

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Thursday, October 24th, 2024

9:00 AM Education Session

MDWFP Headquarters

1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211

EDUCATION SESSION MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Scott Coopwood and Commissioners Gary Rhoads, Billy Mounger, Todd Hairston and Colin Maloney.

Among the MDWFP staff present were Executive Director Lynn Posey, Curtis Thornhill, Brian Ferguson, Col. Jerry Carter, Lt. Col. Scottie Jones, Russ Walsh, Amy Blaylock, Jerry Brown, Jason Thompson, Andre´ Hollis, and Drew Malone.

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the Educational Session and introduced Ron Selby, Ricky Flynt, and William McKinley who would speak at the education session.

MS Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund

Ron Selby from Delta Wildlife began his address about the Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund (MOSTF), highlighting its purpose and history. The fund aims to support natural resource conservation, outdoor recreation, and wildlife management in Mississippi. Since its inception, the MOSTF has cultivated partnership with organizations such as Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Delta Wildlife, and the Mississippi Department of Wildlife, Fisheries, and Parks.

During the 2022 regular legislative session, the House of Representatives passed House Bill 606, the Mississippi Outdoor Stewardship Trust Act, which created the MOSTF trust fund with an initial appropriation of \$10 million and an additional \$15 million in 2023. The 2024 legislative session resulted in a \$12 million appropriation, totaling \$37 million since the fund's inception. The fund has leveraged additional federal and private funds, significantly increasing its impact.

Ricky Flynt, the Executive Director of the MOSTF, explained the grant process, emphasizing the importance of matching funds and the criteria for project selection. The fund awarded \$10 million in grants in 2022, \$15 million in 2023, and \$12 million in 2024. Specific projects include conservation easements, wetland enhancements, boat ramps, and walking trails.

Flynt discussed the challenges faced in the first year of applications, including a basic misunderstanding of the fund's purpose. The purpose is to be a source of funding for managing and improving our natural resources and providing outdoor recreational opportunities that complement our abundant wildlife and fisheries resources, promote

conservation of our wildlife resources, water and soil conservation, protection of wildlife and fishery habitat, preservation of cultural sites, archeological sites and historical resources.

The fund receives a high volume of requests, with many projects being unfunded due to limited resources. The fund has generated significant economic benefits, with every dollar awarded possibly being used to leverage Federal or other matching funds. The fund's success is attributable to the support of policy makers, legislators, and the public.

The fund's impact is not limited to hunters and fishermen but benefits the entire state. The fund's future success depends on continued support and funding from the legislature.

CWD Update

William McKinley, Statewide White-tailed Deer Coordinator, provided an update on Chronic Waste Disease (CWD) in Mississippi, highlighting its spread and impact on deer populations. The disease has been found in 16 of Mississippi's 82 counties, with a significant increase in positive cases in recent years.

The disease threatens deer populations, and the state has implemented surveillance and management strategies. The state uses taxidermists and drop-off freezers for sample collections, with a focus on targeted removal of positive deer. The state has increased surveillance efforts, with 59 drop-off freezers and a taxidermist program that has found many positives.

Research is ongoing to understand the disease's spread and impact, including studies on deer-pig interactions and environmental sampling. The state is working with other agencies and researchers to develop effective management strategies. The state is working to increase awareness about CWD and its impact on deer population. The importance of hunter participation in surveillance and management is crucial to decrease the number of positive CWD deer in Mississippi.

Chairman Coopwood thanked the presenters for the valuable information brought to the Commission. The Chair then recessed the Education Session for a brief break before the regular Business Session.

MISSISSIPPI COMMISSION ON WILDLIFE, FISHERIES, & PARKS

Thursday, October 24, 2024
10:00 AM Business Session
MDWFP Headquarters
1505 Eastover Drive, Jackson, MS 39211

BUSINESS SESSION MINUTES

PRESENT: Chairman Scott Coopwood and Commissioners Gary Rhoads, Billy Mounger, Todd Hairston and Colin Maloney were in attendance.

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

The Chairman gavelled the meeting into order and welcomed guests, both those watching the live stream video and those attending in person.

OPENING PRAYER

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

MINUTES

Chairman Coopwood asked the Commission to review the minutes from the September meeting and when done called for a motion to approve the minutes.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Rhoads and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the Commission meeting minutes of September 18, 2024, were unanimously approved.

AGENDA

The Chairman asked Executive Director Posey if there were any changes to the proposed agenda. Mr. Posey stated that during Other Business, Attorney Mann would present a Proposed Rule request from Jackson County for the designation of a "No Wake" Zone. There would be no need for an Executive Session.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Hairston and seconded by Commissioner Rhoads, the Commission unanimously approved the meeting agenda for October 24, 2024.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

The Chairman noted for the record that no members of the general public had requested to address the Commission.

