

**THE MINUTES OF
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL MEETING
GOTO MEETING APRIL 12, 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 April 5, 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-
- Councilman Robert Puskas - (Absent)
- Councilman Loren Robinson
- Councilman Ken Whildin

Division employees included: D. Golden, L. Barno, C. Stanko, J. Hearon, F. Panico, S. Crouse, M. Monteschio, A. Ivany, K. Springer, 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 March 8, 2022, minutes, seconded by Councilman DeStephano. Vote taken; all approved, motion carried.

Chairman Virgilio welcomed everyone and on behalf of the entire Fish and Game Council, he would like to thank Assistant Commissioner Golden and his entire agency for providing the citizens of New Jersey with endless outdoor opportunities to experience wildlife-related activities. New Jersey residents and non-residents spent over \$2.1 billion on wildlife-related recreation in the state. This means an impact of 4.1 billion on the state economy (sources are Southwick Associates and US Fish and Wildlife Service).

Today stakeholders will have two opportunities for comments: one after the Recommended Migratory Bird Seasons and Waterfowl Status Update presentation, which will be followed by a vote from the council; along with the regular comment period at the end of the meeting.

Assistant Commissioner Golden wanted to thank the staff, especially Assistant Director Kopkash and Michelle Smith for putting together the NEAFWA (Northeastern Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies) meeting. New Jersey was the host state for the conference this year. This meeting was supposed to be back in 2020 but due to COVID it was canceled. Our staff planned and executed a successful meeting with a lot of great feedback from Agencies and Directors from across the Northeast. Assistant Commissioner Golden also attended the AFWA (Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies) meeting at the national level in Washington state last month. One thing he wanted to bring back to Council, when he attends these national meetings and sit down with directors from Fish and Wildlife agencies across the country along with their staff and its very valuable to exchange stories and struggles, we have that come along with wildlife management. One example was in Wyoming, their bear population is grown to the size of New Jersey's bear population. The difference between their bears and our is they are dealing with grizzly bears where we have black bears. They pay an estimated 300,000-500,000 per year in just property restorations. Lastly, RAWA (Recovering Americas Wildlife Act) on Thursday last week moved out of the Senate Environment and Public Works committee with bipartisan support with a 15-5 vote. This could be heard by both the house and the Senate by Memorial Day. If that were to happen, NJ would be looking at roughly 10 million dollars in the next Federal fiscal year.

Agriculture:

Councilman Jones reported deer are returning back to the fields and starting their grazing. We still have a concern with wild fowl and Avian influenza.

Councilman Kertz reported tons of deer in the field. He attended the Farmer/Sportsman Relations meeting and got a lot accomplished for the game code. He also attended the Game Code committee meeting. Last night he attended the board of Agriculture meeting where they discussed the agriculture meet and greet and awarded high school student Kyle M. a memorial scholarship.

Farmer/Sportsman Relations:

Councilman Jones reported he attended the Farm borough meeting where there was discussion on farm borough and Department of Agriculture policies that relate to Wildlife, public access, simplification of the regulations to make it easier for hunters, Sunday hunting and an option for late season culling after deer season.

NJ State Federation of Sportsman's Clubs:

Councilman DeMartino reported he did not attend any Federation meetings due to building his new house. He had some calls and concerns on the national Parks. Any updates would be appreciated. He attended the Duck Stamp Committee meeting and they budgeted for \$125,000 for the Canada Ducks Unlimited Project which leaves us with a \$110,000 budget. The new increase in the stamp will help fulfill some of the holes and we still have around 67,000 that is frozen. The Manahawkin WMA impalement construction is scheduled for winter of this year. Next Duck Stamp meeting is scheduled for September 13, 2022. We also had the Migratory Bird Committee meeting which Ted Nichols will give a presentation later in the meeting. The Waterfowlers want to make sure that we print the annual registration cards like we have been doing for the last few years.

Councilman DeStephano reported he attended the Trappers meeting, Rehabilitators meeting, Farmers/Sportsman Relations meeting. He also did work at the beaver check station at Newfoundland. He did get comments and concerns about the Water Gap.

