

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL
Conservation Center
Robbinsville, NJ
April 12, 2016**

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

The meeting was called to order at 10:10 a.m. by Acting Chairman David Burke.

The flag salute and Pledge of Allegiance were completed.

Acting Chairman Burke 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 April 1, 2016 and delivered to the designated newspapers of the Division, the Newark Star Ledger and the Atlantic City Press.

Roll call was taken.

In attendance were: Acting Chairman Burke
 Councilwoman Blumig
 Councilwoman Brummer (late arrival at 10:17 a.m.)
 Councilman Brodhecker (late arrival at 10:20 a.m.)
 Councilman DeMartino
 Councilman Gudmundsson
 Councilman Van Mater
 Councilman Link
 Councilman DeStephano (late arrival at 10:12 a.m.)

Division employees included L. Herrighty, P. Nelson, M. Brown, D. Golden, A. Ivany, C. Stanko, J. Matthews, L. Barno, D. Ogonofski, B. Stoff, F. Panico, D. Roberts and S. Coltrain

There were numerous members of the public in attendance.

Motion was made by Councilman Gudmundsson and seconded by Councilman Van Mater to approve the minutes of the March 8, 2016 meeting with corrections identified. Vote taken, all were in favor with Councilwoman Blumig abstaining.

Acting Chairman Burke reported opening day of trout season was a success in spite of the varied weather conditions throughout the state. There was a request in New Gretna/Williamstown area to have stocking to take place closer to opening day since cormorants were eating the fish. Acting Chairman Burke gave a list of upcoming events; Youth fishing tournaments, HOFNOB, kids blue fish, Governor's Surf Fishing on May 15th, Summer Flounder Season opening May 21st and Turkey Season with youth day on the 23rd. He was happy to see the New Jersey Fishing

Digest featuring New Jersey turtles. Acting Chairman Burke noted this article may bring attention to the threatened and endangered turtle species in New Jersey.

Director David Chanda was not present at this meeting and Assistant Director Lawrence Herrighty reported that Director Chanda was on vacation. Assistant Director Herrighty reiterated the success of the opening day of trout season. He made note that several HOFNOD groups were invited to fish at the Pequest Education Pond and the group from Lakewood were up at 4:00 am to get there. Children came from all around the state with some being first time fishers. Assistant Director Herrighty noted that there will be hatch soon at the Rockport Game Farm on Monday and welcomed Council members to visit the farm to participate and talk to the staff. Assistant Director Nelson reported that we are a little below in revenue than we were last year at this time, and it may be due to the timing of deposits. She also noted that she is not worried as we are coming into fishing season.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Agriculture Committee Report:

Councilman Link reported that this a very busy time of the year for agriculture and everything is good so far. Councilman Link also reported that he tried to purchase an extra permit for turkey hunting. When he started the process there were over 50 available and by the time he went to put in his credit card information, they were sold out. A discussion went on regarding the current licensing system. Councilwoman Blumig wants the Division to look into a new vendor for the licensing system. Councilman Brodhecker reported there have been good sighting of deer now that the greenery is coming back. Dr. Reist had nothing to report at this time.

State Federation Reports:

Acting Chairman Burke noted that the NJ State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs Convention is the weekend of April 16th and asked who was planning to attend. Acting Chairman Burke is hoping there will be a joint resolution on deer. Assistant Director Herrighty reported that at the last state meeting that the Game Committee wanted to meet during the last week in April and it would behoove the Federation Deer Committee to get their requests in. As a result, there is a meeting scheduled the week before to pull things together. Council members Van Mater, Blumig, and DeMartino had nothing to report as they had been sick and did not attend any meetings. Councilman Gudmundsson reported on opening day in his area. In spite of the cold, there were a lot of children from the Camden area at the Pequest event. Many of them had never been fishing before. Children from Camden camped out the night before and there were children from Morris and Sussex Counties, all caught a lot of fish. Councilman DeStephano attended the open house on Sunday and there was a really good turnout, in spite of the weather, and he received lots of compliments of the Division. He reported that the stream levels are way down. Councilman DeMartino attended the deer meeting, the Monmouth County meeting and 13 Ducks Unlimited fundraisers during the month of March. Acting Chairman Burke attended Atlantic County Federation meeting. Atlantic County had 115 children at the sporting event they sponsored, it was a nice event. They are also involved with HOFNOD at Patriot Lake in Galloway Township. Cumberland County will have their annual trash roundup but the date is unknown.