LICENSE SALES REPORT

Jason Thompson, Director of Administrative Services, presented the License Sales Report for the month of September 2024. The total revenue for the end of September was down not quite 8% (\$2,899,803.60) compared to September 2023 (-7.94%).

Highlights of his report are listed below:

- Resident license sales – \$1,566,694.50 (down 2.22%)
- Non-resident license sales – \$1,075,866.10 (down 15.97%)
- Other Licenses – \$84,243.00 (up 0.63%)
- Lifetime License category – \$173,000.00 (down 5.72%)

WILDLIFE

Russ Walsh, Wildlife Bureau Chief of Staff, yielded his time to Houston Havens, Statewide Waterfowl Coordinator, for the annual presentations of requests for funding of various waterfowl programs from the Duck Stamp Fund. There was a brief pause to connect via telephone with Delta Waterfowl for the presentation of their request.

Jeffrey Howell of Delta Waterfowl updated the Commission on their efforts in the past year to protect and preserve nesting habitat in the extreme northern reaches of the United States and parts of Canada. Unfortunately, the Canadian Parliament had recently passed legislation encouraging placement of more arable land under cultivation thus disincentivizing protection of nesting wetlands. The proposal includes matchable funding to purchase critical nesting habitat in Minnesota and Canada and predator control programs. Delta is requesting continued funding participation in their efforts to protect nesting habitat in Manitoba Canada under their "Adopt-a-Pothole" program. Delta will continue to lobby for habitat preservation and predator control in Canada and the Dakotas. Details of the programs underway for which Delta Waterfowl was requesting funding are set forth in the Staff's executive summary of all the presentations and requests which is attached to these minutes.

Next to present was Howard Singer of Ducks Unlimited and Ducks Unlimited/Canada. Ducks Unlimited is the premiere non-governmental organization (NGO) involved with migratory waterfowl conservation. DU sponsors and coordinates numerous partnerships with state and Federal entities to protect and conserve waterfowl habitat. This year, DU is requesting \$125,000 from the MDWFP which they will match to capture another \$250,000 from NAWCA for a total of \$500,000 to invest in waterfowl conservation programs in both the US and Canada. Mr. Singer went on to report on the progress of several programs currently underway. Any monies from the MDWFP will be leveraged to promote wetland and upland habitat restoration projects. Many current programs will focus efforts to promote conservation programs in Saskatchewan where nesting habitat needs protection.

James T. Calicutt of MSU appeared next to present a request for funding of a mallard tracking program to be conducted by MSU. This program will place GPS “backpacks” on mallard ducks to track their movement throughout North America and where they choose to nest. This project is the natural evolution of prior tracking programs, but uses newer technology that will collect more useful data.

Houston Havens closed out the request presentations by summarizing the requests for funding from the NGO partners and the Department’s own requests, to include funds for maintenance and operation of waterfowl projects at state WMAs. A copy of the executive summary of projects and requests for Duck Stamp sales proceeds is attached to these minutes.

Mr. Havens asked the Commission to approve the staff recommendations for disbursement of Duck Stamp sales proceeds for waterfowl projects.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Rhoads and seconded by Commissioner Hairston, the Commission voted unanimously to approve staff recommendations for disbursement of duck stamp sales proceeds for 2024.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law Enforcement Update

Colonel Jerry Carter, Chief of Law Enforcement, reported that during the month of September, 2024, a total of 505 citations were issued with “No Resident License” being number one (87), “Unlawful Possession of Game or Fish” was number two (69), followed by Hunting over Bait (66), “No Federal Waterfowl Stamp” (41), and Un-Plugged Shotgun (39).

The Colonel continued his report noting several details where officers worked dove fields, including one field where hunters had shot cattle egrets and a crow. The Colonel showed photos of several baby alligators which were unlawfully possessed (and seized). Photos of our officers finding and rendering aid to a lost senior citizen who had wandered away from his caregivers were shared as well as officers working at an MSSP shooting event. The Colonel reported on the SRT deployment to hurricane-ravaged parts of North Carolina and the thanks we have received from our counterparts for the MDWFP’s assistance.

Customer counts for the department’s shooting ranges for the month of September were: McIvor – 1,575; Turcotte – 1,369; and McHenry – 948 customers.

License Reinstatements

Colonel Carter brought two (2) individuals before the Commission, requesting to have their hunting licenses restored.

Tyler Breland of Poplarville, MS addressed the Commission stating that he and some friends were on the Pearl River during flood stage and were out intentionally shining for deer. He was not caught during the act, but as a result of the seizure of one of the participants’ mobile phones,

the data recovered indicated that Mr. Breland was one of the participants. He was charged after the fact based upon the photographic evidence. Counsel and the Commissioners had several follow-up questions and discussion regarding other charges and violations; however, it was determined that those charges had not resulted in a conviction.