Councilman Robinson reported he attended a meeting in Somerset, Hunterdon, Middlesex, Union, the Migratory Bird meeting, State Federation and the Central regions meeting. Hunterdon would like to know how the Buddy Fishing license sales are and how its progressing and to know if we could do one of the Ignite talks on Turkey Population. Middlesex County asked how the new regional offices are progressing and will it help to move people out of Trenton to save on rent. They also wanted to thank the Division for the re-stocking Spotswood Lake. Union discussed their deer management hunt that they got two coolers that were discarded federal government communication trailers that they retro fitted to make coolers at a very low price and were 8ftx12ft and were able to hold up to 10 deer. We might want to look to purchase, and retro fit them. All the meetings he went to discuss the Water Gap.

Councilman Whildin reported he attended Cumberland County Trash Hunt where they collected a total of 14.51 tons of trash along with 72 tires. He also attended the Waterfowl Stamp and Migratory Bird meetings.

Chairman Virgilio reported he attended Gloucester County meeting. He attended the Cumberland County Trash Hunt, where him and his wife collected two full bags of trash. He

attended the Governors Surf Fishing Tournament meeting where they finalized expenses and disabled veterans beach locations. he attended the Farmers/Sportsman committee meeting, and a Woman's field program at the NJ School of Conservation. Finally, he attended an awards selection committee meeting.

Finance Committee: No report

Fish Committee: No report but wanted to thank the Division for stocking.

Game Committee: No report

Endangered and Non-Game Species Advisory Committee:

Councilman Lathrop reported the meet on March 23, where they discussed the conflicts between listed species and negative interaction between falcons and shorebirds. We had representatives from the US Fish and Wildlife Service come to talk about some of the dam removal projects they are doing and potential interactions there with freshwater mussels. The next meeting will be in mid-May.

Waterfowl Stamp Committee: gave report under NJ State Federation of Sportsman's Clubs.

Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee:

Councilman DeStephano reported this was his first meeting for this committee. There next scheduled meeting is in September.

Law Enforcement Committee: No report

Public Member:

Councilman Pollock reported that he has received a lot of inquiries on the national park. He has had a few people reach out that were in favor of it and a few that are against it. He also was told by several people in the Sparta area that bear cubs are running all over the place, in yards.

He received a picture of 4 bear cubs attacking a grill. He is not sure if it is because they are just starting to come out or if the population is growing but there is definitely a higher concern in terms of population in the Sparta area.

Legislative Report:

Mary Monteschio reported that on the State side nothing happening right now because it is budget season.

Division Reports:

Bureau of Business of Administration:

Chief Springer reported that they added a new employee to the bureau in the licensing section, Rosalie LaGrotta. First quarter permit and license sales had a 14.9% decrease compared to 2021. For the first quarter 2021 had a total of 156,700, while first quarter of 2022 had a total of 133,280, and 2019 had an increase of 5%. The Habitat Supporter Program received \$21,135 in donations. Fish and Wildlife's four web-based applications ranked in the top 15 of the most used DEP apps. The department has around 80 applications. The NJ Hunting and Trapping Explorer app is the most used app in Fish and Wildlife and has 35,890 views making it the third most used DEP application. The NJ Deer Management Zone Explorer app had 29,860 views, making it the 5th most used DEP application. The NJ Fish and Wildlife Licensing Agent Locator has 13,000 views landing it in the top 10 of the most used DEP applications. Finally, The Great Fishing Close to Home in NJ app which is the newest of the apps in this top 4 had 10,200 views putting it in the top 15 DEP applications. This is a great testament to the quality of work from our staff.