Finance Committee:

No meeting held. Assistant Director Nelson announced that the Division now has an accountant and a committee meeting has been scheduled for May 10th at 9:00am. A format for financial reporting that was formerly used will be sent to Assistant Director Nelson for review to use for future finance reports.

Fish Committee:

Councilman Gudmundsson reported the committee has not met recently, but he is looking forward to meeting with a committee from Trout Unlimited, Sunday, April 17th. The Committee is meeting to discuss potential trout regulation recommendations for the upcoming Fish Code. Councilman Gudmundsson indicated people are excited about the wild trout proposal and he hopes we can get the process started early. Council Gudmundsson also reported he has been approached to allow fishing clubs to be open during the closed season. Councilman Gudmundsson thanked the Pequest staff for such a great open house event and reports from anglers indicated that the fish were enormous.

Game Committee:

Acting Chairman Burke reported the committee met on March 15th. Present were himself, Councilmen DeStephano and DeMartino. The discussion was on everything other than deer. They are anxiously awaiting the deer season results and input from the Federation. Another meeting will be scheduled soon.

Legislative Committee:

Councilman DeMartino reported on the Committee meeting as follows:

S-977 Prohibits possession, transport, import, export, processing sale, or shipment of certain animal species threatened with extinction. This is a copy of federal legislation on endangered and threatened species listed in the bill. The problem is it makes only possession illegal, and you would have to get a permit from the Division. Duplicates federal law. The committee recommends the council send letters to the Governor, Legislation and Assembly, to be drafted by Assistant Director Nelson for Acting Chairman Burke to sign, that we oppose this bill.

A2763 enters New Jersey into the interstate Wildlife Violator Compact – this will make NJ part of the interstate wildlife compact to share violations with other states. It will allow NJ to carry out suspensions, if appropriate, and the other participating states would see our violations and use them accordingly. The Committee is in favor of the bill.

A3527 removes black bear from the list of game species. – The Committee is against this bill.

A784 & S1595 establishes multi-species depredation permit. The Division already does this but would like to see the process streamlined for farmers. The Committee would like this to be addressed in the Game Code.

A432 Prohibits use of snares in trapping wildlife. The Committee is against this bill because the Division uses this type to trap for bears and other animals.

Motion was made to accept the Legislative Committee report by Councilman DeMartino and seconded by Councilwoman Blumig; all in favor, no abstentions.

Assistant Director Nelson – highlighted new bills that are being introduced as follows:

S893 & A3505 prohibits baiting for black bear during authorized bear hunt and requires use of bear-resistant dumpsters and food boxes at certain campgrounds and camping facilities;

S1635 & A2949 Provides diamondback terrapins protection as nongame indigenous species;

S1764 Authorizes deer hunting with firearm on Sundays on private property;

S1808 Designates striped bass (*Morone saxatilis*) as New Jersey saltwater fish;

A3506 Authorizes municipalities to adopt ordinance regulating storage or disposal of food waste or other bear-attractant refuse;

A3527 Removes black bear from list of game species;

AR127 Opposes expansion of black bear hunting season in New Jersey;

AJR83 Designates first full week of June each year as “New Jersey Fishing and Boating Week.”

No position will be taken by the Council at this time on the new bills.

Endangered & Non-Game Species Advisory Committee:

Dr. Brummer reported the committee will meet on May 18th. Two topics up for discussion are use of ATV's on State land and the Forest Stewardship Plan. Enforcement and Conservation Officer's as well as a herpetologist will be at the meeting. A tagged pine snake was found dead on a wood single track trail that is used by the ATV riders. Since both topics required lengthy discussions, the Committee will discuss the ATVs first and the next meeting the Forest Stewardship Plan will be discussed. There is a lot of controversy around the plan, Sparta Mountain and Audubon Society.

Aquaculture discussion update: a study has been done at Rutgers with Dr. Maslo which talks about the impact of aquaculture practices on foraging red knots and horseshoe crabs. An initial report is out and the Council will get an update at the next meeting. Dr. Brummer talked about her visit to Haskin's Oyster farm and encouraged other members to visit the farm to see the process performed on the farm.

Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee: Acting Chairman Burke reported there will be a committee meeting next week April 19th at 6:00. Councilman DeMartino stated a regional biologist from Ducks Unlimited will make a presentation on the projects done in St. Lawrence, Canada that the Committee has supported by donating money.

Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee: Councilman Brodhecker reported the committee will meet on April 27th.

Acting Chairman Burke reviewed the Council Committee list noting that there can only be four people per committee with one alternate. The Finance Committee Meeting was moved to June 14th. Acting Chairman Burke reminded everyone if they cannot make a committee meeting, please contact the alternate.

Acting Chairman Burke acknowledged that he received a letter from a Mr. Still dated February 25, 2016. Chief Barno also received the letter and stated that Mr. Still has done significant cleanup of the Raritan River mainstem and is looking to have fish stocked there. Chief Barno will respond to his letter. Acting Chairman Burke gave compliments on the Digest, Chief Barno acknowledged Brian Zarate, ENSP, as being the lead on the turtle identification layout but also complimented Chairman Burke, as the article was his suggestion. A discussion took place regarding getting fish and wildlife posters printed for distribution/sale.

DIVISION REPORTS

Chief Lisa Barno, Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries, reported on Opening Day of Trout Season and distributed two charts, one of lakes/ponds the other of streams/rivers, with the results of opening day angler surveys taken comparing waterbodies, number of anglers and number of trout caught. Cormorants were once again reported to be prevalent on a number of waterbodies. A final report will be sent to the Council before the next meeting. Councilman DeMartino asked what is going on with shad, concerned with low numbers be reported. Chief Barno stated it is still early to report but that the river was low and clear which will effect shad movement.

Chief Barno reported that she and Assistant Director Larry Herrighty met with the Commissioner's office last week concerning the Adoption of the 2016-2017 Fish Code. The next step in the Adoption process is for the Fish Code to go to the Governor's office before it can be published in the NJ Register. She indicated it would be late May or early June before the regulations would become effective for 2016. The Digest had to be released with the new regulations despite not being formally adopted.

Snapping turtle harvesters were the most affected by the delay and they were sent a letter with the 2016 permits being issued and provided a printed copy of the new regulations so they were aware of the delay and upcoming changes. Acting Chairman Burke asked was there any harvesters who made a comment during the fish code comment period and did not get the letter? He also stated there seemed to be a lot of misinformation going around. Chief Barno said she will check with Krista Moser, who now handles the issuance of snapping turtle permits, to find out who the letter was sent to, but she was certain all commenters had received the information.

The Bureau is waiting for the final review of the Adoption documents from the Office of Legal Affairs. The Commissioner requested his legal counsel to flag the document for an expedited review by the Governor's Office. After this is complete, Freshwater Fisheries can begin working on the 2018 regulations with a goal to have an effective date of January 1, 2018.

One of the pending regulation changes requires private clubs to purchase fish from the Pequest Hatchery. Two clubs currently stock the river. One club is disbanding and the other club, Pequest Anglers, has agreed to purchase trout from the Pequest Hatchery despite the delays in adoption of the regulations. The group purchased 100 rainbow trout to stock the river on Friday before opening day.

Chief Barno reported on the Open House for the Columbia Lake Dam Removal Project held on April 4, 2016. Councilwoman Brummer reported at the meeting the community requested a formal presentation. The next Open House will be 7:00 pm on April 25th at the Knowlton Lions Club. A formal presentation about the project will be provided and partners will be there to also answer questions. Councilwoman Brummer indicated the question that needs to be asked is “what does the community want to see so that the project will meet the needs of the community?” Approximately 60 people were in attendance at the last meeting consisting of town councils, mayors, ex mayors and others. Dr. Brummer commended Chief Barno on a job well done in educating the community on the impact of removing the dam.

Chief Barno also updated the Council on an in-stream habitat project on Sparta Glen Brook, a small tributary to the Walkill River. The brook has a native Brook Trout population that has been struggling for years. In addition to the in-stream habitat improvements over 1400 trees and shrubs will be planted along the stream corridor. A high school group will be planting 400 plants this weekend.

