

THE MINUTES OF  
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL MEETING  
GOTO MEETING DECEMBER 14, 2021

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

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.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 December 2, 2021, and delivered to the designated newspapers for the division, The Atlantic City Press and The Newark Star Ledger.

Roll call was taken in accordance:

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

Division employees included: D. Golden, G. Kopkash, L. Barno, C. Stanko, J. Hearon, J. Heilferty, L. Quirk, M., Monteschio, A. Ivany, and D. Bajek.

There were numerous members of the public in attendance.

Chairman Virgilio asked if there were any changes or corrections to the November 9 minutes.

**A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to approve the November 9, 2021, minutes, seconded by Councilman Lathrop. Vote taken; motion carried.**

Chairman Virgilio wanted to welcome everyone during this most wonderful time of the year. On behalf of the entire Fish and Game Council, he would like to thank Director Dave Golden and his entire staff for providing the citizens of New Jersey with uninterrupted customer services during these most trying times. He would also like to thank the outdoor enthusiast and hunters of New Jersey for being true heroes. He quoted Jim Miller, a professor emeritus from Mississippi State University; "Hunters were the first to call for laws to restore wildlife populations, and they continue to support and defend scientific wildlife management, and they're passionate about wild things and places." Finally, a special thanks to Janet Pizar, Barbara Sachau, and the Animal Protection League of New Jersey, who represents the public trust of wildlife management that commands broad public representation for equal lawful jurisdictions in the creation of wildlife policies. Today stakeholders will have two opportunities for comments: one after the community-based deer management application presentation along with the regular comment period at the end of the meeting.

Director Golden appreciates Chairman Virgilio's comments, specifically the one regarding hunters being some of the first conservationists in the US and is always struck with how forward thinking that community was when they developed the North American wildlife conservation model. Our Wildlife Habitat Supporter Program launched late last month, and we are now accepting donations from both license and non-license buyers across the state and some outside the state. He appreciates the support from the council on this, specifically Chairman Virgilio who was one of the first to donate. DEP yesterday released its Natural and Working Land Strategy document for what will be an ongoing strategy by the Department to utilize natural lands to help sequester carbon and combat climate change. That is available now for public comment on DEP website. We reached a significant milestone in November as our Wildlife Management Area system has now exceeded the 360,000-acre mark, so we now manage lands in excess of 360,000 acres on our 122 Wildlife Management Areas. We now have a camera showing our conference room in our Central Region Office and we are testing out the technology which will at some point in the future give us the ability to have Council in-person and the public to view in virtually. Last month the Council reviewed the farm leases and approved us to move forward, and we brought them to the State House Commission who then approved them conditionally on the premise that come 2023 farmers will not use neonicotinoid pesticides on farming on state lands. We are excited about the fact that there was a Senate hearing on the RAWA, it was in the Environmental and Public Works Committee last week, Director Golden listened in on that meeting and felt optimistic that there is momentum behind it. Most that commented on it were positive but concerned about the money that would go into funding. Also, just to let the Council and public know, the minutes from October F&G meeting are posted on our website along with the November monthly reports.

## **Council Reports:**

### **Agriculture:**

Councilman Brodhecker reported most farmers are finishing up harvesting. The deer fencing bill, in the past there were funds available through the Department of Agriculture for deer fencing but ran out of money and the program ended. About 3-4 years ago funds became available again through the preservation program which is part of the Green Funds. This money was available and made a special deer fencing program which was only for preserved farms and did not allow for the funding to be used for non-preserved farms. Farmers that were not preserved had no access to these funds. This bill S4231 is for funding to non-preserved farms for equal funding for all the farms to get deer fencing. As far as wildlife up his way, he spoke to a few hunters who had very successful hunts; one club had a record with their harvests.

Dr. Reist: no report

**Famer/Sportsman Relations:** no report

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

Councilman DeStephano reported he attended Warren County Trappers Association , and State Federation meetings. He reached out to Essex County about the meeting and never heard a response back. Morris County meeting was canceled due to deer season.

Councilman Robinson reported he attended Somerset and Middlesex County meetings in-person and they discussed the Garden State Outdoor Show. They also discussed some legislation the gun bills are coming up and the animal advocate bill, there was a lot of discussion on EHD. There are concerns over signs being put up on the East Brunswick side and he contacted Assistant Director Barno about the issue. It is also great to see a Conservation Officer at the meetings and would like to see more officers attend throughout the counties. He also went to the State Federation virtual meeting and the Hunting Digest Stakeholders' virtual meeting. Lastly, he got to enjoy the Tuckahoe Waterfowl Hunt this past Saturday and was very impressed with the program.

Councilman Whildin reported he attended the Southern Region Predator Club meeting and Biologist Andrew Burnett was there and gave an excellent presentation which was well attended.

