

**Minutes  
Wildlife Resources Committee**

Unicoi State Park Lodge  
Master's Hall 3 & 4  
1788 Highway 356  
Helen, GA 30545

**May 25, 2011**

**Attending:**

Committee Members

Joe Hatfield, Vice Chairman  
Warren Budd  
Mabel Jenkins  
Duncan Johnson  
Ray Lambert  
Aaron McWhorter  
Loyce Turner  
Earl Barrs, Board Chairman, ex-officio

Board Members

Dennis Billew  
Bill Carruth  
Walter Hudson  
Rob Leebern  
Jim Walters  
Philip Wilheit  
Steven Woodruff

Staff Members

Mark Williams  
Todd Holbrook  
Spud Woodward  
Dan Forster  
Dave Crass  
Emily Hitchcock  
Kyle Pearson  
Homer Bryson  
John Bowers  
Steve Friedman  
Jim Ussery  
Linda MacGregor  
Lauren Curry  
Cathy Barnette  
Paul Nelson  
Wally Woods  
Mary Ann Evans

Visitors

Wanda Barrs, Chair, Board of Education  
Daniel Groce, Georgia Agribusiness Council  
Karl Ledford, Georgia Transmission  
Mike Giles, Georgia Poultry Federation  
Scott Tanner, Joe Tanner & Associates

The May 25, 2011 meeting of the Wildlife Resources Committee was called to order by Board Chairman Earl Barrs.

Chairman Barrs called on Wanda Barrs, Chair of the Board of Education, who gave a time of inspiration and reflection on the importance of partnerships.

Chairman Barrs called on Wally Woods, Chief of Operations, Parks, Recreation & Historic Sites Division (PRHSD), who welcomed the Board and staff to Unicoi State Park Lodge, and introduced several PRHSD staff members.

Chairman Barrs recognized Board Member Jim Walters for being inducted into the Northeast Georgia Business Hall of Fame.

Chairman Barrs read a note from former Board Member Tom Wheeler thanking the Board for the Resolution in his honor.

Chairman Barrs welcomed new Board Member Aaron McWhorter.

Chairman Barrs called on Joe Hatfield, Chairman of the Wildlife Resources Committee, who stated that there would be two action items and two briefings by Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) staff.

Mr. Hatfield called on John Bowers, Assistant Chief of Game Management, for presentation of the proposed amendments to Hunting Regulations, Chapter 391-4-2, and Firing Ranges, Rule 391-4-9-.02.

Mr. Bowers stated that the changes include amendments to reflect the need to adopt hunting regulations for the next two years, reflect statutory changes, eliminate unnecessary regulations, modify either-sex days to enhance hunter satisfaction, set seasons for rails and woodcock, establish a bear season in central Georgia, regulate pursuit of bears by dogs for training purposes in North Georgia, regulate hunting and other activities on wildlife management areas (WMAs), federal areas and other state lands, and changes to firing range rules.

Mr. Bowers stated that the proposed amendments were discussed in detail at the March meeting prior to publicizing these regulatory changes. He further stated that comments received from the public were generally supportive and summaries of the comments were mailed in the board package.

Mr. Bowers stated that he would like to request that the Committee recommend that the Board approve the proposed amendments as presented.

A motion was made by Mr. Lambert, seconded by Mr. Johnson and carried unanimously that the Committee recommends that the Board approve the proposed amendments to Hunting Regulations,

Chapter 391-4-2, and Fire Ranges, Rule 391-4-9-.02. (Hunting Regulations and Firing Ranges Rule attached hereto and made a part hereof)

Mr. Bowers stated that the second item for action was the proposed adoption of Rules for the Georgia Outdoor Recreation Pass, Chapter 391-4-9-.06. He further stated that this proposed rule results from an extensive public participation effort that began in October 2009 to increase the self-sufficiency of providing recreational services on WRD-managed lands by capturing revenue from non-hunting and angling users for use of certain designated areas on WMAs and Public Fishing Areas (PFAs).

