

# MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Thursday, May 16th, 2024

10:00 AM Business Session

MDWFP Headquarters  
1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211

**PRESENT:** Commission Chairman Bill Cossar, Vice-Chairman Scott Coopwood, Commissioners William Mounger and Gary Rhoads.

Among the MDWFP staff attending were Lynn Posey, Executive Director; Curtis Thornhill, Deputy Executive Director; Larry Pugh, Deputy Director; Brian Ferguson, MS State Parks Chief of Staff; Andre Hollis, Director, MS State Parks; Colonel Jerry Carter, Chief of Law Enforcement; Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff; Jason Thompson, Director of Administrative Services; Doug Mann, Staff Attorney; and Drew Malone, MDWFP General Counsel, and Clark Gordin, Executive Director of the MWFP Foundation.

## OPENING PRAYER

Mr. Jason Thompson, Administrative Services Director, opened the meeting with prayer.

## MINUTES

**ACTION:** Upon motion by Vice-Chairman Coopwood and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the Commission meeting minutes of March 21<sup>st</sup> and April 25<sup>th</sup> were unanimously approved.

## AGENDA

Director Posey stated that there would be five public comments and there would be no need for an Executive Session. He said a date change for the next Commission meeting would be discussed at the end of the meeting.

**ACTION:** Upon motion by Commissioner Coopwood and seconded by Commissioner Rhoads, the Commission unanimously approved the meeting agenda for May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

## PUBLIC COMMENTS

- **Ron Seiss**

Mr. Seiss discussed the agency's previous fall turkey season regulations and addressed any past misconceptions prior to its suspension. He also discussed a more conservative and restrictive fall season for the Commission's consideration. He distributed a handout with these proposals which are appended to the meeting minutes. Discussion followed.

- **Todd Williams**

Mr. Williams addressed the Commission on the rising turkey population in MS and acknowledged MDWFP's Adam Butler for his excellent work. Mr. Williams asked the Commission to consider reopening the fall turkey season on public lands and restrict the harvest to be males-only. He provided an outline of details to the Commission of his efforts to improve habitat for turkeys at his home near the Homochitto National Forest.

- **Robert Varner**

Mr. Varner, a landowner with property adjoining the Tombigbee National Forest, stated that he was having a recurring problem with hunting dogs trespassing onto his property. He distributed photos to the Commission taken on his land during and after dog deer hunting season had closed. He expressed his frustration that there are no laws for dog trespassing, only for humans and livestock, and asked the Commission to consider penalties for dog trespassing. He stated that the situation had gotten so bad that he no longer deer hunts on his own property. Discussion followed.

- **John Overby**

Mr. Overby spoke on his support of the dog deer hunting season and acknowledged guests who came to support him. He stated that there are currently 39 days for deer hunting with dogs statewide, except for that of Delta National Forest (managed by Sunflower WMA), which only has 25 days due to the closing of the "Thanksgiving Season," (November 18<sup>th</sup> – December 1<sup>st</sup>). Mr. Overby asked the Commission to consider a change in the regulations to Sunflower WMA to allow dog deer hunters to hunt during that time.

- **Senator Mike Seymour**

Senator Seymour addressed the Commission through the following points:

- Requested clarification on Wildlife Rule 1.1 – Creating USFS Public Use Areas.
- Requested clarification on regulations for the Pascagoula River WMA and "The Land Between the Creeks," since some members of that community are excluded from draw hunts.
- Asked the Commission why some WMAs restrict the use of buckshot, since it is safer when firing through dense underbrush present in many of these areas.
- Expressed concern for Sunflower WMA's regulations to prevent depletion of deer populations.
- Said he would like to see the dog deer season on Sunflower WMA reinstated to 39 days currently in place statewide.
- Asked the Commission to reconsider the current restrictions on hunting wild hogs with dogs, which he said can cause an agriculture issue.
- Requested a link to the MS Secretary of State's website for the list of proposed regulations to assist with calls he receives from the public.
- Asked the Commission to address with the USFS the overgrowth of pine trees, which he said interferes with sources of food for agriculture and wildlife.
- Stated that he works every year to ensure MDWFP has sufficient funding for law enforcement and believes there should be more of a give and take relationship between hunters and officers.