Mr. Breland stated that the cost of the violation (fines) and loss of his license was not worth it, and that he had learned his lesson.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Hairston and seconded by Commissioner Mounger, the Commission voted unanimously to reinstate the hunting license of Mr. Tyler Breland.

Damion Pipkin of Lucedale, Mississippi was next to present his request to have his license reinstated. Mr. Pipkin told the Commission that he had just gotten off night shift at work when his brother called to ask him to come help him spotlight a deer he had seen recently. Mr. Pipkin said no at first but then relented. They went back to the spot where the brother had seen the deer but it was no longer there. They continued shining. While shining, the officer blue-lighted them and began processing them for arrest. Mr. Pipkin was contrite and embarrassed as he is a combat veteran and was ashamed of his actions.

After some general questioning and discussion from the Commission, Chairman Coopwood called for a motion.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Hairston and seconded by Commissioner Maloney, the Commission voted unanimously to reinstate the hunting license of Damion Pipkin.

Colonel Carter concluded his report.

OTHER BUSINESS

40 Miss. Admin. Code, Part 4, Rule 2.7 “No-Wake Zone for Bluff Creek in Jackson County.”

The Chairman recognized Attorney Doug Mann for an item of “Other Business.” Mr. Mann reminded the Commission that he had advised them of a request from Jackson County to adopt an administrative rule designating of a “No Wake Zone” on Bluff Creek which is a tributary of the Pascagoula River. Mr. Mann stated that the request had been transcribed into rule form and requested that the Commission approve the rule as a “PROPOSED” rule to be filed with the Secretary of State for 30 days public comment.

ACTION: Upon motion by Commissioner Hairston and seconded by Commissioner Rhoads, the Commission voted unanimously to approve the proposed rule for a No Wake Zone on Bluff Creek as presented by staff.

NEXT MEETING DATE

Executive Director Posey announced the proposed date and time for the next meeting as follows:

Date: Thursday, November 14, 2024

Location: Jackson Headquarters – 1505 Eastover Drive

Time: 9:00 AM Education Session and 10:00 AM Business Session

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 Coopwood called for a motion to adjourn. Commissioner Maloney made the motion to adjourn which was seconded by Commissioner Rhoads. The motion passed unanimously. Chairman Coopwood gavelled the meeting into adjournment.



Scott Coopwood, CHAIRMAN

11/14/24

Date



Gary Rhoads, VICE CHAIRMAN

11/14/24

Date

Summary of 2024 Staff Recommendations for State Waterfowl Stamp Funding

Current Balance in State Waterfowl Stamp Fund: \$1,802,223.35

Total FY 2024 Revenue: \$624,028

Total 2024-25 Recommendations: \$872,395

- Ducks Unlimited and DU Canada: \$125,000 for Continued Waterfowl Breeding Habitat Conservation in Saskatchewan.
- Delta Waterfowl: \$125,000 for Adopt a Pothole Program – perpetual wetland and associated upland easements in Manitoba.
- Mississippi State University: \$30,000 for year one of a new research project titled “Fine Scale Habitat Selection and Activity Budgets of GPS-marked Mallards in the Mississippi Delta and Investigations of Moist-soil Wetland Management Practices”.
- WMA Wetland Enhancement and Management Projects: \$475,000
 - Some of this funding will be reserved for “as needed” projects or repairs on Wildlife Management Areas.
 - Outside funding sources will be pursued to replace or match state funds to offset costs.
- Private Land Wetland Infrastructure Assistance Program: \$40,000
 - Continue private land water control structure program.
 - This funding will also be used as match to leverage some Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund money received for private lands habitat work.
- Aerial Waterfowl Surveys: \$25,000
- Waterfowl Program Travel: \$9,000
 - Funding for MDWFP staff to attend Joint Venture, MS Flyway Council, or other waterfowl-related meetings and workshops as needed.
- Waterfowl Trapping and Banding Supplies: \$5,000
- MS Flyway Council Annual Dues and Cooperative Projects: \$33,395
 - MS Flyway project costs are typically divided either equally among the states or divided according to proportions of band returns (harvest) from each state.
- Annual Youth Waterfowl Hunting and Education Camp: \$5,000

2024 MDWFP Staff Recommendations – State Waterfowl Stamp Funds

Funding Information

Current Balance in State Waterfowl Stamp Fund: \$1,802,223.35

Total FY 2024 Revenue: \$624,028

Total 2024-25 Recommendations: \$872,395

Ducks Unlimited and DU Canada: \$125,000 for Continued Waterfowl Breeding Habitat Conservation in Saskatchewan