Freshwater Fisheries:

Chief Crouse reported Opening Day for trout was Saturday April 9th and Hackettstown Hatchery had their event with the weather not cooperating it was raining. Chief Crouse wanted to thank everyone who helped. During our pre-season stocking, we successfully stocked 248,385 production sized rainbow trout along with 4,725 broodstock. We stocked 174 waters across the state, 89 of which are rivers and streams and 85 being lakes and ponds. We did return to our broodstock program, where we selected 10 ponds statewide. Angler participation Opening Day was fair to moderate due to the weather. We had our Fishery staff go out and gage angler interaction. We chose 8 ponds and counted 250 anglers with about 31 anglers per waterbody. The average catch rate was 0.4 trout per angler, which doesn't sound like a lot, but it is not too far off from our typical average of ½ of fish per angler. Hackettstown Hatchery has been collecting northern pike and have collected 350,000 northern pike eggs from 13 females

collected at Budd Lake. We are currently culturing 50,000 pike, fingerlings that have reached two inches in length. We supplied Connecticut with 71,000 surplus and Rhode Island with 39,000 with pike fry. We distributed 36,000 fathead minos to four county mosquito commissions last week for the use of mosquito control. Freshwater fisheries staff and Muskies Inc chapter 22 are being recognized by the New Jersey State Federation Sportsman's club with a President's award for our efforts to create fish habitat at Mountain Lake.

Dr. Reist reported the USDA finally released a list of where Avian Influenza has been detected for consumption. The USDA Wildlife Services had a map up, but the USDA Veterinarian Service did not.

Information and Education:

Chief Ivany reported that under old business Michelle Smith will be presenting on the comprehensive bear management outreach plan. The NEAFWA conference went exceptionally well. Chief Ivany is pleased to announce the Principal Biologist Michelle Smith was presented with the Northeast Information and Education Professional of the Year Award at the conference. Michelle's work this past year has been exceptional, she has been overseeing the Habitat Supporter Program, Black Bear Outreach Campaign, working on the new website all while being the point-person planning the NEAFWA conference. She is certainly deserving of this award. We had the Opening Day trout event a Pequest with over 60 veterans attending, each year we invite our vets up to fish in the pond. The morning was a washout with non-stop cold rain from 7am to noon, but everyone came prepared and had a great time. He would like to acknowledge and thank the Summit New Jersey Elks committee who sponsored breakfast for the veterans this year. Work on the new website continues and are on track to get it up and running in June. Planning for the Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament continues and right now we have approximately 250 participants who have registered. The conservation trailer was up at the NEAFWA conference for people to walk through. We will soon be at the DEP 50+2 event, 2 years past its 50th anniversary will be coming up on April 23 in Jersey City. The trailer will also be at the Atlantic County Electric company in Egg Harbor Township for Earth Day April 24th. Production continues on the marine digest and work is continuing on the hunting digest, with the first pass of the hunting digest to go to the publisher soon. We welcome new employee Courtney Venuti to the Information and Education. Courtney was an hourly employee for several years with our deer project and is now a program specialist trainee working out of the southern office. she will be working with hunter education and R3.

Land Management:

Chief Hearon reported his staff was busy with trout stocking. He is hoping that COVID stays at a level where it is not impacting the habitat projects, which are in full swing across the state. We are back to the boat ramps and sportsmen are back out on the water. We had to recently close a hiking trail. Chief Hearon wanted to mention the Trash Hunt and how it was a huge success. Thank you to all who helped put it together. Ocean County Sportsman's Federation also did a trash hunt and collected 3 tons of trash. We do take each and every dumping issue seriously. We partnered with Gloucester County to cleanup a parking area in white branch WMA. Trash was removed, over hanging branches were trimmed, parking area was graded, and potholes were filled, and a guardrail was installed to prevent vehicles from driving over the fields. We have had an uptick in vandalism to our equipment, contractors' equipment and the harassment of our staff. We added two new boat ramps which are Stone Tavern and Rising Sun.

