Councilman DeMartino reported they have a Duck Stamp Meeting and Waterfowl meeting today.

Councilman DeStephano reported he attended the Sussex County's, the Trappers' Association , and Law Enforcement Committee meetings. The Morris County meeting was canceled, and the Warren County's meeting has been rescheduled to tomorrow night.

Councilman Robinson reported he attended the in-person meeting at Somerset County, where they discussed coyote problems and Game Code changes; Hunterdon County's meeting which Chief Stanko and Assistant Director Barno attended and gave presentations; Middlesex County's meeting where they discussed windmill effects on radar; and the Game Committee meeting. He virtually attended Central Region and Ocean County, where they will have their Wildlife Management Area Cleanup Day March 20th. The State Federation meeting discussed the Delaware Water Gap Recreational Area. He also attended the Law Enforcement Committee meeting. He observed the net and bolt operation in Princeton by White Buffalo.

Councilman Whildin reported he attended Cumberland County's meeting, where they discussed Game Code concerns, and the Law Enforcement Committee meeting.

Chairman Virgilio reported he attended Atlantic County Federation meeting where they are in the final planning for their venison dinner; he also attended the Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament meeting where the Tournament will take place May 15th. Chairman Virgilio met with Marsha Bencivengo, a board member of Trout Unlimited and Program Coordinator for Casting for Recovery program that provides outdoor retreats for women with breast cancer. They discussed multiple topics. He attended the stakeholders meeting and discussed the Delaware Water Gap. He also observed the net and bolt operation in Princeton with White Buffalo technicians and Councilman Robinson. Finally, he attended the virtual Fisheries Forum.

Finance Committee: No report

Game Committee:

Chairman Virgilio reported they had preliminary discussions on considerations on the 2023 Game Code amendments and regulation simplifications. a. Nothing was finalized or to bring forward as of yet.

Endangered And Non-Game Species Advisory Committee: No report, meeting scheduled for March 23, 2022.

Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee: Meeting today.

Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee: Meeting scheduled for March 23

Law Enforcement Committee:

Councilman Whildin reported they met yesterday and will discuss under License Restorations.

Legislative Report:

Mary Monteschio reported that the NJ Legislature has been very busy. The Restoring America's Wildlife Act now has 165 sponsors.

Division Reports:

Central Services:

Assistant Director Kopkash gave an update on sales for deer regulation set permits; bow permits sold were 1,172, muzzle loader was 450, and shotgun was 987, with a total of 2,519 permits sold this permit year. The Apprentice License were up for 2021 compared to 2020. In 2020 we sold 2,018 and in 2021 we sold 2,240.

Freshwater Fisheries:

Chief Crouse reported the Spring Trout Stocking Programs staff are working hard. The weekly allocations are complete, and we are about to finalize the stocking schedule. There are 10 bonus lakes; Birch Grove Park Pond (Atlantic), Burnham Park Pond (Morris), Crystal Lake (Burlington), Dahnert's Lake (Bergen), Franklin Lake (Monmouth), Lower Echo Park Pond (Union), Mountain Farm Pond (Hunterdon), Shaws Mill Pond (Cumberland), Spooky Brook Park Pond (Somerset), and Verona Park Pond (Essex).

We also have some waterbody changes; Mill Pond (Bergen) – The stocking of Mill Pond has been suspended from the spring 2022 stocking schedule due to increased sedimentation from heavy storm events from summer and fall of 2021. This excessive siltation has made this waterbody unsuitable for trout stocking.

Hohokus Brook (Bergen) – This winter, additional mileage was identified along the Hohokus Brook for trout stocking in Spring 2022. An additional 1 mile on public park land will be stocked to increase angling opportunities on this waterbody, bringing the total mileage to 2.7 miles. This change will result in an additional 550 fish being stocked in Hohokus Brook as compared with 2021.

Ken Lockwood Gorge (Hunterdon) – Ken Lockwood Gorge will continue to be stocked with its normal allotment of rainbow trout, however, due to heavy erosional storm events, much of the access roadway to Ken Lockwood Gorge has washed out and is closed to vehicle traffic. Anglers may still park at either end of the Gorge and walk in to access the entire stretch for fishing. Trout will be stocked as far into the Gorge as the access roadway will allow. There will be no change to the number of trout stocked.

Franklin Pond Creek (Sussex) – Stocking on Franklin Pond Creek will be altered due to an active roadway construction project on Route 23 North. In spring 2022, this waterbody will only be stocked behind the old Forest Fire building on Route 23; there will be no change to the number of trout stocked.

On behalf of Assistant Director Barno, there is a brief update on Greenwood Lake. Parks and Forestry are working with the Township to close out the lease.

Devoe Lake (AKA Spotswood Lake) (Middlesex) will be stocked with a variety of catchable-sized warmwater fishes including but not limited to Largemouth Bass, Bluegill, Black Crappie prior to Memorial Day and will be stocked with additional fingerlings in the fall.

Information and Education:

Chief Ivany reported staff is extremely busy with the F&W website, which is set to launch in late June. The Northeast Association Fish and Wildlife Agencies Conference is April 3-5. Hunter Education is up and running and now open for scheduling classes. The first field session is scheduled for March 19th at the Northern Region Office in Clinton and March 20th at Colliers Mills. R3 Women's Turkey Hunt is May 1-3 for the hunt. In February we assisted with the annual Wounded Warriors Veteran Hunt, where over 100 pheasants were stocked. Those who participated were all either Purple Heart recipients or 100% disabled veterans. Opening Day for trout is April 9th and we are moving forward with our annual event at the Hatchery. So far, we have 43 vets that are planning on attending. Events are from 7am- noon. The Governor's Surf Tournament is scheduled for May 15th. This year is our 130th anniversary, we are planning social media posts to run throughout the year with historic photos and videos.