- This request is a continuation of a long-term partnership project (1977 to present) supporting breeding habitat in key areas for waterfowl that migrate to Mississippi.
- Prior Year Accomplishments:
 - Habitat Protection: 1,247 acres of long-term easements and other conservation agreements
 - Habitat Restoration: 479 acres of upland restoration through perennial forage cover
 - Total Acreage: 1,726 acres
 - An additional 26,871 existing acres were managed to continue productivity.
- Contributions:
 - MDWFP: \$125,000
 - DU, Inc.: \$125,000
 - NAWCA and other partners: \$250,000
 - Total funding: \$500,000 USD = \$650,000 CAD

Delta Waterfowl: \$125,000 for Adopt a Pothole Program – perpetual wetland and associated upland easements in Manitoba

- This request is a continuation of a long-term partnership project.
- Prior Year Accomplishments:
 - 579 acres of wetlands and associated upland habitat perpetually conserved through conservation easements
 - 2,035 acres of wetlands enhanced through installation and maintenance of hen houses
- Contributions:
 - MDWFP: \$125,000
 - MHHC and other partners: \$250,000
 - NAWCA: \$250,000
 - Total funding: \$625,000

Mississippi State University Waterfowl Research: \$30,000 (year 1 of 4, potentially)

- This funding would support year one of a new, four-year project titled “Fine Scale Habitat Selection and Activity Budgets of GPS-marked Mallards in the Mississippi Delta and Investigations of Moist-soil Wetland Management Practices”. Proposed work includes:
 - Placing GPS transmitters on mallards captured in Mississippi to determine habitat use and activities related to weather, wetland availability, and hunting disturbance during winter.
 - Transmitters would also inform spring migration timing and summer breeding locations.
 - Quantifying structure and composition of habitats used by marked birds.
 - Collecting blood and feather samples for genetics and geographic origin information.
 - Evaluating applied moist-soil management practices on public and private lands to inform Mississippi land management.

WMA Wetland Management and Enhancement Projects: \$475,000

- \$250,000 for replacement of wetland infrastructure on Pearl River WMA (matching a recent MS Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund award).
- \$225,000 for WMA waterfowl habitat management, public waterfowl hunting enhancements, and wetland infrastructure needs/repairs as they arise.
- Outside funding sources will be pursued to replace or match these state funds to offset costs.

Private Land Wetland Infrastructure Assistance Program: \$40,000

- Continue a wetland habitat assistance program for Mississippi private landowners.
- Provide water control structures for projects prioritized by competitive ranking criteria.
- This will also match a recently received MS Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund award.

Aerial Waterfowl Surveys: \$25,000

- Funding for continued long-term monitoring of winter waterfowl abundance in the MS Delta.
 - 4 surveys: Mid-November, Mid-December, Early January, and Late January.
- Delta Wildlife has also contributed survey funding in past years and may continue to do so.

Waterfowl Program Travel: \$9,000

- Funding for MDWFP staff to attend Joint Venture, MS Flyway Council, or other waterfowl-related meetings and workshops as needed.
- Funds used to represent Mississippi interests on regional and national migratory bird issues.

Waterfowl Trapping and Banding Supplies: \$5,000

- Various items as needed for trapping, handling, and banding of waterfowl.

Mississippi Flyway Council Annual Dues and Cooperative Projects: \$33,395

Note: MS Flyway project costs are divided either equally among the states and provinces or divided according to proportions of band returns (harvest) from each state or province.

- \$2,690 annual dues to the Mississippi Flyway Council.
- \$4,508 annual contribution for arctic goose population monitoring (white-fronted, snow, and Ross' geese in southern Saskatchewan and Alberta).
- \$2,857 annual contribution to Hudson Bay snow goose population and habitat monitoring.
- \$2,978 annual contribution to Karrak Lake light goose research on population dynamics and habitat effects.
- \$750 for a mallard reward band study to assess reporting rate changes after discontinuing the call in number, which will inform harvest rate estimates.
- \$987 annual contribution to duck banding efforts in Ontario.
- \$1,210 annual contribution to scaup banding project on Pool 19 of MS River.
- \$1,100 annual contribution to duck banding efforts in North and South Dakota.
- \$3,600 for a collaborative research project on the prevalence and effects of highly pathogenic avian influenza in waterfowl.
- \$715 for a collaborative Mississippi Flyway duck harvest distribution analysis project.
- \$5,000 for Lower Mississippi Valley Joint Venture migratory bird management and monitoring projects.
- \$4,000 for Gulf Coast Joint Venture migratory bird management and monitoring projects.
- \$3,000 for East Gulf Coastal Plain Joint Venture migratory bird management and monitoring projects.

Annual Gunner Palmer Youth Waterfowl Hunting and Education Camp: \$5,000

- Funding to continue an annual youth education and recruitment event.
- Partnership with Ducks Unlimited, Inc. and Drake Waterfowl.