

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL
Central Region Office
Robbinsville, New Jersey
September 12, 2023**

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 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 September 7, 2023 and delivered to the designated newspapers for Fish and Wildlife, the Newark Star Ledger and the Atlantic City Press on September 7, 2023.

Roll call was taken in attendance:

- Chairman Frank Virgilio
- Councilman James DeStephano
- Councilman Mitchell Jones
- Councilman Ed Kertz
- Councilman Rick Lathrop
- Councilman Rob Pollock
- Councilman Bob Puskas- **Absent**
- Councilman Loren Robinson
- Councilman Ken Whildin

Fish & Wildlife employees included: D. Golden, L. Barno, G. Kopkash, C. Stanko, A. Ivany, J. Hearon, C. Smith, K. Springer, and D. Bajek.

There were several members of the public in attendance.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to approve the August 8th F&G Council minutes.

Councilman Robinson made a motion to approve the August 8th minutes, seconded by Councilman DeStephano. Vote taken. All approve. Motion approved.

Chairman Virgilio welcomed everyone to our September NJ Fish and Game Council Meeting. Yesterday was the 22nd anniversary of 9/11, when a terrorist attack killed thousands of ordinary men and women. Among them, 343 firefighters, paramedics, and 60 Police officers all rose to meet that day's challenges and made the ultimate sacrifice. Please keep them in your prayers, along with the children and families they left behind.

Assistant Commissioner Golden wanted to recognize staff for their hard work and efforts on getting the CBBMP and amended Game Code changes through, they were filed last Friday and

should appear in the October 2 register. He also wanted to announce that we have two employees retiring: Carole Stanko and Bob Longcor. He thanked them for their time with the agency and wished them good luck in all their future endeavors.

Council Reports:

Agriculture:

Councilman Jones reported the Agricultural community wanted to thank the Council and the Division for the bear hunt. He is starting to get bear damage reports coming in. Rutgers is moving forward with the study on bear damage, and we are trying to put together some drone footage and actual GIS measurement for acreage lost, so we have some hard numbers for that. Deer season opened on Saturday.

Councilman Kertz reported we are getting some rain we needed in the South. We will be harvesting corn soon, and the wildlife side of things our farm got hit hard last year with EHD. He has talked to other farmers, and they had a lot of deer damage, so he talked with them to see if they would be interested in having someone from the federation come and help them with their depredation permit and deer.

Dr. Reist, Department of Agriculture reported an update on Avian Influenza, it is dying down locally, and PA just came off the AI positive statuses.

Farmer/Sportsman Relations:

Councilman Jones reported they had a meeting yesterday and Chief Stanko gave a presentation for proposal on deer regulations and simplifications. This presentation was well received by agriculture, and they were in support of simplification. They also touched on the bear hunt and the Rutgers survey.

NJ State Federations of Sportsman's Club:

Councilman DeStephano reported he attended the Northern Deer Forum at Pquest, and he wanted to add that the paving job looks great. Warren County changed their meeting to tomorrow night.

Councilman Robinson reported he attended Hunterdon and Middlesex Counties Federation meetings, the Federation Convention meeting, Northern Deer Forum, today's Finance

Committee meeting, the Migratory Bird Season Setting Committee, and virtually the Federations White tail deer committee meeting. They discussed the new deer reporting form, upcoming deer forums, Tuckahoe WMA, the Managed Waterfowl Hunt, the Youth Pheasant Application and the Trout survey. He got a lot of calls the first day of bow season with the system being down, but it was back up shortly after. He would like to thank Jodi and the Deer Project staff, they did a great job at the deer forum. Also, he would like to thank Bob and Carol for all their years of service, the sportsmen really appreciate it.

Councilman Whildin reported he attended the Migratory Bird Season Setting meeting, and the bear meeting last week. Also, he attended the Tri County long beards banquet.

Chairman Virgilio reported he attended the NJ Federation Sportsman's Club Convention Committee meeting, where they discussed the deer classics. He also attended the Salem County Youth Day Outing, the Norther Deer Forum and the Finance Committee meeting. He also attended a meeting hosted by Assistant Commissioner Golden on Marine Fisheries in NJ, with topics covering New Jersey's Significance in Resource Values.

