

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL

Central Region Office
Robbinsville, NJ
March 13, 2007

The regular meeting of the New Jersey Fish and Game Council was held on the above date. In attendance were:

Acting Chairwoman Jeanette Vreeland
Councilman Dave Burke
Councilman Ed Kertz
Councilman John Messeroll
Councilman Robert Puskas
Councilman Dan Van Mater
Councilman Len Wolgast

Absent: Councilman Richard Culp
Councilman Fred Hough
Councilwoman Jane Morton-Galetto

Division employees included: Director Dave Chanda, Larry Herrighty, Mark Dobelbower, Lisa Barno, Tony Petrongolo, Paulette Nelson, Jim Sciascia, Sue Predl, Andrew Burnett, Carole Kandoth, Jodi Powers and Joe Leskie.

The public included: George Howard, Jean Howard, Ed Markowski and others.

Acting Chairwoman Vreeland called the meeting to order at 2:05 pm.

In accordance with P.L. 1975, c231, notice of this meeting was filed with and posted at the Office of the Secretary of State and sent to the designated newspapers of the Division, the Newark Star Ledger and The Press (Atlantic City) on February 23, 2007.

The flag salute and Pledge of Allegiance followed.

Acting Chairwoman Vreeland shared some information about the recent outdoor show in Parsippany. She was able to gather much public feedback about the Division.

A letter was sent to Commissioner Jackson as a reply to the meeting that was held with her, and she replied back that she would like a new bear policy by September 10, 2007.

Director Chanda noted that the court had sent the policy back for the Commissioner and Council to work on together. He noted that a representative from the Deputy Attorney General's office was due to be present today, and said that Council would go into Executive Session at that time to discuss this matter.

He spoke of the Teaming with Wildlife fly-in day that was held recently in Washington, D.C. He was able to attend along with Paulette Nelson. Every state had sent representatives to this event. He added that the Audubon Society had set up meetings with all the congressional representatives from New Jersey. Also in attendance were Rob Winkel from the Federation of Sportsmen, Toms Wells from the Nature Conservancy and Pola Galie from Conserve Wildlife Foundation. Their roll is to lobby the congressional representatives for the State Wildlife Grant money, and many signatures of support have been received. All the congressional representatives from New Jersey gave time with their aides this year, and Director Chanda and Paulette Nelson were able to show them how the monies are being spent on projects in New Jersey. He noted that the I & E Section was able to put together a packet of material that could be shared to show this, and Director Chanda wanted to congratulate the staff for their efforts.

The Batsto Fisheries Forum had over 50 people in attendance. There was a good exchange of ideas at this meeting.

He noted that he has been attending many dinners lately, including those with Ducks Unlimited, New Jersey Waterfowlers and the Morris County Federation of Sportsmen.

He noted the retirement of John Makai, Fisheries Biologist after 38 years of service. There was a dinner held for him, with many former employees in attendance to wish him well.

The Budget Committee met today prior to the Council meeting, and because of retirements and the inability to backfill vacant positions, there will probably be a surplus of monies at the end of this fiscal year. They are looking to move those monies into accounts so that vehicles can be replaced. The Bureau of Law Enforcement is especially in need of new vehicles.

Everyone in attendance was reminded of the hearing this evening on the amendments to the Game Code.

Roll call was taken.

The minutes of the February 10, 2007 meeting were reviewed. **A motion was made by Councilman Messeroll and seconded by Councilman Puskas to accept the minutes of the February 10, 2007 meeting. All were in favor, none opposed.**

Agriculture Council Representative Puskas reported that he has been receiving many goose complaints. There seem to be more geese than ever, and they are everywhere and destroying everything. He noted that the Federal Permits are not being sent back to those who are applying, however, their application checks are being cashed. Some people have been waiting months for their permits, and are shooting without paperwork in hand, hoping that their cancelled check will cover them.

Councilwoman Vreeland noted that she heard in the Northern Region the farmer representative to the Council will be Phillip Brodecker. Council will see him when his approval comes forth.

Councilman Kertz added the greenhouses are being started. Some of the farmers in Vineland have begun working the fields. He also added since the deer season had ended, the deer have been coming back in to the fields.

