

HUNTING AND FISHING ADVISORY EDUCATION COUNCIL

MINUTES

March 16, 2010

WOODY CREWS
CHAIRMAN

BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

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AGENDA
HUNTING AND FISHING ADVISORY EDUCATION COUNCIL
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA
MARCH 16, 2010

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING

OF

HUNTING AND FISHING ADVISORY EDUCATION COUNCIL

Tuesday, March 16, 2010

Chairman Woody Crews presiding.

Vance Gordon
Nelson "Snoop" Roth
Will Courtney
C.T. Williams
Samuel J. Smith
Mike Windham
Lyle Johnson
Stephen Pellessier
Jeff DeBlieux IV
David Rousseau
Dr. Donald Reed

Council Members Mike Rainwater, Shane Crochet and Eric Sunstrom were absent from the meeting.

The Council did not have any comments or corrections to the **Minutes of September 15, 2009 and December 8, 2009** so the minutes were approved.

The Chairman dispensed with the next item, **Welcome and Opening Comments**.

Member Organization Overview, C. T. Williams, Louisiana Charter Boat Association began with Mr. Williams stating the job of being a fishing captain was the greatest job in the world. But the job was not from 9 AM to 5 PM, but more of 5 AM to 9 PM or worse and involved a lot of work. Mr. Williams stated he grew up hunting and fishing in Louisiana having caught his first fish when he was 2 years old. He got his first boat when he was 7 years old, a 16 foot wooden flat with 7 1/2 horsepower motor. During his college years, Mr. Williams began running crew boats and after getting his Captain's license, a law firm picked him up and he ran a 56 foot boat. After college, he focused on new product marketing for 21 years. While taking people fishing, he met a friend who became his business partner, Captain Barry

Brechtel, and they started Big Fish Charter. Big Fish Charter began as a tax shelter. Since Captain Brechtel was a great sales person and Mr. Williams loved the marketing side of the business, their business grew. When he decided to focus on the charter business, it was one of opportunity something that he could leave better than he found. To be a charter captain, a person has to be licensed by the United States Coast Guard (background check on federal, state and local municipality levels, drug tested, physical exam, reference letters and sea times); then you get a license from the State (random drug testing, annual CPR and First Aid classes, Transportation Workers Identification Card [additional background checks from Homeland Security]). Next Mr. Williams noted the insurance was a lot higher than those with less experience on the water or boater education certification. No industry was regulated the way the charter boat captains were. Then you add in what Mr. Williams did not agree with and that was mandatory reporting of catch or you could face penalties. Another issue to deal with was the vessel monitoring system. The Charter Boat Association represents about 2/3 of the captains licensed in Louisiana. To be a licensed captain and considered full-time you must run about 100 trips per year with the majority of the trips occurring from May to August. Mr. Williams added that another issue they face was that Mississippi residents can drive to Louisiana and catch fish without having to buy a license. He informed the Council that the Louisiana Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism has no money in their budget to promote hunting, fishing or outdoor recreational activities. Mr. Williams felt Louisiana had the greatest fishing resources in the world. He knew that the fishing limits were generous and the inshore resource was healthy, but no one promotes it. If tourism was promoted in Louisiana, Mr. Williams felt the money received could be spread to areas that traditionally does not see revenue, such as Calcasieu, Cameron, lower St. Bernard, lower Plaquemines and Terrebonne Parishes. With a little economic development and support, Louisiana has the labor, with the 700 captains and infrastructures, to do amazing things. Mr. Williams felt the industry was undeveloped and hoped it did not drown with more regulations. The Charter Boat Association was a fantastic industry in a fantastic state with an incredible resource that was managed impeccably, but Mr. Williams was not sure which way the industry was headed. He hoped the industry could be nurtured into something everyone would be proud of. Mr. Gordon asked if the Association had a presence at the Legislation and Mr. Williams stated they have a lobbyist which was a "loose cannon" but he helps them. Mr. Roth stated the

