

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

March 29, 2017

Attending:

Committee Members

Aaron McWhorter, Chairman
Dwight Evans, Vice Chairman
William Bagwell
Dwight Davis – via conference call
Ray Lambert
Mark Mobley
Miki Thomaston- via conference call
Duncan Johnson, Jr., Board Chairman, Ex-Officio

Board Members

Nancy Addison
Mike Phelps
Bodine Sinyard
Brother Stewart
Dee Yancey

Guests

Bill Hodges, Hodges, Harbin, Newberry & Tribble
Leon Watkins, Whitestone Landfill
Chris Manganiello, Chattahoochee Riverkeeper
Ronny Just, Georgia Power
Bryan Tolar, GA Agribusiness Council
Hunter Loggins, GA Agribusiness Council
Debbie Phillips, Georgia Industry Environmental Coalition
Harold Reheis, Joe Tanner & Associates
Trip Addison, Georgia Southern
Alex Bradford, Georgia Farm Bureau

Staff Members

Mark Williams
Walter Rabon
Terry West
Artica Gaston
Kyle Pearson
Melanie Johnson
Wes Robinson
Cathy Barnette
Amber Carter
Dave Crass
Rusty Garrison
Col. Eddie Henderson
Becky Kelley
Spud Woodward
Bowers, John
Jac Capp
Richard Dunn
Lauren Curry
Jeff Cown
Sydney Brogden
Don McGowan
Jodie Gardner
Hays, Karen
Langley, Bert
Mueller, Chuck

The March 29, 2017 meeting of the Wildlife Resources Committee was called to order by Chairman Duncan Johnson.

Chairman Johnson called on Aaron McWhorter, Chairman of the Wildlife Resources Committee.

Mr. McWhorter called on John Bowers, Chief of Game Management of the Wildlife Resources Division, to present the proposed amendments to Hunting Regulations, Chapter 391-4-2, and Firing Ranges, Chapter 391-4-9.

Mr. Bowers stated that hunting regulation proposals are developed on a 2-year cycle. He further stated that this is the year for a presentation on regulatory proposals for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 hunting seasons. He further stated that the regulatory objectives seek to be biologically appropriate and scientifically sound; responsive to public desires; minimize barriers to recruitment and retention of hunters; and strive for simplicity and flexibility. He added that he will return to the Board for action in May after public hearings and comment in April.

Mr. Bowers stated that participation and input was substantial at the 8 public meetings in January. He further stated that there were 369 in attendance at the meetings and they received 1,552 comments via email, letters and other forms of communication.

Mr. Bowers stated that one of the substantial changes expands respective zones along the Fall Line physiographic transition region by adding 10 counties. He further stated that the Fall Line transition region is the northern extent of the historical and desired range for alligators. He added that this proactive measure will minimize alligator encroachment into marginal habitats outside the natural range.

Mr. Bowers stated that another major change is to the Central Georgia bear season. He further stated that a one-day season started in 2011; scheduled in November. He added that females comprised an average of 52% of the harvest and that the bear management plan states that we should not exceed 50%.

Mr. Bowers stated that in 2013, season timing adjusted to December to reduce the percentage of females in the harvest, but the percent of females in harvest continued to exceed conservation goals. He further stated that from 2011-2016, females have comprised an average of 57% of harvest and is inconsistent with conservation goals. He added that to address this biological issue, the proposed change recommends shifting the timing of the one-day hunt from the second Saturday in December to the second Saturday in January, which will maintain the hunting opportunity while ensuring we meet conservation management goals consistent with the management plan.

Mr. Bowers stated that there are also changes to the South Georgia bear season. He further stated that the proposed recommendation expands hunting opportunity by adding 3 days prior to the current season opening. He added that the population monitoring data indicates that this population is

healthy and increasing and can sustain additional harvest pressure; which is consistent with public input to increase hunting opportunities.

Mr. Bowers stated that firearms either-sex days for hunting deer will also see some changes. He further stated that either-sex opportunities are set by physiographic regions and there will be no change to the Blue Ridge, Upper Coastal, Metro regions or the Chattahoochee National Forest lands outside of the Wildlife Management Areas. He added that the Piedmont, Ridge and Valley regions will add 22 days of either-sex and the Lower Coastal region will add 14 days.

Mr. Bowers stated that there is a proposed recommendation to establish a 300-foot buffer from docks and structures on Lake Blackshear when hunting waterfowl to address complaints of hunters infringing on private property and hunting too close to docks and dwellings. He further stated that this is responsive to requests from the Crisp County Power Commission and lakefront homeowners. He added that this proposal is consistent with existing regulations that were enacted on Georgia Power lakes and Lake Seminole.

Mr. Bowers stated that there are several changes to hunting on Wildlife Management Areas. He further stated that they will now allow use of buckshot and suppressed firearms, which establishes consistency with state law pertaining to legal weapons for hunting certain game. He added that they will also expand falconry to be consistent with statutory frameworks and responsive to public desires.

Mr. Bowers stated that feral hogs and coyotes may be taken during Small Game and Big Game seasons and special hunts. He further stated that proposed recommendation adds a May 16-31 hunting opportunity.

Mr. Bowers stated that proposed recommendations update current regulations to ensure consistency with authorizing statute for crop depredation permits for deer. He further stated that the regulations will allow for use of integrated technologies to achieve efficiency and enhance customer service. He added that the regulations address compliance issues and are responsive to public input.

Mr. Bowers stated that proposed recommendations update current regulations to ensure consistency with recent statutory changes and exemptions related to firearms on shooting ranges.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.