Sampling for the Bureau's Coolwater Fisheries Assessment continued, led by Scott Collenburg with trap nets set at Echo Lake Reservoir last week. Echo Lake Reservoir has Leech Lake strain of muskies. The largest muskie netted was over 50” and weighed 33 lbs, the largest ever trapped by Fish and Wildlife.

Chief Barno also indicated staff participated at the open house at Pequest helping kids fish at the education pond. Staff reported fishing at the pond was the best to date.

Information has also been surfacing regarding the Pequest disease outbreak by a Mr. Moffit. Mr. Moffit put together an eight page overview in the handling of the furunculosis outbreak at the Pequest Hatchery. Chief Barno is drafting a response to put on the website so the public will have accurate information.

Chief Jeff Matthews, Bureau of Fish Production, commended the production staff of the hatcheries and bureaus involved with the trout program this year. The most complaints were about the cormorant issue. Pequest has exceeded its goals by maximizing the carrying capacity of the facilities without jeopardizing the health and well-being of the production fish. This weekend fish upwards of 11inches were stocked. Concentration at Pequest is now on 2017 season, moving stock out of the nursery, keeping a schedule of 18 months ahead. There were 184,700 fish put out by opening day. In Hackettstown, northern pike has been spawning and hatching. Fry were stocked in the Delaware River from Belvidere up to the Delaware Water Gap. Massachusetts has been in contact for northern pike and they have offered up 2,000 landlocked salmon to be housed at Hackettstown. We are in trap net season for muskies at

Greenwood. Mosquito fish, very popular, has been supplied to five counties: Warren, Camden, Passaic, Ocean and Monmouth.

Chief Al Ivany, Information and Education, reported Trout season this year has had really good press and media. We have also had a successful Outdoor Writers Workshop on March 31st at Assunpink. The Commissioner attended as keynote speaker and stayed afterwards to talk to and greet reporters. Chief Ivany is in the process of updating the list of new writers for the workshop. Councilman Gudmundsson asked if Chief Ivany has looked into extending an invitation to individuals who write blogs? Chief Ivany was open to the suggestion and asked that anyone who had contacts, please give to him.

Pequest Open House was on April 2nd and 3rd and was a really great event. It was estimated about 1,000 cars on Saturday and 500 cars on Sunday, 4,500-6,000 people over the two days. Chief Ivany publicly thanked all staff from all bureaus for the work done on this event. Pequest is now open on weekends and 100 people came through the hatchery during trout opening day. There is a schedule of events on the web. Attending the opening day festivities were more than 100 Hooked On Fishing - Not On Drugs participants from throughout the state including Linden, Sussex, 4H Real Fun Club in Lakewood, Camden and BurlCam HOFNOD. According to their instructors, many have never seen a pond before. Four award winners from the Fishing Fun Photo Contest were present as well. DEP Deputy Commissioner David Glass attended the event. He really enjoyed the event and was impressed with the HOFNOD participation. Chief Ivany read an email that was sent from the Deputy Commissioner commending the work done and committed post-event support of HOFNOD with the press.

Plans for the Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament are being finalized. New Jersey's 101.5 may be attending for a few hours. The Commissioner's office has invited the Governor. April 15th is the cut off for early registration and last chance to be put in a raffle.

Planning for the Wild Expo scheduled for September 10th & 11th is in effect. Michelle Smith has extended her leave until September and Lindsay Harrington, who was planning the expo, is leaving the Division. Two other staff are now working on the planning.

Trevor Anderson will be the Sussex County rep for NJ Federation. Chief Ivany noted that there are still a few more positions that need to be filled.

Councilwoman Brummer requested that we look into having some Fish and Wildlife posters printed made of a variety of species available to sell. Chief Ivany responded the Bureau is looking into having this done through a federal grant as well as promotion of Wildlife Management Areas (WMA) and what can be done at these sites. Councilwoman Brummer asked that we place poster development on the agenda for the next meeting.

Councilman DeMartino asked for an update on the status of the food trucks at the Wild Expo as the food trucks can be a draw to the Expo. Chief Ivany responded it is being looked into, but there must be a balance of the vendors.