Legislative Council Representative Messeroll noted that there are a few things going on regarding firearms issues, one being a .50 caliber ban. Also, there is an ammunition bill being put together that would require someone to show proof of ownership before being able to purchase ammunition for that weapon. He has not seen anything on this yet, he just knows what he has heard.

Paulette Nelson noted that the .50 caliber bill is not on her list of legislation that is pending, but added that she would look up the bill number.

She also added that A423 has moved, which will provide free licenses to various members of the military, in addition to the National Guard and Disabled Veterans. This will include those people who are on active duty. According to the language of the bill we will be reimbursed for these licenses, and this could provide us with additional funds if it passes. It has gone through the Assembly, and still needs to go through the Senate.

Councilman Messeroll added that the next meeting of the Federation would be held on Friday evening. HOFNOD is holding many fishing derbies. They are trying to get a listing together of the derbies. He reviewed some of the upcoming events, including a combined event in Monmouth County that will include both fishing and a youth archery day on June 16.

The Federation Convention is scheduled for June 29 through July 1. Councilman Messeroll has the information on booking a room for the Convention for anyone who may need it.

He reported that a good number of National Rifle Association grants have been received this year, including \$2,200, for the Youth Pheasant Hunt, that provides monies for bird stocking and ammunition.

Chief Lisa Barno gave the report from the Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries. They have been working on numbers and allocations since January. She noted that the final list had a number of changes to the Central and Southern runs, mostly to streamline the operations due to the limited number of personnel available to stock. She added that Ray Porutski from the Bureau of Land Management had been a huge help working with Kelly Davis from Fisheries to make these changes. The schedule will be posted on the Division website, alerting anglers to be aware of these changes since they may be used to seeing the truck arrive on a certain day.

Stream conditions are currently low, but none are being perceived as a problem for the upcoming stocking program.

Stocking trucks will be rolling out on Monday, and as always, Council members are invited to join them at the Hatchery about 8 am.

The fishing derby schedule is being looked at for the upcoming season. Once again, they have received more applications than they can schedule. In addition, the Hackettstown Hatchery is now down by one more person, and they are working with only four full time personnel this year, resulting in more cuts to the derby program. Right now 66 events are scheduled, and 30 more are going to be turned away. Help is received from one of the prisons in South Jersey, and they will be able to host about 12 more derbies. These numbers are down from two years ago when they had over 127 events statewide. The walleye operation at the Hatchery requires weekend coverage, and this in turn affects the number of personnel available to go to these derbies.

Chief Barno spoke again of the Fisheries Forum at Batsto, noting that Councilman Van Mater and Councilman Burke were in attendance. There was some initial concern over the choice of venue, but it seemed to be an ideal location for the anglers in attendance, and she noted that the personnel from the Division of Parks were great to work with and were very accommodating. They received some good public feedback at this meeting.

The Bureau of Wildlife report was given by Chief Larry Herrighty. He noted that a bear had been removed today from Mendham Township. It is believed that this is the same bear that was previously removed from Maplewood. It will be transported and released at the Wildcat Ridge section of the Berkshire Valley WMA.

In the Stillwater area, there is a very large bear that is known as “Bearzilla” who has been breaking in to houses and has learned to open garage doors to get into protected garbage. He has been active for about a week. A trap has been set for this bear.

Kelsey Burgess and his team have been actively going out to the dens, and Council members are invited to attend if they wish.

Acting Chairwoman Vreeland asked about “Bearzilla” and why the people of Stillwater and the northern area are not aware that the bears are starting to come out, so that they are more knowledgeable and aware that the bears are there? Chief Herrighty noted that last week a “hot issue” was sent up through the channels, and the Commissioners office would probably not see those until Wednesday or Thursday. He added that in the past these went straight to the Governor’s office to be put in to a press release. Chairwoman Vreeland added that she would like to see the public made aware of these things right away. Chief Herrighty added that it would be a good idea to have them address these topics and put out a press release right away.

He reported that the Deer Project would have all the numbers put together by next month, and asked that the Council put aside some time to discuss the harvest by zone during the meeting.

He noted that he and Principal Biologist Sue Predl met with the Essex County Freeholders and the County Executive last week to discuss the South Orange Mountain Reservation. He feels that they are going in the right direction, and should have some sort of decision this Spring for deer management in the Reservation.

