

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Wednesday, August 21, 2019

1 p.m. Educational Session 2 p.m. Business Session
Hancock Bank, 2510 14th St., Gulfport, MS 39504

EDUCATIONAL SESSION – 1 PM

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

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.

Gulfport Aquarium

Anthony Wilson, Chairman, Mississippi Aquarium Foundation, made a presentation to the Commission about the world class aquarium, currently under construction in Gulfport, Mississippi, which will combine research and conservation. Members of the Board are from every area of Mississippi. This is a true Mississippi Aquarium which will tell the story of all Mississippi's aquatic resources from the Delta wetlands to the marshes and coastline. An announcement will be made in the next month regarding the opening date.

David Kimbell, Aquarium CEO, presented a PowerPoint presentation. The Aquarium will represent three principles: education, conservation, and community. Some of the many features will be salt water and fresh water aquariums, touch pools, alligator habitat, dolphin habitat, marsh habitat, river otter habitat, bird aviary, and a 30 ft. suspended water tunnel where fish can swim 360 degrees around the visitors. Guests will also be able to view the "back of the house" to see how aquarium staff feed, examine, and care for the animals.

Algae Bloom / Bonnet Carre

Dr. Paul Mickle, Chief Scientist, MS Department of Marine Resources (MDMR), presented a PowerPoint presentation of findings following the recent Mississippi River flooding, and the impact of the release of fresh water from the Bonnet Carre spillway into the Gulf of Mexico.

MDMR's motto is to enhance, protect, and preserve. He explained that Mississippi was the seafood capital of the world in the 1900s. Since then, Louisiana took over the top spot but was eclipsed by the East Coast states. There are large economic drivers and pushers in the ocean: (1) Shrimp industry is \$132 million a year in our state alone; (2) Crab \$7.1 million; (3) Oysters have been in a rebuilding mode since Katrina in 2011; (4) Fin fish \$81 million (all species).

MDMR's job is to protect species under their management for conservation and economic development. This includes water safety testing and production research. MDMR is currently teaching others how to raise soft shell crab and other types of fish.

Bonnet Carre is only functional during extreme flood stages of the Mississippi River. It was built in the 1930s. At the time, it was estimated that it would be opened every five years to handle cyclical extreme flooding. It has been opened four times in the last three years, which is an indicator that something has changed in our country's rainfall patterns. When Bonnet Carre is opened for an extended time it impacts the salinity of the Mississippi Sound. Dolphin mortalities were exorbitant when the Bonnet Carre first opened. The remains of 130 dolphins and 156 sea turtles were found along the Mississippi Coastline and the oyster reefs experienced a mortality higher than 90% for all reefs except for Pass Marianne.

When the water is changed (salinity) there are other diseases that appear, too. The Mississippi Department of Environmental quality issued beach closures in Hancock and Harrison Counties this summer due to an algae bloom on the surface of the water. MDEQ advised people and their pets to avoid contact, including swimming, with the blue-green algae because exposure could be harmful.

USM is providing satellite oceanography, modeling of currents, and ocean chemistry along with MDMR's expertise in fisheries monitoring. These scientists are using this technology to understand and predict how wind and freshwater interact in the Mississippi Sound.

USM's School of Ocean Science and Engineering has developed a website to host updates and photos in order to keep the public adequately informed on Bonnet Carre Spillway research projects at www.gcr.usm.edu/news/2019.bonnet.carre.spillway.overview.php.

Education session recessed until 2 p.m.

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Wednesday, August 21, 2019

1 p.m. Educational Session 2 p.m. Business Session
Hancock Bank, 2510 14th St., Gulfport, MS 39504**MINUTES OF THE BUSINESS SESSION – 2 PM**

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

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 Coopwood welcomed special guest and former Commissioner Jerry Munroe. Also in attendance were Scott Bounds, Chairman of the House Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks Committee, and MWFP Foundation members Don Brazil, John Taylor, and Chris Gouras.

OPENING PRAYER

Deputy Executive Director Robert Cook opened the meeting with prayer.

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Wagner and seconded by Commissioner Cossar, the minutes of the July 17, 2019 Commission meeting were unanimously approved.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the minutes of special Commission meeting held on July 29, 2019 were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

Chairman Coopwood made the following changes to the Commission Agenda.

- Move Outdoorsman Award from "Other Business" to the top of the agenda
- Add under "Other Business" – Deer Urine Ban Rule (call off the table).