Wildlife Management:

Chief Stanko reported during a regular field trip for banding purposes a group of 59 mallard's were captured and sampled in Cape May County on February 7th. HPAI and H5N1 was detected in one of the birds. Another 21 samples detected HS but the viral load in the samples were too low to distinguish the strain. We sent out advisories and announcements to our rehabbers, so they are aware of the situation and take precaution when handling these birds and also what to look for. There is no new progress on Norvin Green as of yet. We interviewed for two biologist trainee positions for the bear project, we sent out offers and they were accepted by our top 2 candidates. We also interviewed for the deer outreach Bio Trainee position, and we sent HR the name to put forward an offer, we are still waiting to hear back on that. Regarding Category 1 bear incidents since last council meeting, we have had 13 in the last month with 1 in Hunterdon, 5 in Morris and 7 in Warren. Traps were set, one bear was captured and euthanized. In Hunterdon County it was a protected livestock incident. Morris County there was one home entry and one attempted home entry and three protected livestock instances. In Warren County we had one aggressive behavior, one property damage of over \$1,000 and five protected livestock incidents.

Endangered and Nongame Species:

Assistant Director Barno reported that work on Sparta stand 9A has been completed so the edits and monuments area has been reopened, that was the Shelterwood approach so it was around 20-30 trees per acre, then they removed the other trees. Stand 18 will be next year, which is an additional 10 acres.

Old Business:**Greenwood Lake Update:**

Assistant Director Barno reported the 10-million-dollar lakes bill initially looked like recreational projects could be funded through it, but it appears that there was a switch in the funding source to The American Rescue Plan Act. This limits it to infrastructure for water quality improvements. So, they will be entertaining grants that will have improvements in water quality to the lakes, which ties into the department's initiative on decreasing HABS occurrences throughout the state. We are still moving forward.

Black Bear Education Marketing Campaign (Non-Lethal Measures)**Black bear Outreach Campaign:**

Michelle Smith gave a brief presentation on Black bear Outreach Campaign.

New Hire Personnel Status:

Assistant Commissioner Golden reported that one year ago funding was appropriated into the budget. Hiring for the state takes time and is challenging. We have money that was from a Governors priority and here we are almost a year later and have yet to fully onboard any individuals. In the budget we had set aside funding for 11 positions, 2 -biologists in Wildlife Management whose names have been forwarded and have accepted those offers, 4- technicians in Wildlife Management with interviews starting next week, 3- Conservation police officer positions have been posted and today they are accepting the background paperwork from 34 out of the 150 applications received. Once we have the background packages received, then we will start the interview process with them. The remaining 2 positions are within the Solid Waste program and have yet to be posted.

Training for Police Departments:

Chief Panico reported we have three Conservation Police Officer positions posted and he plans on having them on board sometime in July, where they will go to the Cape May Police Academy at the end of August for 23-weeks. Once they graduate from the academy, they will go into our Game Warden school for another 8-weeks.

LUNCH: 12:10 – 12:45

New Business:

Proposed Migratory Bird Seasons and Waterfowl Status Update:

Ted Nichols gave a brief presentation on the recommended NJ 2022-23 Migratory Bird Season.

Public Comment on the Proposed Migratory Bird Seasons:

Barbara Sachau is opposed to killing birds. She would like to lead out of shotgun.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to accept the recommended NJ 2022-23 Migratory Bird season.

Councilman DeMartino made a motion to accept the recommended 2022-23 Migratory Bird Season as presented by Ted Nichols, seconded by Councilman Robinson. Vote taken; all approve, motion carries.

Cormorant Assessments on Trout Stocked Waters

Chief Crouse gave a brief presentation on Cormorant Assessments on Trout Stocked Waters.

2021 Deer Harvest Summary:

Chief Stanko gave a brief presentation on the 2021-22 deer harvest report.

Public Comment:

Barbara Sachau would like to have more than 3-minutes to speak at these meetings. She feels that the NEAFWA conference should have been held as a virtual event to save money.

Janet Pizar wanted to congratulate Michelle Smith on her presentation, it was very detailed and easy to understand. She feels the public should be able to see where and how these appropriations are being spent.

A motion was made by Councilman Jones to adjourn the meeting at 2:04 pm., seconded by Councilman DeStephano. Vote taken; all approve, motion carries.

Next meeting will be in-person at 10:00 am at the Assunpink Conference room.