

**MINUTES OF THE
HUNTING & FISHING ADVISORY EDUCATION COUNCIL**

Meeting of January 31, 2007
Department of Wildlife & Fisheries Headquarters – Baton Rouge, La.

ATTENDEES

Members of the Advisory Council in attendance included E.R. “Smitty” Smith, Nelson Roth, Will Courtney, Mary Poe for Capt. Jeff Poe, Samuel Smith, Dave Moreland, Shane Crochet, Woody Crews and Dr. Donald Reed.

OPENING COMMENTS

LDWF Secretary Bryant Hammett thanked those present for coming. He explained that the hurricane recovery efforts throughout 2006 and the transition from Secretary Landreneau to his being appointed secretary had complicated the department’s normal business activities to the extent that there had been no opportune time to bring the group together since their last meeting in October 2005.

Sect. Hammett expressed his intent to re-establish a link to the Council and receive their input on items including recruitment of new outdoorsmen into the ranks of licensed hunters and fishermen, outreach activities to better communicate with the public and legislative initiatives to move the department forward in the years ahead. He indicated that the meeting would be informal and questions would be taken after the presentations from each division, and then finally after all reports had been given.

Following opening comments, the minutes for the meetings of July 21, 2005 and October, 2005 were approved.

DIVISION REPORTS

Dave Moreland (Wildlife Division Administrator), presenting for the Office of Wildlife, explained with the use of a PowerPoint presentation that both the Wildlife Division and the Fur & Refuge Division were still involved in recovery efforts set in motion by the impacts of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

Moreland emphasized the severe damage done to the timber in the Pearl River Wildlife Management Area in St. Tammany Parish and the Wildlife Division's efforts to clear access points for hunters. He explained that access is still limited due to the amount of downed timber and will be a problem for quite some time.

The work done by Fur & Refuge post-storm has been concentrated on habitat damage assessment and repairs to facilities within the coastal WMAs. Pass-A-Loutre WMA's marshes and trees were greatly impacted by Katrina. Major facility damage was sustained at Rockefeller Refuge in Cameron Parish. Facility damage assessments are complete and insurance/FEMA repair funding is anticipated within the next several months. Fur & Refuge personnel have been able to work out of the facilities that survived the storms.

Wildlife species survival post-storms has been very good relative to deer, alligators and waterfowl.

Moreland reminded the council that deer and turkey tagging requirements will begin in 2007/08 for deer and 2008 for turkey. This past season was an initiation period for deer

hunters with the harvest card requirement designed to remind hunters of post-harvest information gathering and reporting rules. Hunters had to have in their possession a deer tag harvest card and when they killed a deer the card had to be filled out. Hunter response has been good. When the actual tagging programs begin, hunters will attach a tag to the carcass of the deer or turkey and document their kill on the license issued. The hunter must then, within 72 hours, validate the kill by reporting required information to the department by phone or Internet connection.

Questions from the council for Mr. Moreland:

Q - What do you think will happen on Pearl River as far as the deer population?

A - We anticipate the deer and feral hog population to greatly increase over the next few years. With this increased density of deer and hog populations, we need to be sure we get sufficient hunter effort to achieve the necessary harvest and keep the herds healthy.

Q – Have hunting license sales rebounded from the 2005-06 season affected by the storms?

A – In general, they have rebounded, but non-resident license sales are still down, due mainly to the hunting camp/lodge availability that is not back to pre-storm capacity.

Overall, lifetime license sales are up and the senior license category is growing as the baby boomer generation turns 60. We will begin to lose this group in the next 10 to 20 years as they age out of hunting activities.

Jim Hanifen (Marine Fisheries Asst. Division Administrator), presenting for the Office of Fisheries, outlined information in PowerPoint format on the post-storm status of the state's fisheries' resources and the fishing industry.

Hanifen explained that the coastal marine interests experienced damage in infrastructure (docks, marinas, ice houses and processing plants) and also in the restricted access to fisheries stocks due to debris blocking waterway navigation. The state's coastal fishing fleet was also hit hard and is still below full strength as fishermen seek grant and loan funds to get back in business.

The Office of Fisheries has worked to assist the fishing community through the Back to the Dock program, developed by the La. Seafood Promotion & Marketing Board (LSPMB) and the La. Fishing Community Recovery Coalition (LFCRC). Their efforts have resulted in a proposal being considered by the La. Recovery Authority for \$20 million in aid to fishermen impacted by Katrina/Rita.