bill Mr. Williams referred to would not ban bowfishing but would put redfish into gamefish status and this would not allow it to be taken with a bow. Texas, Mississippi, Alabama and Florida do not allow the taking of redfish with a bow. Mr. Williams felt Louisiana had redfish as compared to the other states. Chairman Crews asked if the charter boat captains wanted to be recreational or commercial fishermen or did they prefer to "stay on the fence". Mr. Williams stated no one wanted to stay on the fence, but did not think there was enough information to know which side would benefit them the most. The captains were recreational fishermen, since they take people fishing recreationally. Mr. Courtney asked if the recent plan to ban sportfishing in the Gulf and other places, would it push the captains into the commercial side. Mr. Williams felt he did not have enough information to know what would take place. Mr. Windham asked how many charter boat captains were there, and he was told there were between 600 and 700 licensed captains, but only 400 work to make it a real business. Of those 400, between 200 and 300 run more than 100 trips per year. Mr. Windham thought with all of the talk about the Lt. Governor's office, the Department of Culture, Recreation and Tourism may end up a part of Economic Development. Mr. Williams explained he had a show which aired nationally that was sponsored by Culture, Recreation and Tourism. The show received positive feedback but then there was a change in the Governor's Office and CRT's budget was cut. Mr. Williams added that his efforts lately have been to visit with Convention and Visitor Bureaus in the lower parishes. Chairman Crews offered to prepare a Resolution from his organization to help the charter boat industry.

The next agenda item, **US Army Corps of Engineers Update on Aquatic Plant Control** was handled by Mr. Mike Saucier. Mr. Saucier noted he provided technical support for the RAG Program (Removal of Aquatic Growth) in the New Orleans District. This Program was authorized in 1899 primarily to remove aquatic growth that impeded navigation on the Navigation Channels. The primary use for the funds were in Florida and Louisiana. For the last 10 years, the budget was about \$2 million a year. A new contract was issued midway through the year which did not result in all funds being spent. So for fiscal year 2010, the budget was cut to \$1.3 million and they were hopeful the funds would increase to \$1.4 million next year. The Corps of Engineers sprayed the coastal zones from the 1970's through the early 1990's and the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries handled the inshore areas. Plaquemines Parish had a ban on 2,4-D and so the Corps was excluded from spraying that area. The

area primarily sprayed by the Corps of Engineers was from Barataria-Terrebonne-St. Mary Parish to the Barrier Islands with the biggest area being Terrebonne Parish. Mr. Saucier commented that the Mississippi River was not the biggest contributor to aquatic growth, it was rain water from the urban areas which fuels growth for the aquatic plants. The current RAG contract covers 30,000 acres of spraying 2,4-D on water hyacinths and alligator weed. There are other treatments such as on common salvinia and water lettuce. The contract had been with ChemSpray for the past 10 years, but now it was with Dautrieve from New Iberia. The price for 2,4-D treatment was about \$35 per acre, \$95 per acre for Diquat and \$75 per acre for Glyphosate for a total cost per year of \$1.1-\$1.2 million. Mr. Saucier then explained that RAG was part of the Control Operations, trying to keep the aquatic plants out of the channels where navigation can pass. The Aquatic Plant Control program has not received any funding since 1996; this was a 50 percent federal/50 percent state funding share. With the possibility of future infestations of giant salvinia, hydrilla, or other invasive, there will be a need to look at other treatment methods since their budget was "up against the wire" on what they treat. Again Mr. Saucier noted new problems could come from giant salvinia, hydrilla and Asian carp which were in the waters but has not provided much benefit in controlling aquatic plants. Chairman Crews asked what was the impact to salvinia from the frozen winter weather. Mr. Saucier felt salvinia was very tolerant to freezes. Mr. Gordon asked if the overall assessment for carp was not good. Mr. Saucier stated Asian carp were not much of a consumer, it was only the Grass Carp.

