

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL  
Central Region Office  
Robbinsville, New Jersey  
August 12, 2025**

The regular meeting of the Fish and Game Council was held on the above date.

The meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m. by Chairman Frank Virgilio.

Chairman Virgilio read aloud the following notice: In accordance with P.L. 1975, c. 231 notice of this meeting was filed with and posted at the Office of the Secretary of State on July 30, 2025, and delivered to the designated newspapers for Fish and Wildlife, the Newark Star Ledger and the Atlantic City Press.

Roll call was taken in attendance:

- Chairman Frank Virgilio
- Councilman James DeStephano
- Councilman Mitchell Jones - Absent
- Councilman Ed Kertz
- Councilman Russ Funarri
- Councilman Rob Pollock
- Councilman Jeffery Bowlby
- Councilman Loren Robinson
- Councilman Ken Whildin

Fish & Wildlife employees included: D. Golden, K. Meistrell, G. Kopkash, M. Monteschio, A. Ivany, S. Crouse, J. Oxley, K. Clark, T. McBride, B. Stoff, and D. Bajek.

There were several members of the public in attendance.

**Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to approve the June 10, 2025, F&G Council minutes.**

**Councilman Robinson made a motion to approve the June 10, 2025, minutes, seconded by Councilman Kertz, (one abstention-Councilman DeStephano). Vote taken. Motion approved.**

Chairman Virgilio welcomed everyone to the meeting. On July 27th at Assunpink WMA, NJ DEP Fish and Wildlife, along with 12 major Hunting and Trapping organizations, attended and participated in a modern hunting ammunition workshop and signed onto a voluntary North American lead-free partnership agreement.

On behalf of our Fish and Game Council, I would like to thank DEP Commissioner Shawn LaTourette for his dedication to environmental stewardship and conservation.

Assistant Commissioner Dave Golden's vision and tireless dedication have been vital in making this partnership a reality.

I would also like to acknowledge Assistant Director Kristen Meistrell for her unwavering guidance, as well as Mary Monteschio, Esq., our Regulatory Officer, for her extensive legal expertise and advice throughout this process. Their collective efforts exemplify the highest standards of NJ Fish and Wildlife in protecting the wildlife and natural resources of our state, and this Council expresses its deep appreciation.

This voluntary agreement represents more than just a change in ammunition—it's a bold step toward safeguarding the health and welfare of our wildlife and the lands they inhabit.

Lead has long been recognized as a threat to scavenging species like bald eagles and vultures, and even to the broader ecosystem. By choosing to transition toward lead-free ammunition, we are choosing stewardship over stagnation, science over tradition, and sustainability over short-term convenience.

Let me be clear: this is not a mandate. It's a movement. A movement led by hunters, trappers, conservationists, and wildlife advocates who understand that our outdoor heritage depends on responsible practices and forward thinking choices.

I am proud that New Jersey is among the first states to embrace this partnership, and I hope it inspires others across North America to follow suit.

**Opening Remarks by Chairman of the New Jersey Fish and Game Council,**

I want to thank our partners—especially the sportsmen and women who have championed this cause—for their leadership and their willingness to embrace change.

1. New Jersey DEP Fish and Wildlife
2. New Jersey State Federation of Sportsmen Clubs
3. New Jersey Wildlife Sportsmen's Foundation
4. New Jersey Outdoor Alliance
5. New Jersey Ducks Unlimited
6. New Jersey Predator Hunters

7. New Jersey Waterfowlers
8. Safari Club International
9. New Jersey Fur Harvesters
10. New Jersey Trappers Association
11. New Jersey Wild Turkey Federation
12. New Jersey Coalition of Gamebird Conservation
13. Back Country, Hunters and Anglers

Together, we're proving that conservation and tradition can walk hand in hand. And together, we're ensuring that future generations will inherit a landscape as rich, wild, and vibrant as the one we cherish today.  
Thank you.

Assistant Commissioner Golden thanked Chairman Virgilio for bringing together the multiple organizations to consider signing on to the National Non-Lead Partnership and recognized the amount of work it took to organize this effort. NJ is now a national leader now when it comes to support for the Partnership.

