

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Wednesday, June 19, 2019

2 p.m. Educational Session 3 p.m. Business Session

1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211

EDUCATIONAL SESSION – 2 PM

2019 DELTA FLOODING & DELTA WATER PUMPS

Drew Smith, Chief, Water Management Section, U. S. Army Corps of Engineers, gave a detailed PowerPoint presentation on the history of the Corps of Engineering and events that led up to the current flooding event in Mississippi which has had homes and crops in the Delta under water for the past four months.

Smith explained that the Flood of 2019 began with extremely heavy rains covering most of the nation from September, 2018 through May, 2019. An average of 36.2 inches fell over the Lower 48, the first time it has topped 36 inches over a 12-month period in over 120 years of record-keeping. More than 40 percent of the nation's watershed flows through the lower Mississippi River. With all this water in the swollen Mississippi River and its tributaries, the backwater kept building to an all-time high, flooding around 544,000 acres in Mississippi.

Some compare the 2019 Flood to the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927, which was the most destructive river flood in the history of the United States. Following the Flood of 1927, Congress passed the Mississippi Flood Control Act and built the world's longest system of levees, pump stations, and floodways. In 2008 a halt was placed on the Yazoo Backwater Area Pumps Project by the United States Environmental Protection Agency because of the potential impact on wetlands and wildlife in the lower Mississippi Delta. Mississippi is the only back water area of the Mississippi River that does not have a pump system. The Environmental Protection Agency is now reconsidering the 2008 decision due to the current flooding.

Discussion followed concerning the Pumps Project and whether this would have significantly reduced flooding in the Mississippi River backwater. Smith said that there would be a four to five-foot difference in the water levels and the duration would have been less with the pump stations, which is significant.

Education session was then adjourned until 3p.m.

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Wednesday, June 19, 2019

2 p.m. Educational Session 3 p.m. Business Session
1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211**MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS SESSION – 3 PM**

PRESENT: Commission Chairman Bill F. Cossar, Commissioners Scott Coopwood, Robert Taylor, Billy Mounger, and Clay Wagner.

Among the MDWFP staff attending were: Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director; Robert Cook, Deputy Executive Director; Michael Bolden; Jennifer Head; Curtis Thornhill; Col. Steve Adcock; Larry Pugh; Russ Walsh; Amy Blaylock; and counsel, Doug Mann, Special Assistant Attorney General. Chairman welcomed guests from the Delta.

OPENING PRAYER

Commissioner Mounger opened the meeting with prayer.

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Wagner and seconded by Commissioner Coopwood, the minutes of the May 15, 2019 Commission meeting were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

ACTION: Commissioner Wagner moved to approve the agenda for June 19, 2019, Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

- **Eddie Hatcher**, Issaquena Co., spoke on behalf of the wildlife in Issaquena County being stressed from the flood and aborting offspring. Dead carcasses are in his yard and along the road. Wildlife is our resource and without water pumps we are losing our wildlife. He asked the Commission to voice their opinion on the pumps and what plans are being made for the hunting seasons this fall. He would like to see public land in the Delta shut down and people hunt elsewhere.

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Executive Staff Officer, replied to his question and assured him that the MDWFP staff are monitoring the flood and wildlife and will continue to do so; however, the full

impact of this flood will not be apparent for two to three years. The potential plan will be to issue supplemental nutrition permits for land owners along the levee and with other property owners in the future. Some permits have already been issued.

Four farmers came forward from the Delta. Their farms are a part of the 250,000 acres of agricultural land which have been impacted from the flood. Floodwaters have kept many farmers from planting crops this year and the remaining crops, which were not flooded, are being eaten by displaced wildlife looking for food and dry ground. Farmers have had a dramatic loss of income and have had to let go of hired help this spring.

- **Byron Seward**, Yazoo & Sharkey Counties, stated that one-third of his land is under water. The flood took 300 acres of cotton and 80 acres of soybeans, totaling a loss of \$624,000. He currently has 868 acres of corn which the displaced deer are eating. He is very concerned that wildlife recreational concerns take a priority over people. He has had the difficult job of deciding which workers to let go since there are few crops to pick or plant. People in his area are facing unemployment. When asked whether he had insurance, he replied that he does, but it helps very little. Property damage is not covered. The expense is shifted back to the farmer. He estimates a 1-1.5 million dollar hit this year. When asked if he was able to control wildlife in earlier years when there was no flood, he replied "yes."

Dr. Sam Polles, MDWFP Executive Director, stated that MDWFP is trying to balance conservation and commerce. Depredation Permits have been issued to some farmers to help control wildlife eating their crops.