LDWF's Marine Fisheries Division also is working with NOAA Marine Fisheries to fund debris removal from coastal areas where navigation hazards posed by storm debris still needs to be addressed.

Inland water ways fisheries stocks suffered more direct losses as storm surge pushed saltwater inland and disturbed sediment that depleted oxygen levels. Fish kills resulted in the most serious instances of these impacts. The department's Operation Jumpstart re-

stocking program has addressed and will continue to address this loss of fish in inland water bodies.

Repairs and office relocations due to Katrina/Rita damage continue. A permanent office for the Office of Fisheries in the New Orleans area is still being finalized. The Oyster Lease Survey office is open in Jackson Barracks and construction of a new Marine Lab on Grand Isle will begin next month (February).

In other business, the Cooperative Marine Sport Fish Tagging Program continues to attract volunteers, as does the Troutwatchers Program. Inland Fisheries is also coordinating a Big Rivers awareness project to alert fishermen that the state's major rivers are available for recreational fishing.

Questions from the council for Mr. Hanifen:

Q – Have Fisheries biologists detected any exotic fish in state waterways that may have been displaced/freed by Katrina/Rita flooding or storm surge?

A – John Roussell, LDWF Fisheries Deputy Asst. Secretary, responded that Bayou St. John in Orleans Parish was being tested, but early reports had found no cause for alarm.

Q – Relating to commercial fishermen impacted by the storms -- is there a program that would provide recovery dollars to buy out commercial fisherman who want to get out of the business?

A – Hanifen indicated he was not aware of any such program for buyouts, but recovery funds were being pursued through the La. Recovery Authority for those who wanted to get back in business.

Jeff Mayne (Enforcement Division Major), presenting for the Enforcement Division, outlined information in PowerPoint format on the role of Enforcement within the agency. The report detailed the patrol and surveillance duties performed by Enforcement agents to insure compliance with regulations and laws governing fish and game harvest, as well as boating safety and litter law enforcement. The additional role agents fill is that of search and rescue first responders, as was illustrated following hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005.

The Enforcement report also detailed the cadet training program and requirements for acceptance into and completion of the academy training conducted by the division. A section of the report detailed Enforcement's public relations efforts in promoting youth outdoor participation, hunter safety and boating safety, as well as DUI surveillance while on the water.

Q – Is the agency having trouble recruiting new agents?

A – Major Mayne pointed to new incentives now in place that should make a difference: \$30K starting salary and shift re-alignments that allow more weekend time off for agents.

Q – Is Enforcement back in a normal work routine, post-storms?

A – Major Mayne responded that agents are receiving additional urban rescue training and would continue to participate in training exercises. The benign 2006 hurricane season did allow for catching up on projects that had been put on hold for the last quarter of 2005. With all the additional training, the challenge is to maintain a presence in the field and on the water and heighten awareness.

Q – How can the public get more involved in assisting Enforcement as they do their job?

A – Major Mayne pointed to the Game Thief Hotline and the new web site as the best communication tools to connect to Enforcement when illegal activities were noted. He stated that a new reporting mechanism will soon be available to the public via the LDWF website to allow access to Enforcement cases and their outcomes.

Q – What is the current law on life jackets?

A – Passengers ages 12 and under have to have one on while in a boat and those older than 12 have to have it readily available, according to Major Mayne.

Janice Lansing (Undersecretary, Office of Management and Finance), presenting for OMF, outlined information in PowerPoint format on the budget for 2006-07 and the outlook for years ahead. Ms. Lansing outlined how the declining license sales, and increasing salary and benefit costs, are forcing increased use of the Conservation Fund. This is a trend that must be offset at some point by an infusion of funds from another source.

Ms. Lansing also gave an update on the new Point of Sale vendor changeover. All details for a smooth transition had been worked out and the move should take place within the next week.

Sect. Hammett followed up Ms. Lansing's report with comments on the department's impending cash flow problems. Revenue is on the decline and expenditures are on the rise for the Department. In the past (2000) the Legislature had provided relief with increases in license fees. That is not currently viewed as an option. LDWF is looking at options such as establishing a tax credit for licensees paying reduced rate fees so the agency could receive the full license cost up front. Another option might be seeking a dedication from marine fuel sales taxes. Input was solicited from the Council.