Chairman Cossar asked for clarification on the issue of hunting wild hogs with dogs. Director Posey said the act of running dogs can often scatter hogs and interfere with trapping. Mr.

Walsh stated that the wild hog hunting restrictions were put in place a couple of years ago on land owned by the Army Corps of Engineers.

- **Ashley E. Smith**

Ms. Smith addressed the Commission on the fall turkey season and supports MDWFP biologists' recommendations. Ms. Smith, a hunter in Jefferson County, MS, said she had concerns with Mr. Seiss' recommendations, including his proposed fall season only available to private landowners (on WMA's), and that fall season dates would not be published on the MDWFP website. Ms. Smith said she agreed with Mr. Seiss' other fall season recommendations but believes equal access should be available to all fall turkey hunters.

### AIMS

Mr. Clark Gordin, MWFP Foundation Executive Director, updated the Commission on the Archery in Mississippi Schools (AIMS) program, part of National Archery in Schools (NAS). The legacy program, begun around 2007 in just five schools by the late Waldo Cleland, is open to male and female students in grades 4-12. As of 2024, AIMS has grown to include 250 schools with a South Tournament in Hattiesburg, a North Tournament in Starkville, (both held in March), and the State Championship at the MS Trade Mart in Jackson in April, which drew over 6,200 student archers and over 10,000 spectators.

Mr. Gordin stated that AIMS has several permanently disabled students who participate in wheelchairs. In 2024, MS had the second largest target set-up (84 targets) in the nation and had 144 All-Star students.

Mr. Gordin announced the MWFP Foundation has provided \$10,000 in scholarships, (matched by NAS) and has paid \$6,000 for AIMS trophies and T-shirts. In addition to funding AIMS, the MWFP Foundation has purchased an emergency response trailer for law enforcement (totaling \$177,900) and bullet-proof vests (totaling \$79,469) over the past year, mostly from money generated from tournament gate fees. Mr. Gordin said that Mississippi College, Blue Mountain College, and William Carey University recruit archery scholarships at AIMS tournaments.

Chairman Cossar thanked Mr. Gordin for his presentation and expressed his appreciation for such a program available to potential MS hunters.

Commissioner Mounger asked about the MWFP Foundation's relationship to MDWFP regarding the funding of projects. Mr. Gordin answered that the MWFP Foundation exists to benefit the MDWFP.

### LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, License/Boat Registration Division Director, presented the License Sales Report for the month of April 2024. The total revenue for the end of April was \$19.4 million—up 2% (\$461,000) from last year. The total number of license and permit sales are down 4%, which is 17,734 less sold than last year.

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident License Sales – down less than 1%

- Resident WMA Permits – \$13,000 in sales
- Three-Day Fresh Water Fishing Licenses – up 15%
- Freshwater Fishing Guides –104 sold - 92 RES; 12 NR. Total revenue = \$2,725
- Freshwater Fishing Licenses – 3-day was up 13%; 1-day up 12%
- Annual Freshwater Fishing Licenses – up \$11,000
- Non-resident license sales – up 4% (\$474,000)
- Permits – up 4%
- Lifetime Licenses – up 4%
- License Packages sold – up 31,796 vs. 30,302 last year
- April Autorenewals – \$1,878 vs. \$1,618 last year

## WILDLIFE

### PROPOSED – 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 2, Chapter 2 – White-tailed Deer

William McKinley, Enclosure Program Coordinator/Deer Program, recommended the following changes to Rule 2.2:

#### ▪ Rule 2.2 – White-tailed Deer Hunting Seasons and Bag Limits

##### Velvet Season

- Will be consecutive Friday, Saturday, and Sunday between September 10-20 on private lands, authorized state and federal land, and specified Wildlife Management Areas. Dates for 2024 shall be September 13-15.
- All hunters (unless exempt or have a lifetime license, must possess a valid Velvet Season Permit. The cost of the resident permit shall be ten dollars (\$10).

##### Bag Limits

- Southeast Deer Management Unit, including Desoto National Forest: Bag Limit on antlerless deer is one (1) per day, not to exceed three (3) per annual season.
- Antlerless deer are defined as any female deer and any male deer without hardened antler above the hairline. Spotted fawns are not to be killed.