He added that Principal Biologist Predl would be addressing the Council with the Watchung Mountain Reservation community based deer management application.

He added that at the re-adoption hearing tonight it was not necessary for the Council to sit up on the stage unless they chose to. He added that the door open at 6 pm, and public comment was due to begin at 6:30.

Principal Biologist Predl next gave a review of the Watchung Mountain Reservation which is part of the Union County Parks System and their application for a community based deer management permit. She noted that they were the first community to request a community based deer management permit when the program began, and they are doing so again this year. They have received township resolutions from the five townships that the County park falls in, and all resolutions have been approved. The application requests to have twelve agents shoot deer on three days starting on March

26 and ending on March 28 if the weather allows. These agents are volunteer sportsmen , who will be shooting from treestands, using shotguns and slug guns. They are permitted to keep 20 pounds of venison, and the rest is donated to the community food bank, but they must be present at all three sessions in order to keep the meat.

She noted that Union County does pick up deer carcasses from the county roads, and last year they did pick up 82 carcasses from October through November 2006, and although the Watchung Mountain Reservation area is takes up only 7% of the County, 23% of the carcasses picked up were from in and around the Watchung Mountain Reservation area. They still have a serious deer vs. car problem in the vicinity of the Watchung Mountain Reservation. They have done spotlight and infrared counts, and assume that there are 130 deer who over wintered this year. They would like to reduce that number to 60 deer, and would like to harvest 70 deer. They had asked to use unplugged guns because 7 out of the 12 volunteer agents work for a private companies that do use unplugged guns to cull deer, but because 5 of the agents do not have experience with unplugged guns, the Division recommends that this portion of the application not be approved. Based on the number of deer vehicle accidents, Principal Biologist Predl recommends that the Council does approve the application to allow the three day program, which involves approving shooting deer out of season and above the bag limit. There is a check station set up right there at the Reservation, and then the deer are loaded onto trucks and taken to one of the participating butchers so that the meat can be donated to the community food bank.

Councilman Wolgast noted that there is no question that they need to have this permit, but once again, the need for the 120 day application period has not been followed. Principal Biologist Predl added that she has starting writing letters to all those who have previously been issued community based permits to advise them of this. She noted that the application did come in to her early, but the resolutions did not come in until later, but noted that they will have to make more of an effort next year to meet the required time period.

Councilman Messeroll added that they can put these 12 hunters in their in December with deer permits to do the same thing and then they would not have to come before the Council. Principal Biologist Predl noted that she had suggested this to them, adding that she would not be surprised if that is what they do next year. Councilman Messeroll shared some additional thoughts on this matter.

A motion was made by Councilman Messeroll, seconded by Councilman Wolgast to approve the application from the Watchung Mountain Reservation. All were in favor, none opposed.

Bureau Chief Jim Sciascia presented the Information and Education report. He presented a graph with information on Hunter Education graduates from this past year back to 1993. There was a 10 percent decrease in the number of graduates this year.

The problem of too many “no shows” at classes in the early part of the season and high numbers of attendance in the later part of the season continues. They are in the process of putting up 35-40 banners on high traffic wildlife management areas to say take your course now and beat the fall rush.

The Hunter Education staff has been talking to a number of different Boy Scout councils in New Jersey. A lot of the independent councils are creating a hunter education badge, and they will be giving hunter education courses at some of the big jamborees that they have. They continue to work with the State council to have this made a statewide badge. There has also been some discussion about also having a hunting badge. The discussions between Hunter Education Administrator Paul Ritter and

Regional Coordinator Keith Griglak, it looks as though they have the potential to put 500 boy scouts through the program this spring and summer, with potential for more in the future.

A call was put out for new instructors to the Hunter Education Program, and they had a great response and have added 12 new instructors.

The staff is also in the process of taking the hunter education course information and putting it online, however, one of the problems they encountered was that the manual being used is actually owned by someone else, so the staff has been working over the past 18 months to rewrite the manual. Once that is done, someone will be able to go online to review the video and manual, and complete the workbook, thus eliminating the need to travel one of the region offices or sporting goods stores to pick up this information.

