

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL

Central Region Office
Robbinsville, NJ
February 12, 2013

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

The meeting was called to order at 10:04 a.m. by Acting Chairman Burke.

The flag salute and Pledge of Allegiance were completed.

The following was read aloud by Acting Chairman Burke: 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 and delivered to the designated newspapers of the Division, the Newark Star Ledger and the Atlantic City Press on January 16, 2013.

Roll call was taken. In attendance were:

Acting Chairman David Burke
Councilwoman Cathy Blumig
Councilman Philip Brodhecker (arrived 10:08 a.m.)
Councilwoman Barbara Brummer
Councilman Joseph DeMartino
Councilman Agust Gudmundsson
Councilman Jeffrey Link
Councilman Dan Van Mater

Absent: Councilman Robert Puskas

Division personnel included D. Chanda, P. Nelson, L. Barno, M. Chicketano, A. Petrongolo and C. Stanko.

Members of the public included former Councilman Messeroll, representatives from the Department of Agriculture, the Farm Bureau and others.

Minutes of the January 8, 2013 meeting were reviewed. **A motion was made by Councilman Van Mater, seconded by Councilman Link to approve the minutes as presented. A vote was taken with all in favor, none opposed, and an abstention from Councilman Gudmundsson.**

Acting Chairman Burke noted legislation on gun control that was being heard tomorrow by the Law and Public Safety Committee, and that there was a need to be concerned about the negative impact that this proposal could have on hunters. Also noted was a rally last Friday in Trenton on gun control issues that drew 1,000 participants.

(Councilman Brodhecker arrived at 10:08 a.m.)

Acting Chairman Burke remarked that this is usually time of year that hunting and fishing activities tend to slow down, but both are still occurring in many areas.

Director Chanda addressed the Council. He reported that staff have been consumed with follow up work from Hurricane Sandy. Cost figures are being assessed from the impact to the marine industry, and he added that there was a tremendous impact to the inland area as well. Reports will be filed with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service for funding assistance, but it is still undetermined how those monies will be distributed. Nesting habitats along the shore and the Delaware Bay are being reviewed as projects for restoration if needed. Director Chanda added that Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reimbursements from Hurricane Irene are still pending for damage at the game farm. Projects from this most recent storm include a variety of issues, ranging from debris removal to mosquito control.

The public trout meeting at Pequest and the Freshwater Fisheries Forum at Batsto were mentioned, as was the upcoming schedule of Division Staff meetings to be held throughout the State.

Acting Chairman Burke noted the extreme damage done to the Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge during Hurricane Sandy. There was some additional discussion on the ongoing hurricane recovery efforts and the possible reimbursements that may be available.

Acting Chairman Burke noted that there were no agenda items for public comment today, so there would be no public comment period at this time. Additionally, Council would be going in to Executive Session to discuss a license restoration appeal, but that would occur at the end of this meeting.

Committee reports began with Councilman Link reporting for the Agriculture Committee. In his area there was not too much activity to report on, but he noted that water levels were good and they should be able to prepare for Spring planting activities. He added that the geese still continue to cause problems. Not too many deer reports have been received with the close of the season.

Councilman Brodhecker reported that there is still snow in his area. He also reported on using the online version of the automated deer check system, and that it worked well.

The State Agriculture Convention was held last week, and George Conover was nominated as the Central Region Representative to the Council for Agriculture, which would replace Councilman Puskas' seat.

Councilman Puskas had advised Councilman Brodhecker that there were still many geese in his area, and Councilman Van Mater added there are quite a lot in his area as well.

Councilman Link noted many reports of large sized coyote in his area. There was additional lengthy discussion on the special coyote hunting season, which ends March 15, 2013, the ability of hunters to take coyote while deer hunting, populations, whether or not they were considered a nuisance, and the ability of farmers to be able to legally control them.

Councilman Link also noted the feral pig population seemed to be down, and that fewer problems have been reported to him.

There was no report for the Federation. Councilwoman Blumig will be attending the State meeting this Friday evening.

Acting Chairman Burke commented that he had attended the Atlantic County meeting last month, and was told that the Southern Region had formed a committee to address deer population concerns. He also

brought Supervising Biologist Stanko's harvest report information from the last Council meeting with him to review for the membership.

Councilman Gudmundsson noted that hunters in the Sparta Mountain area had a good season.

Acting Chairman Burke reported that the Finance Committee has not had a recent meeting. He made inquiry to Assistant Director Nelson about sequestered Federal monies, and she commented that while they may not be distributed right away, they will be eventually. She also noted that the sales of guns and ammunition are up, and while Division finances are lean, revenue is back on track.

Councilman Gudmundsson reported for the Freshwater Fisheries Committee, noting that they will be meeting next week. Members also discussed who would be attending the two upcoming public events.

Acting Chairman Burke advised that the Game Committee would be meeting later today, and had no additional report.

