

**Minutes
Board of Natural Resources
Brasstown Valley Resort
Creekside Pavilion
6321 Highway 76
Young Harris, GA 30582**

**Tuesday, December 5, 2023
9:00 a.m.**

Board Members

Dwight Davis, Chair
Joe Hatfield, Vice Chair
Gary Vowell, Secretary
Nancy Addison
Randy Dellinger
Patrick Denney
Charles DePriest
Dan Garcia
Penn Hodge
Duncan Johnson
Bill Jones
Ray Lambert
Lesley Reynolds
Paul Shailendra
Bodine Sinyard
Harley Yancey

Guests

J. D. McCrary, GA Forest Watch
Anna Edmondson, Robbins Government Relations
Alice Keyes, One Hundred Miles
Brian Foster, Georgia Conservancy
Bill Sapp, Southern Environmental Law Center

Staff Members

Walter Rabon, Commissioner
Thomas Barnard
Trevor Santos
Kyle Pearson
Cathy Barnette
Artica Gaston
Mike England
Steve Friedman
Doug Haymans
Angie Johnson
Ted Will
Heather Abercrombie

Jeff Cown, Director
James Boylan
Chuck Mueller
Katie Hegarty

Chairman Dwight Davis welcomed everyone to the December board meeting at Brasstown Valley Resort. He thanked John Peels, General Manager, and his staff, for an evening of wonderful fellowship at The Stables. He recognized Charles Burton and his staff from the North Georgia Mountains Authority and Mark Osterhaus from Coral Hospitality and stated that the resort looks terrific and thanked them and their staff for all the great support.

Chairman Davis called on Heather Abercrombie, Site Manager at the Dahlonega Gold Museum State Historic Site, as the employee spotlight speaker.

Chairman Davis thanked Ms. Abercrombie for her presentation and stated that it is always great to hear from employees about their career paths within the department.

Chairman Davis stated it is a privilege to welcome former board member Ms. Miki Thomaston to the board meeting. He further stated that it was a pleasure to serve with Ms. Thomaston, as she was a valuable resource to the board, and he would like to honor her by presenting a board resolution. Chairman Davis invited Ms. Thomaston to join him at the lectern as he read the resolution. Chairman Davis and Commissioner Rabon thanked Ms. Thomaston for her service and presented the resolution. Ms. Thomaston stated it was a great honor to serve on the board, but the greatest honor was the friends she made along the way.

Chairman Davis adjourned the Board meeting to move into the Committee meetings.

Chairman Davis called the meeting of the Board of Natural Resources to order.

Chairman Davis stated that Item A, under Other Business, will be removed from the agenda and called for a motion to amend the agenda.

A motion was made by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Ms. Addison, and carried unanimously that the Board approve to amend the agenda and remove Item A, under Other Business.

Chairman Davis called for a motion to approve the minutes of the Board of Natural Resources meeting on October 24, 2023; minutes of the conference call meeting of the Nominating Committee for the 2023 Board of Natural Resources Rock Howard Conservation Achievement Award on November 14, 2023; minutes of the conference call meeting of the Nominating Committee for 2024 Board Officers on November 14, 2023; and minutes of the Special Conference Call meeting of the Board of Natural Resources on November 15, 2023.

A motion was made by Mr. Sinyard, seconded by Mr. Johnson, and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the Board of Natural Resources meeting on October 24, 2023; minutes of the conference call meeting of the Nominating Committee for the 2023 Board of Natural Resources Rock Howard Conservation Achievement Award on November 14, 2023; minutes of the conference call meeting of the Nominating Committee for 2024 Board Officers on November 14, 2023; and minutes of the Special Conference Call meeting of the Board of Natural Resources on November 15, 2023.

Chairman Davis called on Jeff Cown, Director of the Environmental Protection Division, for his report.

Director Cown updated the Board on expanding the Solid Waste Trust Fund for new grants, a coastal groundwater stakeholder meeting, and a stakeholder process in Southwest Georgia about endangered mussels in the area.

Director Cown stated this concluded his report.

Chairman Davis called on Walter Rabon, Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources, for his report.

Commissioner Rabon provided an update on the DNR Leadership Academy's final session and graduation at Unicoi State Park. He thanked Artica Gaston, Bobby Wilson, Lacey Creech, and Kaitlin Goode for their efforts in facilitating the program. He added that in addition to the Leadership Academy graduation, an orientation session for new board members was held at Unicoi State Park and thanked Chairman Davis for his leadership in putting it together.

