

Minutes
Wildlife Resources Committee
2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, S. E.
Suite 1252 East Tower
Atlanta, GA 30334

June 26, 2012

Attending:

Committee Members

Joe Hatfield, Vice Chairman (Acting Chairman)
William Bagwell
Duncan Johnson
Phyllis Johnson
Ray Lambert
Aaron McWhorter
Philip Wilheit
Rob Leebern, Acting Board Chairman, ex-officio

Board Members

Dennis Billew
Mark Mobley
Mark Smith
Loyce Turner
Jim Walters
Steven Woodruff

Visitors

Ronny Just, Georgia Power
Doug Fulle, Oglethorpe Power
Debbie Phillips, Georgia Industry Environmental Coalition
Phil Zinsmeister, Sierra Club
John Eberhart, Georgia Earth Alliance
Rebecca Lam, Environment Georgia
Jeanette Gayer, Environment Georgia
Madison Poche, Environment Georgia
Robin Osindel, Environment Georgia
Stefan Bugge, Environment Georgia
Scott Tanner, Joe Tanner & Associates

Staff Members

Mark Williams
Jud Turner
Todd Holbrook
Homer Bryson
Spud Woodward
Dan Forster
Becky Kelley
Dave Crass
Steve Friedman
Lauren Curry
Ben Stowers
Doug Haymans
John Bowers
Mike Harris
Richard Tanner
Jim Ussery
Doralyn Kirkland
Joshua Ellis
Zachary Harris
Kyle Pearson
Eddie Henderson
Steven Adams
Jac Capp
Paul Nelson
Leigh Burns
Mary Ann Evans
Hellen Harris

The June 26, 2012 meeting of the Wildlife Resources Committee was called to order by Acting Board Chairman Rob Leebern. Chairman Leebern called on Joe Hatfield, Vice Chairman, serving as Chairman, of the Wildlife Resources Committee.

Mr. Hatfield called on John Bowers, Assistant Chief, Game Management, to present the briefing on proposed amendments to Hunting Regulations, Chapters 391-4-2-.46; 391-4-2-.48; 391-4-2-.49; 391-4-2-.52; and 391-4-2-.55 through 391-4-2-.58, Waterfowl and Late Season Migratory Bird Regulations.

Mr. Bowers stated that the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) regulates the harvest of migratory birds by establishing a framework (opening and closing dates, maximum season length, and maximum bag limits) within which the states can set their migratory bird hunting seasons. He further stated that the Wildlife Resources Division's (WRD) proposed waterfowl and late-season migratory bird hunting season dates are within the framework that is anticipated to be offered by the USFWS later this summer.

Mr. Bowers stated that WRD's proposal maximizes hunting opportunity within the framework, although that framework may change, based on habitat conditions in northern breeding grounds and other biological parameters. He further stated that the proposed 2012-2013 migratory bird seasons are as follows:

- Canada Goose – September 1 – 30; November 17-25; December 8 – January 27
- Teal – September 8 – 23
- Youth Days – November 10 – 11
- Ducks – November 17 – 25; December 8 – January 27
- King & Clapper Rails – September 14 – October 31; November 10 – December 1
- Sora & Virginia Rails – September 14 – October 31; November 10 – December 1
- Woodcock – December 8 – January 21
- Common (Wilson's) Snipe – November 15 – February 28
- Snow Goose – November 17 – 25; December 8 – January 27
- Gallinules – November 17 – 25; December 8 – January 27
- Mergansers – November 17 – 25; December 8 – January 27
- Coots – November 17 – 25; December 8 – January 27
- Sea Ducks – November 17 – 25; December 8 – January 27

- (Scoters, Elders, Long-tailed)
- Falconry – September 1 – 30; November 17 – February 1

Mr. Bowers stated that the final proposal would be presented for approval at the August meeting.

Mr. Hatfield called on Mike Harris, Chief, Nongame Conservation, for a briefing on the Endangered Species Act Listings: Process, Implications and Opportunities for Landowners.

