

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL**

**Central Region Office  
Robbinsville, New Jersey  
June 14, 2022**

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

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 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 June 6, 2022 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 Joe DeMartino  
Councilman James DeStephano- (absent)  
Councilman Mitchell Jones- (late arrival 10:10)  
Councilman Ed Kertz  
Councilman Rick Lathrop  
Councilman Rob Pollock- (absent)  
Councilman Bob Puskas  
Councilman Loren Robinson  
Councilman Ken Whildin

Fish and Game employees included: D. Golden, L. Barno, G. Kopkash, C. Stanko, A. Ivany, S. Crouse, J. Hearon, K. Springer, M. Monteschio, and D. Bajek.

There were several members of the public in attendance.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to approve the May 10th F&G Council minutes.

**Councilman Robinson made a motion to approve the May 10 F&G minutes, seconded by Councilman Whildin vote taken, 5 approve, 3 abstentions (Puskas, DeMartino, Lathrop). motion carries.**

Chairman Virgilio wanted to welcome everyone to the Assunpink wildlife Management Area on this second Tuesday in June. Today our meeting is both in-person and virtual. It is the Assistant Commissioners and Councils intent to bring our council meetings to a larger broader audience. He would like to mention that June is Pride month, a time to celebrate and recognize the LGBTQ communities in New Jersey. Our Fish and Game Council is committed to providing inclusive programs designed for equal opportunity that connects LGBTQ communities to our great outdoors. Additionally, as New Jersey Fish and Wildlife designs its program, please consider any existing racial inequalities, the racial compositions of those who have access to or would be excluded from the division's program, and the program's impact on different racial groups.

Assistant Commissioner Golden welcomed everyone and wanted to let them know that this is the second month with hybrid format at the meeting. One thing that has changed since last meeting is this meeting, we are allowing virtual participants to ask questions. Speaking of virtual meetings and work, the Department has instituted a telework policy that will go into effect on June 18<sup>th</sup>. this policy will allow staff within DEP o apply for up to 2-days of telework. We are trying to figure it all out with our employees of Fish and Wildlife to see who has portable work where they may be eligible. We are happy to announce that we are making progress on the revisions on the Division's website. With the combined hard work and efforts of nearly all of our staff that we got to the point where we are. Special recognition goes to Assistant Director Kopkash, Chief Ivany and their staff on keeping everyone track. Assistant Commissioner Golden also wanted to mention that RAWA (Recovering Americas Wildlife Act) will be heard on the floor for the House of Representatives this afternoon.

**Chairman Virgilio read aloud the comment period. He also made an announcement that today we will be testing out a new comment period where he will give commenters a second time around if they feel they still need more time to comment after the standard 3-minute time limit.**

## **Council Reports:**

### **Agricultural:**

Councilman Jones reported yesterday he had a conference call with the Committee of State Board of Agriculture where they discussed the bear problems that agriculture is having and what could be done. Last night he attended a meeting with the Chair of the Assembly of Agriculture committee and around 20 farmers from north Jersey where they discussed agricultural issues with deer and bear.

Councilman Kertz reported he received a phone call after last meeting saying the State was going to restrict our baiting in NJ. He looked around and couldn't find information on it, but at the Atlantic County Federation Sportsmen meeting last week where someone had it on their phone. What it was is State Parks want to limit the amount of bait someone can put at their stand to a 5-gallon bucket or 50-pound bag at one time. A lot of the sportsmen at the meeting were concerned as well as farmers. He would like to know if anything could be done about it.

Councilman Puskas reported wet weather has planting delayed and hay making slowed down. There is wheat damage from geese as well as soybean damage. A bear has done some extensive damage to beehives.

Dr. Reist reported last time we met NJ was the second to last state on the Eastern seaboard to have High-path Avian Influenza in a domestic flock. About 2-weeks after that meeting, Georgia filled in the East Coast, so every state has now had a detection in domestic flock. We are hopeful that by Friday this week we will be able to lift our control zone. NJ will stay a High-path Avian Influenza effected state by international standards until October.

**Farmer/Sportsman Relations:** No report

### **NJ State Federation of Sportsman's Clubs:**

Councilman DeMartino reported that he received some complaints on the Delaware Water Gap and asked if there is any update. Also, this might be his last meeting as he is closing on his house.

Councilman Robinson reported he attended in-person meetings at Hunterdon, Somerset, Middlesex. He also worked at the State Federation booth at the Somerset Fish and Game Anniversary. He attended virtual meetings at The State Federation meeting and at the Central Jersey Predator Hunters meeting. The discussions at all the meetings were on the new Wild Turkey Survey, free fishing, upcoming game code changes, legislation, and Delaware Water Gap.