Land Management:

Chief Hearon reported we are working very short-staffed across the state and are in desperate need of backfills due to recent retirements. Staff are starting field mowing and reset of vegetation. We have been working in preparation for Spring planting, ordering seed, and finalizing plans. We are also preparing our equipment for trout stocking. We have been working with Forest Fire across the State with their Spring burns. We are wrapping up the Money Island beach replenishment project with Blue Acres. That project rebuilt sections of the beach that were previously homes, this will provide habitat for shorebirds and horseshoe crabs. We are working on a design phase of a project for dredging the mouth of the Maurice River. There has been an interest in the increase of quail in the northern region areas, so staff has been evaluating Wildlife Management Areas to see what we have in our stock/inventory for potential sites. There have been concerns raised on our new shooting stations with sag in the beams of the buildings and we worked with an engineer to take a look and see what the situation was. It has been determined that the sag we are seeing in the beams is within the allowed allotted tolerance. There are no structural concerns.

Wildlife Management:

Chief Stanko reported on the deer harvest numbers for 2021-2022 season, these are preliminary numbers, and we will give a full report to Council at their April meeting. Numbers are down around 30% compared to 2020, which was an exceptional year due to the Covid bump. The numbers were down 20% compared to 2019 which was a more normal year, and the total numbers were down 33% at 36,816. All 746 of our Chronic Wasting Disease samples that were sent out came back negative. We have been testing this since 1989.

We had one Category 1 black bear incident since the last Council meeting, and it was for multiple protected hives. Traps were set, but no capture. Biologist Andrew Burnett retired March 1, 2022. Andy was with the Division for over thirty years, with the Upland Game and Furbearers. He was much beloved by the sportsmen whom he dealt with and will be missed.

Law Enforcement:

Chief Panico reported the officers are transitioning from ice fishing up north to the Spring fish runs. We are also finishing up our de-escalating training mandated by the Attorney General's Office. We should have the entire bureau trained by the next two weeks. We are also in the process of going through around 150 resumes for onboarding new CPOs.

Endangered and Nongame Species:

Chief Heilferty reported a lot of the staff are starting to transition from winter work to getting ready for field season. We have already had six Bald Eagle nests hatch out. This year we had the earliest nest hatch on record on January 28th. We will continue to coordinate over the next few months with the Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries staff on discussions regarding the potential for propagating Brook floaters and other freshwater mussels out of the Hackettstown Hatchery. We are monitoring some concerns we have regarding Avian Influenza. Our ENSAC meeting will be later this month. This time of year, we are regularly either renewing or replacing members and this March meeting will have some discussions about replacing one member's term who is about to expire and a replacement for them.

Old Business:

Black Bear Marketing Campaign (Non-Lethal Measures):

Chief Ivany reported we are set to begin the campaign March 14 which will include updates to the website, videos, banner ads, and radio spots with both traditional and internet radio. A higher percentage of the ads will go out in the northern region which is "bear country", but it will hit everywhere.

New Business:

Operation Game Thief 2021 Report:

Captain Quirk gave a brief presentation on the Operation Game Thief Program.

Ecosystem Management Levels in Marine Fisheries Management:

Jeff Brust gave a brief presentation on Ecosystem Management Levels in Marine Fisheries Management.

HOFNOD Program Update:

Liz Jackson and Alanna Newmark gave a brief presentation on HOFNOD (Hooked On Fishing Not On Drugs).

LUNCH: 12:28 – 1:00

Assistant Commissioner's Annual Report:

Assistant Commissioner Golden gave a brief presentation on where the Division stands in the form of an annual report.

License Restorations:

Michael Kalicharan- Present

Captain Quirk read aloud the statement for the revocation appeal for Mr. Kalicharan who was present. Mr. Kalicharan was convicted of a violation on May 8 ,2017, for **NJSA 23:3-1 b(2)** failure to exhibit a valid license upon request. A second violation on September 22,2021, for **NJSA 23:4-47**, failing to complete the deer harvest report card.

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

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

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

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to close the floor for discussion, seconded by Councilman DeStephano. 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 DeStephano made a motion Not to reinstate Mr. Kalicharan's license, seconded by Councilman Robinson. Vote taken, all in favor; motion carried.

Kyle Vollers- Present

Captain Quirk read aloud the statement for the revocation appeal for Mr. Vollers who was present. Mr. Vollers was convicted of a violation on November 1, 2021, for **NJSA 23:4-47**. Failed to properly register a deer as required and for **NJSA 23:4-47** possess unregistered untagged deer parts, over the daily limit of crappie.

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

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

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

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to close the floor for discussion, 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 Kertz made a motion Not to reinstate Mr. Vollers license, seconded by Councilman Robinson. Vote taken, all in favor; motion carried.

Public Comment:

Barbara Sachau feels the fines and punishments are too easy on the violators. She does not think farming should be done on any WMA and to stop the logging.

Mark Dryfus wanted to thank F&W for working with Land Management team. They have been creating woodcock habitat across Northern NJ down to South NJ for over 15-years. He wanted to give a heads up that we are finding Woodcock on our migration flight back and they are landing in habitat projects that we've been working on. The work we are doing is benefiting these birds.

Janet Pizar feels netting and bolting is unethical and that the Division of Fish and Wildlife and the Fish and Game Council should not even offer it for CBDM. Statewide in 36 deer management zones out of 60 manage deer for increase and stabilization not reduction.

A motion was made by Councilman DeStephano to adjourn the meeting at 1:51 pm, seconded by Councilman Jones. Vote taken; all approve, motion carries.

Next meeting will be on April 12, 2022, at 10:00 a.m. Location to be determined.