Chairman Virgilio reported he attended the Cumberland County meeting where they discussed all the activities leading up to the deer season. One of the things they were concerned about Zone 45 permit season, with only being able to take 1 deer but you have to get a buck tag if you wish to take a buck and they feel they are paying twice for 1 deer. This is something we will discuss in committee when we look at regulation changes. He is also involved in the R3 Program especially as it relates with women, and they have a planned hunt with a deer club with Gloucester County

for the January permit season where a group of women will be harvesting deer. Chairman Virgilio is meeting with two foundations, one of which he is an officer on and looking at funding a field initiative to reach out to minority groups. In Camden Counties meeting there was a Go Fund Me due to a fire tragedy.

**Finance Committee:** No report

**Game Committee:** No report

Chairman Virgilio reported they are working on scheduling a meeting in January.

**Endangered and Non-Game Species Advisory Program:**

Councilman Lathrop reported they had their meeting November 17<sup>th</sup> and had a special report on shorebirds and nesting on the Jersey shore. Piping Plovers took a bad hit with the Memorial Day storm which caused poor hatch rates.

**Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee:** Scheduling a meeting for February

**Law Enforcement Committee:** No report

**Legislative Report:**

Mary Monteschio reported bills:

**S4097/A6094** Extends the Right to Farm Act protections to certain aquaculture activities. It was reported out of the Agriculture Committee that there were no changes.

**A6096** – Eliminates prohibition against taking commercial shellfish on Sunday from commercial shellfish aquaculture producers - it was reported out of the Agriculture Committee last week with no amendments and still no Senate version

**A6088/ S4080** Requires certain snowmobiles, all-terrain vehicles, and dirt bikes to be forfeited and destroyed. Bill was modified to the point where our interest in the bill is no longer there. They modified it so municipalities would have the ability to have ordinances to address the conditions of the bill.

The CBT spending bills were heard in the Senate Environment and Energy Committee last week and have all passed out of the Committee to the Assembly and was passed out to the General Assembly.

**A2070/S1016** Restricts the use of neonicotinoid pesticides. Passed out of Senate

**S4231/A4232** Creates a program in Agriculture for deer fencing on certain farmland. It was sent to the Senate on the 9<sup>th</sup> and on to the full Assembly.

**RAWA** now has 139 co-sponsors in the house.

**HR5608** Chronic Wasting Disease Research and Management Act. Up to 38 co-sponsors in the house and still no Senate version.

### **Division Reports:**

#### **Central Services:**

Assistant Director Kopkash went over the Habitat Supporter Program, we have currently collected \$3,085 in donations to that program across three states. We had people donate from New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. There will be another email blast next week to remind people of the donation program. Barbara Stoff does a report of the license sales over the last three years due to the COVID bump that happened and where we stand as of sales for 2019-2021. Overall, except for archery, in comparison to 2019 we are up, however so far today compared to 2020 numbers we are down. The only areas we seen increase in licenses sales are the All-Around License with an 8% increase, Pheasant and Quail Stamp with 4.6% increase, and Trapping License with a 3% increase.

**Freshwater Fisheries:** No report

#### **Information and Education:**

Chief Ivany wanted to follow up on the Division's new website, things are moving along very well with the company they are working with. They are starting to get into new website now as far as wireframes and links. Everyone in the Division is working on moving that project forward. The upcoming Outdoor Garden State Sports Show, we will be attending, and the show is still on. We just recently got approval from the State for Division personnel to attend events and we are on a time frame to put the show together. The end of year Hunter Education statistics in 2019 we did 4,920 certifications, in 2020 even with having to cancel the Spring courses we did a lot in the Fall with 5,338 certifications and in 2021 we are at 6,442 certifications. Hunter Education program is going strong, and our numbers are up and attribute this to our online course.

### **Land Management:**

Chief Hearon reported Sue Predl retired last week, and he will be filling that role as well as his current role until her position gets filled. Following up on what Director Golden said about the farm leases, neonicotinoid was the focus and what we expect the outcome to be a delay to the farm service contracts getting out and renewed. The next step would be the farmers will be made aware of the changes and restrictions on the leases through the State House Commission and will have the option to not move forward with their leases. Hopefully we have enough time for them to roll this out for 2022 but we are expecting delays. Staff will be stocking quail and pheasants this Friday. Land Management did not have any big issues with the 6-day Firearm season. On the project front for Lands Management, Manahawkin WMA impoundment restoration is starting to get underway, and we have engineers doing assessments this week. On the infrastructure side, there has been a delay with the Tuckahoe boat ramp with permitting. We are almost ready to put out bidding for the Point Pleasant boat ramp as well.

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

Chief Heilferty reported two updates; his primary lead zoologist Mandy Dey filed for retirement and her last day will be January 31<sup>st</sup>. New Jersey was asked to become a fourth state to help compete for a competitive State Wildlife Grant and for freshwater mussels and if 4 states get together it increases the total funding the states get to collectively apply for. The State of Massachusetts was leading in its efforts. They had already had South Carolina and Virginia; they needed a 4<sup>th</sup> state, so NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife agreed. We have contributed to an application that was ultimately approved and we will be getting \$133,000 to put towards a project for Brook Floater conservation.

