

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Infinity Science Center, One Discovery Circle, Pearlington, MS

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

EDUCATIONAL SESSION – 2 PM

PRESENT: Commission Chairman William “Billy” Deviney, Commissioners Bill F. Cossar, Clay Wagner, and Scott Coopwood

ABSENT: Commissioner Robert Taylor

Among the MDWFP staff attending were: Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director; Robert Cook, Deputy Executive Director; Michael Bolden, Larry Castle, Colonel Steve Adcock, Larry Pugh, Jason Thompson, Josh Moree, SW Regional Biologist, and counsel, Doug Mann, Special Assistant Attorney General.

Only three items were on the agenda for the Educational Session.

1. Josh Moree, SW Regional Biologist, presented an update on Canemount WMA.
2. Deer Season & Bag Limits was moved to the Business Session for consideration.
3. Legislative Update was postponed until the April Commission Meeting.

BUSINESS SESSION – 3 PM

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

PRESENT: Commission Chairman William “Billy” Deviney, Commissioners Bill F. Cossar, Clay Wagner, and Scott Coopwood

ABSENT: Commissioner Robert Taylor

Among the MDWFP staff attending were: Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director; Robert Cook, Deputy Executive Director; Michael Bolden, Larry Castle, Colonel Steve Adcock, Larry Pugh, Jason Thompson, and counsel, Doug Mann, Special Assistant Attorney General.

Chairman Deviney, having noted for the minutes that a quorum was present, gaveled the meeting to order at 3 p.m. Chairman Deviney welcomed David Smith, President of Mississippi Dog Hunters Association.

OPENING PRAYER

Robert Cook, Deputy Executive Director, opened the meeting with prayer.

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Coopwood, the minutes of the February 13, 2017 meeting were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

Dr. Sam Polles, Executive Director, stated that the agenda was in need of the following revision:

- Add "Deer Seasons and Bag Limits" under WILDLIFE section. This item was originally to be presented during the Educational Session.

ACTION: Commissioner Cossar moved to approve the agenda for March 22, 2017, as amended by the Executive Director. Commissioner Wagner seconded the motion. The Commission voted unanimously to approve the agenda as amended.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no members of the general public who wished to address the Commission.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, Director of License/Boat Registration, presented the License Sales Report for the month of February 2017. The total revenue for the end of January is up over \$1,000,000.

Highlights of Thompson's end of the year, annual report are listed below:

- Resident License Sales – up \$1,000,000
- Sportsman license sales – up \$800,000 (25% increase)
- Small Game Freshwater Fishing licenses – 27% increase
- Non-resident licenses –down less than 1%
- NR Small Game Hunting - up 13%
- NR 7 Day Small Game – up 25%
- NR Freshwater Fishing – up 17%
- NR 3 day Freshwater Fishing – up 19%
- NR 1 day Freshwater Fishing – up 12%
- Permit category – down \$28,000
- Lifetime License category – up \$25,500

WILDLIFE

PROPOSED Rule- 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 2, Chapter 5 – Alligator

Larry Castle, Director of Technical Programs, presented the following proposed alligator rule changes for the 2017 Alligator Hunting Season on public waters and private lands in Mississippi on behalf of

Ricky Flynt, Alligator Program Coordinator. A press release will be issued to notify the public of the changes to the application process and a 30-day comment period will follow for the public to respond.

Summary of Alligator Application Process - As proposed, a total of 920 permits will be available within seven hunting zones across the state for the 10-day season, August 25 – September 4, 2017. The process for issuing permits will change to an electronic application process followed by a random drawing of applicants conducted by an outside third party who will have no connection to names of applicants, only customer ID numbers will be used. Drawn applicants will be notified by email from the third party with a link to purchase their permit (\$200) within a limited amount of time. Upon the purchase deadline, any unpurchased permits from the first drawing will be entered into a second drawing of available applicants. Drawn applicants from the second drawing will also be notified by email with a link to purchase their permit within a limited amount of time. Applications will be accepted for one week beginning June 1.

Eligibility Requirements - To be eligible to apply for an alligator hunting permit you must be a resident of Mississippi, at least 16 years of age at the time of application. Applications will be free, but electronic processing fees will be required. Applicants may only apply in one alligator hunting zone of their choice. Applications will be accepted on-line or at any point of sale location where Mississippi hunting and fishing licenses are sold. Applicants must have one of the following licenses to be eligible to apply: a valid Mississippi Sportsman License, All-Game Hunting/Fishing License, Small Game Hunting/Fishing License, Apprentice Sportsman License, Apprentice All Game License, Apprentice Small Game License, Senior Exempt License, Disabled Exempt License, or Lifetime License.