Assistant Director Nelson reported for the Legislative Committee, commenting that things have been quiet. Only two new bills have been introduced, which are:

A-2653 Repeals State moratorium prohibiting taking of horseshoe crabs from State waters.

It was noted that this is a companion bill for S-2376 that was introduced in 2012. No action has been taken yet.

S-2554 Establishes recreational fishing license plate; dedicates fees to coastal fishing research.

It was noted that this is a companion bill for A-474 from 2012, A-3113 from 2010 and S-2185

There was also discussion on a previous bill that would have transferred the Division to the Department of Agriculture. This bill has been heard and is active in the Committee, but there has been no vote. The Fish and Game Council has previously voted on their opposition to this bill.

Councilwoman Brummer reported for the Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee. They last met on January 16, 2013 and had a review of 12 of the many projects that staff had planned for 2013. One project of note was an intrusive fungus that has been spreading through the snake population, and Councilwoman Brummer reviewed information that was given during the presentation. Council also discussed the status of the bat population which has also been affected by a fungus. Ideas for reporting suspected infected species was also discussed.

The next meeting of the Committee will be March 20, 2013 where a shorebird report will be given. Councilwoman Brummer reminded members of the Council that all were welcome to attend.

Acting Chairman Burke reported for the Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee. The Committee met on January 8, 2013 and recommended the purchase of four parcels in Cumberland County totaling 266 acres.

Councilman DeMartino advised that he would be able to represent the Fish and Game Council on the Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee, and a replacement will be made to the position he formerly held representing Ducks Unlimited.

Councilman Brodhecker reported for the Wildlife Rehabilitator's Advisory Committee. He advised that they have scheduled six meetings for Calendar Year 2013, and currently have a vacancy for a veterinary representative. Topics discussed at the meeting included handling of requests and responses, the refocusing on the purpose of the Committee, and upcoming vacancies for terms that will be expiring.

Division reports began. Chief Barno reported for the Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries. She advised that staff have been very busy with Hurricane Sandy follow up and repairs, and FEMA reports related to same.

Chief Barno noted that there was a saltwater intrusion of coastal lakes during Hurricane Sandy, and of the 12 that have been monitored, seven will be fine for restocking, but five still have elevated salinity levels. A brief review was given on this matter. Chief Barno added that the Hackettstown Hatchery will be pushing the limit for production this year, to meet all the 2013 needs, and there was some additional discussion on this.

Chief Barno reviewed the trout meeting scheduled for this coming Saturday, where program changes and a summary of the angler survey will be given. The fisheries forum on February 23 was also reviewed.

Opening day angler surveys will be conducted at 42 water bodies this year. In addition, temperature data loggers will be installed in designated Trout Conservation Areas and streams with reproducing brook trout populations to collect stream temperature information.

Staff met with members of Trout Unlimited this week. Trout Unlimited presented a proposal to make the section of the Big Flat Brook from Rt. 206 bridge downstream to Roy Bridge, a Year Round Trout Conservation Area (TCA). TCA regulations are artificial only with a daily creel of one (1) trout over 15 inches. In addition to the TCA proposal, the Bureau staff presented additional options which include an artificial only, catch and release only for the same stretch of the Big Flat Brook or incorporating a section as fly fishing only, either on the upper section, or the lower section starting at the Blewitt Tract. Chief Barno gave a brief review of suggestions that have been made, as well as distributing a draft of the proposal changes to the Council. Results of the electrofishing survey were also distributed and reviewed. Information concerning the options for regulations on the Big Flat Brook will be presented at the public meeting this Saturday for angler feedback as well as discussed at the upcoming Fish Committee meeting.

Chief Petrongolo reported for the Bureau of Land Management. More than 5,776 acres were added to the wildlife management area (WMA) system during January. He reviewed the 5,075 acre Lenape Farms acquisition, which will become part of the Tuckahoe WMA. Currently, the WMA system has more than 337,000 acres of land.

Staff, in the Southern Region, have been working to refurbish the shooting range at the Makepeace WMA, which is scheduled to re-open on February 22, 2013. Chief Petrongolo briefly reviewed the work being done, which includes clearing of the shot fall zone, new shooting stations, paved parking and handicapped parking access and a muzzleloader and shotgun slug shooting area.

Staff is in the process of completing winter management activities Statewide. This includes a large hydro-ax project at the Pequest WMA, and working with staff from the Bureau of Wildlife Management and the Endangered and Nongame Species Program on a quail management plan in the Southern Region.

Chief Petrongolo reported an incident that occurred last week at the site of a logging project at the Sparta Mountain WMA. The contractor brought in equipment in preparation to begin the project, but vandals did major damage to the equipment and the project is now delayed. The Bureau of Law Enforcement is investigating.

At the Hyper-Humus portion of the Paulinskill WMA wetlands permits will be needed for replacement work on the water control structures. At the Prospertown Lake WMA the spillway project has been completed and the lake is refilled.

