

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

GOTO MEETING

April 14, 2020

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

The meeting was called to order at 1:03 p.m. by Chairman Virgilio.

Chairman Virgilio read aloud the following notice: In accordance with P.L.1975, c. 231 notice of this meeting was filed with the office of the Secretary of State on April 7, 2020 and delivered to the designated newspapers for the division, The Atlantic City Press and the Newark StarLedger and published on April 10, 2020.

Roll call was taken in attendance:

- Chairman Frank Virgilio
- Councilman Phil Brodhecker
- Councilman Joe DeMartino (absent)
- Councilman Jim DeStephano
- Councilman Agust Gudmundsson
- Councilman Dr. Rick Lathrop
- Councilman Ed Kertz
- Councilman Rob Pollock
- Councilman Loren Robinson
- Councilman Ken Whildin

Division employees included: D. Golden, P. Nelson, L. Barno, C. Stanko, A. Ivany, J. Hearon, S. Cianciulli, T. Nichols and D. Bajek.

Also in attendance was Assistant Commissioner Ray Bukowski.

There were numerous members of the public in attendance.

Chairman Virgilio asked if there were any changes or corrections to the March 10 minutes.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to approve the March 10 minutes, seconded by Councilman Kertz. Vote taken, one abstention (Councilman Pollock), motion carried.

Chairman Virgilio asked if there were any changes or corrections to the March 30 minutes.

Councilman DeStephano wanted it known that he was present at the March 30 meeting, there were some phone issues.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to approve the March 30 minutes, seconded by Councilman Lathrop. Vote taken, all in favor; motion carried.

Chairman Virgilio started with we are open for business and running. He would like to give a special thanks to Assistant Commissioner Bukowski, Director Golden, Assistant Director Nelson, and Acting Assistant Director Barno and the entire staff of DFW for all their hard work and effort. God bless and good health.

Director Golden mentioned what a difference a month makes. Last council meeting we were told to call the virus COVID-19 and we are going on week 5 of learning to work remotely. We had a quick meeting to discuss important decisions with the first attempt having 95 participants. Managing that was difficult. The Bureau of Information and Education put together videos, posts, and signs in such a short amount of time. The Division is offering a refund for turkey permits with zone state park/forest closures.

On the personnel side, Chief Lisa Barno was appointed Acting Assistant Director. Congratulations Lisa!

Assistant Director Nelson's last day will be May 8, 2020. This will be her last Fish and Game Council meeting; she is retiring July 1 but will be using up some vacation time.

Assistant Director Nelson wanted to say, "Thank you." She has worked with six directors in her time with Fish and Wildlife and there has been a lot of changes throughout the years.

Assistant Commissioner Bukowski wanted to congratulate Assistant Director Nelson on her retirement and wish her best of luck. He would also like to thank the Council for coming together for the trout stocking adjustments. He mentioned that it is not an easy call to close the State parks, but we are concerned about everyone's safety.

Licenses and Permits:

Assistant Director Nelson reported that we are dealing with customer service the best we can. The sportsmen have lots of questions and we will get through this. The turkey lottery went off without a hitch, the sales were up 7% with more over-the-counter sales than lottery. It seems to flip flop one year to the next. We will be refunding some money, so we have to wait to see what that will be. An e-mail went out yesterday and we received 33 requests for refunds. Where you bought your permit determines how you get your refund, if you bought online it is an easy refund but if you bought with an agent then the Division will issue you a refund, not the agent. Fishing sales and trout stamps are up 5%.

Acting Assistant Director Barno reported staff are working hard. Staff across the Division have had just about everything thrown at them over the past month and they still managed to piece it all together. This shows the level of dedication across the Division.

Council Reports:

Agriculture:

Councilman Brodhecker reported seeing a lot of bear in the fields and beekeepers are getting electric fences. There is a huge surge in backyard chicken purchases.

Councilman Kertz reported he has been busy on the farm and has only talked to a few people about the turkey permits.

Endangered and Nongame Species Committee:

Councilman Lathrop reported they had a meeting after the last Council meeting in March where they discussed offshore wind and issues related to birds.

Dr. Sebastian Reist gave two updates. There has been a small outbreak of hemorrhagic disease in domestic and wild rabbits in New York and New Mexico. When seen in wildlife, it might be a sign that it is here to stay. Avian influenza in birds is now in both North and South Carolina.

Public Comment:

Councilman Pollock wanted to congratulate both Assistant Director Nelson and Acting Assistant Director Barno.

