

NEW HAMPSHIRE FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

JUNE 14, 2022 COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

Meeting Location: Owl Brook Hunter Education Center, 387 Perch Pond Rd., Holderness, NH.

Commissioners Present: E. Stohl, M. Lachance, C. Hodgdon, J. Caveney, S. Price, A.J. DeRosa, P. DeBow, R. Green, P. McInnis & B. Temple.

Commissioners absent/excused: M. Hodgson

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.

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Commissioner Green moved to approve the May 10, 2022 Commission Meeting Minutes and Commissioner DeBow seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

2.) Consent Agenda - The following items were grouped together and 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 Green moved to approve consent agenda items 2a – 2e, as presented below, and Commissioner Temple seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

2a.) The Commission accepted the donation of \$100.00 from Kristine Barker, in honor and appreciation of the Law Enforcement's Search & Rescue Team.

2b.) The Commission accepted the donation of \$250.00 from Frank & Kathy Kopyt, in grateful recognition of the Conservation Officers who assisted their son off the summit of Kearsarge North after falling & suffering a head injury.

2c.) The Commission accepted the donation of a Pro-4 Remote Operated Underwater Camera that was on a safeboat that the Law Enforcement Division took possession of in May of 2022, valued at approximately \$50,000. The camera was not part of the original equipment; it was added after Governor & Council approval was granted.

2d.) The Commission accepted the donation of \$200.00 from Judith Thompson, in memory of her husband, Lawrence Thompson, of Keene, NH, who was an avid angler, for use in the Department's Discovery Room.

2e.) The Commission accepted the donation of \$2,500 from the Meredith Rotary Club, earmarked to support Inland Fishery Management, specifically the Large Lakes Program.

- 3.) After brief discussion, Commissioner Green moved to accept the donation of a 400-acre conservation easement on the Hinman III parcel in Hooksett, NH, from Bear Paw Regional Greenways, along with the donation of \$25,000 for long-term easement monitoring and management, Commissioner DeBow seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.
- 4.) Commissioner Green moved to approve the expenditure of \$13,000 from the Wildlife Habitat Account to purchase a 47-acre property in Canaan, NH, that abuts and is located between the Mascoma WMA and the HL Webster WMA, and Commissioner Caveney seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.
- 5.) Commissioner Temple moved to add \$40,000 from the Wildlife Habitat Account to the Wildlife Division's FY'23 authorized budget of \$40,000 (for a total of \$80,000), for exclusive use in the Wildlife Habitat Enhancement Small Grants Program and Commissioner McInnis seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

INFORMATION ITEMS:

- 1.) Kathy LaBonte, Chief, Business Division, fielded a few questions regarding the financial statement.

She reminded the Commission to submit any outstanding mileage requests to Tanya Haskell, ASAP, in order to be reimbursed for travel made within the Fiscal Year.

- 2.) Tom Flynn, Facility Manager, Owl Brook Hunter Education Center, introduced Eric Geib, Program Assistant at the Center. Tom reported this is the 20th year that the center has been open. He further reported that the center is dedicated to educating people in the knowledge, skills and behaviors needed to become safe and responsible hunters, trappers and stewards of the state's natural resources.

He reported that Owl Brook is managed by Fish and Game's Hunter Education Program, located on 500-forested acres of land at 387 Perch Pond Road in Holderness, NH. The center was the first facility of its kind in the state. Owl Brook hosts workshops, group programs and special events conducted by Fish and Game staff, Hunter Education and center volunteers, often in partnership with organizations such as the NH Trappers Association and the National Wild Turkey Federation. These activities allow individuals and families to start the lifelong journey of becoming safe and responsible hunters and trappers. As much as possible, the "hands-on" and "learn by participation" approach is used at the center.

The Owl Brook Hunter Education Center was made possible through a grant from the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act (managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), as well as private donations, including support from the Wildlife Heritage Foundation of New Hampshire.

The Owl Brook Hunter Education Center relies upon volunteer assistance from the state's sporting community to accomplish our mission. The center offers basic, advanced and special opportunity classes and workshops on hunting, trapping, shooting, outdoors skills and wildlife management. The center's classroom building, shooting ranges, and interpretive trails and courses are important tools helping Fish and Game pass on the heritage of hunting and trapping to future generations.