Mandatory Boating Safety Course Requirement: Report on Effectiveness began with Lt. Col. Jeff Mayne stating the boating education bill previously had the born on date of January 1, 1988 which required those individuals to have boater education before they could operate a boat if it was powered with a 10 hp or greater outboard motor. During the last legislative session, the born on date for the mandatory boating education was changed to January 1, 1984. States with no boating education has an average fatality rate of 12.28 per 100,000 boats and states with boating education programs for over 20 years, the fatality rate was 3.89. The Department's initial boating education requirements were established in 2003, the course was a 6 to 8 hour course and available free. Enforcement personnel teach the course monthly throughout the state; also the Power Squadron and U.S. Coast Guard have classes; and a course can be taken online

for a fee of \$15. Lt. Col. Mayne felt the course was comprehensive with major effects. There have been 4,000 to 6,000 people certified annually and with the new age group, staff thought that number may grow. The boating education requirement was for individuals that were operating a boat by themselves; if the individual has an adult or someone of age on the boat, they can operate the watercraft without the certification. Talking on boating accidents, from 1999 to 2008, Lt. Col. Mayne stated that number has steadily declined. As the State Boating Law Administrator, Lt. Col. Mayne wanted to effectually go after problem areas without addressing the masses of boating public. About 2.2 million people participate in boating annually, and they did not want to put undue regulations on an activity that would keep them from wanting to participate. Over the last few years, regulations on kill switches and PFD's required while operating a tiller operated boat were put in place. For 2008, Louisiana was ranked 6th in boating fatalities with a total of 38 fatalities and 32 in 2009. Mr. Williams asked if those captains under the age of 25 that met the requirements to be licensed, had to go through the boating education course. Lt. Col. Mayne stated the National Association of State Boating Law Administrators approves the standards for the course and the Coast Guard has not submitted the captain's license requirement, but if the Coast Guard would submit a request, it could possibly be approved. Mr. Williams wondered how could one charter captain affect the Coast Guard by submitting a request. Lt. Col. Mayne suggested writing a letter to Col. Landry with the Coast Guard. Next Mr. Williams asked who was in charge of the t-shirt program this year and he was told that each region was responsible for getting donations and the Wildlife Agents Association puts together the t-shirt program. One of the Corps of Engineers representatives asked Lt. Col. Mayne if their boat operators were certified by the Corps, could it satisfy the state program. Again Lt. Col. Mayne felt it did not satisfy the requirement, but a letter could be written to NASBLA requesting their approval. Mr. Courtney asked if there would be a life jacket bill in the upcoming legislative session and he was told the Department was not proposing any boating regulation bills this year. Chairman Crews asked if a charter captain fishing reef fish offshore of Louisiana needed a commercial reef fish license. Lt. Col. Mayne commented there was a charter reef fish license issued by NOAA in addition to state charter license.

The next agenda item, **LDWF Black Bear Program Report**, began with Ms. Maria Davidson stating she was the Large Carnivore Program

Manager for the Department. The Louisiana Black Bear was listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1992 which was due to habitat loss and unregulated harvest. These happenings resulted in 3 populations in the state, in Tensas, Pointe Coupee and St. Mary Parishes. In 1995, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service came up with a Recovery Plan which gave a map to delist the bear. The recovery criteria was to have 2 viable subpopulations (in the Atchafalaya River Basin and the Tensas River Basin); a corridor that exists between the 2 populations; and protect the habitat the populations live on and the corridor. The program was divided into 3 sections: research, management and education. The research segment was to provide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service the data needed to delist. Population demographics began in Tensas Parish (this was year 5), then moved to Pointe Coupee (year 4) and will start this summer along the coast. By 2012, staff should have a good idea of the number of bears in the state and whether the population was growing or declining. Another part of research was to prove that the corridor exists showing that there are contiguous trees. Ms. Davidson noted the Department recently purchased GPS collars to track male bears which would show how the bears were moving across the landscape. The reintroduction project which involved moving bears recently finished. Since 2000, a total of 48 females with 104 cubs were moved to the Red River-Three Rivers-Lake Ophelia-Dewey Wills-Spring Bayou-Grassy Lake areas. As far as population demographics, hair snares were being used and would be used in all 3 areas for a 10 week period during the summer. The corridor use study was a bit more difficult in that the collared male bears may not leave their home base. Hopefully the number of collars purchased would give the Department the information that was needed. Ms. Davidson felt the reintroduction project was a success; this was initiated to bridge the gap between Pointe Coupee and Tensas. A female cub will establish her home range within her mother's home range or just next door which results in range expansion happening at a very slow rate. In order to have a breeding population in a wooded lot, you need to actually move bears to the area. One hurdle to overcome was that bears have a homing instinct so staff go into a bear's winter den and bring the female and her cubs and relocate them and hope the females maternal instincts would trump her homing instincts. Once the bears are at their new location, they are placed into large boxes in order to keep them safe from the elements or other animals. Another segment of Ms. Davidson's job was conflict management with the main being residential problems. Bears have a great sense of smell and an insatiable appetite and when you combine that with a very