- **Jerry Whitaker**, Delta farmer, stated that he has 3,300 acres with 800 acres under water. He has around 500 deer laying in the middle of his corn and would like a permit to kill four or five each night to drive them out. He had requested a permit and it was denied. **Col. Steve Adcock**, Chief of Law Enforcement, replied that there were so many deer there that we are trying to keep one disaster from creating another disaster. He explained that one farmer was issued a permit and shot 400 deer. Depredation Permits are denied if they are next to residential or if there are so many deer that it will not move them off the property. The problem is the deer have no where else to go for food. **Polles** stated that MDWFP will go back to Mr. Whitaker's property and investigate.
- **Clay Adcock**, Holly Bluff farmer, asked the Commission to take a public stand on the reinstatement of the Delta Water Pump Project. While the flood is here, this is our best chance to get this ruling reversed. Once the water is gone, people forget.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Coopwood and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Commission unanimously voted to support an initiative to build a pump system in the lower Mississippi River Basin in order to lessen the impact of high water in Mississippi.

- **Hunter Fordice** thanked the Commission for letting everyone speak today. It scares him that the visual flooding is about to go away but the problem is still here. He appreciates the stand that the Commission has taken. He would like the Commission to go further and take

this to Washington and appeal to Congressmen and officials by letter and resolution for a relief to human and wildlife suffering.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Michael Bolden, Deputy Administrator, presented the License Sales Report for the month of May 2019. The total revenue for the end of May is down 3.5% from last year.

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident license sales – down 4%
 - Small Game Freshwater Fishing – down 7%
 - Sportsman License – down 4.49%
 - 3 day Freshwater – up 4.56%
 - Fall Turkey Permit – up 62%
- Non-resident licenses – down 2.6%
 - NR Small Game Hunting – down 3.5%
 - Freshwater Fishing – down 4.3%
 - 1 day Freshwater Fishing – up 3%
 - WMA User Permit – up 2.3%
 - Fall Turkey Permit – up 6.25%
 - Spring Turkey Permit – up 2.86%
- Permit category – down 5.58%
- Lifetime Licenses – up 17.58%

WILDLIFE

Wild Turkey Harvest Report

Adam Butler, Turkey Program Coordinator, presented a handout to the Commission on the Inaugural Season for Wild Turkey Harvest Reporting in Mississippi. Butler was very pleased with the ease of use of the new app and the number of harvests reported the first year. He thanked the Commission and everyone on staff, including Executive, Wildlife, Law Enforcement, and MIS, who made this happen this year. Some of the highlights of his report were:

- Nearly 9,000 unique users reported almost 13,000 gobbler harvests
- 76% of the users reported via the smartphone app; 15% call center; 9% website
- Hunters reported harvests from 81 of Mississippi's 82 counties (Lafayette Co. was top county reporting 407 gobblers; Attala, Carroll, Copiah, Marshall, and Panola counties reported harvests in excess of 300 birds; only Sunflower Co. failed to register any turkeys)
- 51% of the overall harvest occurred the first two weeks of the season
- No major technical difficulties were reported by users.
- Most of the hunters who utilized the Game Check system only reported one bird. Approximately 9.7% of users attained Mississippi's seasonal bag limit of 3 gobblers.
- 12% of harvests came from public land

- Estimated by Law Enforcement that only 50% of the harvests were actually reported

Update on Proposed Turkey Summit

No update was given at the meeting. A date has not been set at this time.

FISHERIES

Fishery Awards

Larry Pugh, Fisheries Bureau Director, had the honor of presenting awards to the following employees who made outstanding contributions in their line of work for 2018.

Tom Holman	2018 SEAFWA Fisheries Biologist of the Year
John Stamps	State Fishing Lake Manager of the Year
Ryan Jones	Fisheries Biologist of the Year

A round of applause followed as each recipient accepted their award.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law Enforcement Update

Col. Steve Adcock, Chief of Law Enforcement, presented a handout to the Commission which highlighted license violations for the month of May with “no license” being the top violation, followed by PFD Violation, no WMA Permit, no boat registration, and trespassing. Officers Blackburn, Robinson, and Stokes had the opportunity to speak at the Neshoba Lake Youth Day. Officers were on the waterways keeping them safe, issuing 257 water related citations and 8 BUI citations.

Animal Control Permits

Adcock distributed a handout to the Commission on Animal Control Permits comparing 2018 to 2019.

Statewide Statistics Comparison (January – June)

- 229 permits requested in 2019
 - 66% deer
 - 30% hogs
 - 4% other

- 234 permits requested in **2018**
 - 44% deer
 - 56% hogs

Yazoo Backwater Comparison (January – June)

- **2019** Counties current affected by Yazoo Backwater Flood (Emergency).
 - 28 permits requested for deer:
 - Yazoo – 24
 - Sharkey – 2
 - Issaquena – 2
 - Warren – 0
 - Permit Status within Yazoo Backwater Flood:
 - Approved – 9
 - Denied – 8
 - Canceled by farmer – 7
 - Pending process – 4
- **2018** same counties located in Yazoo Backwater.
 - 10 permits requested for deer:
 - Yazoo – 7
 - Warren – 2
 - Issaquena – 1
 - Sharkey – 0

Justice Court Unpaid Fines

At the last Commission meeting the Chairman requested the top 20 counties where courts are not serving papers to collect Wildlife and Fisheries fines. Adcock distributed a handout to the Commissioners. Courts were asked to provide data on unpaid Wildlife and Fisheries citations from the past five years or as their current technology would allow. Sixty-three (63) counties across the state provided data (77%) and 19 counties were unable to produce data, stating their existing system(s) could not generate information requested. Based on data provided from reporting counties, there is an estimated \$2.5 million in unpaid Wildlife and Fisheries citations. As stated last month, MDWFP only receives \$5 from a fine issued. Counties receive the majority of the money collected on fines. The reason for concern is that the lack of compliance with the courts in collecting fines has undermined MDWFP Law Enforcement's authority and respect.