##### HB 526

- All deer hunters must wear 500 square inches of solid unbroken fluorescent orange or pink while this special hunt is in effect.
- Archery hunters must wear 500 square inches of solid unbroken fluorescent orange or pink while these special hunts are in effect, except when the hunter is in a fully enclosed deer stand/blind or hunting from a deer stand that is elevated twelve (12) feet or more above the ground. During these special hunts, archery hunters must wear 500 square inches of solid unbroken fluorescent orange or pink while traveling to and from the stand/blind.

**ACTION: Commissioner Mounger moved to approve staff recommendations on PROPOSED Rule 2.2, seconded by Commissioner Rhoads, and the motion carried.**

**PROPOSED – 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 2, Chapter 3 - Turkey**

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Chief of Staff, made the following recommendations for changes to Rules 3.1 and 3.4.

**▪ Rule 3.1 – Wild Turkey Seasons and Bag Limits****Guests**

- Drawn non-resident hunters may be accompanied by one licensed guest, aged 16 years or older. This guest is not allowed to harvest a turkey.
- During the Non-Resident Draw Hunt, one youth aged 15 years old or younger may accompany or hunt with the permitted adult hunter. The adult and youth combined harvest shall not exceed the permit bag limit.

**Non-Resident Youth**

- A licensed non-resident must be drawn in the non-resident public lands draw in order to supervise a youth on open lands or WMAs during the youth season.

**ACTION: Commissioner Mounger moved to approve staff recommendations on PROPOSED Rule 3.1, seconded by Commissioner Coopwood, and the motion carried.**

**▪ Rule 3.4 – Mandatory Tagging and Harvest Reporting for Wild Turkeys**

- When hunting spring turkey, all hunters, regardless of license exemption status, shall obtain a valid turkey harvest tag issued by the MDWFP. This requirement will be enacted during the 2026 spring turkey hunting season.
- Only harvest tags issued by the MDWFP shall be valid. The harvest tag may take a physical or electronic form.
- Before moving a turkey from the point of harvest, hunters must invalidate the turkey harvest tag via a methodology approved by the MDWFP.
- Hunters utilizing physical harvest tags must attach the invalidated tag to the bird's leg before moving the carcass from the location of harvest; these must remain attached until the bird is processed.

**ACTION: Commissioner Mounger moved to approve staff recommendations on PROPOSED Rule 3.4, seconded by Vice-Chairman Coopwood, and the motion carried.**

**▪ Rule 4.1 – Squirrel**

- **Fall Season** – October 1 to February 28  
Bag Limit – 10 per day
- **Spring Season** – May 15 to June 13, 2024  
Bag Limit – 10 per day

**Youth Squirrel Hunts** – (On private lands and authorized state and federal lands only in those areas open for squirrel hunting).

Season – September 24 – 30

Bag Limit – 10 per day

**ACTION: Commissioner Mounger moved to approve staff recommendations on PROPOSED Rule 4.1, seconded by Commissioner Coopwood and the motion carried.**

▪ **Rule 8.3 – Inherently Dangerous Animals Rule 8.3**

**Exhibitor Permits**

- Change name from “Temporary Exhibitor Permits” to “Exhibitor Permits” to cover facilities that are not included in other categories.

**ACTION: Commissioner Mounger moved to approve staff recommendations on PROPOSED Rule 8.3, seconded by Vice-Chairman Coopwood, and the motion carried.**

**PROPOSED – 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 2, Chapter 1 – Wildlife Management Areas**

Mr. Walsh made the following recommendations for changes to Rules 1.1 – 1.47. He clarified that the proposed regulations would streamline public use area regulations and would not affect the running of dogs after dog deer season, hog hunting, or nuisance animal regulations on WMAs.