Assistant Commissioner Golden introduced our newest employee, Brittany Welch, who started with NJDEP Fish & Wildlife three weeks ago as a Senior Policy Advisor. She will be working on different agency policies and also help with advancing some regulations.

AC Golden announced that the hunting digest came out in print and handed out a copy of the Digest to each Council member. Special thanks was offered to our I&E team for getting the Digest out on shelves early this year. AC Golden also reminded the Council of the Game Code changes that are being advanced and that we will be having a presentation on the Fish Code at today's meeting.

## **Council Reports:**

### **Agriculture:**

Councilman Kertz reported it is growing season and seeing minimal deer damage in the corn fields. He has yet to see fawns or fawn tracks in the field.

Councilman Bowlby reported corn is growing, but the outside rows are all stripped from the deer. We see lots of very mature bucks; in the soybeans you can count 50-60 deer from the road.

Dr. Reist reported that the Division of Agriculture is setting up a program for testing free testing for Tyleria for farmers to see how widespread it is in livestock in NJ. This is tick born from the Asian Longhorn tick.

New world screw worm, A system was set up to control it at state levels and the last detection was in a mountain lion on the border of Texas. And lastly, HPAI is still ongoing.

**NJ State Federation of Sportsman's Club:**

Councilman DeStephano reported there is an upcoming Trappers Convention in October.

Councilman Robinson reported there were no meetings last month. Hunterdon County meeting is this Thursday, and he attended the Fish Committee this morning.

Councilman Whildin reported no meetings last month. He was asked to talk about trapping and that went really well. Almost all of the attendees had never hunted, fished or trapped before.

Chairman Virgilio reported no meetings last month. All day workshop on Non-Lead, he attended the trappers' meeting and was unanimously voted to approve the non-lead initiatives.

**Finance Committee:** Meeting in November before the F&G meeting.

**Fish Committee:**

Councilman Pollock reported they met today and will discuss under New Business.

**Game Committee:** No report

**Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee:**

Councilman Furnari reported the Committee met on July 16. We got an update on the Red Knot survey results, discussed issues with Osprey and the changes in food availability. There was a presentation on saltmarsh restoration projects, and the ENSP's colonial waterbird population trends. He noted there were nest failures on Gull Island due to high mink predation.

**Waterfowl Committee:** No report

**Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee:** No report

**Law Enforcement:** No report

**Public Member:**

Councilman Pollock just wanted to mention that they are seeing a lot of big bears in Rockaway Township.

**Legislative Report:**

Mary Monteschio reported the NJ Legislature is in summer recess. There are no changes to the Congressional bills and, therefore, no updates to the Legislative Report.

**Fish & Wildlife Reports:****Office of Business Administration:**

Barbara Stoff handed out packets to council on the comparison of sales to the end of July. Freshwater fishing sales by comparison are down .97%, which include the all-around licenses. Buddy license sales are up 51%, with WMA access down 11.91%. Turkey permit sales for 2016-2025 for the last 10-years is down 10.3%.

**Freshwater Fisheries:**

Chief Crouse reported the NJDEP Aquatic Invasive Species Reporting Form was developed by Sam MacQuesten and with Molly VanWieren from the Office of Information Technologies. It has been resulted in quite a few reporting's since it was launched on June 18<sup>th</sup>. One particular report was for Archway Lake in which a pair of adult Northern Snakehead, guarding fry was reported on 7/16/2025. This would be the first known occurrence of Snakeheads within the Pinelands and is very bad news for aquatic biota such as Pinelands Fish such as the Blackbanded Sunfish and others. Archway Lake is a private 4-acre impoundment of the upper Mullica River located in Waterford Twp., Camden County. The lake is owned and bordered by the Archway School, a private education facility for students with disabilities. The lake is entirely private with no public access, only staff are permitted to fish. The lake is extremely shallow due to sedimentation, with a small spillway, and abundant aquatic vegetation in the form of Pondweed and Water Smartweed.

