

NEW HAMPSHIRE FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

MAY 11, 2021 COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Location: Pemigewasset Valley Fish & Game Club, 295 Beede Rd., Holderness, NH

Commissioners Present: J. Caveney, B. Temple, C. Hodgdon, P. DeBow, E. Stohl, M. Lachance, D. Patch, & R. Green.

Commissioners absent/excused: P. McInnis, & F. Bird

Rockingham County Commissioner – position currently vacant.

Executive Director Mason – Present

Chairman Stohl called the meeting to order at 1:02 p.m., and asked the audience to join in the pledge of allegiance. He informed the audience that the public is entitled to attend all Commission meetings and when recognized by the chairman, the public may speak on any item on the agenda. The Chair reserves the right to limit comment to the extent necessary for the orderly conduct of the meeting.

Chairman Stohl announced where the restrooms & exits to the facility were located.

ACTION ITEMS:

1.) Commissioner Patch moved to approve the April 20, 2021 Commission Minutes, as written, and Commissioner Green seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

2.) Consent Agenda - The following items were grouped together and were noticed as consent agenda items to expedite action on routine matters, which may not require public discussion. The Commission voted to approve these matters as presented. Commission members may remove certain items if further public input or discussion is deemed necessary.

Commissioner Hodgdon moved to approve consent agenda items 2a – 2d, as presented below, and Commissioner Green seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

2a.) Commission accepted a \$75.00 donation from Lonnie Schorer, Moultonborough, NH, to be utilized by the Wildlife Division's Moose Management Project. (M. Ellingwood)

2b.) Commission accepted a \$1,200.00 donation from Sally Merrill, to be utilized by the Canine Team. (K. Jordan)

2c.) Commission accepted a \$1,000.00 donation from Dale Purdy, to be utilized by the Canine Team. (K. Jordan)

2d.) Commission accepted a \$35.00 donation from Paul & Diane Phelps, Bedford, NH, to be deposited into the Small Gifts & Donations Account. (S. Mason)

INFORMATION ITEMS:

1.) Financial Statement (was not discussed)

2.) Colonel Jordan came before the Commission and provided an overview of the Law Enforcement Division.

Colonel Jordan reported that the Law Enforcement Division is the largest Division within the Fish & Game Department, with 42 Conservation Officers (37 being Field Officers).

He stated, "Demands are growing, calls have tripled, and we are running out of staff & time, which will unfortunately result in some things getting put on the back burner, so to speak." He reported that being short staffed causes issues all around and that he would ideally like to see 5 or 6 additional officers assigned to each district.

In addition, he reported that he would like to see OHRV use better controlled, as much destruction is being done to habitat on trails.

He further reported that he would like to see a better/fair way to fund Search & Rescue. He reported that billing individuals, similar to the "Hike Safe Card", has worked well and has made a huge difference in the account.

He showed a slide presentation identifying some of the situations the officers encounter and the various duties they perform on a daily basis, from the White Mountains to the Seacoast.

Councilor Kenney thanked Director Mason for inviting him to the meeting. He reported that he has learned a great deal from the North Woods Law Show. He reported that the Executive Council is aware of the issues at hand, lack of resources & enforcement that the department is experiencing.

He reported that he would like to see more women become Conservation Officers, as he feels it brings a whole new perspective to Law Enforcement.

In closing, Councilor Kenney stated that he would be available after the meeting if anyone had anything they wished to discuss with him.

3.) Dianne Timmins, Coldwater Fisheries Biologist, Region 1 Office, Lancaster, NH, came before the Commission and provided an overview of wild trout, stocking and future management in New Hampshire. (See below link to view presentation).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KbzfXeGtUI3xnaIKkbEAn27tYFRiecr/view?usp=sharing>

Dianne discussed changes to stocking, the presence & absence of wild brook trout, wild trout size, and threats to fish.

Dianne answered many questions from the public.

On behalf of the Commission, Chairman Stohl thanked Dianne for the informative presentation.

At this time, Chairman Stohl reported that Mark Ellingwood would be retiring at the end of May, 2021.

Chairman Stohl recalled a trip to Connecticut when he had visited the CT DNR, where he witnessed a large framed photo of Mark Ellingwood on the wall. He stated, “They must think highly of him, as here in NH we put photos of the Governor and/or President on the walls at the NH F&G Department.”

Commissioner Stohl reported that Mark began his wildlife career in 1978. Before coming to New Hampshire, he worked 5 years as a deer research associate at New York’s Institute of Ecosystem Studies; 2 years as an American woodcock graduate research assistant at West Virginia University; and 9 years as a deer biologist for the Connecticut Wildlife Bureau.

Mark’s 27- year career at NH Fish and Game began in 1994, when Fisheries & Wildlife were joined as a single Division. During his tenure at Fish and Game, Mark worked 8 years as a regional supervisor, 10 years as game program supervisor, and 9 years as Wildlife Chief.

Some of his accomplishments include his role in helping to establish Wildlife Division species management teams; his role in helping to establish the Department’s small game project and conflict abatement team; his efforts in support of the establishment of our existing youth turkey and fall firearms turkey seasons; his role in helping to administer over several long-term Game Management Plans and multiple Biennial Rule-Making efforts; and his active role in helping to establish and implement a number of management-directed wildlife research studies in partnership with UNH.

On behalf of the Commission, Chairman Stohl thanked Mark for his dedication and tenure with the Department.

STANDING COMMITTEES:

POLICY COMMITTEE: Chair: B. Temple; Commissioners: Lachance & Bird.