The National Archery in Schools program still shows much interest but funding is still an issue for some schools. There are 13 schools currently participating, with additional teachers who have received training but can not obtain funding for equipment. They are looking in to the possibility of having kits on hand to use as loaner kits to different schools, since most schools only offer the archery program for a portion of the school year. This way more schools could be provided with the necessary equipment. They have also put in an application to the Easton Foundation to obtain a \$50,000 grant to purchase and provide one kit per County. They have gone through the pre-application process, and things are looking good. If this grant is approved, they may have the ability to provide the program to 200 schools through this equipment loan program.

There is a state shoot, the first scheduled in New Jersey, for participants in the National Archery in Schools program. Winners will be able to go on to the National competition.

They are planning to hold an Archery Summit on June 2 at the Eco-Complex. More information will be forthcoming. They are currently putting this program together, and Chief Sciascia further explained the results they hoped to achieve by having this event.

Things are still up in the air for distribution of the bear resistant trash cans. Surveys should be going out soon regarding the program. Trash cans have still not been distributed, since the original vendor backed out and the package had to be re-bid, but he did not have information as to whether or not another vendor had been selected.

They have been working closely with Parks and Forestry to create a Bear Management Policy. This would be a specific policy put together for all parks employees, and they will be trained on this policy and how to use it. It will be broken down by region, with the Northern region having the most restrictions. This will help to alleviate any inconsistencies with how the parks are implementing restrictions to park goers regarding bears.

Council Messeroll questioned if the policy should not be standard statewide and not broken down by Region? Chief Sciascia noted that this policy have been going back and forth between Parks personnel for a long time, and he is comfortable with the way it is set up now, but added that it can always be changed if needed. They shared some additional thoughts on this policy.

They are in the process of sorting out applications for the Bear Education Biologist position. One other person is being reassigned from Watershed Management to Bear Education. This will help to get out the bear education message.

Acting Chairwoman Vreeland about bear education CD that is available, noting that this is an inexpensive way to get a lot of information out there. Chief Sciascia saw the one from Arkansas, but has heard of another one that has been put out by New York, and they are waiting to receive a copy of that one for review.

The open house at Pequest is scheduled for March 31 and April 1, tying in with the opening of trout season. Advertising is being paid for one week before the open house letting people know that trout season opens April 7 and they can come to the open house. Many events are scheduled for the open house.

They are doing a promotion this year, mostly to Pennsylvania anglers, to mail a brochure with the information in the Digest on New Jersey fishing. This will be mailed to all the border residents of Pennsylvania from mailing lists purchased from Trout Unlimited.

The opening of trout season will be advertised on four radio stations the week before the opening day.

An Outdoor Writers Workshop is scheduled on March 29 at the Central Region Office. All Council members are welcome to attend.

They have just finished the list of New Jersey Outdoor People programs for this coming year. They should be posted on the website very soon.

Chief Sciascia distributed copies of the coloring books that have been obtained with funding from the WCRP program.

Acting Chairwoman Vreeland asked if any of the monies received from the Commissioner had gone to Information and Education supplies? Chief Herrightly noted that those monies had to be designated to certain object codes where the need exists, and some would be put toward vehicles. This should be set up shortly once the paperwork is submitted.

Director Chanda reiterated that Chief's Sciascia and Barno took the lead last year for marketing publicity regarding the freshwater fishing season, and felt that their efforts along with the work done by their staff's made a difference in revenue not declining for the first time in three years.

The Bureau of Land Management report was given by Chief Tony Petrongolo. He referred to the monthly report, which shows that lands have grown to over 310,000 acres.

There was a contract signed for 600+ acres addition to Dix WMA, and this is a property that Green Acres has been trying to obtain for years. It is known as the Brick House Farm. It has some improvements, including an old historic house. These will be reviewed by Chief Petrongolo and Director Chanda tomorrow as to what can be done with them.

He noted that while the acreage increases, the reduction in staff continues. Wildlife Worker Mike Jaglowski has recently retired, and Crew Supervisors Robert Dolly and Steve Smyser will both be retiring on June 30.

Pemberton Lake in Burlington County was posted during this last reporting period. It is good for bass fishing, and may have future potential for trout stocking.

This past winter 130 tons of lime was applied to Lake Audrey at the Millville WMA. This was purchased under a grant from the Cumberland County Improvement Authority, and applied by volunteers from the Cumberland County Federation. The recent test results showed that the Ph level was up to 7.7, which is higher than expected. The Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries plans to stock the lake this Spring with small mouth bass.