Staff met with representatives of the Cape May County Municipal Utilities Authority for NJ Clean Communities financial assistance with trash disposal of debris dumped on wildlife management areas. Councilman Gudmundsson suggested reaching out to local Mosquito Control Commissions as well to see if financial assistance is available.

Chief Petrongolo reviewed the results of the most recent farm lease auction that was held. Six new leases in the Northern Region and one in the Southern Region were available to be bid on. There was some additional review of the auction, the program, and the farm leases that have been issued.

Acting Chairman Burke asked about plans for controlled burning activities, and Chief Petrongolo advised that staff have been working with personnel from the Forest Fire Service and have plans to control burn many areas this Spring.

Councilman DeMartino inquired about the possibility of allowing permits to take downed trees on WMA properties, and Chief Petrongolo explained why that is not an activity that the Division allows explaining that they can make good habitat for certain species, and additionally there are liability concerns. Director Chanda added that the Bureau of Forest Management has been looking at the types of trees that are down and whether or not they could be used to develop a timber sale.

Director Chanda made a brief report for the Bureau of Information and Education. He noted that work is in progress for the annual WILD Outdoor Expo which will be held September 14 and 15 this year, and gave a brief review of information from last year's event.

The Division phone app has been downloaded 16,000 times to date. A listserv message was sent, advising that it had hit No. 8 on the iPhone top 10 list of free downloads.

Plans are moving forward on the proposed archery park site.

Lunch break began at 12:01 p.m., at which time Councilman Gudmundsson departed for the day. The meeting resumed at 12:59 p.m.

Chief Chicketano reported for the Bureau of Law Enforcement. He reviewed several highlights from the monthly report for each of the regions.

Chief Chicketano reported that both groups of the most recently hired recruits are doing well. There was one termination of a provisional employee from the most recent completed class. The three remaining Conservation Officers from that class are all doing a great job. The four newest police academy graduates will start their field training officer program in about three weeks, and will then be on their own by the Summer.

Supervising Biologist Stanko reported for the Bureau of Wildlife Management, noting that the deer season would be ending this Saturday. Preliminary estimates show that the harvest is down by less than 400 from last year's season totals, but data is still being analyzed and edited.

The most recent reporting session for coyotes showed 49 were harvested, and to date there have been 104 taken. Last year had a total harvest of 249. The current season will end on March 15, 2013.

The survey of the pheasant and quail stamp purchasers received 627 responses, which was an 18% return rate. Supervising Biologist Stanko briefly noted some of the preliminary response information that was received.

A technical change to be made in the Game Code was also noted. "Conibear" is used to describe a specific type of body gripping trap. This is a brand name owned by the Oneida Victor Company and they have asked the Division of Law that it be removed. Alternate language to describe this type of trap will be used instead.

The Game Code is making slow progress through the system. Staff is now hoping to be able to meet an April 1, 2013 publication date for the New Jersey Register.

Supervising Biologist Stanko has been asked to participate with the Planning Committee for the first annual New Jersey Wildlife and Conservation Conference, which is a joint effort between the Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs, the Conserve Wildlife Foundation and the Division. The conference is planned for April 26 through 28, 2013. Some agenda topics were noted and reviewed.

Acting Chairman Burke inquired on the status of the waterfowl hunter survey that was done. Councilman DeMartino commented that there was not a big response received, and there were some complaints from the Coastal hunters regarding season dates. Principal Biologist Nichols met with both Ducks Unlimited and the New Jersey Waterfowlers Association representatives and gave good biological reasons to support the season date changes.

Old and New Business was noted, but there was none to discuss.

Acting Chairman Burke advised that the public comment period would be opened, followed by the Executive Session, then the regular meeting would reconvene in order to adjourn.

Barbara Sauchau addressed the Council, commenting on a letter in the newspaper which noted complaints about the killing of wildlife and felt the Division should keep a record of complaints. Additionally, she commented on an article regarding a decrease in fishing licenses in Pennsylvania and asked that New Jersey provide similar information, that the Division should be transferred to the Department of Health and why, the age of deer being tested for CWD, Division highlights, and why commenters were only allowed three minutes.

Past Councilman John Messeroll was asked if he had any comments for the Federation. He noted most items had been covered earlier in the meeting, but added they would be having the State meeting this Friday evening. They are preparing for the Convention, as well as working on possible license and stamp fee increases. He commented that he is looking forward to working with the Division as a Federation member.

With no other public commenters, the meeting dismissed and **a motion was made by Councilwoman Brummer, seconded by Councilman Van Mater to begin the Executive Session. A vote was taken with all in favor.**

At 1:50 p.m., a motion was made by Councilwoman Brummer and seconded by Councilman Van Mater to resume the regular meeting. All were in favor.

At 1:51 p.m., a motion was made by Councilman Brodhecker and seconded by Councilwoman Blumig to adjourn. All were in favor. Meeting adjourned at 1:51 p.m.