Staff coordinated with the school quickly followed and access was granted for removal efforts. A seining survey was conducted on 7/22/2025 to gather baseline fish assemblage data. A total of 7 species were encountered, comprised of Pumpkinseed, Bluegill, Golden Shiner, Brown Bullhead and Banded Sunfish, Largemouth Bass and Chain Pickerel were also observed. No Northern Snakeheads were observed or collected while seining.

Removal efforts via boat electrofishing were conducted on 7/24/2025. One adult Northern Snakehead measuring 478 mm / 19 inches was collected and removed.

**Next Steps**

- Currently we are gathering owner contact information for four downstream impoundments to acquire access for sampling and to determine if snakeheads have spread beyond Archway Lake.
- Additional long-term monitoring and removal efforts along with eradication efforts are being discussed, however an evaluation of the downstream impoundments is necessary before eradication recommendations can be made.
- Increase Education on the impacts of invasive fish species and increase Enforcement efforts as possession of live individuals and release even into the water in which they were caught is illegal.
- This is an unfortunate report, however it is nice to see the Online reporting form is serving its intended purpose.

**Lake Shenandoah (Lakewood Twp. Ocean County)** – On July 2 the Lake Shenandoah dam breached during a heavy rain event. The spillway of the dam was under repair during the time of failure. Staff are working with Dam Safety to understand the severity and the timeline for repair. Staff visited the site to determine next steps and determined that a fish salvage was not necessary. No dead or stressed fish were observed. Although water levels were low, there was adequate flow and oxygen. Sheet piling was reinstalled later that week and water levels had risen. Construction staff were instructed to contact us if any dead or stressed fish are observed.

**Harmful Algal Blooms (HABs)** As reported last month, HABs have been a fairly regular occurrence in NJ in recent years. I do not plan to continue to report on HABs as the NJDEP HAB Dashboard is readily available and contains up to date information on HABs in NJ. The HAB on Mountain Lake (Warren) has resolved.

Advisories in 15 waters (Swimming Beaches closed and no consumption of fish): Greenwood Lake, Lake Rogerene (Morris), Budd Lake, Darlington Lake (Bergen), Weequahic Lake (Essex), Manny's Pond (Hunterdon), Fox Chase Pond (Somerset), Carnegie Lake (Mercer), Rosedale Lake, Assunpink Lake, Pemberton Lake, Cooper River, Memorial Lake (Salem), Thundergust Lake (Salem), and Botswick Lake (Cumberland).

Watches in 14 waters (no consumption of fish).

See table below regarding HAB Alert levels in NJ.

HAB Alert Level	Criteria	Recommendations
<b>HAB Not Present</b>	<b>HAB reported and investigated. No HAB present.</b>	<b>None</b>
<b>WATCH</b> <i>Suspected or confirmed HAB with potential for allergenic or irritative health effects</i>	Suspected HAB based on field survey <b>OR</b> Confirmed cell counts $\geq 20K$ - $< 80K$ cells/mL <b>AND</b> No known toxins above public health thresholds	<b>Public Bathing Beaches Open</b> Waterbody Accessible: Use caution during <b>primary contact (e.g. swimming) and secondary (e.g. non-contact boating)</b> activities Do not ingest water (people/pets/livestock) Do not consume fish
<b>ADVISORY</b> <i>Confirmed HAB with moderate risk of adverse health effects and increased potential for toxins above public health thresholds</i>	Lab testing for toxins Microcystins: $\geq 2$ $\mu\text{g/L}$ Cylindrospermopsin: $\geq 5$ $\mu\text{g/L}$ Anatoxin-a: $\geq 15$ $\mu\text{g/L}$ Saxitoxin: $\geq 0.6$ $\mu\text{g/L}$ <b>OR</b> Confirmed cell counts $\geq 80K$ cells/mL	<b>Public Bathing Beaches Closed</b> Waterbody Remains Accessible: Avoid primary contact recreation Use caution for secondary contact recreation Do not ingest water (people/pets/livestock) Do not consume fish
<b>WARNING</b> <i>Confirmed HAB with high risk of adverse health effects due to high toxin levels</i>	Toxin (microcystins) $\geq 20$ - $< 2000$ $\mu\text{g/L}$	<b>Public Bathing Beaches Closed</b> Cautions as above May recommend against secondary contact recreation.
<b>DANGER</b> <i>Confirmed HAB with very high risk of adverse health effects due to very high toxin levels</i>	Toxin (microcystins) $\geq 2000$ $\mu\text{g/L}$	<b>Public Bathing Beaches Closed</b> Cautions as above. Possible closure of all or portions of waterbody and possible restrictions access to shoreline.

