

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL  
Central Region Office  
Robbinsville, New Jersey  
May 9, 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 May 2, 2023 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 Rick Lathrop- Absent  
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, S. Crouse, J. Hearon, K. Clark, F. Panico, K., J. Soell, Springer, and D. Bajek.

Also in attendance was Candice McLaughlin and Matthew Knoblauch from NJ Office of the Attorney General, Division of Law.

There were several members of the public in attendance.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to approve the April 11<sup>th</sup> F&G Council minutes.

**Councilman DeStephano made a motion to approve the April 11<sup>th</sup> minutes, seconded by Councilman Robinson. Vote taken. 4 approve, 2 abstain (Whildin, Pollock). Motion approved.**

Chairman Virgilio welcomed everyone on behalf of the entire Fish and Game Council. He stated that Assistant Commissioner Golden and the Council intend to bring our meetings to a broader audience within the scope of our technical limitations. Today our meeting is in-person with an adjustment to its virtual component, which Assistant Director Kopkash will explain.

Assistant Director Kopkash explained that we are committed to continuing to use the virtual platform but have encountered problems with the quality of the meetings. Because the internet can be unpredictable and connectivity can be influenced by many factors, we have resorted to audio only for these meetings. Turning off the cameras appears to improve the quality of the meeting to the people participating virtually. This is not a decision we entered lightly, and we are still exploring other options. We will continue to share all presentations during the meeting and post them on our website. Also, on our website we provide how to join the meeting via computer as well as by phone. If you have any issues during the meeting, type them into the chat or if by phone you can send a text to 609-775-5794 and we will try to assist you. On our website you can find our disclaimer on this.

Assistant Commissioner Golden reported he will discuss more under New Business.

### **Council Reports:**

#### **Agriculture:**

Councilman Kertz reported we were going into a drought, then we got 6-7 inches of rain last week which halted field work. It is starting to brighten up. Hopefully it will continue like this through summer.

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

Councilman DeStephano reported he attended the Federation Convention in Ocean City. The presentations were great, and he is looking forward to the next one.

Councilman Robinson reported he attended in-person meetings at Hunterdon County, Ocean County, and Middlesex County. He attended virtually the Union County meeting, where Meghan Mills with the deer project gave a great presentation.

Councilman Whildin reported he attended Cumberland County Federation meeting with deer as the hot topic. Meghan will also present at Hunterdon's June meeting. The Cape May County Chapter is hoping to get started up with their meetings again.

Chairman Virgilio reported he attended meetings at Burlington County, Gloucester County, Southern Region, NJ State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, where they gave out 11 awards. Cape May County is having a meeting in September with all new groups, and he attended the Governor's Surf Fishing meeting.

### **Finance Committee: No report**

### **Swearing in of New Officers:**

Chief Panico introduced Candice Mclaughlin and Matthew Knoblauch, Deputy Attornies General here to swear in our new officers: Jack Sikora, William Chillari, and Cohen Sikora.

Matt Knoblauch, DAG stated it is his honor to participate in the ceremony, and to swear in the newest cadre of Conservation Police Officers. New Jersey Conservation Police Officers are the original stewards of Environmental Protection to protect our air, our water, our land and our other resources. But, for nearly a century before that, the Game Wardens who preceded our modern CPOs carried the heavy burden of enforcing the laws in many of the wildest places the Garden State has to offer. CPOs protect our wildlife from over-exploitation and serve as guardians of our fish, our wildlife, and hundreds of thousands of acres of public land. Conservation Officers are an integral part of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation, and it is my absolute pleasure to swear in new officers to this unique and elite force. One at a time he swore in Jack, William, and Cohen as the newest NJ Conservation Police Officers. Congratulations!

Chief Panico wanted to thank the Council and Assistant Commissioner Golden for this opportunity. It really means a lot to the Bureau of Law Enforcement the support we receive and we appreciate it.

### **Officer of the Year 2022 Award:**

Chief Panico recognized Joseph Soell as Officer of the Year 2022. Officer Soell is in our administration unit and is our guy that if he wasn't here everything would grind to a halt. He is that important to the bureau and the protection of NJ. Congratulations Officer Soell!

**Fish Committee:** No report

**Legislative Report:**

Assistant Commissioner Golden reported that the Recovering America's Wildlife Act or RAWA is being reintroduced to the Senate. They are trying to get 10 bipartisan co-sponsors before moving forward to a vote.

**Fish and Wildlife Reports:**

**Business Administration:**

Chief Springer provided members of the council with a graphic comparison of the license sales through the end of April 2019-2023. License sales as of the end of April 2023 were down .67% as compared to April of 2022. As compared to 2019, sales were down by .33%. The total number of donations for the Habitat Supporter Program for FY23 are \$16,090 and the total number of donations since the program started in November 2021 are \$41,745. Chief Springer would like to take this opportunity to recognize Molly V. with Fish and Wildlife's Office of Information Systems who received 1<sup>st</sup> place in the thematic map category at the Department's 35<sup>th</sup> annual GIS Mapping Contest for her map on the Wildlife Management Area System which showcases Fish and Wildlife's WMA App.