Mr. Harris stated that in Georgia, Federally-listed plants and animals include 42 endangered, 18 threatened, nine candidates and 101 pending status review. He further stated that during the past year, the USFWS has received requests to add additional species to the endangered list. He added that each state was asked for input in development of candidate agreements in helping to address listing decisions.

Mr. Harris stated that there are two ways an animal is added to the Endangered Species List: (1) candidate assessment process that is conducted internally; and (2) by petition of the USFWS. He further stated that once a petition is received, it goes through a 90-day review process to determine if substantial information results in status review. He added that once the 90-day finding is published in the Register, a 12-month review of the status occurs.

Mr. Harris stated that a determination is then made as to whether or not the species warrants listing. He added that the next step is publishing a draft rule in the Federal Register that would list the species, which then undergoes a peer review by three appropriate and independent species specialists and a 60-day public comment period is held.

Mr. Harris stated that at that point a determination is made whether or not to list the species and publish the final rule in the Federal Register. He further stated that thirty day later, the species will then be officially added to the Endangered Species List.

Mr. Harris stated that the listing process includes the Five Factor Analysis: (1) Present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of its habitat or range; (2) Overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes; (3) disease or predation; (4) inadequacy of existing regulatory mechanisms; and (5) other natural or man-made factors affecting survival.

Mr. Harris stated that critical habitat designation for listed species is done when prudent and determinable. He further stated that critical habitat includes geographic areas that contain the physical or biological features essential to the conservation of the species and may include areas not currently occupied by the species at the time of listing, but are essential to its conservation. He added that an area can be excluded from critical habitat designation if an economic analysis shows that benefits of excluding area outweigh benefits of including area unless failure to designate may lead to extinction.

Mr. Harris stated that implication for private landowners includes the following: (1) the take of listed wildlife species is prohibited without permit; (2) take is defined as to harass, harm, pursue, hunt,

shoot, would, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or any attempt to engage in such conduct; (3) harm may include significant habitat modification or degradation if it kills or injures wildlife by significantly impairing essential behavior patterns including breeding, feeding, or sheltering.

Mr. Harris stated that Federal agency responsibilities include: (1) use their legal authorities to promote the conservation purposes of the Endangered Species Act; (2) consult with USFWS or NMFS to ensure that effects of actions they authorize, fund, or carry out are not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of listed species; and (3) avoid destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat.

Mr. Harris stated that tools for private landowners are Habitat Conservation Plans, Safe Harbor Agreements, and Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances; and gave an explanation of each tool.

Mr. Harris stated that WRD and USFWS have established teams to collaborate in the conservation of imperiled species. He further stated that hundreds of potential Federal listing actions will be faced in the coming decade. He added that southeastern states and USFWS are working to conserve as many species as possible without listing, thus avoiding additional regulations.

Mr. Harris stated that both private and public landowners will work together to implement these conservation solutions, and although urgent, there is time for success. He further stated that these efforts will require ongoing funding to be proactive in this field.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Hatfield called on Richard Tanner, Ranger First Class, to present a PowerPoint on Side Scan Sonar.

Ranger Turner stated that some of the uses for Side Scan Sonar are as follows:

- Salvage operations in lakes, rivers and at sea.
- Dam inspections
- Marine archaeology
- Bridge footing and abutments inspection
- Location of sunken logs from lumber operations
- Location of mines and beach landing obstructions
- Fish finding for recreational or commercial operations
- Shell fish bed location and identification

- Oil pipeline location and inspection
- Oil drilling rig inspection
- Assist police operations searching for crime evidence
- Location of drowning victims
- Monitor and guide diver search operations
- Dredging Operations
- Location of sunken boats, vehicles and aircraft for insurance and salvage rewards

Ranger Tanner showed acoustic images that are available on the Side Scan Sonar, and gave examples of training required in this field.

Discussion ensued with Colonel Eddie Henderson giving an update on the search for a 13-year old boy, who was the victim of an accident on Lake Lanier.

Mr. Hatfield called on Dan Forster, Director, WRD, for an update.

Director Forster gave an update on the upcoming Alligator Season and the 25th Anniversary of Weekend for Wildlife, which will be held at the Cloister on Sea Island on February 8 – 9, 2013.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.