Lunch Break - 12:00pm - 12:35pm

Chief Dave Golden, Bureau of Land Management, reported Sparta Mountain WMA Stewardship Plan has been out for public comment. Public comment period closed on March 31st. We received over 3,500 comments on the plan, which are in review now. There appears to be 25% in favor and 75% opposed. Many of the letters that are in opposition were form letters. A response is being developed and revisions of the draft plan, based on the comments and recommendations, are being made. The strategy is to revise the plan and have another public meeting sometime in late May someplace around Sparta. At that time, the finalized plan will be presented and the Bureau will address the comments verbally to the people who are interested. Chief Golden asked that if you know someone who is in support of the plan, try to get them to come to the meeting so there will be a balance of comments.

Sparta Mountain is 3,500 acres. The proposed plan is to carry out forest management on roughly 20 acres a year. The Division of Parks and Forestry started an initiative last year to do forest stewardship plans on 40,000 acres of forest per year over the next 10 years. Land Management is trying to link with that effort. WMAs that are adjacent to parkland or state forest where work is being done will include the WMA as part of the management area.

Chief Golden noted that DEP has recently established a 14-step process for forest management. The Sparta management plan was initiated prior to that 14-step process being developed by DEP and is now trying to follow that process.

A WMA survey will be started in May. Stockton University has been contracted to carry out the survey. There will be training for those conducting the survey on the April 23rd at the Assunpink office. It will be a year-long effort. There will be 40 surveys in each of the three regions, over the next three seasons ending in April 2017 (120 surveys total in each region). The questions are designed to help understand who is using the area, where they come from, what do they do in the area and do they currently hold a license to hunt, fish or trap. They will also find out what kind of land management practices would they like to see, and are they willing to pay to use the WMA. Survey is geared to take 5 minutes. Assistant Director Herrightly suggests to make the public aware that this is a Division approved survey in order to cut down on calls to the office questioning the validity of the survey/surveyors. Acting Chairman Burke passed around an Atlantic City Press article regarding the survey. After a discussion, it was noted we should try to find out how do we set incentives for people to come out and use WMA that will be fair to all. Chief Golden will also research how federal lands, other states and Forsythe Preserve generate revenue.

Chief Golden gave an update on the pheasant stocking formula. There will be a stakeholders meeting for all stamp buyers going back three years. There will be two meetings, one North/Central NJ and one in South/Central NJ towards the end of May or early June.

Acting Chief Matt Brown, Bureau of Law Enforcement, reported on opening day there were 788 inspections by law enforcement. There was a 99% compliance rate. There was one incident in Mercer County where the individual would not produce any type of license and ran away. He was later processed by the local police department after returning to his car. Officers have investigated 5 illegal dumping cases on state lands. One in northern region, Sparta Mountain, was traced back to New York State. It has not gone to court yet. An individual in Union

Township, Union County has been trapping songbirds. An officer responded, investigated and found the individual had 10 songbirds in her possession as pets. The officer noted that the birds were well taken care of as they were well fed. The birds were taken to Raptor Trust, soon to be released. April 21st is the Conservation Officer recruitment test by Civil Service. There are approximately 90 people that are slated to sit for test. The results will allow Law Enforcement to hire/backfill several open Conservation Officer positions.

The Bureau has been working for 4 years on a report management system. Taking standard written reports and putting into industry standard electronic format which will aid on the backend in pulling statistics and inquiries that the Council and Director may have. The Bureau is expecting to go live in the beginning of May. Chief Brown thanked the Division for their patience and support as this has not been an easy or cheap venture but it will bring the Bureau into the 21st century

Councilwoman Brummer thanked Acting Chief Brown for a clear, concise report and asked how many Conservation Officer are on staff. Chief Brown responded a total 46 including command staff; with 30 in the field. Councilwoman Brummer requested Acting Chief Brown to attend the ENSAC meeting on May 18th.

Councilman Brodhecker stated in Paulinskill on state land there are concrete abutments and there is starting to be a lot of graffiti on them. Who is responsible, county, township, state police, WMAs? Chief Golden, stated it is not ours, but the Division painted anyway. He also stated to contact him and the Bureau will investigate.