curious mind bears realize that residential garbage has a higher calorie content than what they can find in the wild. At first the bears are very cautious, but the more times they return to an area, they become bolder and puts themselves at risk for mortality. Another problem was industrial dumps, but this has been fixed by using the heavy metal dumpsters and chaining the side gates. Hunter complaints was a third problem and this was due to the fact that bears love the corn hunters puts on the ground for deer. One way for hunters to get rid of bears was to use soybeans if they are in an area with good habitat. Ms. Davidson emphasized that bears and deer do co-exist. She added that they try to educate hunters and the public that enjoys the outdoors. Next was a chart that showed between 20 and 30 bears are killed each year, either by poaching or by vehicles. These numbers keep going up which may be an indication of a population increase. Chairman Crews asked what was the time frame on the chart and Ms. Davidson stated it was from the late 1980's to 2009. One of the biggest goals of the program was hunter education, along with conflict management and research. Mr. Pellessier asked if there was a reintroduction in the late 1960's or early 1970's. Ms. Davidson answered yes, bears from Minnesota were put around Lottie and Tensas, but the vast majority of those bears were killed. Mr. Pellessier asked if it was a different species and he was told it was one of 16 subspecies of Ursus americanus. Mr. Gordon asked if hunters understood there are significant penalties for shooting bears. Ms. Davidson believed they understood, but felt the drive was the same as the drive hunters take when committing other crimes of opportunities. Hunters generally do not like bears mainly because of damage to their feeders, but Ms. Davidson suggested they carry bear spray. Mr. Gordon knew there were more educational challenges to overcome. Ms. Davidson felt the best thing for the bear would be for it to be delisted and give hunters the chance to hunt it which may result in an attitudinal change. Mr. Gordon wondered if there may be a time to worry about cougars. He was told that there was not a cougar breeding population in this state, but that did not stop the calls that come in (on average - 2 per week). Mr. Gordon felt information should be given to the public sooner rather than later. One of the Corps of Engineers representative talked about his experience while hunting and seeing bears and expressed appreciation to Ms. Davidson for the information she sent him. Mr. Johnson asked how long before there would be a bear season. Ms. Davidson stated the data analysis would be finished by 2012 and then the delisting process would begin in 2012-2013. If all went as planned, she hoped for a season in 2014.

Expanded Use of Non-Toxic Shot on WMAs was the first of two agenda items for Mr. Fred Kimmel. The first issue on non-toxic shot was that it would be required for snipe hunting on all WMAs. The reason for the regulation was an attempt to reduce the possibility of lead poisoning in ducks. The other non-toxic shot issue was on Point Farm within Pointe-aux-Chenes WMA. The regulation for this area will be to require non-toxic shot for doves. Mr. Kimmel noted they require non-toxic shot on Elbow Slough WMA with no problems. Mr. Pellessier asked if the Department was going in the same direction that Indian Bayou was a few years back. Mr. Kimmel stated it was being studied in relation to dove hunting, but where this occurs there is not much other types of hunting occurring. This issue was a big topic in the bird community, Texas was doing a study on doves and non-toxic shot. The Department did not have any plans to expand this to small game or any other species. An Unidentified Speaker asked if this would affect private lands and he was told this regulation was for WMAs only. Mr. Kell McInnis asked if small shot was readily available and Mr. Kimmel stated #6 shot was fairly available. Mr. Pellessier asked about the birds that died from lead poisoning. Mr. Kimmel knew that lead kills ducks. Mr. Larry Reynolds commented there was a big lead poisoning around Gueydan, Louisiana. It has not been determined whether the lead came from a dove field or skeet range. Mr. Windham stated Pointe-aux-Chenes was an area he supervised and that dove field was site specific. With the number of hunters in the dove fields, most shoot 3 to 4 boxes of shell. The area, when there is good rains, results in gravity drainage with lots of potholes. This results in a good chance for the waterfowl to inject lead.