**Freshwater Fisheries:**

Chief Crouse reported on Potential Striped Bass Regulation Change - Pending the approval by the NJ Marine Fisheries Council, we will be drafting an NOAC to present to the Fish and Game Council to keep Striped Bass regulations in freshwater consistent with regulations in marine waters.

Spring Trout Stocking is underway, and we are currently in week 5 of our stocking program, we have 2 more weeks to go. Stocking is going smoothly, with very few complications. He would like to urge all trout anglers to participate in upcoming online angler surveys that will help guide future program changes.

We have been experiencing a relatively high number of fish kills. These fish kills are generally small in magnitude and unrelated to pollution events. It is believed they are primarily due to these ever-changing weather patterns we have been experiencing. In fact, some of the ponds in our hatchery have recently dropped 18°F. Temperature swings, coupled with prolonged periods of cloud cover (which reduces photosynthetic production of Oxygen) is the likely cause. We are looking forward to the hiring of a fish pathologist to help in these matters.

Biologists have been in the field conducting fisheries surveys. Assessments of our Coolwater Fisheries (Muskellunge and Walleye) have recently taken place at Lake Musconetcong, Little

Swartswood Lake, and Swartswood Lake. Assessments were also conducted for Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass at Assunpink Lake, Lake Carasaljo, Manasquan Reservoir, and Merrill Creek Reservoir. Data are being analyzed and will be released in our Bureau Monthly Reports and then more detailed analysis will be made available in our Annual Report.

### **Information and Education:**

Chief Ivany reported the R3 program completed a Women's Turkey Hunt, which was very successful. The Marine Digest is available online and will be on shelves next week. Our Fish and Wildlife calendar of events and meetings is now posted on the DEP website. The Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament will be held at Island Beach State Park on May 21.

### **Wildlife Management:**

Chief Stanko reported preliminary turkey harvest numbers. Youth Day we took 120 birds this year compared to 89 last year, so that's up almost 35%. Period A is also looking good this year at 966 birds compared to 787 last year, so we are almost up 23%. The first Saturday in the B period was not so good due to the weather, with 97 birds this year compared to 202 last year. As far as bear Category 1 incidents since we last met, we had a total of 12, 1-Bergen County, 1-Hunterdon County, 5- Morris County, 3- Sussex County, and 2- Warren County. We have several traps that are still out. We have one target bear euthanized and one non-target capture and we are expecting a busy season this year.

### **Land Management:**

Chief Hearon reported its turkeys all day as well as trout stocking. Staff is out stocking after 12, so there are no issues with the turkey hunters. We are adding positions for Coastal Resilience work. The Tuckahoe Boat ramp is complete, and the Belvidere ramp is in the works. He would like to thank BLE for the apprehension of dumpers and having them clean up their mess. Cameras are up at Central region range; they detect motion and are bullet proof. We are doing a trial run and will expand it if it works out.

### **Law Enforcement:**

Chief Panico reported the vendor for the body cameras will be here tomorrow and we anticipate them being in the field in June. All the background packages will be in tomorrow for the new hires, we are looking to hire 6-7 new officers. Menanico Ponds "No Parking" signs are posted as well as a digital sign.

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

Sharon Petzinger reported that there are no new updates since the last meeting, but it is peak migrating time and our first breeding male Golden Winged Warbler arrived April 28<sup>th</sup>. He is one of our banded males from a few years ago. In terms of the wildfires, she had not been up to West Milford yet to see how hot the burn was. She expects to be there in the next few weeks.

### **Old Business:**

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

Assistant Commissioner Golden reported we are moving along with Parks and are having a struggle with Highlands. We did find an old parking lot on the old site.

### **Comprehensive Black Bear Management Policy and Black Bear Management:**

Michelle Smith introduced Lyla Kaul as Fish and Wildlife's new Black Bear Outreach Coordinator. She joins us after previously working with the NJ Department of Agriculture and the US Department of Agriculture as a quarantine officer with their invasive species project. She specialized in the Spotted Lanternfly Management field work and outreach to stakeholders and citizens for that program to stop the spread of that invasive species. Lyla brings a strong skill set to the Bear Outreach Program and has been spearheading several projects including the production of bear literature and creating tool kits for communities on bear safety. The FY23 Multimedia Campaign is ongoing and will have a specific message for each season.

### **New Business:**

#### **Invasive Insects and Plants:**

Paul Kurtz, Entomologist with NJ Dept. Of Agriculture gave a presentation on invasive insects.

### **Lunch: 12:20 – 12:55**

### **Outside Together Initiative:**

Assistant Commissioner Golden gave a presentation on the Statewide Recreation Plan to bring together agency priorities of open space.

**Sparta Mountain Forest Management Results:**

Sharon Petzinger gave a presentation on the Sparta Mountain Forest Management Results.

**Public Comment:**

Barbara Sachau would like to ban all hunting and trapping. She feels the public deserves more than just 3 minutes once a month to talk.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

**Councilman DeStephano made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:49 pm, seconded by Councilman Robinson. Vote taken; all in favor. motion carries.**

**Next meeting will be on June 13, 2023, at 10:00 am. At the Robbinsville office**