

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

March 22, 2011

Attending:

Committee Members

Philip Watt, Chairman
Joe Hatfield, Vice Chairman
Gene Bishop
Warren Budd
Mabel Jenkins
Duncan Johnson
Phyllis Johnson
Ray Lambert
Loyce Turner
Earl Barrs, Board Chairman, ex-officio

Board Members

Dennis Billew
Bill Carruth
Walter Hudson
Robert Leebern
Mark Smith
Jim Walters
Philip Wilheit
Steven Woodruff

Visitors

Jim Scarbrough, Gwinnett Water
Ronny Just, Georgia Power
Doug Fulle, Oglethorpe Power
Aaron Mitchell, Georgia Power
Bryan Tolar, Georgia Agribusiness Council
Colleen Kiernan, Sierra Club
Bob Curry, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission
Mike Giles, Georgia Poultry Federation
Abit Massey, Georgia Poultry Federation

Staff Members

Mark Williams
Allen Barnes
Todd Holbrook
Becky Kelley
Dan Forster
Marlin Gottschalk
Dave Crass
Emily Hitchcock
Kyle Pearson
Lauren Curry
Lisa Mehalko
John Bowers
John Biagi
Steve Friedman
Linda MacGregor
Jac Capp
Jim Ussery
Doralyn Kirkland
Terry West
Connie Buck
Vonetta Pryor
Doug Haymans
Candy Henderson
Suzanne Burnes
Brad Konwick
Mary Ann Evans
Hellen Harris

The March 22, 2011 meeting of the Wildlife Resources Committee was called to order by Board Chairman Earl Barrs. Chairman Barrs called on Philip Watt, Chairman of the Wildlife Resources Committee.

Dr. Watt called on John Bowers, Assistant Chief, Game Management Section, for a briefing on the proposed amendments to Hunting Regulations, Chapter 391-4-2, and Firing Ranges, Rule 391-4-9-.02.

Mr. Bowers stated that the Hunting Regulations were set on a two-year cycle, and that he would be presenting the proposed amendments for the 2011-2012 and 2012-2013 Hunting Regulations. He further stated that the purpose of hunting regulations is to manage Georgia's game bird and game animals according to sound principles of wildlife management and to meet public objectives for use of these renewable natural resources. He added that changes to the existing rules reflect the need to adopt hunting regulations for the next two years, reflect statutory changes, eliminate unnecessary regulations, modify either-sex days to manage white-tailed deer, 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 members of the general public will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed regulations at three public hearings on April 18 at different areas of the state. He further stated that any participant at the public hearings may present data, make a statement or comment, or offer a viewpoint or argument either orally or in writing. He added that those unable to attend a public hearing may submit written statements before the close of business on April 29, 2011 to the Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) Headquarters.

Mr. Bowers stated that the proposed amendments to the Hunting Regulations would be presented at the May meeting for action. (Proposed Amendments to Hunting Regulations, Chapter 391-4-2, and Firing Ranges, Rule 391-4-9-.02 attached hereto and made a part hereof)

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Bowers briefed the Committee and Board on the proposed adoption of Rules for the Georgia Outdoor Recreation Pass, Chapter 391-4-9-.06. He stated that DNR initiated an extensive public participation effort in October 2009 to increase the self-sufficiency of providing recreational services on WRD-managed lands. He further stated that this effort resulted in a recommendation to the Commissioner in September 2010 to establish a fee system that

captures 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 Rules were in the Board package and included information related to public input. He further stated that public meetings were conducted in January 2011 to receive input for consideration into the development and structure of a fee simple system for individuals and groups using designed sites on WMAs and PFAs.

Mr. Bowers stated that public hearings on these proposals would be conducted in mid-April and would be presented to the Board for action at the May meeting. (Proposed Rules for the Georgia Outdoor Recreation Pass, Chapter 391-4-9-.06 attached hereto and made a part hereof)

Dr. Watt called on John Biagi, Chief, Fisheries Management Section, for a briefing on the Coosa River Lake Sturgeon Restoration Project.

Mr. Biagi stated that Lake Sturgeon is one of four species of Sturgeon native to Georgia. He further stated that Lake Sturgeon is native to the Coosa River system and can live up to 100 years and reach over 200 pounds. He added that the females first spawn at 14-25 years old and then once every 4-9 years.

Mr. Biagi stated that records indicate that the Lake Sturgeon disappeared from Georgia in the late 1970s from a combination of pollution and overharvest. He further stated that the Coosa River is much cleaner now than at that time, and that work began to restore the Lake Sturgeon in 2002 with the first stocking.

Mr. Biagi stated that the goal for the Lake Sturgeon Restoration project is to develop a self-sustaining population that anglers could catch and potentially harvest from in the future. He further stated that to do this, eggs are acquired from the State of Wisconsin and the plan is to stock every year for 20 years. He added that this will build up the population level and provide genetic diversity in the population, so that bottleneck problems will not occur in the future.

Mr. Biagi stated that WRD focuses on school children, with staff actually going into the classroom to educate the children on the life history of the Lake Sturgeon and WRDs restoration efforts.

Mr. Biagi stated that WRD is working with other state agencies, and non-governmental agencies in this pursuit. He further stated that education and outreach with media releases, regional television and radio, and internet is very is very important to the success of this project.

Mr. Biagi stated that to date, over 125,000 Lake Sturgeon have been stocked, which are moving throughout their historic range in the Coosa River system. He further stated that the biggest fish caught so far was reported to be 40 inches long and weighed about 15 pounds.

Discussion ensued.

Dr. Watt called on Dan Forster, Director of WRD, to introduce a special guest. Director Forster called on Bob Curry, North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission and President of Fisheries Administration of the American Fisheries Society, to present an award to WRD.

Mr. Curry stated that the American Fisheries Society is the world's oldest and largest organization dedicated to strengthening the fisheries profession, advancing fisheries science and conserving fisheries resources. He further stated that the Annual Sport Fish Restoration Outstanding Project Award is intended to highlight the importance and effectiveness of the Sport Fish Restoration Program and recognize excellence in fisheries management, research and aquatic education. He added that he would like to present a plaque to WRD Fisheries Management Section for the Coosa River Lake Sturgeon Restoration Project.

Director Forster gave an update on Turkey Season forecast and quota hunts, shooting range opportunities at Charlie Elliott and other areas across the state, communications and marketing efforts, social media, GoFish tournament ramps, and HB 277 (hunting deer over bait).

Dr. Watt stated that he would like to request an information session on the Hunting Regulations at an upcoming meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.