Next Mr. Fred Kimmel talked on **Turkey Tagging: Educating Hunters**. Last year was the first year to require tagging of turkeys, noted Mr. Kimmel. With deer being tagged also, the Department hoped most hunters had some experience with turkey tagging. Going into the season, staff did television shows, news releases and made a video explaining the process of tagging. The Wildlife Division wanted to know how the hunters did with tagging, so they asked the Enforcement agents to keep record of the number of hunters checked and issues found. About 1900 turkey hunters were checked and about 98 percent had their turkey tags. Agents checked 52 hunters that harvested a turkey and only about 70 percent had properly tagged their bird. The last step in the tagging process was to validate the kill either by phone or on the internet within 72 hours. Mr. Kimmel noted

they were not sure of the validation compliance, since recent annual harvest surveys showed between 8,000 and 9,000 birds killed, but only 2,500 were validated last year. He then noted this was an ongoing educational process and trying to get people used to having to do this new process. An Unidentified Speaker asked Mr. Kimmel what was the public feedback on the proposed deer season changes. The speaker was told that the comments were mixed, but he did not know which group was being heard from more. The Unidentified Speaker then asked why there was not a public hearing held in the heart of Area 6. Mr. Kimmel stated the public hearings rotated around the state each year. In recent years there were 9 hearings held, but with the low number of people attending, they reduced that number to 6 this year.

The **2009-10 Duck Season Overview** began with Mr. Larry Reynolds showing a picture of his son with a pair of redheads taken in an area he had never seen redheads. He reminded the Council that in September 2009, he reported there were 4.2 million breeding ducks (up 13 percent from 2008 and 25 percent above long term average); 8.5 million mallards and 6.4 million ponds (up 45 percent from 2008 and 31 percent over the long range average) which was pretty good news. But the not so good news was the reproductive bust for arctic geese due to the late spring. Although no change was made in snow or white fronted goose regulations, the number of juveniles would be low. Habitat conditions in Louisiana showed good production in seed producing annuals in southwest Louisiana, better submersed aquatic growth, excellent food production in Catahoula Lake, and water conditions in the agricultural lands were hard to predict. Mr. Reynolds commented that the weather and water conditions were not predictable. Then the rains came which resulted in the wettest October on record and then the fifth wettest December on record. This did not just occur in Louisiana, it was up and down the Mississippi Flyway, which was not good for Louisiana. Louisiana has the best season when it is cold and dry and it was not dry this season, commented Mr. Reynolds. A slide was shown of water flowing over the Diversion Canal on Catahoula Lake. In September, 99,000 blue wings were in southwest Louisiana (down from 444,000); 28,000 blue wings in southeast Louisiana (up from 2008); and 9,000 on Catahoula (up from zero in 2008). The long term average was 252,000 blue wings for the September survey and the numbers listed were low in anticipation of the teal season. The November survey was 1.34 million ducks which was slightly below the 5-year average and substantially below the long term average. From that survey, 598,000 of those ducks were blue wings. Blue wings carried the harvest in Louisiana for the