The statewide public waters season will include opportunities in specific public waterways.

A private lands alligator hunting season will be available to landowners whose properties meet specific qualifications within 33 open counties. Two new counties, Coahoma and Tallahatchie, were added for the private lands season for 2017, Applications and instructions for private lands permits are available online. Applications are accepted in June and must be submitted by July 1.

Specific language changes to the rules are detailed below:

- **Rule 5.1 – Alligator General Regulations**

1. Damaged or broken Temporary Alligator Possession Tag(s) (TAPT) will no longer be replaced by the department.

- **Rule 5.2 – Private Lands Alligator Season**

1. Season opens 12 noon August 25 and ends 6 a.m. September 18, 2017
2. Coahoma and Tallahatchie Counties are added to the open counties list (33 counties)
3. A properly signed voucher showing property and property owner's name must be in possession while hunting on private land.
4. It is illegal to leave an alligator in the possession of a person/buyer in another state without the federal CITIES tag.

5. Language added which clarified which weapons are considered "bowfishing equipment." This language is added to insure that "air-bows/air-rifles" are not mistaken as legal equipment.

Rule 5.3 – Public Waters Alligator Season

1. Season opens 12 noon August 25 and ends 12 noon September 4 (Labor Day), 2017
2. Removed the First-Come, First-Serve permit purchase process
3. Applicants are required to provide an email address and winners will be notified via email.
4. Language added which clarified which weapons are considered "bowfishing equipment." This language is added to insure that "air-bows/air-rifles" are not mistaken as legal equipment.
5. It is illegal to leave an alligator in the possession of a person/buyer in another state without the federal CITIES tag.
6. Permit cost increased from \$150 to \$200, as requested by the Commission. This is consistent with the maximum permit cost allowance as stated in MS CODE 49-7-47.

ACTION: By motion of Commissioner Wagner and seconded by Commissioner Cossar, the Commission unanimously approved PROPOSED Alligator Rules 5.1, 5.2, and 5.3.

Mississippi Comprehensive Wild Turkey Management Plan

A draft of the "Mississippi Comprehensive Wild Turkey Management Plan" was distributed to the Commission at the February 13, 2017 Commission Meeting for review. Castle distributed another copy to the Commission stating that no changes or comments had been made and requested Commission approval.

ACTION: By motion of Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, the Commission unanimously approved the Mississippi Comprehensive Wild Turkey Management Plan as presented.

Deer Seasons and Bag Limits

ACTION: By motion of Commissioner Cossar, seconded by Commissioner Wagner, and unanimously approved by the Commission, the "Deer Season and Bag Limits" presentation was tabled for consideration under OTHER BUSINESS.

FISHERIES

Larry Pugh, Director of Fisheries Bureau, presented the following proposed rule changes. A press release will be issued with the proposed changes and the public will have a 30-day comment period.

PROPOSED Rule- 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 3, Chapter 1 – General Fisheries**• Rule 1.3 – Regulations regarding Sport Fishing**

1. Allow license holders' MDWFP numbers to be used on Yo-Yos and FFFDs; exempt anglers will still provide address (requested by public; same as Commercial gear requirement)
2. Clarified names of locks on Tenn-Tom Waterway (USACE request)
3. Clarified language regarding use of artificial lures in spillways; treble hooks cannot be larger than #2
4. Clarified gear used to capture shad and minnows in spillways per Statute and Rule
5. Legal fish caught in these spillways must be placed on ice or in dry bucket immediately – will help prevent the spread of Asian Carp
6. Added freshwater shrimp for commercial license requirement; freshwater crawfish were already listed
7. Included tagging requirement for exempt anglers for traps; licensed anglers already had to provide MDWFP number
8. Clarification – No limit on the number of crawfish and shrimp traps a person may fish
9. Cannot take fish, crawfish, or shrimp from Sportfishing gear without owners consent; added crawfish and shrimp
10. Cannot set gear more than halfway across body of water (see Commercial Rule)

• Rule 1.4 – Statewide Creel Limits

1. Added language to clarify statewide creel limits
2. Established length limits and creel limits to reopen Lake Monroe
3. Removed length and creel limit for bass at Lake Tom Bailey
4. Added species headings and language for clarification and consistency

PROPOSED Rule- 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 3, Chapter 2 – State Fishing Lakes and Community Fishing Assistance Program Lakes**• Rule 2.1 – Regulations regarding State Fishing Lakes**

1. Set dates to reopen Lake Monroe:
Youth Day – Saturday, June 3 (7 a.m. to 3 p.m.)
General public – Wednesday, June 7 (6 a.m.)