Commissioner Temple reported that the committee would be meeting in the near future.

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE: Commissioner Green, Chair; Commissioners: Hodgdon, Patch & DeBow. Commissioner Green reported that the committee has not met.

Paul Sanderson, Legal Coordinator, reported that the Wildlife Season Setting rules would be submitted to JLCAR (Joint Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules), on May 21, 2021, at 9:00 a.m., via Zoom.

AWARDS COMMITTEE: Commissioner Lachance, Chair; Commissioners: Bird, & Caveney. Commissioner Lachance reported that the committee did not meet.

RIVERS COMMITTEE: Commissioner Hodgdon reported that the committee did not meet.

LAKES COMMITTEE: Commissioner Temple. Commissioner Temple had nothing to report at this time.

HANDBOOK & ORIENTATION COMMITTEE: Commissioner Patch, Chair; Commissioner Green & Caveney. Commissioner Patch reported that there was a copy of the new/updated Commission Handbook before each Commissioner.

On behalf of the committee, Commissioner Patch thanked Heidi Holman, Nongame Wildlife Biologist, who assisted greatly with the project.

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE: Commissioner Hodgdon, Chair: Commissioners Temple, Stohl & DeBow. Commissioner Hodgdon reported that the next committee meeting was scheduled for May 18, 2021, at 10:00 a.m., at F&G HQ.

WILDLIFE HERITAGE FOUNDATION: Commissioner Hodgdon. Commissioner Hodgdon reported that Maria Colby, of “The Wings of the Dawn” received a grant that will allow the rehabilitation center to teach young eagles how to fish in a more natural environment with the creation of an eagle pool. He thanked Colonel Jordan for his involvement & for recognizing how important Maria is in supporting the work the department does.

OLD BUSINESS: N/A

NEW BUSINESS: Chairman Stohl reported that this meeting would be considered one of the Commission’s off-site meetings. He reported that Governor Sununu would like to see the Commission hold meetings at different locations around the State.

Director Mason reported that as the Commission travels around the state he would be inviting the host Executive Councilors to meetings in their areas.

Chairman Stohl thanked Jerry Thibodeau & the Pemigewasset Valley F&G Club for their generosity in hosting the Commission Meeting and stated what a great facility it was.

COMMISSIONERS REPORTS: Commissioners will report on their recent activities as it relates to Fish & Game Commission duties and responsibilities. This is an informational item only.

DIRECTOR’S REPORT: The Director will report on recent department activities. This is an information item only.

Director Mason reported that he requested all employees to return to work on May 7, 2021. He reported that the mask mandate has expired, however, he has asked staff to be respectful of others when in certain situations, particularly when you are not able to social distance.

He reported that he recently participated in a 2-day NEAFWA zoom meeting.

He further reported that the Inland Fisheries Division Chief search was still underway and that interviews for the position would take place in the near future.

In addition, Director Mason reported that the Hatchery Advisory Committee recently toured the Powder Mill Fish Hatchery in New Durham, NH. He reported that the last meeting of the committee consisted of a virtual tour of the Platte River State Fish Hatchery in Beulah, Michigan. He reported that the video was very informative and depicted the process to treat phosphorous.

Further, Director Mason reported that the Executive Council has approved the final phase of the Downing's Landing Project, at Alton Bay.

He reported that discussion was ongoing as to the re-opening of the department's visitor centers, which were manned by volunteers and have been closed for a few years.

In closing, he reported that Discover Wild New Hampshire Day was cancelled and would take place next spring.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC:

Representative Cathryn Harvey of Spofford, NH, was present at the meeting and reported that she serves on the House, Fish, Game & Marine Resources Committee. She inquired as to the status of HB-640 (2019 Session), to establish a public boat access donation program for operators of non-motorized boats.

Paul Sanderson, Legal Coordinator, reported that it never made it to the Senate for a vote.

Jay High, of Manchester, NH, requested that the department stop stocking the Connecticut River in Pittsburg, downstream of Murphy Dam. He asked the Commission to watch a Wild Fish Video from Montana, relative to the stopping of trout stocking in streams/rivers that supported wild trout populations. Video can be found at: www.wildfishconservancy.org, click on "The Montana Story".

Kristina Snyder, of Chester, NH, reported that she was the President, of NH Citizens Against Recreational Trapping, and has had many individuals reach out with an interest to join, not just radical groups, but professionals as well.

She reported that Rockingham County has not had representation on the Commission for over a year & a half. She further reported that she was disappointed to see that Commissioner Bird was not in attendance, as the Commission changed the date of the monthly meetings to the 2nd Tuesday of the month, vs. the 2nd Wednesday of the month, to accommodate his schedule.

Further, she voiced her concern that only 4 or 5 Commissioners attended the public hearings, and that no changes were made to the Wildlife Season Setting Rules, even after receiving many requests from the public to do so. She stated, "There is increasing disappointment with the Commission and the way things are going."

In closing, she reported that it was a pleasant meeting and that she was sad to hear that Mark Ellingwood would be leaving the agency.

In addition, she thanked Colonel Jordan for the great presentation.

Dave Poole, of Rumney, NH & North Country Fishing Guide, reported that he did not disagree that the Connecticut River was a special piece of water, however, felt that overuse without stocking could be detrimental. He further expressed his concern that if the department were to move forward with regulatory measures, it would mean the entire Connecticut River in Pittsburg would have special regulations and felt it wouldn't be fair for all user groups.

At this time, 4:47 p.m., Commissioner Green moved to adjourn and Commissioner Hodgdon seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Eric Stohl, Chairman
NH Fish & Game Commission