early season. In December, there were 2.16 million ducks, similar to the 5-year average, but 25 percent below the long term average. All species increased except blue wings, and Mr. Reynolds felt there was a migration into the state. Catahoula Lake went from 7,000 to 69,000 ducks and northeast and northwest Louisiana were slightly below average. January was the watershed month, but the survey improved to 2.7 million (same as 5 year average, but 13 percent below long term average). Catahoula Lake remained the same as in December, northeast Louisiana had an increase of ducks by 33 percent despite vast areas of frozen habitat. Where you did find ducks in northeast Louisiana, the birds were keeping the waters open with their own activity. Geese were up 13 percent statewide, up from last year and about the same as the 10-year average. Fifty-four percent of the geese were in northeast Louisiana and over 50,000 geese were counted in southeast Louisiana. This resulted in fewer geese in southwest Louisiana. Next Mr. Reynolds wondered who had ducks. Missouri's January survey was down 50 percent and Mississippi's mid-winter survey was 900,000 as compared to just over 500,000 the last two years. Arkansas had 3 million ducks which included 2.4 million mallards, there have never been that many ducks counted in Arkansas. However Mississippi and Arkansas's hunters were mad too since they were not killing any birds either. The variance estimates used in the survey data were "out the roof". If you have a high variance, you are seeing lots of ducks in a small number of places; and in Mississippi, the ducks were seen from Vicksburg to Natchez in the deep shrub scrubbed lakes. "How was the hunting" was the most difficult question to answer, commented Mr. Reynolds. He explained 3 reasons why it was difficult to answer: harvest data was not available until July; the Department has spotty harvest data collections across the state; and he does not hear from successful hunters. Results of the season from Mr. Reynolds best guess was that the teal season was below average, duck hunting was spotty, generally below average to poor for the first split; excellent hunting was reported after the freeze in northeast and central Louisiana and much improved in southeast Louisiana; and the goose hunting was generally tough. Hunting results from the coastal WMAs (Atchafalaya Delta, Pass-a-Loutre, Salvador and Pointe-aux-Chenes) for the 2007-2008, 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 seasons showed that this year was a tough year. The results also showed that each area was down this year from the previous year. Data from picking houses in southwest Louisiana was the same as elsewhere. Hunting success on the large scale was down. An Unidentified Speaker asked if there was any data on black bellies. Mr. Reynolds stated no, adding they ban 300

to 400 each year across from New Orleans and more are showing up in the harvest data which are reported on the mid-winter surveys. He knew that the population was increasing and confirmed breeding was occurring in Arkansas, Missouri and Mississippi. Data needed to be gathered on that species, but conversations have already begun on having black bellied whistling ducks in the teal season bag limit. The Speaker stated the Louisiana Wildlife Federation had a Resolution in support of the ducks. Dr. Reed asked if there was any information on wood ducks being absent. Mr. Reynolds stated he has received reports over the last 2 years that people were not seeing wood ducks where they have seen them in the past. The harvest for 2008-2009 went from 100,000 to 133,000 which could have been attributed to the bag limit going from 2 to 3. Mr. Reynolds noted the Department had trouble banning wood ducks this year. He felt it was due to the much larger backwater flooding in the swamps. Mr. Williams noted that during the first split in Delacroix, they were inundated with Mexican squealers or tree ducks. Mr. Smith stated the tree ducks have been around for about 3 years. Mr. Reynolds explained that they tend to nest in the rice fields, being a ground nesting bird, and typically, they migrate out before the season opens.

The Council set the **Next Meeting Date** originally for Tuesday, June 22, 2010 beginning at 1:30 PM. (An e-mail received on March 17, 2010 notifying the Council that the next meeting would need to be held on June 15, 2010 instead of June 22, 2010.)

Chairman Crews then asked the Council members if there were any agenda items they would like discussed at the next meeting. Mr. Gordon asked for deer harvest information by Mr. Scott Durham.

There were no **Public Comments** heard. But Mr. Courtney advised that this would be his last meeting on the Council for Louisiana BASS Federation. Mr. Alexander Perret with the Department would replace him on the Council. Chairman Crews thanked Mr. Courtney for his contributions over the years.

Mr. Smith stated he would like to give a report at the next meeting on a trip to China and added there will be a delegation coming to Louisiana to look over the fur operations.

Chairman Crews **Adjourned** the meeting.