Regional Sportsman Representatives:

Councilman DeStephano reported no county meetings. He was out on opening day for trout and saw a good turnout. He would like to compliment the Division for the turkey permit refunds.

Councilman Gudmundsson reported that he has heard nothing but compliments on opening the trout season early, the only confusion was with the closure of parks, people were asking if the WMAs were still open. His compliments to the Division and congratulations to Assistant Director Nelson and Acting Assistant Director Barno.

Councilman Robinson reported since last meeting, Somerset County had their meeting the day after ours. Hunterdon County had their meeting before the closure and talked about gun laws.

He attended migratory bird telephonic meeting. He wanted to thank Director Golden for the turkey refund plan and congratulate Assistant Director Nelson and Acting Assistant Director Barno.

Councilman Whildin reported Cumberland County canceled their trash hunt with no new date as of yet. Trout are not as popular in the south as the north. He wanted to congratulate Assistant Director Nelson and Acting Assistant Director Barno.

Chairman Virgilio reported most of South Jersey's meetings were canceled. We have a few platforms to hold meetings. We had the first regular meeting on Zoom looking at the State Federation meeting this Friday. We were looking to get one trail camera and ended up with four. There were some good comments for how the Division handled the closures. He wanted to thank Assistant Director Nelson for all the years working together.

Freshwater Fisheries:

Acting Assistant Director Barno reported on Opening Day Angler Counts conducted by staff on April 1, 2020, the beginning of the newly instituted catch and release season, and on the official opening day of the season on April 11, 2020. Angler pressure on April 1 was highly varied between the waterbodies, fishing pressure on the Musconetcong was extremely light while places like Pequest River and Big Flat Brook were busy. Anglers were very appreciative of the season being opened early to catch and release as it provided a much-needed recreational opportunity in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Anglers were seen successfully catching a number of fish on April 1. The closure of state parks on April 7, just four days prior to opening day, definitely affected angling opportunities. Angling activity on Opening Day, although lighter than previous years, was still busy with anglers. Closure of parks concentrated anglers in other waters that were still open to public access. Water temperatures had dropped and with ten days of catch and release prior to the season anglers had to work a bit more for fish. Anglers were seen in most instances complying with social distancing rules.

Law Enforcement:

Chief Cianciulli reported that law has been pretty busy. The WMAs remained open, but due to overcrowding the parks needed to be closed. A lot of people are utilizing our WMAs and we were given permission to give overcrowding orders. There have been small groups in the parking lots and the CPOs had to ask them to disperse. Most of the violations are Title 23 by issuing summons. We have had certain areas overcrowded with fishermen fishing shoulder to shoulder and we are just trying to break up large groups to maintain social distancing.

New Business:

2020-2021 Migratory Bird Season and 2021-25 Zone Split Option:

Ted Nichols gave a brief presentation on the 2020-21 migratory bird season and needed the Council to vote.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to accept the 2020-21 Migratory Bird Season, seconded by Councilman Kertz. Vote taken, all in favor; motion carried.

Ted Nichols gave a presentation on the 2021-2025 Zone and Split Option for New Jersey and needed the council to vote.

A motion was made by Councilman Kertz to accept the proposal for 2021-25 Zone and Split Option for New Jersey, seconded by Councilman Robinson. Vote taken, all in favor; motion carried.

Pheasant Stocking Schedule:

Chief Stanko gave a brief presentation on pheasant stocking and stamp sales. We had changed the pheasant stocking schedule back in 2016 with 50% implementation the first year and 100% in 2017. So, we have had three years under our belts of 100% implementation of the new stocking formula which was meant to fairly redistribute pheasants throughout the state. We had some complaints from the northern region because that is the region that sustained a loss of birds. We took some out of the north and redistributed them through the central and southern regions with this new stocking formula. We also looked at stamp sales. Overall state-wide from 2015-2019 we are down 4.7%. we will reassess in two years in 2022 which is when we will be able to open the Game Code to amendment.

Public Comment:

Barbara Sachau, White House Station NJ, was very disappointed at how difficult it was to get through to the number posted for this meeting. She would like to know why there is no list of complaints of hunters who trespass. We should be protecting our wildlife and not killing it.

A member of the public commented on how nice it is that we have these meetings and that they are very transparent.

A motion was made by Councilman DeStephano to adjourn the meeting at 2:53 p.m., seconded by Councilman Whildin. Vote taken, all in favor; motion carried.

Next meeting will be May 12, 2020 at the Central Region Office at 10:00 a.m.