Sect. Hammett then reviewed a list of LDWF legislative items that may receive consideration in the 2007 session:

1. **Tax credits for reduced/special licenses.** Convert special privilege license fees to a tax credit versus a reduced license fee. Resident licenses of all types (including military) could be made easily accessible at all POS (point of sale) locations across the state instead of at limited LDWF locations, and reducing the amount of documentation needed to meet qualifications for special rate. Agency will be able collect a full license fee for all resident customers, increasing revenue to the agency's conservation fund and increase the federal matching funds that can be collected for "paid" licenses issued.
2. **Witness court fees.** Allow LDPS (La. Dept. of Public Safety) and LDWF to compensate their law enforcement officers for court appearances outside of regularly scheduled duty. Allowing agencies to collect officer court attendance fees for their presence would not affect regular patrol effort while providing compliance with the FLSA regulations. Proposal will maintain the current intent of the off-duty court compensation statutes.

3. **Stock assessment reports, broaden fishery management options.** Reduce requirement for providing annual updates on biological profiles and stock assessments on black drum, sheepshead, southern flounder and striped mullet to a biennial schedule. Change current provision whereby, if the SPR (spawning potential ratio) for a stock is below 30%, the department is required to close the season within two weeks for a period of at least one year. Allowing a broader range of management options, recovery of the stock within a specified time period would reduce immediate social impacts of closure of a fishery. This approach is currently recognized under federal fishery statutes and regulations, where the recovery time for a species is dependent on the longevity of the species and the time within which the species is expected to recover.
4. **Boat registration procedures.** When registering boats which transfer ownership, require a full 3-year registration period be paid, versus providing credit for any remaining registration period from the previous owner. Clarify fee charged to register an 18 foot vessel.
5. **Concealment, destruction of fish/wildlife evidence.** Create specific crime with reduced penalties from that of the crime, “obstruction of justice” when involving fish, wildlife and/or other animals to a misdemeanor violation within Title 56. This will eliminate the necessity for a jury trial and benefit the adjudicatory process for such violations and further enhance compliance. Change will maintain consistency with other violations involving fish, animals and wildlife enforced by the department.
6. **Symbol to word change, (resolution).** Request the state law institute to change all symbols for degrees, minutes and seconds to the words degrees, minutes and seconds in Title 56. Title 56 contains various sections of law using longitude and latitude describing lines of demarcation. Current law uses symbols for degrees, minutes and seconds. Use of the symbols has caused conversion problems when transmitting laws electronically, updating legislation and misprints in official law books.
7. **Shrimping.** Eliminate loopholes in existing statues, establishing uniformity among shrimping prohibitions within designated areas. Current law prohibits use of trawls in certain areas and does not specifically prohibit use of other shrimping gear, i.e. skimmers and butterfly nets.
8. **License vendor contract.** The current contract for the electronic issuance of hunting and fishing licenses must be re-bid every 3 – 5 years, which results in unnecessary and duplicative efforts by LDWF staff and licensing system contractor(s). Proposed law would allow a multiyear contract for up to 10 years.
9. **Reptile and amphibian vendors.** Currently, out-of-state vendors of native Louisiana reptiles are required to purchase an annual non-resident wholesale/retail

dealer's license for \$405. The Louisiana Reptile/Amphibian Task Force has requested that the department change the law providing for a three-day, non-resident license for \$75 to attract additional vendors to in-state reptile vendor shows.

Sect Hammett then opened the floor for questions:

Q – Will a change in the Legislature due to term limits open up opportunities to approach that body for license fee increases?

A – Sect. Hammett: That cannot be predicted and based on the trends we're seeing, license sales cannot be relied upon long term to fund the department at the level necessary to do all that needs to be done. The Aquatic Weed program, for instance, operates now at just over \$500,000 or so a year and should be funded to a \$6 million level.

Q – Could LDWF possibly access the additional mineral royalty funds that will be coming Louisiana's way from offshore leases?

A – (Person responding not identifiable on tape): The money is dedicated for coastal restoration projects only.

No further questions were asked.

Sect. Hammett thanked the Council for their attendance and indicated that he planned to call the group together again before the Legislature convened in April.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned.

Bryant O. Hammett, Jr.

Secretary

BH:bb

(The preceding constitute minutes of the Advisory Council Meeting and are not a verbatim transcript of the proceedings.)