Commissioner Rabon provided an update on the DNR Career Academy and stated the application period has closed. He stated that there is an extremely competitive number of applications. He further stated that the applications will be scored internally, and virtual interviews will be held for selected applicants. He added that students will be notified in late January or early February of selections.

Commissioner Rabon stated the Georgia General Assembly will reconvene for their 2024 legislative session on Monday, January 8. He added that in addition to budget, there is one piece of departmental legislation, House Bill 244, which addresses some technological advances in the mariculture industry that were not considered when the original mariculture bill passed in 2019 (HB 501).

Commissioner Rabon announced that Sportsman's Day at the Capitol, also known as Keeping Georgia Wild Day, is scheduled for Thursday, January 11. He further stated that Georgia

DNR will be well represented from each of the divisions and is looking forward to the opportunity to interact with Governor Brian Kemp, legislators, and staff during the event. He invited all board members to attend.

Commissioner Rabon provided an update on the 2024 Weekend for Wildlife and stated the event is shaping up to be another record year. He thanked the sponsors and donors who continue to help the fundraising event grow and raise awareness for the worthy cause. He stated that he wanted to especially thank Norfolk Southern and Tom and Eleanor Ratchford for being the first \$100,000 sponsors and added that the department is immensely grateful for their generous support.

Commissioner Rabon called on Doug Haymans, Director of the Coastal Resources Division, for his report.

Director Haymans began his update by announcing the new state record for the Almaco Jack. He stated the 7-pound, 0.8-ounce fish was caught offshore 40 miles east of Brunswick on October 18 by Sean Tarpley, 26, of Brunswick.

Director Haymans updated the board on the Saltwater Information Program (SIP), an angler education campaign to collect saltwater angler data. He stated the data will be used in fishery management and amenities placement, and it is free to add to fishing licenses. He further stated there were 227,252 SIP permits in CY 2022 and they must be renewed annually. He added that previously the permit expired in February and that the expiration-date model changed in 2020 to 365 days. He further added that there will be educational giveaways in exchange for angler photos, holiday radio ads to buy fishing licenses and free SIP, a message from Commissioner Rabon on social media, and a grand prize winner will receive a swag package including a filet knife, hat, and grocery bag.

Director Haymans provided an update on the Cannonball Jellyfish harvest and stated they are harvestable November 22 through March 31. He stated there is one active processor in McIntosh County, and the jellyfish is generally exported to Asia as food product.

Director Haymans stated this concluded his report.

Commissioner Rabon called on Colonel Mike England, Director of the Law Enforcement Division, for his report.

Colonel England provided an update on a drone-assisted arrest of a murder suspect on November 6, in Habersham County; night hunting on Rich Mountain WMA in Gilmer County where a suspect was arrested and charged with one felony and eleven misdemeanor charges;

the waterfowl opening weekend stats from November 18-19, with 144 total citations and 134 total warnings; DNR Aviation regarding new paint for all three helicopters, a new pilot, Lt. Sam Miller, a new mechanic, Andy Brown, and FLIR (Forward Looking InfraRed) that will enhance DNRs operational capability and functions and adding a boost in illegal night hunting and shrimping enforcement. He stated a second FLIR is a CONTROP FLIR and is scheduled to be added to the fleet in early 2024.

Colonel England announced that Captain Al Greer is the new Region I Supervisor, effective December 1. He stated that Captain Greer is a 23-year veteran of the LED and will fill the vacant position left by the promotion of Lt. Colonel James McLaughlin.

Colonel England stated that on November 27, Congressman Buddy Carter and U. S. Coast Guard 7th District Command presented Meritorious Service awards to first responders involved in the Golden Ray incident in September 2019. He further stated that Sgt. Mark Carson, Cpl. Jay Bright, Cpl. Thomas Shaske, and Game Warden Zac Griffis were presented with the awards.

Colonel England stated this concluded his report.

Commissioner Rabon called on Angie Johnson, Director of the State Parks & Historic Sites Division, for her report.

Director Johnson provided an update on the Fall festivals and events throughout the state, including Fort McAllister Wild Turkey craft program, F. D. Roosevelt American Frontier Day event, and events at General Coffee, George L. Smith, and Jarrell Plantation.

Director Johnson provided an update on Leaf Watch 2023 and stated there were more than 161,000 views, with the highest being October 21 (6,500 pageviews).

Director Johnson updated the board on the Fall Career Fairs at Locust Grove High School and Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College.

Director Johnson updated the board on the 2023 Resources Management Quota Hunts and stated there were four managed hunts to date: Hard Labor Creek on November 7-8, and Don Carter, Panola Mountain, and Red Top Mountain on November 14-15. She further stated there were 263 hunters, 312 deer harvested, and the largest deer harvested was 162 lbs. dressed (HLC and PAN). She added it was the first hunt at Don Carter with several deer over 5.5 years old.