### **Law Enforcement:**

Captain Quirk reported they just finished 6-day Firearm season and calls for service were down. Officers are in the process of completing mandated training with a deadline of the end of the year. The training topics are interrelated, the first one is ABLE (Active Bystandership for Law Enforcement), De-Escalate Incidents and ICAT (Integrating Communicating Assessment Tactics) and the updated Use of Force Policy, which was issued at the end of 2020. We are completing our training by using both inhouse training unit and cooperating with the county police academy. We are wear-testing a third body camera system and there are officers currently in the field with these body cameras and the administrative staff will be testing things on the back-end side to make a decision on which product to go with. We are also in the process of selecting another CAD system, which is how the communications system operate at Trenton Dispatch keeps track of our officers on their calls for service also the Park Police, Forest Fire, and other DEP emergency services. This system is expensive, and we are partnering with State Police to have shared services with them if we are able to make this transition to the new CAD system.

## **Wildlife Management:**

Chief Stanko reported she has nothing new this month on Norvin Green Forest but will update on after the 1<sup>st</sup> of the year. We are getting some questions from people on whitetail deer and COVID-19. There has been testing of deer in four states and they have found the COVID-19 virus in some of those deer. We have had sportsmen ask if the virus is communicable to them and we did post on our website regarding this. According to the CDC there is no evidence that wildlife, which includes whitetail deer, are a source of COVID-19 illness for people in the United States or that people could get COVID-19 from preparing and eating hunted game, but we do advise hunters not to consume any deer that appears to be ill and to take precaution not only against the possibility of Covid, but wildlife does carry a plethora of other of diseases and parasites. When handling and cleaning the carcass you should wear rubber or disposable gloves. Wear a mask, don't eat, drink or smoke or anything to touch your mouth or face while doing it, limit cutting into to handling the lungs, throat, and nasal cavity as much as possible. When finished, thoroughly wash your hands and all equipment. If you are immune compromised ask for assistance. Cook all meat to an internal temperature of 165 degrees or higher. We will be participating in a study with the USDA to test deer in NJ to see if they have been exposed to Covid and we will report back to Council when we get those results.

Last month, the overall deer harvest numbers up until November 7 were down 34% due to warm and wet weather, abundant mast crops, reduced sportsmen participation, and deer dying of EHD. Opening day of 6-day Firearm, December 6<sup>th</sup>, was warm, foggy, and windy day so it was down over 48% from 2020. The overall 6-day Firearm season is down 31.3% at 4,212 deer this year. Deer season opening day Sept 11 - Dec 12 is down 34.8% from last year.

## **Old Business:**

### **Hunting Digest Stakeholder Update:**

Assistant Director Barno reported they met on November 18<sup>th</sup> for the 2022 Hunting Digest, and we walked away with a lot of great suggestions for the Division to consider. We had the Division well represented with I&E, BWM, and BLE staff. We will be looking at those suggestions and seeing what we can integrate into the Digest. What is very clear is the lines in the charts not being clear enough, the contrast needs to be worked on. It seems a number of hunters were having problems especially in the deer regulations.

## **New Business:**

### **Community Based Deer Management Permit Applications:**

Jodi Powers gave a review of the following application for Community Based Deer Management.

### **Princeton Township:**

Princeton Township has applied for Community Based Deer Management permit. The Township's application requested that White Buffalo would cull deer through March 31, 2022. Princeton Township is proposing to allow White Buffalo to cull deer using silenced bolt-action .223 centerfire and .22 rim-rifles on nine private and six township properties. The Division is not recommending approval of .22 rim-fire rifles.

The goal is to reduce the number of accidents caused by the over-abundance of deer.

Fish and Wildlife recommends the Council approve this application.

### **Public Comment on Community Based Deer Management Permit Applications:**

Barbara Sachua commented that she is against the permit of killing deer.

Doris Lin commented that she opposed the application, and that net and bolt is inhumane.

Janet Pizar commented that she is opposed the Princeton CBDMP and think every Council member should go out in the field and witness the net and bolt to see how inhumane it is.

**A motion was made by Councilman DeStephano to accept the Princeton CBDMP, seconded by Councilman Robinson. Vote take; all approve, motion carries.**

### **Division Digest Overview:**

Assistant Director Kopkash reported that for September publication, we began working in November. Internally our editor sends out last year's digest to staff for responses by February. Once we internally organize our comments the editor works with the publisher, this also includes ads. In all this process takes almost a year. In the end we order over 110,000 digests and distribute to over 300 locations.

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

Chief Ivany reported we are about to embark on our largest black bear marketing campaign, especially on the digital side. Recently we sent a request for marketing proposals, and we have received 4 proposals back. Staff has gone through them and have chosen a company. We are moving forward setting up meetings with the company and getting this marketing campaign going as soon as possible.

**Public Comment:**

Barbara Sachau commented she protests the habitat assault in Wildlife Management Areas by the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife.

**A motion was made by Councilman DeStephano to adjourn the meeting at 11:36 am, seconded by Councilman Robinson. Vote taken, all approve, motion carries.**

**Next meeting: January 11, 2022, 10:00 a.m. Location to be determined.**