

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

March 24, 2015

Attending:

Committee Members

Dee Yancey, Chairman
William Bagwell
Dwight Davis
Dwight Evans
Aaron McWhorter
Philip Watt
Philip Wilheit
Ray Lambert, Board Chair, ex-officio

Board Members

Duncan Johnson, Jr.
Phyllis Johnson
Mike Phelps
Paul Shailendra
Bodine Sinyard

Visitors

Debbie Phillips, Georgia Industry Environmental Coalition
Andrew Schols, TCF
Doug Miell, Georgia Chamber
Harold Rehies, Joe Tanner and Associates
Ronny Just, Georgia Power
Bryan Tolar, Georgia Agribusiness
Abit Massey, Georgia Poultry Federation
Walter Jones, Morris News Sun
John Eberhart, Georgia Earth Alliance
Kevin Jeselnik, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper
Chris Manganiello, Georgia River Network
Mike Giles, Georgia Poultry Federation

Staff Members

Mark Williams
Walter Rabon
Dave Crass
Eddie Henderson
Spud Woodward
Steve Friedman
Kyle Pearson
Mary Kathryn Yeara
Cathy Barnette
Taylor Brown
John Biagi
John Bowers
Mike England
Jon Ambrose
Mary Walker
Trip Addison
Doralyn Kirkland
Jac Capp
Karen Hayes
Mark Whitney
Wally Woods
Thomas Barnard
Jeff Weaver
Thom Litts

The March 24, 2015 meeting of the Wildlife Resources Committee was called to order by Chairman Ray Lambert.

Chairman Lambert called on Dee Yancey, Chairman of the Wildlife Resources Committee, who called on John Biagi, Chief of Fisheries Management, to present the proposed amendments to Fishing Regulations, Chapter 391-4-3-.03, Seasons and Trout Water Designations.

Mr. Biagi stated the proposed change will amend the Rules of Chapter 391-4-3 to remove the season from currently designated seasonal trout water in north Georgia. He further stated these waters will remain designated trout waters and be open to angling year round.

Mr. Biagi stated removing the season for mountain trout is proposed in response to public requests. He further stated recent research indicates that the season on currently designated trout water provides no significant biological protection for mountain trout.

Mr. Biagi stated two public hearings were held in February and a total of 135 verbal, written and emailed comments were received during the public notice period. He further stated 73% of the comments indicated support for removing the season from currently designated seasonal trout water. He added the public comment period results mirrored the 7,000+ public scoping comments received during the fall of 2014, where 74% of the respondents were in support of the regulation change.

Mr. Biagi stated he would request the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the item as presented.

A motion was made by Dr. Watt, seconded by Mr. Evans and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the Resolution to approve the proposed amendments to Fishing Regulations, Chapter 391-4-3-.03, Seasons and Trout Water Designations, as presented.

Mr. Yancey called on John Bowers, Chief of Game Management, to brief the Board on the proposed amendments to Hunting Regulations, Chapter 391-4-2.

Mr. Bowers stated the Hunting Regulations are developed on a two-year cycle. He further stated this is a year for a presentation to the Board on regulatory proposals for the 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 hunting seasons. He added the proposed regulations are responsive to public input and desires and action items in Georgia's Deer Management Plan 2015-2024.

Mr. Bowers stated effective with the 2016-2017, hunting seasons harvest reporting will be required by smart phone application, internet or telephone for harvested deer and turkeys within 72 hours of carcass recovery.

Mr. Bowers stated alligator season will be increased by opening on the third Saturday in August. He further stated statewide quota is proposed to increase from 850 to 1,000.

Mr. Bowers stated population and harvest data indicate that Georgia's bear populations are healthy and stable. He further stated WRD proposed to expand the Northern Zone by 11 counties and increase the season by approximately 30 days. He added the Southern Zone will also be expanded by 2 counties.

Mr. Bowers stated the proposed regulations to Hunting Regulations will establish a uniform statewide deer season that closes the second Sunday in January. He further stated either-sex opportunity will be set by physiographic regions.

Mr. Bowers stated targeted efforts were made to mitigate loss of small game opportunity from the shift to a single statewide deer season expanding or adding opportunities on Wildlife Management Areas. He further stated on average, 12-14 days of small game opportunity was gained across Georgia's WMAs.

Chairman Lambert asked Mr. Bowers to explain the mechanisms used by the Wildlife Resources Division for receiving input from the Law Enforcement Division when amending the Hunting Regulations.

Mr. Bowers stated WRD works very closely with the Law Enforcement Region Captains at the regional level.

Mr. Bowers clarified that the proposed Hunting Regulations do not affect the baiting regulations in the Northern Zone or Southern Zone.

Discussion ensued on hunting zones in Georgia.

Dr. Watt discussed the use of the electronic harvest reporting system for reporting harvested coyotes as a mechanism to track data on the population of coyotes in Georgia.

Mr. Sinyard asked WRD to report on the progress of the Hunters Helping Farmers joint-operation with the Department of Agriculture. Mark Whitney, Assistant Director of the Wildlife Resources Division, updated the Board on the Hunters Helping Farmers program.

Chairman Yancey called on Dr. Jon Ambrose, Chief of Nongame Conservation, to brief the Committee on the State Wildlife Action Plan revision.

Dr. Ambrose stated Georgia's Wildlife Action Plan addresses conservation needs for high priority animals, plants and habitats in Georgia. He further stated WRD is undertaking a "comprehensive review and revision" of the plan which will be completed on October 1, 2015.

Dr. Ambrose stated WRD Non-Game Section will be using the same approach for completing the revision to Georgia's Wildlife Action Plan as they did in 2005. He further stated they will review goals

and objectives from the 2005 State Wildlife Action Plan and summarize progress on high priority conservation actions since 2005. He added the goal is to build on existing framework and maintain a balance between specificity and flexibility.

Dr. Ambrose stated the updated Wildlife Action Plan will serve as a guidance document for wildlife conservation programs in Georgia for the next five to ten years. He further stated it will serve as a plan that will inform conservation efforts at multiple scales, from local to national.

Dr. Ambrose stated WRD has established 13 Species Technical Teams to revise lists of priority species based on current distribution and status information. He further stated the technical teams' reports were finalized on March 20.

Dr. Ambrose stated the draft State Wildlife Action Plan revision document will be submitted for internal review in April 2015. He further stated public review of the draft will be completed in May 2015. He added the final draft of the revised State Wildlife Action Plan will be completed by July 30, 2015.

Chairman Yancey stated there being no further business, the meeting was concluded.