Chief Carole Stanko, Bureau of Wildlife Management, passed around a picture of wildlife staff with six cubs from one sow which documented the first time staff has handled a litter that size during winter den research in New Jersey. The sow and her cubs were under a porch of a house located in Butler. The staff has relocated the bears to a wooded location outside of town. Pheasant hatching at Rockport Game Farm will begin on April 18th. If anyone is interested in visiting, please call and Chief Stanko will make arrangements to see the chicks.

Federation conference will be held on the weekend of April 16th. Chief Stanko will make a presentation on the October bear season and the deer harvest results from last year. Tony McBride will make a presentation on turkeys. Staff spent a day training Parks and Forestry staff on their bear response plan.

Chief Stanko is preparing a memo to Commissioner through Assistant Commissioner Boornazian and Director Chanda requesting an exemption for hiring technicians for wildlife control/the bear project. There are 3 pending retirements within the next year on that staff which would leave two staff members on wildlife control for the whole state. At one time there were 11 wildlife control staff and now it is down to 5 and has become a matter of public safety.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is back in the news. There have been 5 new positive results in Maryland. Another eastern state, Arkansas, has now been added to the list this year. CWD was found in a female elk killed by a hunter followed by a road killed white-tailed deer in February. By April 1st, there were 56 positives within their disease containment area. Chief Stanko is not

aware of any other state that has had that kind of density or prevalence of CWD. The Bureau will be keeping an eye on them as they are not sure of the relationship on captive deer in Arkansas. Arkansas has not mentioned captive deer in any of their press releases, so we are not sure if that is a fact or not. CWD has been found in a free ranging reindeer in Norway; this is the first index case in Europe. The Bureau will add reindeer to the list of banned cervids in the state of New Jersey. The next game committee will be on May 17th at 9:00.

Dan Roberts, Deer Project Leader, gave a presentation on the final results of the 2015-16 deer harvest season. Final results of 2015 deer harvest have been the lowest in decades with a total harvest 41,439 deer. In 2014 52,704 deer were harvested and the 5 year average harvest of deer was 49,158. That makes this year harvest well below the five year average. Dan gave out a copy of the report and gave further details.

Barbara Stoff, Licensing and Permits, gave an update on the buddy fishing license program. The Division has sold over 1,000 buddy fishing licenses. The fishing licenses sales are up by 3% compared to last year this time not including the buddy fishing license. The Division is still having issues with license agents regarding selling the buddy fishing. Three mailings have been sent to retailers regarding the buddy license, each time editing instructions in order to clarify. The problem is usually the larger retailers. The staff usually does not know how to sell the product. Within in the last four years, it has been difficult getting in contact with Walmart IT department in order to help work out technical difficulties. Ms. Stoff's staff is working on taking the names of the stores with the most difficulty off the list as being advertised sellers of licenses. Councilwoman Brummer has requested before doing that, please provide data on how many license are sold at Walmart and where are license being sold.

Acting Chairman Burke recognized Aaron from USDA and welcomed him to speak. He declined.

Public Comment (3 minutes):

Mr. Doug Ramseur, Bridgeton NJ - South Jersey Quail program is trying to restore grassland in Cumberland County. The group are members of NBCI, Tall Timbers and Mr. Ramseur has personally have been in contact with states where bobwhite quail are making a comeback. They would like to see more being done for upland game. Met with Chief Golden last fall, he would like to see the division set up something to have direct communication with field crop community.

Janet Piszser, Milburn, NJ passed out a template that will easily allow the division to track deer management zones and gave information on how she developed the plan and how to use it.

Barbara Sachau, Whitehouse Station, NJ - addressing issue on the Sparta Mountain proposal Ms. Sachau feels it is anti-environmental. Ms. Sachau stated New Jersey is losing money on the cutting down of trees on the WMA. New Jerseyans pay to protect the lands. Ms. Sachau is against the Archery Center, she feels it is a waste of money and feels the manufacturers should pay. Ms. Sachau expressed her discontent for spending \$642,000 for a survey of WMA wanting to know why we need the survey.

There were no other comments

Motion made by Councilwoman Blumig and seconded by Councilman DeMartino to adjourn meeting. Vote taken; all in favor; none opposed;

Meeting adjourned at 3:01 p.m.