▪ **Rules 1.1 – 1.47 – WMA Regulations**

1. **BASIC REGULATIONS – Rule 1.1**

- Creating USFS Public Use Areas
- Littering – Shotgun shells.
- Fluorescent pink – HB526
- Guests – Guests on permitted hunt must be licensed

**ACTION: Commissioner Mounger moved to approve staff recommendations on PROPOSED Rules 1.1 – 1.47, seconded by Vice-Chairman Coopwood, and the motion carried.**

2. **CAMPING**

*Pascagoula River WMA – Rule 1.18*

- Allow camping on Land Between the Creeks Unit

3. **CWD**

*Little Biloxi WMA – Rule 1.2*

- Antlerless deer heads must be submitted for sampling

*O’Keefe WMA – Rule 1.16*

- Antlerless Deer heads must be submitted for sampling

*Canemount WMA – Rule 1.43*

- Antlerless deer heads must be submitted for sampling

4. **DEER**

*Pascagoula (LBTC) WMA – Rule 1.18*

- Change archery to permitted gun hunts

Cossar SP WMA – Rule 1.45

- Senior adult hunts

**5. DEVINEY WMA**

Deviney WMA – Rule 1.41

- Lyons Tract – Deer and small game

**6. HIGH WATER**

Mahannah WMA – Rule 1.12

- Allow small game hunting during high water

**7. LANGUAGE CLARIFICATION**

Little Biloxi and Old River WMAs – Rules 1.2 and 1.17

- Clarification that buckshot is not allowed

Canal and Divide Section WMA – Rules 1.7 & 1.9

- Clarification that hog dog hunting is not allowed

Marion County WMA – Rule 1.14

- Combine Dillon Creek Unit with rest of the WMA

**8. MIGRATORY BIRD REGULATIONS**

Divide Section WMA – Rule 1.9

- No entry prior to 1 p.m. Field limit is 35 hunters (dove season)

Mahannah WMA – Rule 1.12

- Clarify migratory bird hunt days and locations

Black Prairie and Deviney WMAs – Rules 1.28 & 1.41

- Opening day for adults will be permit-only (dove season)

**9. SMALL GAME**

Pascagoula River WMA – Rule 1.18

- Allow squirrel dogs on the Land Between the Creeks Unit

Charles Ray Nix WMA – Rule 1.36

- First Monday in November through 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in February

**10. TURKEY**

Mahannah, Shipland, Sunflower, Twin Oaks, and Phil Bryant WMA – Rules 1.12, 1.21, 1.23, 1.24, 1.46

- Allow permitted turkey season

Theodore Mars WMA – Rule 1.39

- Allow youth turkey hunting

**11. WATERFOWL**

Mahannah WMA – Rule 1.12

- Change teal hunts to permitted hunts

O'Keefe WMA – Rule 1.16

- Same as statewide seasons for waterfowl

Sunflower WMA – Rule 1.23

- Close waterfowl hunting in greentree reservoirs at 12:00 noon

Tuscumbia WMA – Rule 1.32

- Allow teal hunting in Unit 2

Multiple WMAs that offer waterfowl hunting

- Clarify the Veterans/Active Military language

**ACTION:** Upon motion made by Commissioner Rhoads and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the Commission approved PROPOSED Regulations (Rules 1.8 - 1.32), as recommended by staff.

### FISHERIES

Jerry Brown, Director of Fisheries, presented PROPOSED changes to Rules 1.4 and 2.1.

#### PROPOSED 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 3, Chapter 1 – General Fisheries Rules

- **Rule 1.4 – Statewide Creel Limits**

- Add limits for Elvis Presley Lake and Holmes Co. State Park
  - Largemouth Bass: 16-22” slot limit with 1 over 22”; 10 per day
  - Bream: 50 per day
  - Crappie: 20 per day
- Grenada, Enid, Sardis, and Arkabutla Lakes
  - Crappie
    - Reduce creel limit from 15 to 10 per day
    - Reduce boat limit from 40 to 25 (for boats with 3 or more anglers)
- Reduce pole limit from 4 to 3 per person
- Add that fish may only be cleaned at designated fish cleaning stations if available, not on the water or in the parking lot
- Lake Washington
  - Reduce crappie creel limit from 30 to 20 per day

**ACTION:** Upon motion made by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Vice-Chairman Coopwood, the Commission unanimously approved PROPOSED Fisheries Rule 1.4, as recommended by staff.

