

HUNTING AND FISHING ADVISORY EDUCATION COUNCIL

MINUTES

December 8, 2009

WOODY CREWS  
CHAIRMAN

BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

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Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries  
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**HUNTING AND FISHING ADVISORY EDUCATION COUNCIL**  
**BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA**  
**DECEMBER 8, 2009**

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MINUTES OF THE MEETING

OF

HUNTING AND FISHING ADVISORY EDUCATION COUNCIL

Tuesday, December 8, 2009

Chairman Woody Crews presiding.

Vance Gordon  
Nelson "Snoop" Roth  
Samuel J. Smith  
Mike Windham  
Stephen Pellessier  
Jeff DeBlieux IV

Council Members Mike Rainwater, Will Courtney, C.T. Williams, Lyle Johnson, Shane Crochet, David Rousseau, Eric Sunstrom and Dr. Donald Reed were absent from the meeting.

Under the **Welcome and Opening Comments**, Chairman Crews noted there was no quorum so this would be a Committee Meeting. The action item, **Approval of Minutes of September 15, 2009**, would not be considered. With Mr. Williams not in attendance, the next item, **Member Organization Overview, Louisiana Charter Boat Association**, could not be heard.

For the **Enforcement Division Report: November 2009 Case Reports**, Major Sammy Martin stated there were 8 reported boating accidents for a yearly total of 133; 9 injuries for a total of 110 and no fatalities. However, agents were still looking for one person in Red River area. Aviation Report showed two of the Department's planes flew a total of 94 hours for the month. News Releases discussed included: an injured hunter rescued on November 23 in Pointe Coupee Parish and a hunter was cited for killing a female bear and her cub on the Red River WMA. The bears were mistaken for feral hogs. Another News Release centered on a night hunting case in St. Landry Parish for taking deer during illegal hours with an artificial light. The November case report showed a spike in the number of night hunting cases this year. To date, over 80 night hunting cases were made in the state. Total cases reported in each region were: Region 1 - 132 citations and Region 2 - 188 citations. Mr. DeBlieux asked about the citation for not abiding by rules

and regulations and about a mounted eagle. Continuing on, Major Martin stated Region 3 issued 350 citations, Region 4 - 113 citations and Region 5 - 136 citations. Chairman Crews asked what was the struggles on boating citations and Major Martin noted there have been no fatalities or drownings since the new law on PFD's and kill switches was implemented. Major Martin added there were 36 cases of hunting migratory game birds over baited areas in Region 5. There were 117 citations issued in Region 6. Mr. DeBlieux asked about the 4 cases on Endangered Species Act and Major Martin stated he would find out and report back. Region 7 and 8 agents issued 188 and 370 citations, respectively. One committee member asked about the number of sacks of oysters confiscated and unlawfully taking of oysters and Major Martin explained it was fishermen coming off of their leases and dredging state water bottoms. The committee member next asked what was the biggest problem on the commercial side. Major Martin stated it depended upon the area and time of year. Then the unidentified member asked if the commercial fishermen were purposely breaking the law and he was told that some do break the law on purpose and some do not have the equipment on their boats to know the boundary lines. Going on, Major Martin noted there were 266 citations issued in Region 9, 40 by the Oyster Strike Force, 3 by the Special Investigation Unit and the Statewide Strike Force issued 95. A total of 1857 citations and 350 warnings were issued and agents helped with 45 public assists. Chairman Crews asked if the total was high and Major Martin answered most regions were average. Mr. Pellessier was amazed at the 86 non-resident hunting without a license citations. Major Martin noted there were quite a number of non-resident angling without a license citations issued also. This may be due to the number of Mexicans working in the state and not able to get a resident license with just a work visa. Mr. Gordon asked if a person would self-report a cougar incidence, would they face the same consequences as the person that killed the bear and Major Martin answered yes.