Finance:

Jeff Saintvil gave a presentation on the Hunter and Angler FY24.

Bob Longcor gave a presentation on Federal Grants FY24, Power of Partnership.

Fish Committee: No report

Game Committee: No report

Endangered & Non-Game Advisory Committee:

Councilman Lathrop reported there is no meeting this month, but new members will be coming on the committee.

Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee: No report.

Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee: No report.

Law Enforcement: No report.

Public Member: No report.

Legislative Report: No report.

Fish and Wildlife Reports:

Business of Administration:

Chief Springer handed out a packet with the past five-year comparison of sales from 2019-2023. License sales for the end of August 2023 were up 1.17 % as compared to the end of August 2022. Sales compared to 2019, which is considered a normal year pre-covid, license sales were up by 1%. Wildlife Habitat Supporter Program total amount of donations for August was \$2095.00 and the total since it started in November 2021 is \$59,285.00.

Freshwater Fisheries:

Chris Smith reported during the August Council meeting we reported that angler compliance in entering their CID# was very low. We would like to revise the record with good news and report that angler compliance in entering their CID# was higher than previously thought. Due to an error during file download, many CID#s became shortened and seemed invalid, leading to an inability to properly analyze the initial data file. Given this new information, we can confidently cross-reference and analyze the survey results with a much higher degree of confidence. When last checked 1,952 responses to the first survey on angler usage, of which 1,763 contained valid CID#s and 934 of the 966 responses from the second survey on pre-season and in-season closures contained valid CID#s, allowing both surveys to be used for informing future management and regulation options. Survey #3 was launched on August 28 and as of September 7 we have 953 anglers that have participated. We look forward to analyzing the results and launching additional surveys. The Fall and Winter Trout Stocking Schedule has been prepared and vetted by Bureau of Land Management and Pequest Trout Hatchery staff. There are no changes to this program this year and continues to be one of the most popular stocking programs offered by Fish and Wildlife. The Fall stocking will begin on October 10 and conclude on October 18. See handout. The Winter stocking consists of only two days, November 20 and 21, just prior to the Thanksgiving Holiday on November 23. In 2024 Thanksgiving will fall late, on November 28, so it is being discussed as to whether the Winter stocking should occur on the 18th and 19th or 25th and 26th. The Fall and Winter Stocking program will be a topic on one of our upcoming online angler surveys, in which anglers

will have the opportunity to weigh in on the program, including preferred stocking dates and regulations. Building off of the successful project to restore Brook Trout in Reinart Brook (Hacklebarney SP) by the removal of non-native Brown Trout, a project on two additional streams has been initiated. This study aims to determine cost and feasibility of restoring Brook Trout populations by conducting manual removals of Brown Trout through backpack electrofishing. This study should determine how long Brook Trout populations can withstand Brown Trout recolonization under different environmental conditions. This knowledge will inform trout biologists if manual Brown Trout removals to restore Brook Trout populations is a viable management tool and if it can and should be implemented on a greater scale in the future. The streams that were selected are Trout Brook (also in Hacklebarney SP) and a tributary of the Pohatcong Creek. Both streams are connected to source populations of Brown Trout, therefore recolonization is expected. The information hoped to be gained is to answer the question, "How long does it take for Brown Trout to colonize a stream segment and regain their dominance over Brook Trout?" The Pequest Hatchery's production cycle is on schedule. At this point we have successfully taken 936,000 eggs from 314 ripe females during the week of 8/28 and 354,591 eggs from 107 ripe females during the week of 9.4. These eggs will be raised in the nursery building until they are ready to go outdoors.