The Absecon Ramp bulkhead renovation project has been completed. The paving on the approaches and the roadway to the ramp is being done by the Township of Absecon, and should be completed this summer. The Town of Absecon has a lease in hand, that they are prepared to sign, for the ramp facility. Preliminary discussions are underway to develop a use permit for the ramp. A new floating dock is also going to be installed by the town using matching federal aid funds from the Division.

They have also been working with the Bureau of Forest Fire on a 1,400 acre project at the Stafford Forge WMA in Ocean County. The Forest Fire Service received federal grant money for a plan for control of wild fire for that area, and the restoration of the pinelands eco-system. He explained how the program works and the need to control wildfire in the area to keep it from spreading to the surrounding communities should there be a wild fire. Inventories of the forest have been completed over the past year, and they now have a preliminary plan which is being reviewed by the Division.

Councilman Messeroll commented that the Absecon ramp was discussed at the last Federation meeting, and questioned the fees for residents vs. non-residents, and the very limited number of permits available, and how it might affect striped bass fisherman and duck hunters in the Fall. He wondered if there were any provisions for licensed hunters and fisherman to be able to utilize the ramp without paying a fee? Chief Petrongolo noted there had been some preliminary discussions with Absecon, and they are talking now about what the permit may include, but this can be implemented once they sign their lease. There was some additional discussion between Chief Petrongolo and members of the Council regarding the property.

The Bureau of Law Enforcement report was given by Chief Mark Dobelbower. He noted that last month deer violations they made up the bulk of the of the 200 summonses that were issued from the 1,285 field inspections that were made.

Some recent events were that this past Friday a father and son who were ice fishing had drowned at the Assunpink Lake.

Also, a harp seal had swum up the Crosswicks Creek in Chesterfield Township, Burlington County. Conservation Officer Tom O'Rourke had been at the scene, trying to prevent some concerned citizens from netting it themselves. There has also been one sighted recently in Holgate, as well as one in the Philadelphia area.

They are preparing for the Bear Education Enforcement sweep that is scheduled for later this month. They will be receiving help from DEP staff and Parks police. They will be providing handouts and information.

They are presently working on the background investigations for Conservation Officer 3 positions that they have received permission to fill. They can hire two officers who can help to implement the bear policy, and they hope to have them start some time in June.

There is also a potential for two Meadowlands positions as well, and they are hoping to receive permission to fill four positions that will be vacant due to retirements between now and June 1. He noted that they have a small pool of candidates, and it seems to be getting harder each year to find people who are interested in this type of position as a career.

He noted that as the Director mentioned earlier, they are looking to try to replace the vehicles that have over 125,000 miles on them.

This was the conclusion of his report.

The floor was then opened to public comment. There was no public comment.

Councilman Messeroll asked of the Hunters Helping the Hungry program could get a donation line on the point of sale sight? Director Chanda had some concerns on this, noting that they didn't want license purchasers to think there had been a license increase that they had not been made aware of. Chief Herrighty added that there were some Legislators who were floating ideas of surcharges or donations, but everything is up in the air now. Additional discussion and ideas were mentioned, and Director Chanda asked to have some time to talk to the point of sale staff on this, and he will try to report back next month with some ideas.

Acting Councilwoman Vreeland noted that she has a conflict with the June meeting date, and wondered if the meeting could be changed to June 19 instead? This will be discussed again next month, after checking with the missing Council members from today's meeting.

There was a question from Councilman Messeroll about the vote to the Game Code Amendments. Chief Herrighty noted that this would be at the May 9th Council Meeting.

There was one member of the public, Bill Hartrum of the Twin County Rod and Gun Club with regard to a letter that he had sent to Councilman John Messeroll. He read the letter out loud to the Council, which stated their concerns regarding the deer population in Zone 18, especially on the Manchester WMA which they hunt. They would like to see the three day shotgun permit season reduced to one day, or have the ability to shoot coyotes for a longer period of time. There was additional discussion between Mr. Hartrum and the Council regarding his concerns. The matter will be referred to the Bureau of Wildlife Management personnel.

A motion was made by Councilman Wolgast, seconded by Councilman Messeroll to adjourn the meeting. Meeting adjourned at 3:20 pm.

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