3.) Dan Bergeron, Chief, Wildlife Division & Karen Bordeau, Wildlife Biologist, came before the Commission informing them that pheasant prices will be increasing over the next 3 years and costs are outpacing pheasant license revenues. As a result, adjustments will need to be made in the number of pheasants purchased, pheasant license fees, or both. He reported that there is a 3- year bidding process, with birds slightly increasing over the next three years as follows:

2022 - \$13.50/per bird

2023- \$13.70/per bird

2024 - \$13.90 per bird

He reported that the department usually stocks 11,500 birds per year. He further reported that there was an increase in license sales during COVID, however, that is currently on the decline. The cost per bird has increased to a level of not being able to maintain that same number of birds stocked, leaving a decision to either increase the cost of the pheasant license or reduce the number of birds stocked. He reported that an increase in the pheasant license would most likely result in a reduction in license sales. In closing, he reported last year there were 4,800 pheasant licenses sold.

Commissioner Green inquired at what point do we go into a deficit and ask ourselves is it worth having the pheasant program. He suggested getting some input from the pheasant hunters, which may help decide the path going forward.

Much discussion ensued.

4.) Dianne Timmins, Chief, Inland Fisheries Division, came before the Commission seeking approval to expend up to \$20,000 from the Fisheries Habitat Account to restore aquatic connectivity for brook trout and other fish species in Alder Brook and South Branch Stearns Brook located in Success, NH.

She reported that this request would be for the third phase of a multi-year stream connectivity and habitat restoration project in Success, NH. The high elevation streams in Success offer valuable habitat for brook trout and other fish and wildlife. She further reported that this area was identified by Department staff as a high priority for stream restoration in a watershed-wide stream crossing survey conducted in 2018. The entire area is open to hunting & fishing. This request is less than 3% of the overall project costs, which are over \$680,000.

Much discussion ensued.

At this time, Commissioner DeBow moved to change this from an information item to an action item and Commissioner Price seconded. The motion carried with 9 in favor, 1 opposed (R. Green).

Commissioner DeBow moved to approve the expenditure of up to \$20,000 from the Fisheries Habitat Account to restore aquatic connectivity for brook trout and other fish species in Alder Brook and South Branch Stearns Brook located in Success, NH, Commissioner Price seconded. The motion carried with 9 in favor, 1 opposed (R. Green).

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE:

LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE: Public policy development & recommendations, as well as Commission advocacy before legislature.

Commissioner Green, Chair; Commissioners: DeBow, Price & Hodgson
Staff members: Kevin Jordan & Marty Mobley

Commissioner Green reported that the committee has not met. He reported that there would be a Legislative Committee Meeting on July 12, 2022, at the Belknap County Sportsmen's Association, at 11:00 a.m.

Director Mason reported that HB-490, relative to the definitions of "game camera" and "hunting day," relative to the use of game cameras, relative to the use of temporary tree stands or observation blinds, and relative to the definition of "firearm". The committee of conference could not agree on this and the bill failed.

Colonel Jordan reported that the Governor recently signed both HB-1230-FN, presentation of online registration for deer & HB-1323, relative to hike safe. He reported that the hike safe bill allows the Executive Director the authority to change fees on hike safe card.

He further reported that HB-1299, relative to the process for the importation of wildlife and creating an appeal process for denials of permits, was the only outstanding bill.

GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE: Commission professional development, education & policy recommendations related to Commission conduct & activities.

Commissioner Caveney, Chair; Commissioners: Green & Temple.
Staff member: Cheri Patterson

Commissioner Caveney reported that the committee met on June 1, 2022, and reviewed more of the Commission handbook and have three recommended changes/updates as follows:

- Under Orientation Section of the Commission handbook (list of things that Commissioners will receive). Committee decided to scratch telephone credit cards.

Commissioner Caveney moved to accept this minor change to the orientation section of the handbook and Commissioner Temple seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

- Under Resolution Section of the Commission handbook, page 32, (referencing Landowner Support Policy). Committee added the word "trapping" in 3 locations.

Commissioner Caveney moved to approve the above change under the Resolution Section of the Commission handbook and Commissioner Green seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

- Under Policy Section of Commission handbook, (regarding Commission Badges). Committee had lengthy discussion and recommends replacing the word “badge” with “Official I.D.”, consisting of Commissioners name, county representing, and term.”

Commissioner Caveney moved to remove the word “badge” & replace it with the words “Official I.D.”, inserted under the orientation section of the Commission handbook and Commissioner Green seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

SUSTAINABILITY & STRATEGIC PLANNING: Agency funding, development & oversight of strategic plan.