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger moved to approve the agenda for August 21, 2019 as amended, Commissioner Taylor seconded the motion and the motion carried.

OUTDOORSMAN AWARD

Members of the Commission decided to recognize individuals who contribute to the great outdoors and promote conservation. Since the first recipients of this award are from the Gulf Coast, Chairman Coopwood asked Commissioner Clay Wagner to introduce Frank Wilem, Jr. and his daughter, Brittany, of Gulfport. Commissioner Wagner stated that there was a very long list of individuals deserving of this award and after much consideration, Frank and Brittany were selected. They came forward to receive a certificate and applause followed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Warren Strain, Communication Director, introduced **Phil Lechner**, who had comments to present to the Commission concerning the use of a WMA smartphone app vs paper forms. The Commission was presented information at the July Commission meeting concerning the introduction of the WMA app on October 1, 2019.

Mr. Lechner stated that it is difficult to get cell coverage and there is no internet connection at his hunting camp (Leaf River WMA vicinity). We are not totally against the app system, but his suggestion was to start one or two WMAs this year with good cell service. When all the bugs are worked out, expand to other WMAs.

Dr. Polles stated that MDWFP had tested the app statewide. The system works whether you have a signal or not. You enter the information in your smart phone and when you leave and your phone receives a signal, the information is automatically downloaded.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Michael Bolden, Deputy Administrator, presented the License Sales Report for the month of July 2019. The total revenue for the end of July is down 8% from last year.

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident license sales – down 9.5%
- Non-resident licenses – down 6.5%
- Other Licenses category – down 1.16%
- Lifetime Licenses – down 5.32%

This is trending nationwide, not just in Mississippi.

Auto Renewals

- Since February 2019 a total of 16,709 customers have signed up for Auto Renewal
- 2,300 customers have signed up for Auto Renewal in the month of July

AIMS – 560 AIMS participants processed in the month of July.

WMA Mobile Application Development will “go live” on October 1, 2019 (opening day for archery deer season).

WILDLIFE

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Bureau Chief of Staff, presented the following recommended regulations rule changes:

- 40 MS Admin. Code Part 2, Chapt. 1: Wildlife Management Areas:
PROPOSED Rules 1.1 – 1.46 - WMA Rules & Regulations

A. WMA Rules 1.1 – 1.45

Check-in language in currently listed in all WMA Rules 1.1 – 1.46. The current “paper” check-in language would be removed from all the current WMA Rules and the following “app” check-in language would be inserted in Rule 1.1 as a Basic Regulation governing all WMA's:

“All visitors must check in before using the WMA and check out upon leaving the WMA by using the MDWFP WMA Check-in Application.”

B. Rules 1.23 & 1.24 – Sunflower and Twin Oaks WMAs

Due to flooding this year, turkey hunting during the 2020 spring season will be closed in the Sunflower and Twin Oaks WMAs.

C. Rules 1.10, 1.12, 1.21, 1.23, & 1.24 – South Delta WMAs

Adjust deer hunting seasons and bag limits to align with South Delta Zone established in Rule 2.2. (See Rule 2.2 changes below.) A map of the South Delta Deer Zone was reviewed by the Commission, reflecting on the areas which have been flooded. Seven WMAs were in this flood zone -- Howard Miller, Twin Oaks, Shipland, Sunflower, Mahannah, Phil Bryant, and Lake George.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, all proposed rule changes were unanimously approved as presented.

- 40 MS Admin. Code Part 2, Chapt. 2: White-tailed Deer:
PROPOSED Rule 2.2 – White-tailed Deer Hunting Seasons and Bag Limits

During spring and summer 2019, extensive flooding occurred in the South Delta region. Many species were negatively impacted, particularly white-tailed deer. Data collection will be imperative over the next 2-3 years to properly assess the full impacts of the prolonged flooding. However, the Wildlife and Law Enforcement Bureaus do not recommend a full closure of the 2019-2020 hunting season; rather, a shortened season with modified bag limits. Below are the recommendations made to the Commission:

A. Public & Private Land Season Structure

October 15 – January 5

1. 83 total days
2. 27 days of archery only
3. 12 days of primitive weapon (antlerless only on private land)
4. 44 days of gun/primitive weapon

Regular season : 123 days

Public land frameworks may vary given draw hunts or special seasons.