Things are slowing down a bit, with most hourly employees going back to college. Things will ramp back up during the fall. Operations are going well, but challenges are plentiful. Recently the boilers used to heat the water to grow several species of fish in the intensive culture building have been breaking down, with emergency repairs getting us by. They are in need of replacement. In recent years we have been establishing more and more fish trades with neighboring states to capitalize on individual state's expertise and in general it has worked out very well for all trade partners. Unfortunately, a PA Fish & Boat Commission hatchery had issues and was unable to supply us with the requested number of Muskellunge fingerlings (in trade for Northern Pike). Additional Tiger Muskies (produced on-site in Hackettstown and from PA) will be used to make up the balance of pure strain Muskies originally planned for stocking this fall. Tiger Muskie are more colorful with more ornate patterns, so some anglers might be pleased if they are fortunate enough to catch one down the road.

BFF staff have completed revisions for the first pass of the 2024 Freshwater Fishing Digest. It has been edited and passed on to I&E for further editing. Things are going really smoothly, and we are on schedule.

Information & Education:

Chief Ivany reported Hunter Education classes are in full swing for the month and filling up quickly. The new Hunter Ed survey for students started in August and will continue for the remainder of the year with over 50 people completing the survey already. Two Trapper Education classes are filled for this weekend, one at Tuckahoe and one at Hackettstown and

there will be two more classes in October. Our R3 program partnered with Ducks Unlimited and Wallkill National Wildlife Refuge for an intro to Waterfowl program recently, 34 people attended the event. We are working on Fall hunting/Fishing Season promotions, and we are working with the communications office at DEP on expanding our reach. We have several research field trips planned with Commissioner LaTourette who is interested in going out with our Endangered and Nongame Species Program in October.

Land Management:

Chief Hearon reported that we are in the middle of Fall plantings, preparing for fall trout stocking and Pheasant stocking is right around the corner. Hunting season is open, which brings its own issues and we are working through that. Farm leases are out of the auction and should be making their way to the State house commission this month. For Lands Management, this is a time of transition, we are still dealing with our summer events, boat ramps, fishing, high use on WMA's and hunting is upon. Today and tomorrow, we are finishing Stone Tavern and Rising Sun boat ramp projects. Improved ramps were installed previously and today we are adding easy dock style floating docks to make it easier getting in and out of vessels. Our Coastal Program is in full swing, and we are expanding habitat plans on the coastal side as well as land. He also wished Carole and Bob a long and healthy retirement.

Law Enforcement:

Assistant Commissioner Golden reported our recruit class are currently in the academy and we went from 7 recruits to 6 recruits.

Wildlife Management:

Chief Stanko wanted to thank everyone, and it has been a privilege to work with this council. As for bears this past month, we had 16 Category 1: 2- in Morris County, 12- in Sussex, and 2- in Warren County. We deployed 6 traps. We captured and euthanized 1 animal. Fall research trapping is completed and are gearing up for check stations for the upcoming bear season. The Rutgers survey on bears for farmers, Assistant Director Barno and Chief Stanko had preliminary discussions with the same researcher yesterday about doing a survey for the general public, which is still in discussion. The first Deer forum at Pquest had great participation at around 80 people and went very well. Deer season opened this past weekend to almost a complete rainout. Hot weather and rain throughout the state as well as some reporting system issues in the morning resulted in a 35% decrease over last year. As of today, we are at 1479 compared to 2295 from last year. Staff are still going the people who phoned in the morning before the reporting issue was resolved and we will be adding in those deer. If the weather cooperates, we expect that number to rebound.

Endangered and Nongame Species:

Chief Clark reported we are helping to move the Shore Protection rule proposal forward. This rule would allow the department to close portions of inner tidal shorelines for the purpose of Endangered Species Protection. Much of this is work that has been done over the last 30 years, mainly under the statute of the NJ Endangered Nongame Conservation Act. This rule we are working on now will provide a bit more latitude as well as enforcement capability. Yesterday we held an internal stakeholder webinar on the rule proposal that was aimed at agencies and next Tuesday at noon will be the public stakeholder's webinar. We continue to work on the early stages of the NJ State Wildlife Action Plan Revision. So far, we have conducted an evaluation of the species in greatest conservation need and we are currently taking public comments on the process itself. We are working on the next steps which is revisiting the threats and actions sections of the plan. We are working on updates for those categories of threats, while also referencing the Northeast regions category so that at the end were using the same language as the region and other northeastern states use. We have convened a technical Advisory Group, that will help guide the decisions that we make as we go through the planned revision process and their first meeting is at the end of this month. The Marine Mammal project that Bob mentioned, the ENSP staff are also working with the Offshore Wind Research and Monitoring Program for the department. The first project to get off the ground will be a contract to create a full Motis network. Motis receivers, when placed across the landscape and offshore act like Easy Pass receivers and will record the tag frequency of all tagged birds and bats as they fly by. This information will help us understand the flight pathways of birds and bats and how they might intersect with offshore wind structures. Also, she would like to congratulate Carole and Bob on their retirement, you will be missed you.