- **Rule 2.1 – Regulations Regarding State Fishing Lakes**

- Removed permits and language that no longer apply (i.e. cabin rules)
- Remove bow fishing at night on State Fishing Lakes and State Park Lakes
- Remove that Elvis Presley Lake and Holmes County SP are closed
  - Add opening dates for Elvis Presley Lake (May 18/2)
- Add that the use of metal detectors and magnet fishing on lake property is prohibited



**ACTION: Upon motion made by Commissioner Rhoads and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the Commission unanimously approved PROPOSED Fisheries Rule 2.1, as recommended by staff.**

## LAW ENFORCEMENT

### Law Enforcement Update

Colonel Jerry Carter, Chief of Law Enforcement, reported 592 citations issued for the month of May. No Resident License was reported as number one at 157; followed by Trespassing at 53; PFD Violations at 31; No Boat Registration at 28; and Unlawful Possession at 22.

Colonel Carter reported a case made in Newton County in May in which officers seized guns and turkey parts following a trespassing investigation, and a case in Warren County regarding the removal of seven (7) four-foot nuisance alligators from a property. He also briefed the Commission on Officer Speights' speaking to a youth group of more than 200 in Pontotoc County about endangered species.

Shooting range customer counts for 3/11/24 to 5/5/24 were McIvor – 789; Turcotte – 633; and McHenry – 857. Colonel Carter compared these numbers to that of 2023.

### License Reinstatement

Colonel Carter informed the Commission of one license reinstatement request for Anthony Washington of Jackson MS, who had a violation date of 11/24/22 in Madison County.

Mr. Washington addressed the Commission on details of his arrest, which included the illegal harvest of a deer after hours underneath an overhead light. He stated he had paid more than \$2,400 in fines and the reinstatement fee, and that he had completed the hunter education course. He expressed his regret for the violation.

**ACTION: Upon motion made by Vice-Chairman Coopwood and seconded by Commissioner Rhoads, the Commission unanimously approved to reinstate Mr. Washington's hunting license.**

## OTHER BUSINESS

Executive Director Posey informed the Commission and public of projects nearing completion for MS State Parks, as requested by Lieutenant Governor Delbert Hosemann. These include:

- Tishomingo State Park – Renovated 24 RV sites.
- Buccaneer State Park – Renovated 44 RV sites, installed a splash pad, and completed a WIFI installation process throughout the park.
- Natchez State Park – Renovated 10 cabins.
- Percy Quin State Park – Renovated 9 cabins and 102 RV sites.
- Roosevelt State Park – Renovated 13 cabins and 52 RV sites.
- Clarkco State Park – Renovated 6 cabins.
- Paul B. Johnson State Park – Renovated 16 cabins and 65 RV sites.
- LeFleur's Bluff State Park – Completed construction on a Concessions Building.

Mr. Posey also announced that water and infrastructure projects had been added at Percy Quin, Clarkco, Roosevelt, and Paul B. Johnson State Parks, as well as Lake Lincoln. Upcoming projects include cabin additions and upgrades at the hotel at Wall Doxey State Park and cabin renovations at JP Coleman and Percy Quin. He said tiny homes will be added at a few State Parks, with other-day use amenities.

Mr. Posey thanked the Legislators who have been a part of MS State Parks Renovation Project, providing over \$65 million in funding over the past four years, of which MDWFP has been able to match over \$13 million. He said MDWFP is well on its way to getting the MS State Parks system rebuilt.

Mr. Posey announced an official vacancy for the MDWFP Commission, and that Governor Reeves' staff has assured the agency that they are working diligently to fill the position.

Commissioner Mounger stated a quorum was met for the May 23<sup>rd</sup> Commission meeting.

**NEXT MEETING DATE**

Date: Wednesday, June 19th, 2024  
Location: 1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211  
Time: 1:00 PM

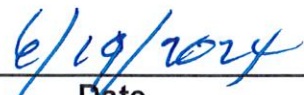
**EXECUTIVE SESSION**

There was no Executive Session.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the Commission, Commissioner Rhoads moved to adjourn, seconded by Commissioner Mounger, and the motion carried. The meeting was adjourned.

  
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Bill Cossar, CHAIRMAN

  
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Date

  
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Scott Coopwood, VICE CHAIRMAN

  
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Date