Director Johnson provided an update on Fort Yargo hosting the DNR Communications team, the furniture refresh at Reynolds Mansion, and Parks support for former First Lady Rosalynn Carter's funeral.

Director Johnson stated this concluded her report.

Commissioner Rabon called on Ted Will, Director of the Wildlife Resources Division, for his report.

Director Will provided a hunting update on the monitoring of statewide doe harvest following the recent regulation changes that increased either sex opportunity in a significant portion of the state. He stated that this change increased doe harvest, and the harvest is trending higher than the same period last season, with approximately 5,000 more does than bucks.

Director Will provided a fisheries update regarding the harvest and stocking of bluegill and channel catfish and stated it has been ongoing for the past month and will continue into January. He stated the Boating Access Team recently completed a parking lot renovation at Middle Boat Ramp on Lake Richard B. Russell and are nearing the completion on two other boat ramp renovations. He further stated the renovation of the Watershed Exhibit at the Go Fish Education Center should be completed by the new year.

Director Will provided a Wildlife Conservation update and stated this year marked a record breaking Becoming An Outdoors Woman (BOW) event at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center with 94 women in attendance. He stated the WCS staff have continued to work on the Altamaha WMA groundcover seed production nursery, and small-scale seed harvests of several of the species planted have been conducted. He added that Georgia hosted the annual meeting of the Gopher Tortoise Council this year in Tifton with more than 100 in attendance. Included were field trips to Alapaha River WMA and Doerun Pitcherplant Bog WMA.

Director Will stated this concluded his report.

Commissioner Rabon stated this concluded his report.

Chairman Davis called on Nancy Addison, Chair of the Coastal Committee, for her report.

A motion was made by Ms. Addison, seconded by Mr. Shailendra, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the resolution to approve the proposed amendments to the Saltwater Fishing Regulations, Chapter 391-2-4-.04. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part hereof)

A motion was made by Ms. Addison, seconded by Mr. Shailendra, and carried unanimously that the Board approve the re-appointment of Mr. Brad Brookshire to the Coastal Marshlands Protection Committee and Shore Protection Committee, effective January 31, 2024, and extending through December 31, 2027.

Ms. Addison stated this concluded her report.

Chairman Davis called on Ray Lambert, Chairman of the Environmental Protection Committee, for his report.

A motion was made by Mr. Lambert, seconded by Mr. Shailendra, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the resolution to approve the proposed amendments to the Rules for Solid Waste Management, Chapter 391-3-4.19. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part hereof)

Mr. Lambert stated this concluded his report.

Chairman Davis called on Charles DePriest, Vice Chairman of the Land Committee, for his report.

A motion was made by Mr. DePriest, seconded by Mr. Denney, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to approve the purchase from the Mary Balent Long and Sergio A. Garza-Corona as Co-Executors of the Steven W. McCloud Estate, 144± acres as an addition to Crockford Pigeon Mountain WMA, Walker County. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part hereof)

A motion was made by Mr. DePriest, seconded by Ms. Addison, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to approve the purchase from The Nature Conservancy 2,345± acres as an addition to Chattahoochee Fall Line WMA, Marion County. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part hereof)

A motion was made by Mr. DePriest, seconded by Mr. Sinyard, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to approve the purchase from Charles R. Matzen, 93± acres as an addition to Big Hammock WMA, Tatnall County. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part hereof)

A motion was made by Mr. DePriest, seconded by Mr. Shailendra, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to approve the extension of an existing lease agreement with the Brunswick and Glynn County Development Authority, Glynn County. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part hereof)

Vice Chairman DePriest stated this concluded his report.

Chairman Davis expressed appreciation to Board members Ray Lambert, Nancy Addison, and Bodine Sinyard, who served on the Nominating Committee for the 2024 Board officers. He

called on Mr. Lambert, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, to propose a slate of officers for 2024.

Mr. Lambert stated that the Nominating Committee for 2024 officers convened via telephone conference on November 14, 2023, and that the unanimous decision was to propose the following slate of officers for 2024: Joe Hatfield, Chairman; Gary Vowell, Vice Chairman; and Lesley Reynolds, Secretary. He further stated that the Board will vote on the proposed officers at the January 2024 board meeting.

Chairman Davis stated the next board meeting will be held at 9:00 a.m., on Tuesday, January 23, 2024, in the DNR Boardroom.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Dwight J. Davis, Chairman

ATTEST:

Gary Vowell, Secretary