

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Thursday, June 19, 2024
1:00 PM Business Session
MDWFP Headquarters
1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211

BUSINESS SESSION MINUTES **(There was no Education Session this month)**

PRESENT: Chairman Bill F. Cossar and Commissioners Scott Coopwood, William Mounger II, and Gary Rhoads.

Among the MDWFP staff attending were Executive Director Lynn Posey, Larry Pugh, Curtis Thornhill, Brian Ferguson, Lt. Col. Scottie Jones, Russ Walsh, Amy Blaylock, Jerry Brown, Jason Thompson, Andre' Hollis, Doug Mann, and Drew Malone, General Counsel.

The Chairman gaveled the meeting into order and welcomed guests, both those watching the live stream video and those attending in person. The Chairman recognized Colonel Carter for remarks regarding the conduct of the meeting due to the large number of persons in attendance. Colonel Carter asked those present to excuse themselves via the back doors should they wish to converse among themselves about topics to be discussed at the meeting.

Chairman Cossar then recognized Executive Director Posey for the purpose of recognizing special guests.

OPENING PRAYER

Chairman Cossar requested that Jason Thompson, Director of Administrative Services, open the meeting with prayer.

MINUTES

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Mounger and seconded by Commissioner Coopwood, the Commission meeting minutes of May 16, 2024, were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

The Chairman asked Executive Director Posey if there needed to be any changes in the agenda. Mr. Posey stated that there would not be a need for an Executive Session. Mr. Posey went on to add that several rule changes that had been proposed at the May meeting would be coming up for final adoption. Chief among those is Rule 1.1 of the Wildlife Management Area Regulations. The proposed version of that rule contained several changes that would apply to US Forest Service lands. Mr. Posey noted that there had been numerous comments received via the website and calls regarding some of those proposed changes. So much so, that staff

and counsel had suggested the proposed changes be withdrawn, reinstating the former version of the rule, and doing further research and discussion with the Forest Service before making any other changes. Therefore, the version of Rule 1.1 that had been proposed in May was being withdrawn and the former version would be presented for final adoption.

That being the case, Mr. Posey asked that any persons who were in attendance only to express opposition to the changes to Rule 1.1 proposed last month, please reconsider the need to comment in light of the decision to withdraw those changes.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Rhoads and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the Commission unanimously approved the meeting agenda of June 19, 2024.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Todd Williams – Mr. Williams had questions and comments regarding supplemental feeding and a possible fall Turkey Season. The Commission noted that there would be no Fall turkey season as decided in a prior meeting, and that there would be no changes to the supplemental feeding regulations unless the area in question had been placed in a CWD management zone.

Danny Manseill – Mr. Manseill appeared to ask the Commission whether or not they were going to allow hunting deer with the aid of dogs at the Sunflower WMA over the Thanksgiving weekend this coming year. Staff responded that the Thanksgiving opportunity had not been offered at Sunflower for many years and there were no plans at present to make that change.

David Smith, President, Mississippi Hunting Dog Association – Mr. Smith wanted to address an incident that occurred during a recent fox hound trial where some of the dogs went off course to run a deer and ended up swimming in a lake. Apparently, the incident was videotaped and there was concern it would hit social media with negative commentary on running dogs and hunting. The Chairman thanked Mr. Smith for letting the Commission and Department know.

Elizabeth Swoope – Ms. Swoope resides in the Homochitto National Forest. She urged the Commission to reconsider withdrawing the proposed version of Rule 1.1.

Ronald Varner – Mr. Varner also expressed his displeasure that Rule 1.1, as proposed, was being withdrawn. Mr. Varner owns property adjacent to the Tombigbee National Forest and was in support of the rules regarding firearm safety on the Forest Service Roads.

Daniel Trotter – Mr. Trotter commented on the need to have additional days to hunt deer with dogs on the Sunflower WMA over Thanksgiving Weekend. Additionally, he thinks there should be more opportunities to run dogs for hogs on WMAs and to trap hogs on WMAs. Mr. Trotter believes this will help recruit new hunters among our youth.

Senator Joseph M. "Mike" Seymour – Senator Seymour raised several questions about the Constitutionality of several provisions of Rule 1.1 as it had been proposed the previous month.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, Director of Administrative Services, presented the License Sales Report for the month of May 2024. The total revenue for the end of May was up 5% (\$969,000) compared to May 2023.

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident license sales – down \$65,000
- RES WMA User Permit – up 1%
- RES Senior Exempt – down 5%
- Non-resident license sales – up 4% (\$478,000)
- NR All Game – down \$274,500
- NR Small Game Hunting Annual – down 8%
- NR 7-day Small Game – up 1%
- NR WMA User – down 4%
- NR Freshwater Fishing – up \$7,000
- Other Licenses – up 4%
- Lifetime License category – up 2%

The sale of license packages are up 2,117 from last year.

WILDLIFE

40 Miss. Admin. Code, Chapter 1 (Compilation) WMA Rules 1.1 through 1.47 FINAL

As mentioned above, Russ Walsh, Chief of the wildlife Bureau, presented the WMA Regulations for adoption as FINAL rules, WITH CHANGES. More specifically, Rule 1.1 has had references to US Forest Service “public use areas,” removed. Other changes over the various WMAs were for technical, typographical or other changes due to the 2024-25 calendar or similar reasons.

Discussion followed.