Both Hatcheries are in full production mode and the Research and Management Unit is in full swing with summer fieldwork.

### Information & Education:

Chief Ivany reported the Association for Conservation Information Conference held from July 21 – 24 in Atlantic City and hosted by NJDEP Fish & Wildlife was a great success. More than 100 natural resource professionals in their respective education, communications, social media, public relations, and marketing fields, representing state, federal, and Canadian wildlife conservation and parks and natural resource agencies, as well as private conservation organizations, attended to share their knowledge, ideas, and experiences, and network with their colleagues. At the conference, I&E social media coordinator Katie Paey was elected as a new member of the ACI Board of Directors and I&E Supervising Biologist Linda DiPiano, was elected as the new ACI Vice President.

The 2025 – 26 Hunting and Trapping issue of the NJ Fish & Wildlife Digest is out and on shelves.

Construction of the new Sedge Island bulkhead is complete.

Hunter Education classes are going strong and will continue into the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in October. During the past Fiscal Year 2025, student numbers are up with 5,281 certificates vs. 4,996 the previous year. Trapper Education numbers were also stable with 258 students completing Trapper Education in FY'25. Also, Trapper Education and the R3 Program are working together and have invited recent Trapper Ed students to a Cable Restraint Workshop to be held at the Hackettstown Hatchery on August 24<sup>th</sup>.

The R3 Hunting & Shooting Program is busy preparing and scheduling programs in August and September including an Intro to Duck Hunting Workshop at the Wallkill National Wildlife Refuge, a Women's Shooting Clays event, and a Muzzleloader Deer Hunting Workshop. R3 staff are also preparing for the Tuckahoe Managed Waterfowl Hunt, with the Lottery opening on September 1<sup>st</sup>.

### **Land Management:**

Tony McBride reported Thunder Gut Pond with WMA had fairways converted to upland habitat. New parking area installed at Prot Republic as well as a new road. Fall planting is happening now and new organic at Dicks WMA to remove actively growing weeds. At Absecon WMA we are restoring 14 acres of marsh that has been eroded over time. Crews at Colliers Mills are getting archery range ready. Round Valley docks are being constructed and not sure of the exact date it should be completed. There are improvements being done at Shotgun Range in Clinton.

### **Law Enforcement:**

Chief Panico reported we are busy with the WMAs. We attended lots of County Fairs and National Night Out with a lot of outreach.

We have three of our newest COs in Game Warden school right now, with 2 of them going not the field training program in early September and the other will be going to the police academy this month.

### **Wildlife Management:**

Chief Oxley reported this is our busy season. Bear project-total calls were down 36.7%. CAT 1 calls decreased 31%. It has been relatively quiet, which we believe is results of a successful hunt. We will be research trapping the end of the month.

Turkey project- Jimmy Sloan will give a presentation.

Waterfowl- 1500 Canada Geese were banded within 38 sites. The goal was 1300, which represents about 1.5% of New Jersey's resident geese population. Staff from BWM and other F&W bureaus, Volunteers from Cape May, Forsythe and Great Swamp NWR, Ducks Unlimited and former biologists assisted with banding.

Deer- we wrapped up attending county meetings and presenting 2024-2025 deer harvest results, which is always well received. We are setting up and distributing the \$160,000 in grant money for CBDMP now.