Old Business:**Greenwood Lake Update:**

Assistant Director Barno reported we just received new schematics. We will be scheduling a meeting with Parks and F&W to take a look and work on the flow of traffic and more parking.

Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy and Black Bear Management Update:

Assistant Director Barno reported that the Council voted to approve the CBBMP policy, and it was sent to the Commissioner, who signed it last Thursday, which enacts the game code for the bear hunt. The document was filed with the Office of Administrative Law, meeting the October 2 NJ register filing deadline. Rules within the register become effective 5-days after publication, which puts everything in place for a needed October 2023 bear hunt.

Lunch: 11:52 – 1:00

Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy and Black Bear Management Update:

Chief Ivany reported our FY23 multimedia campaign continues. Currently we have two summer messages in the market, 1- securing garbage and other attractants, and 2- advising recreationists what to do in the event of a bear encounter. We have developed a new message for the Fall activity period which will launch in mid-October and run for the duration of the campaign. The Fall message will focus on Bears entering Hyperphagia. We will run the new message in conjunction with two other existing messages, so we will have three messages rotating through the whole time. Bear presentation and exhibits request forms are available on our website, under the Black Bear Education page. Since April the bear exhibit has been staffed at 7 events for more than 1,700 people in Mercer, Monmouth, Ocean, Hunterdon, Union, and Sussex Counties. The bear presentation was given to a total of 565 people in Mercer, Monmouth, Ocean, Passaic, Somerset, Sussex, and Warren Counties. We scheduled two upcoming community events and 4 bear presentations. The presentation and exhibit were also promoted to private, municipal and county nature centers across the state. As far as literature distribution, we have given out 650 pieces of black bear safety literature since mid-July to a municipal animal control officer and attendees of the exhibit for the bear presentation. A new publication is being developed to guide electric fence construction for the purpose of preventing bear damage. This guide is now available on the NJ Fish and Wildlife website. Our partnership with Rutgers Cooperative Extension; we are collaborating on bear outreach efforts directly to farmers and providing them with the most recent bear safety resources to prevent bear damage to crops and livestock. Agency staff are working to develop new resources. Our partnership with DEP Sustainable Waste Management continues regarding garbage management and municipal ordinance efforts. Fish and Wildlife staff meet regularly with their staff. The Division of Sustainable Waste Management is currently exploring possible trash management projects that may take place during FY24. Fish and Wildlife staff continue to focus on black bear outreach and education efforts regarding biology, safety, reducing bear attractants, and preventing bear encounters.

New Business:**Tuckahoe Hunt Summary:**

Joe Lesky gave a presentation on the Tuckahoe Hunt Summary.

Rail Bird Season Discussion:

Lisa Clark gave a presentation on the Rail Bird Season Proposal to reduce Sora bag limit.

Public Comment:

Barbara Sachau commented to stop hunting Rails all together. The trout are public trust, and the survey should go out to all the people of NJ. We have the right to comment on issues.

Janet Pizar had asked questions.

Chairman Virgilio mentioned that Public Comment is for agenda items only and is not a Q&A. Anyone looking for specific questions and answers to please use the proper government channels to obtain your answers, such as the Open Public Records Act.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Councilman DeStephano made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:03 pm. Seconded by Councilman Lathrop. Vote taken; motion carries.

Next meeting: October 10,2023 at 10:00 am. At the Robbinsville Office.