Mr. Bowers stated that the proposed rule establishes and implements a fee structure for the Georgia Outdoor Recreation Pass, exempts certain individuals, provides for the availability of passes, and establishes criteria for managing organized events and activities. He further stated that the proposals were discussed in detail at the March meeting prior to publicizing these regulatory changes. He added that comments received from the public were generally supportive and summaries of the comments were provided in the board package.

Mr. Bowers stated that he would like to request that the Committee recommend that the Board approve the adoption of the rule as presented.

A motion was made by Mr. Budd, seconded by Mrs. Jenkins and carried unanimously that the Committee recommends that the Board approve the adoption of the proposed Rules for the Georgia Outdoor Recreation Pass, Chapter 391-4-9-.06. (Rules for the Georgia Outdoor Recreation Pass attached hereto and made a part hereof)

Mr. Bowers stated that the next item was a briefing on the proposed amendments to Hunting Regulations, Chapter 391-4-2-.71, Federal Wildlife Areas. He further stated that the proposed hunting regulations for the 2011 – 2013 hunting seasons contained regulations relating to the pursuit of bears with dogs for training purposes on Federal Wildlife Areas. He added that this proposal included a regulation that reduced the current training season opportunity by 56 percent.

Mr. Bowers stated that in April, this proposal was put before the public electronically, by mailing to more than 1,000 interested persons, and at three public hearings. He further stated that through this public participation effort, WRD received considerable public comment in opposition to the proposed reduction in opportunity for pursuing bears with dogs for training purposes on the Chattahoochee National Forest. He added that public comment indicated a desire to adjust the season in a manner that provides more summer opportunity.

Mr. Bowers stated that in consideration of and in response to public comment, WRD recommends a revised proposal that provides additional summer opportunity for pursuing bears with dogs for training purposes on the Chattahoochee National Forest. He further stated that this proposal will be given widespread distribution to the public and that a public hearing will be conducted in mid-June to receive comments. He added that WRD plans to present the proposed amendment to the Board for adoption at the June meeting.

Dan Forster, Director of WRD, presented the next briefing item on the proposed addition of the new Rule 391-1-7-.01, Refund of Fees.

Director Forster stated that the proposed addition to Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Rules on Administration, Rule 391-1, would be to add a new Chapter, 391-1-7, Refund of Fees, to specify how DNR will provide refunds of fees collected in error or as an overpayment, or to refund fees which the Department or State is not otherwise entitled. He further stated that SB 121, passed during the 2011 General Assembly, allows the Board to establish by rule or regulation a procedure to refund fees collected as above mentioned. He added that previously, Georgia Law did not allow DNR to provide refunds of fees, without customers submitting an application for refund to the Claims Advisory Board in the Secretary of State's office. He further added that this is a fairly lengthy and time consuming process for customers, and consumes considerable staff time within the Secretary of State's office and within DNR.

Director Forster stated that the most common refund requests in WRD result from overpayment for boat registrations and when purchasing hunting and fishing licenses. He further stated that customers often must determine fees to remit to DNR using various guidelines that may be on printed applications, on DNR's website or relayed by telephone, and can sometimes be confusing. He added that customers occasionally may inadvertently create a second customer account and pay for the same item twice, and that in this instance, customers are due a refund. He further added that the new DNR-based refund process will be more immediate, will be appreciated by customers, and will save significant staff time.

Director Forster stated that the types of fees collected, fee collection methods, and conditions for which refunds should be provided vary considerably across Divisions within DNR. He further stated that rather than prepare exhaustive rules for each situation that might be encountered, the proposed Board rule provides guidelines under which the various Divisions may develop forms and procedures for providing customer refunds.

Director Forster stated that this recommendation requires no Board action at this time, but is intended to provide opportunity for input prior to public notice and that the subsequent final proposal will be presented at the June Board meeting.

Director Forster gave an update on the fish kill on the Ogeechee River, testifying before Congress on USFWS operations and maintenance backlog and impacts to resources and recreation, Boat Registration transition with the Department of Revenue, and Licensing and Boat Registration issues.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.