• Rule 2.2 – Regulations regarding Community Fishing Assistance Program Lakes

1. Olive Branch City Park Ponds – added daily bag limits for bream and crappie – increased fishing effort and harvest are extremely high; crappie are stocked by hatchery and quality bream are absent
2. McMillan Park Pond (Carthage) – increased creel limit from 0 to 2 bass/day – bass population structure would benefit from increased harvest
3. Bear Pen Park Lake (Cleveland) – new participant in program

ACTION: By motion of Commissioner Wagner and seconded by Commissioner Cossar, the Commission unanimously approved changes to Fisheries' Rules 1.3, 1.4, 2.1, and 2.2 as presented.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Update

Colonel Steve Adcock, Chief of Law Enforcement, presented a handout which highlighted citations, shooting range attendance at Turcotte and McHenry, McIvor shooting range construction, and officers working details at public events, turkey baiting patrols, drowning at Moon Lake, and Hunter Education classes. A handout disclosing hunting related incident investigations for the current year was also distributed for Commission review.

License Reinstatement Requests

Colonel Adcock presented the following two license reinstatement requests. Both violators had taken their Hunter Education classes and paid their fines. Adcock asked that each come forward and state the circumstances of their arrest before the Commission. Following each statement a motion was made by the Commission.

- *Joshua Hardin, Bogue Chitto, MS*

Hardin was arrested a couple of years ago. He was headlighting with a couple of friends. They killed one deer. The landowner got his tag number and reported them. The officer was waiting for them at home. It cost him \$2,600 in fines. He said it was the worst thing he had ever done and would never do it again. Col. Adcock recommended reinstatement.

MOTION: By motion of Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, Hardin's license was reinstated by unanimous consent.

- *Anthony Perrigin, Columbus, MS*

Perrigin was arrested for headlighting deer and hunting on a public road. He paid \$3,500 in fines. The landowner caught him and called the game warden. He killed one deer and shot at another. He knew it was wrong and will not do it again.

MOTION: Upon motion of Commissioner Cossar and seconded by Commissioner Wagner, the Commission unanimously voted to approve reinstatement of Perrigin's license.

OTHER BUSINESS

Deer Season and Bag Limit Recommendations

Larry Castle's PowerPoint presentation recognized that harvest data from DMAP clubs across Mississippi have not yet been analyzed, but initial reports suggest that total harvest has decreased while the antler quality continues to increase. Mississippi hunters continue to lead the nation in the percent of 3.5 years and older bucks in the harvest. Lower harvest rates in some geographically specific areas could possibly be due to antlerless hunting and/or blue-tongue disease which was higher

in 2016 than in the past three years. Predators, like coyotes and wild hogs, could also contribute to a lower harvest.

Deer observations made by sportsmen, landowners, and MDWFP biologists during the 2016-17 season indicated a below average deer movement. Contributing factors of a late summer/early fall drought which left poor food plot conditions and above average temperatures made movement of deer less than desired. Supplemental feeding and exceptional acorn production also altered "normal" deer movement with food readily available. Feeders make deer more nocturnal and they feed only at night, so hunters do not see them during the day. The public think that because they cannot see the deer that they are not there. HILL and SOUTHEAST zones submitted the most complaints concerning the lack of deer in their area. We want the public to know that we are listening to them.

The Wildlife Bureau staff formulated the following tentative recommendations for the Commission to consider during the next month before setting the 2017-18 Deer Seasons and Bag Limits:

- Continue antlerless opportunity in archery seasons (limited harvest)
- Continue antlerless opportunity for youth (limited harvest – pro-youth)
- Reduce bag limit to 3 bucks and 3 does on private and open public lands in all zones
- Legal antlered bucks are adequately protected in all zones due to zone antler beam length and spread restrictions

Our goal is to offer the maximum recreational opportunities for the hunting community while upholding the best management practices for the resource.

No action was taken by the Commission.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Next Commission meeting date was set for Wednesday, April 19, 2017 at the Jackson Office located at 1505 Eastover Drive. The Educational Session will begin at 11 a.m. and the Business Session at 1 p.m.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

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

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Commission, Chairman Deviney gave the meeting into adjournment.



Billy Deviney, CHAIRMAN



Date



Clay Wagner, VICE CHAIRMAN



Date