Councilman Whildin reported he attended the Cumberland County meeting it was a wind down for the year. The one concern was the lack of turkey poults sightings.

**Finance Committee:** No report

**Game Committee:** No report

**Endangered & Non-Game Species Advisory Committee:**

Councilman Lathrop reported they met May 25<sup>th</sup>, one of the things discussed was we had a report out on white paper produced by the program dealing with threats to Diamondback Terrapins. They have a number of threats but the main is bycatch of Blue Claw crab fishery.

**Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee:** No report

**Legislative Update:**

Mary Monteschio reported a few updates to the report. A3898 and S2522 which will allot 3 million to mosquito control. It will be up for vote in both houses. S428 and A3039 the right to farm act is still in Senate. RAWA now has 194 co-sponsors with 7 from NJ.

**Division Reports:**

**Business Administration:**

Chief Springer reported on the license sales and the comparison to the last 4-years from 2019-2022. She also gave out a handout with a graph of the sales. Overall license sales are down 10.63% compared to this time last year and compared to 2019 they are slightly down by .71%. At last month's meeting she provided us with the status of fishing license and trout stamp sales, compared to the same time last year fishing license sales are down 12.48% and trout stamp sales are down 10.44%. the Wildlife Habitat Supporter Programs total donations are now at \$24,715.

### **Freshwater Fisheries:**

Chief Crouse reported an update on the fish salvage at the Clinton WMA Pond and is being mandated by NJDEP dam safety to be lowered. From May 2- June 3, 3-days of electric fishing and 6-days of trap netting were completed to capture a total of 2509 fish. A total of 932 were relocated to a lake in Spotswood. An additional 1562 fish were relocated to the Spruce run reservoir. He would like to thank Chief Hearon and his staff for getting out to the site to help grade to allow us to get our boat in the lowered pond. Crews are out there today to finish the salvage. The other update is regarding warmwater fish stocking at Hackettstown hatchery, all of our 2022 Northern Pike were stocked. Walleye fingerling production is on track, we stocked over 95000 to our 5 inland waters plus nearly 200,000 into the Delaware river. Our mosquito fish production we had 204,000 distributed to various counties mosquito commissions. We took the first egg masses from channel catfish last week and so far, we collected 9 egg masses totaling 200,060 eggs.

### **Information and Education:**

Chief Ivany reported we are very close on finishing up the new website and are making the final tweaks. We have another meeting with Oxford Communications tomorrow. We are looking for a kickoff date around June 26-27 and it's our intention to do a soft release at that point to get the website up and running and then in July we will do promotions that its up and running. The second pass of the hunting digest is with staff currently and things are moving along smoothly. We are on track to get the digest out by the August 1 release date. We held the Governors Surf Fishing Tournament on May 15<sup>th</sup>, another very successful event. We had 524 participants and that includes 65 high school students. Congratulations to Pam McGee of Newton NJ she was the Governor's Cup winner this year with a 37 ½ inch striper. The Youth fishing event was held June 4-5 and could do either day. There were 34 sites across the state with 807 participants with data still coming in, Chief Ivany will update council at the next meeting.

### **Land Management:**

Chief Hearon reported an update on the farm auction, there will be another auction this fall. Fish and Wildlife will be including 6-leases across the state that did not work out at the last auction. Staff is wrapped up with Spring planting across the state with roughly 1000 acres. Staff will be focusing on areas with increased use due to the warmer weather. we are starting to plan for pheasant stocking. Tuckahoe boat ramp maintenance is still on for this fall, Point Pleasant is underway now with a contractor on site. The Makepeace Range will be closed starting this Thursday to do lead remediation. Pond Creek has had the pre-bid walk through and bid openings are anticipated for June 23<sup>rd</sup>.

**Law Enforcement:**

Chief Panico reported that this week we made conditional offers to 7 recruit CPO's. it was a long process, and we are very happy with the 7 offers and they all excepted. Their tentative start date will be either July 16<sup>th</sup> or July 30<sup>th</sup> we are waiting for HR to confirm. They will all attend the Cape May County police academy, which starts on August 3<sup>rd</sup>. we filled 3 vacancies in the northern region, 2 positions in central region, and 2 positions in the southern region. On the back bear front, the training unit recently conducted another training in Morris County on June 2<sup>nd</sup> where 22 officers attended. The total number of officers trained for 2022 is around 52 officers so far. We have another training class scheduled for October 7 at Colliers Mills for Burlington County and are in the process of planning for Hunterdon County and Bergen County departments.