B. Bag Limits

1. 2 antlerless deer
2. 2 bucks - 1 antler criteria; 1 any antlered deer (private land only)

Statewide bag limits are 5 antlerless deer and 3 bucks (1 buck with any hardened antler)

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Taylor and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, Proposed Rule 2.2 was unanimously approved as presented.

Commissioner Mounger wanted to commend staff for the outstanding job on the CWD Forum at Mississippi State University (MSU) and the Southeastern Wild Turkey Forum. As an attendee at the CWD Forum, Commissioner Taylor stated that it was most impressive and informative. Walsh stated that 102 registrants attended from multiple states.

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 July with “no boat registration” being the top violation, followed by no license, PFD Violation, no boat certificate, and trespassing.

This time of the year alligators are removed from unwanted places and crops are inspected for deer damage. Many outdoor and indoor Conservation talks were presented for special events.

No Wake Zone

40 MS Admin. Code Part 4, Chapt 2: Rules and Regulations regarding Boat & Water Safety:

- **FINAL Rule 2.6 – “No Wake” Zone for Waters of the Jourdan River at the Intersection of Mississippi State Highway 603**

No comments were received and this rule was recommended for FINAL adoption.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Taylor and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, FINAL Rule 2.6 was unanimously approved as presented.

40 MS Admin. Code Part 2, Chapt 2: White-tailed Deer

- **PROPOSED Rule 2.7 – Prohibition on Cervid Carcass Importation/Exportation to Protect Mississippi from Chronic Wasting Disease**

This change in the rule would add "Exportation" language to protect the spread of CWD to other states, etc. Other states already have this language in their laws so that a deer cannot enter their state from another state, or vice versa. The language change is noted below:

"It is unlawful to:

Export, carry, move, transport, or otherwise cause any portion of a cervid carcass originating from inside the State of Mississippi, and inside of an MDWFP-defined CWD Management Zone, across, over, or into any state, territory, or foreign country, outside the boundaries of the State of Mississippi."

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, Proposed Rule 2.7 was unanimously approved as presented.

OTHER BUSINESS

Executive Order

Counsel stated that with the flood waters receding to a safe level the Executive Director, on behalf of the Commission, re-opened the recreational boating activity and fishing activity on lakes or waterways affected by the water level of the Mississippi River, except for Eagle Lake. The previous Executive Order of February, 2019, temporarily closed recreational boating in these areas.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Taylor, the Executive Order was ratified. A signed copy of the Executive Order, as ratified by the Commission, has been appended to the minutes.

Deer Urine Ban

Commissioner Cossar moved to bring the Deer Urine Ban Rule, which was tabled at the last meeting, off the table for discussion and consideration for amendment. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the motion carried.

Commissioner Cossar stated that he had proposed at the last meeting to leave the ban in place with the exception of cervid urine that has been certified by the ATA. Discussion followed. Commissioner Mounger stated that the Commission had looked at the urine ban and there are

good arguments on both sides (ARCUS and MDWFP). Mounger stated that there is NO zero, risk-free, deer urine unless you use synthetic urine. But he added that this is difficult to enforce even with the ban, since deer urine is still for sale in stores with the ban in place. Commissioner Wagner commented that the Commission would be passing an unenforceable rule if the ban is removed for products certified by ATA. Mounger stated that the Commission realizes this is a serious issue. After reading ARCUS's report the Commission was persuaded that this was a minimal risk.

Executive Director Polles asked the Commission if they had read all the documentation, including MDWFP's response. Commissioner Mounger stated that the Commission had read all the documentation and realized that there is a risk and that this rule is unenforceable; however, the Commission felt that the certified urine products represent a minimal risk. Dr. Polles requested that the record reflect, before the final vote, that the Department's wildlife biologists and related staff are opposed to amending the rule to except ATA-certified natural deer urine products from the ban. This record so reflects staff opposition.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar moved to approve leaving the natural deer urine ban in place with the exception of natural deer urine products that have been certified by the Archery Trade Association (ATA). Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion. Chairman Coopwood called for a vote. The Commission voted and the motion carried.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Date: Thursday, September 26, 2019
Location: 1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS
Time: 8:30 a.m. Educational Session; 9:30 a.m. Business Session

EXECUTIVE SESSION

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

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Commission, Chairman Coopwood gavelled the meeting into adjournment.



Scott Coopwood, CHAIRMAN

9/26/19

Date

Robert Taylor, VICE CHAIRMAN

Date