Commissioner Hodgdon, Chair; Commissioners: Caveney, Hodgson & DeRosa.
Staff member: Scott Mason

Commissioner Hodgdon reported that the Committee met for the purpose of discussing and planning the public outreach part of the planning process. The committee focused on how to best reach out to four different types of key stakeholders, including the Public, Elected Officials, Non-governmental Organizations, including advocacy organizations and partner agencies within state government. He reported that the committee would develop a survey for the public and a letter inviting elected officials & NGOs to comment directly; and ask them to let their members/constituents know about the survey. For the state agencies, the committee will work with the Director to organize a meeting where we can ask for and receive direct comment. The goal is to have drafts of the survey and letters for review at the July 12, 2022 Commission Meeting.

RESOURCES & INFRASTRUCTURE: Policy recommendations related to agency infrastructure; including facilities, public access, habitat & wildlife.

Commissioner Temple, Chair; Commissioners: McInnis, Lachance & Caveney.
Staff member: Dianne Timmins

No meeting.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT & EDUCATION: Engagement, partnership, awards, public recognition & education strategies for the public & interest groups.

Commissioner DeBow, Chair; Commissioners: Hodgdon, Price & DeRosa.
Staff members: Dianne Timmins, Kevin Jordan & Cheri Patterson

Commissioner DeBow reported that awards have been ordered & are in the process of being made. Once Tanya receives them, she will inform the committee, at which time the Commission will decide when to present the awards. Tanya will then send notification letters containing pertinent details of the presentation date to award winners & the individuals that nominated the winners.

OLD BUSINESS:

NEW BUSINESS: Commissioner Caveney reported that he would like to see the Department's website have an actual calendar containing every upcoming meeting, gathering, hearing or event, so everyone can have the information in advance and in real time.

The Commission supported the concept.

Commissioner Caveney recommended that a calendar be placed on the Department's website listing all public events and Commissioner Green seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

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.

Commissioner Green thanked Colonel Jordan for allowing Office Crouse of District 5 & his two-year old black lab, Koda, to be at Jake's Day, in Weare, NH. He reported that they were well received and people appreciated them being there.

Commissioner Price reported that she & Commissioner Lachance attended the awards ceremony at the Winni-Derby, which was well attended. She reported that a few individuals inquired as to if a fishery biologist was present, therefore, she inquired if there could be someone present at the awards ceremony next year, as they seem to appreciate the participation in prior years.

Commissioner Temple reported that Sullivan County hosted a "Village of Plainfield Fishing Derby", which was well attended.

Commissioner Caveney reported that he received a complaint from a constituent who is an avid angler of Swanzey Lake, in Swanzey N.H. He reported that apparently Marine Patrol issued a permit for a water ski slalom course, which adversely affects the public ability to safely fish and paddle (canoes & kayaks) on the lake when water skiing is occurring. He reported that he had communicated with law enforcement and fisheries biologists about the permit, and to everyone's surprise, a permit had been granted with wide time parameters for use. He reported that the details of the permit were somewhat troubling, and that there have been verbal conflicts between anglers & skiers, along with boating laws being abused, causing safety issues for anglers & paddlers.

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

Director Mason reported on the following:

- Attended a meeting with the ATV Clubs from across NH with Commissioner Stewart, of DNCR, & along with staff from both agencies, to discuss ATV issues. He reported that the North Country Clubs were very pleased with the increased presence Law Enforcement on the trails last year.

- Attended the CT Lakes Headwaters Citizen Advisory Committee & reported that it was coming up on their 20th Anniversary of the purchase of the land. He further reported that Phil Bryce was retiring from state service as the State Parks & Recreation Director.
- Work is proceeding on the hatchery projects & tours of all hatcheries with HDR are complete. He reported that they would soon begin pilot testing of different technologies to remove phosphorus from the discharge. The goal is to finish the HDR study by the end of the year and begin the design work for the early hatchery rebuilds.
- The Department's computer system/situation is not in good shape with 14 databases that will no longer be serviceable after January 1, 2023 and 38 that require updating.
- Department is starting the process of rebidding the licensing software and are currently working with the Department of Information Technology to try to solve some of the computer issues.
- The Department of Environmental Services, Dam Bureau, received an ARPA grant and are working with staff on some Department owned dams that they would like either fixed or removed.

CALL TO THE PUBLIC:

At this time, 3:54 p.m., Commissioner Green moved to adjourn and Commissioner Lachance seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Eric Stohl, Chairman
NH Fish & Game Commission