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger made a motion to approve the WMA rules and regulations as FINAL rules, per staff recommendation. Commissioner Coopwood seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

40 Miss. Admin. Code, Part 2, Rule 2.2 White-tailed Deer Hunting Seasons and Bag Limits FINAL.

Mr. Walsh presented the 2024-25 rule setting white-tailed deer hunting seasons and bag limits for adoption as a FINAL rule. No comments had been received from the public on the proposed rule; therefore, the rule was being presented as a Final Rule with NO changes. There was no discussion and the Chairman called for a motion.

ACTION: Commissioner Coopwood made a motion to approve the 2024-25 White-tailed Deer Hunting Seasons and Bag Limits rule as a Final Rule with NO changes. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

40 Miss. Admin. Code, Part 2, Rule 3.1 Wild Turkey Seasons and Bag Limits FINAL.

Russ Walsh next presented the Wild Turkey Seasons and Bag limits rule, Rule 3.1 for adoption as a Final Rule. Again, staff had received no comments on the proposed rule, so the rule was being presented as a Final Rule with NO changes.

ACTION: Commissioner Rhoads made a motion to approve the 2024-25 Wild Turkey Seasons and Bag Limits rule as a Final Rule with NO changes. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

40 Miss. Admin. Code, Part 2, Rule 4.1 Small Game Hunting and Trapping Seasons and Bag Limits FINAL.

Next, Mr. Walsh presented the 2024-25 Small Game Hunting and Trapping Seasons and Bag Limits rule for adoption as a FINAL rule WITH changes. Numerous public comments regarding the proposed version of this rule had been received regarding increasing the bag limit for squirrels; therefore, staff recommended we return to the lower bag limit in the previous version of this rule.

ACTION: Commissioner Rhoads made a motion to approve the 2024-25 Small Game Hunting and Trapping Seasons and Bag Limits rule as a Final Rule WITH changes as recommended by staff. Commissioner Mounger seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

40 Miss. Admin. Code, Part 2, Rule 8.3 Regulations for Animals Inherently Dangerous to Humans FINAL.

Rounding out the Bureau's presentations for the day, Mr. Walsh offered the Regulations for Animals Inherently Dangerous to Humans as a FINAL rule with NO changes. As stated previously, the changes to this rule were being made to conform to new Federal statutory and rule changes.

ACTION: Commissioner Coopwood made a motion to approve the Regulations for Animals Inherently Dangerous to Humans rule as a FINAL rule with NO changes from the proposed version. Commissioner Rhoads seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

FISHERIES

FINAL – 40 Miss. Admin. Code Part 3, Rule 1.4 Statewide Creel Limits.

Jerry Brown, Director of Fisheries, presented the Statewide Creel Limits rule for adoption as a FINAL rule WITH changes from the proposed version. Based upon public comments, staff decided to return to the number of poles per boat at the four (4) USACE reservoirs to the prior version of the rule (4 poles per boat). Discussion followed regarding data received and impact on the resource of new technology.

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger made a motion to approve the 2024-25 Statewide Creel Limits rule as a Final Rule WITH changes. Commissioner Coopwood seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

40 Miss. Admin. Code, Part 3, Rule 2.1, Regulations Regarding State Fishing Lakes FINAL.

Mr. Brown next presented the Regulations Regarding State Fishing Lakes as a FINAL rule for adoption, with NO changes from the proposed version.

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger made a motion to approve the Regulations Regarding State Fishing Lakes as a Final Rule with NO changes. Commissioner Coopwood seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law Enforcement Update

Colonel Jerry Carter, Chief of Law Enforcement, reported that during the month of May, 2024, 901 citations were issued with "No Resident License" being number one (178), "No Personal Floatation Device" was number two (137), and "No Boat Registration" was third (110).

The Memorial Day Weekend report for May was reviewed. Officers engaged numerous boats during that time. Officers issued 10 BUI citations.

Shooting range customer counts:

Mclvor – 541; Turcotte – 562 and McHenry – 831.

Col. Carter also gave a brief update on newly recruited conservation officer cadets and the beginning of training. The Chairman noted that he had visited the class during training at MCOTA and how impressed he was with them.

OTHER BUSINESS

Resolution – Commemorating the Service of Commissioner Bill Cossar as a Commissioner and Chairman of the Mississippi Commission on Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks on the occasion of the end of his appointed terms.

The Chairman recognized Executive Director Posey for a brief presentation commemorating the service of Commissioner Cossar as a two-term commissioner and Chairman of the Commission. Mr. Posey read into the minutes the text of a resolution recognizing Commissioner Cossar's

service. A copy of the resolution is appended to these minutes. All present recognized Mr. Cossar with a round of applause.

Mr. Cossar expressed his thanks and appreciation for the staff and his fellow commissioners.

Election of Officers.

Following a very relaxed process of nominations and elections, and in keeping with the rotation of Commissioners as per the expiration of terms, Commissioner Scott Coopwood was nominated to serve as Chairman for State Fiscal Year 2025, and Commissioner Gary Rhoads was nominated to serve as Vice Chairman.

ACTION: Commissioner Mounger made a motion to accept the slate of officers as presented, which was seconded by Chairman Cossar. The motion passed unanimously.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Date: Thursday, July 25, 2024
Location: Jackson Headquarters – 1505 Eastover Drive
Time: To Be Determined

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Executive Director stated that there was no need for an Executive Session.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Commission, Chairman Cossar noted for the record that “a motion to adjourn is always in order.” Commissioner Rhoads made the motion to adjourn which was seconded by Commissioner Coopwood. The motion passed unanimously. Chairman Cossar gavelled the meeting into adjournment.

Scott Coopwood, CHAIRMAN

7/25/24

Date

Gary Rhoads, VICE CHAIRMAN

Date