Game Code- we met with OLA and DAG last week to iron out remaining 2A verbiage and we hope to have the final edits back from DAG this week. Hopefully they will expedite it and we can get it to the Governor's office this week.

Furbearer- New Jersey is hosting the 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Northeast Fur Resources Technical Committee September 8-12 in Jefferson Township at Kean Skylands. There will be 20+ furbearing biologists from 13 states, USDA, NEAFWA, and a couple of Canadian provinces and/or CWS. We will be hosting a Trapping Matters Workshop September 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> at the Conservation Center.

### **Endangered and Nongame Species Program:**

Chief Clark reported big news with the Wildlife Action Plan revision, which has been in the works for almost three years, went out for public comment June 30 to July 31. We received around 170 comments from the public and 30 from NJDOT, which has interests in wildlife crossings and in saltmarsh stabilization with navigation channel dredged materials. Staff are making changes in the final version of the Plan to address comments that were submitted. We will continue to revise the website to include links to make navigating between topics easier. ENSP received a competitive State Wildlife Grant to enhance the website in the next two years. The Plan is due to the US Fish and Wildlife Service by October 1, but we plan to submit in the first week of September.

There are concerns for a number of our raptor species. Osprey nest success has plummeted this year, with preliminary estimates at 82% nest failure due to insufficient food. Peregrine Falcons, which had a bad year in 2024 with 63% loss of breeding adults and 3 vacant coastal nests, continued their decline in 2025 with a turnover rate of 73% of coastal nesting adults and 6 vacant coastal nests. Similar results were recorded in coastal Virginia. The vulnerability of peregrines to HPAI is the prevalent cause of these losses.

ENSP staff are summarizing nesting season data for Bald Eagles. Last year we documented 264 active nests; preliminary figures for this year are 242 active nests. This is the first year we've documented a decline in number of active nests since the recovery began. Eagles were hit hard by HPAI in the winter of 2024-25, which likely affected the resident population numbers.

### **New Business:**

#### **Sparta Mountain WMA Habitat Restoration Project:**

Sharon Petzinger gave a presentation on the Early-successional Forest Restoration Project at Sparta Mountain WMA.

### **Fish Code Proposal:**

Chief Crouse presented the Fish Code Proposal

### **Public Comment:**

Barbara Sashau commented she is against the Fish Code proposal.

**Fish Committee- Councilman Pollock reported the fish committee met this morning and made a recommendation to accept the Fish Code as presented.**

**A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to accept the Fish Code as presented, seconded by Councilman Kertz. A vote was taken; all approve. Motion carries.**

**Lunch: 11:57 – 12:37**

**2025 Turkey Harvest Report:**

Jimmy Sloan gave a presentation on the 2025 Turkey harvest.

**Old Business:**

Wharton State Forest Vehicle Access Update:

Assistant Director Meistrell reported that a map was put together reviewing all digitized roads interested in having hunter access. Our GIS team digitized that and it was sent over to Wharton and Park staff. We had an internal meeting last month and have a follow up meeting next week.

**Oak Ridge Reservoir Update:**

Assistant Director Meistrell reported a letter was written up and mailed to the Department of Utilities on what type of actions should have occurred during the lowering of water to prevent a fish kill. As of last week, the water level is up to 29.53%.

**Greenwood Lake Access:**

Assistant Commissioner Golden reported they are working with the second firm and anticipate that we will have notice to proceed and a kick off meetings end of the month. We have hopes for early September.

**Public Comment:**

Mark C. commented on waterfowl, and he is very disappointed in the Fall 2023 split seasons survey.

Barbara S commented she feels there is a lack of agency help for the public.

Domonick commented he is concerned with the turkey population, and we should limit bag limits to 2-birds and get recruitment from private properties.

Joe L commented he would like to see trapping on private property extended.

Adam S commented on fixing the youth permit to make it eligible statewide instead of zone specific.

**A motion was made by Councilman Furnari to adjourn the meeting at 1:15, seconded by Councilman DeStephano. Vote taken; all approved.**

**Next meeting will be September 9, 2025 at the Assunpink Office at 10:00 am in-person.**