The top five counties in each region are listed below:

- North Region: Webster, Tishomingo, Itawamba, Tunica, and Clay Counties.
- Central Region: Issaquena, Attala, Madison, Neshoba, and Rankin Counties.
- South Region: Wilkinson, Claiborne, Stone, Pike, and Jones Counties.

Discussion followed on how to proceed. It was suggested that the Clerk of the Court and Board of Supervisors in each of these counties should be made aware of the importance in collecting payment of all outstanding fines.

OTHER BUSINESS

Executive Order

Counsel advised the Commission that an Emergency Order was implemented by Executive Order on May 23, 2019. This order would designate "No Fishing" areas in lakes where fish have been stocked for Youth Fishing Rodeos. Public fishing would resume after the scheduled rodeos have ended and the "No Fishing" signs have been removed.

In order to clarify that the Executive Director was acting on behalf of the Commission, a vote ratifying the Executive Order to "Prohibit Fishing in Designated Fishing Rodeo Areas" was required to be spread upon the minutes for posterity.

ACTION: By motion of Commissioner Wagner and seconded by Commissioner Coopwood, the Commission unanimously ratified the Executive Order. A signed copy of the Executive Order, as ratified by the Commission, has been appended to the minutes.

Election of Commission Officers

Chairman Cossar called for nominations for Commission officers for the 2019-2020 year.

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger nominated Commissioner Scott Coopwood as the new Commission Chairman and Commissioner Robert Taylor as Vice Chairman. Commissioner Wagner seconded the nominations. There were no other nominations. The Commission voted unanimously to approve Scott Coopwood as Chairman and Robert Taylor as Vice Chairman, beginning July 1, 2019.

NEXT MEETING DATE


Date: Wednesday, July 17, 2019
Location: 1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson
Time: 1 p.m. Educational Session; 2 p.m. Business Session

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Chairman asked if there was a need for an Executive Session. Executive Director Polles stated that there was no need for an Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

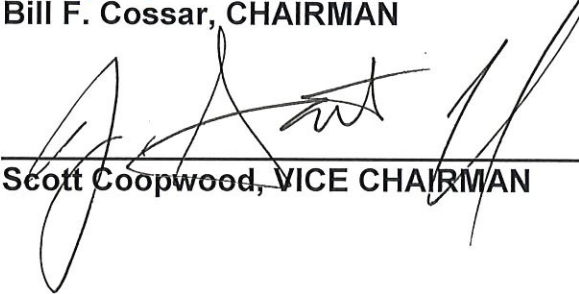
There being no further business before the Commission, Chairman Cossar gaveled the meeting into adjournment.



Bill F. Cossar, CHAIRMAN

7/17/19

Date



Scott Coopwood, VICE CHAIRMAN

7/17/19

Date

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, AND PARKS

In Re: Prohibiting fishing in designated fishing rodeo areas

EXECUTIVE ORDER

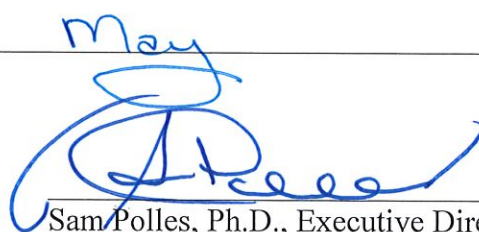
PURSUANT TO the authority set forth in Miss. Code Ann. §49-1-29(i), the Fisheries Bureau has requested to prohibit fishing in designated youth fishing rodeo areas at State Fishing Lakes when “No Fishing” signs are present.

Based upon the request of the Fisheries Bureau, I find as follows:

1. That fishing is prohibited in designated youth fishing rodeo areas at State Fishing Lakes when “No Fishing” signs are present.
2. That designated youth fishing rodeo areas will be well marked.
3. That public fishing will resume in designated areas following the scheduled youth fishing rodeo and the removal of the “No Fishing” signs.

THEREFORE, pursuant to the authority set forth in MISS. CODE ANN. '49-1-29(i), it is hereby ordered that fishing is prohibited in designated youth fishing rodeo areas at State Fishing Lakes when “No Fishing” signs are present. It is further ordered that public fishing will resume in the designated areas following the completion of the scheduled youth fishing rodeo and the removal of the “No Fishing” signs.

SO ORDERED, this the 23rd day of May, 2019.



Sam Polles, Ph.D., Executive Director
Mississippi Department of Wildlife,
Fisheries, and Parks