**Wildlife Management:**

Chief Stanko reported on the preliminary Spring turkey numbers. We stand at 2317, which is only down 10 animals from last year in 2021 but we are down 18% from 2020, which was the covid bump. We had one reported case of rabbit hemorrhagic disease in a domestic rabbit in Cape May County. NJ Department of Agriculture put out a statement that it is not considered a zoonotic risk at this time. Also, high path avian influenza has been reported in fox kits in Michigan, Minnesota, and Ontario so we sent out notices out to our rehabbers to be on the lookout. Our second bear biologist trainee is now on the books, she started on Monday. Our 4 wildlife workers have all accepted their offers but do not have start dates for three of them and one is able to start on the 18<sup>th</sup>. we have a chemical immobilization training scheduled for early October for new and current staff refresher given by the San Diego Zoo Alliance. Since the last council meeting there have been 20 Category 1 reports throughout the state. Hunterdon County had 2 in Clinton and Lebanon for protected livestock and agriculture damage. Morris County had 2 in Harding and Jefferson both aggressive bears. Somerset had 1 report in Bernhards Township for an aggressive bear. Sussex County had 10, 5 aggressive bears there, 3 protective livestock, and 2 attempted home entries. Warren County had 5, 1 in Hardwick, 2 in Blairstown, 1 in Knowlton, 1 in Hackettstown, with 3 aggressive bears and 2 protective livestock.

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

Chief Heilferty reported on some of the Avian projects they are working on. The Delaware Bay Shorebird Migration has come and gone. It begins the first or second week in May and runs through the beginning of June. Horseshoe crab spawning, we had a fairly typical year, and we will continue to focus on horseshoe crab conservation, beach restoration and habitat restoration. Our partners are raising concern on Paragon and the effect they might have flushing birds and taking birds. On the Atlantic Coast, the beach nesting birds are having a better year than last year. We're having our usual challenge with predation and this year it looks like we are losing adult Piping Plovers.

### **Old Business:**

#### **Greenwood Lake Access Update:**

Assistant Director Barno reported we are still waiting on the development study on Greenwood Lake as far as to which launch point in Browns point. We did have the Commissioner on site as part of the kickoff to summer. We were able to go over directly with him some of the issues with access.

#### **Black Bear Education Marketing Campaign:**

Chief Ivany reported it has been a very active Spring and the DEP Press Office is receiving a lot of bear calls from the press, which we have been providing them with information. Our regular black bear outreach campaign that has been ongoing for quite some time commenced on April 3<sup>rd</sup> and go through July. Bear Safety and Awareness in English and Spanish continue to run on various platforms. Recently our staff thought we needed to develop some new and additional 15 second video public service announcements reminding folks if they see a bear to be aware on what to do and not do. We have had internal discussions about the need for a full-time employee within the division and hunter education that would work on black bear education and outreach. We developed criteria which we provided to Assistant Director Golden, and he was able to gain approval from the commissioner's office for Fish and Wildlife to receive one of the full-time positions that was originally allocated for Solid Waste.

### **New Business:**

#### **2022 Pheasant Stocking**

Chief Hearon gave a brief presentation on the 2022 pheasant stocking schedule.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to accept the stocking schedule as presented.

**A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to accept the 2022 pheasant stocking schedule as presented by Chief Hearon, seconded by Councilman DeMartino. Vote taken; all approve, motion carries.**

### **Recovering American Wildlife Act Update (RAWA)**

Assistant Commissioner gave a brief update on Recovering American Wildlife Act (RAWA) which would allot 1.3 billion dollars annually for wildlife.

### **Harmful Algal Blooms and Pets:**

Dr. Nicol Lewis gave a brief presentation on the Harmful Algal Blooms and keeping your pets safe.

### **Public Comment:**

Barbara Sachua commented we should have equality all around.

Janet Pizar talked about the 20 Category 1 bear instances and says a bear can cause damage, but it is typical bear behavior being shown as being aggressive.

Barbara Sachau commented again to say she is against Pheasant stocking and that the virtual part of the meeting has bad audio.

**A motion was made to adjourn the meeting at 12:35 p.m. by Councilman Lathrop, seconded by Councilman Jones. Vote taken; all approve, motion carries.**

**Next meeting: July 12,2022, at 10:00 a.m. at the Central Region Office in Robbinsville.**