**Alligator Program Report: 2009 Season and Market Conditions** began with Mr. Noel Kinler stating he was the Alligator Program Manager for the Department. The report would be an overview of the alligator management program, wild and farm harvest, nuisance program and current market conditions. The state's management program was controlled by CITES, Convention on International Trade and Endangered Species, and alligators are on the endangered list as an Appendix II species. Trade was monitored to make sure that alligators were not mixed in with other endangered species such as crocodiles. A no detriment

review saying that the program would not threaten or endanger the alligator population was conducted each year with the federal government which gives the Department the authority to export alligator skins out of the country. Several agencies besides this Department are involved in alligator management, the Department of Environmental Quality (handles wastewater discharge from alligator farms), Department of Health and Hospitals (licenses facilities that processes alligator meats) and the Department of Agriculture (conducts meat inspections). The Department of Wildlife and Fisheries has the authority to manage alligators based on Titles 56 and 76. The Enforcement Division handles all of the regulatory control aspects. The Wild Alligator Management Program, the Farm Ranching Program, Research, Nuisance Program and the Louisiana Alligator Advisory Council are within the Coastal and Nongame Resources Division. The coastal annual alligator nest survey was the backbone for the program where they fly north-south transects and count the number of nests. This was used to assess the population status and then establish harvest quotas. Flying about 3,000 miles a year, staff surveys 138,000 acres. A map of Terrebonne Parish was shown. This survey has been flown since 1970 and the nest population has grown from 10,000 nests to about 40,000 currently. The years of nest reduction were drought related or from hurricanes. This data was then calculated into nest density by parish, habitat types and land ownership and ended with about 50 wild alligator harvest quotas. The 2009 nest production was the third lowest estimated since 1988 which was due to Hurricanes Gustav and Ike. A map was shown of Cameron Parish comparing 2009 nests with 2008 after the hurricanes. In 2006, there was very little nest production throughout Cameron and Vermilion Parishes. Mr. Kinler then gave some statistics - in 2006, quotas were reduced and about 31,000 alligators were harvested; in 2007, good nest production and quotas were increased with 35,000 alligators being harvested; for 2008, record harvest of about 36,000 alligators out of the 41,000 tags issued; and in 2009, a projected 37,000 tags were to be issued, but with the economy, only 24,000 tags were issued. In 2009, only 8,000 of the normal 32,000 alligators were harvested with the price per foot at \$7. Chairman Crews asked Mr. Kinler if his presumption was due to the worldwide economy. Mr. Kinler answered yes, adding that alligator skins produce luxury products and as such product sales decreased resulting in push back on price and lower demands for skins. On the wild harvest, about 40 percent was comprised of 5 to 6 foot alligators and 60 percent were larger with an average skin length of 7.4 foot. In 1979, wild harvests began in the coastal areas resulting in

16,000 to 17,000 taken and since then, it has increased to average about 34,000 to 35,000 alligators each year. The Department was expanding opportunity for the public that did not own or lease habitat by creating harvest chances on wildlife management areas. A total of 31 public areas were opened for lottery alligator hunts, 15 WMAs and 16 public lakes, and tags were issued to 284 hunters for a total of 725 tags. Chairman Crews asked if a trapping license was required and Mr. Kinler stated an alligator hunting license was needed.

Next Mr. Kinler talked about the farm ranching program. In 2008, staff permitted the collection of over 800,000 eggs. Last year, around 700,000 alligators were on farms with about 50,000 alligators released and the harvesting of about 270,000. Also, staff provides technical assistance to landowners and farmers and inspects hides and live animals that are leaving the state. Pictures of a typical alligator farm was shown. In 2008, a peak was reached of a half million eggs collected from private wetland habitat. In 1991-1992, there was a boom in alligator farmers of about 120 and in 1992-1993 there was a severe price reduction which "weeded out" a lot of farmers. Now there are about 50 farms with 30 being active in selling stock each year. Alligators harvested on a farm are generally in the 3-4 foot range and this market was targeted toward the watch strap and small leather products. Chairman Crews asked what was the return rate and he was told 12 percent of the eggs hatched. Mr. Gordon asked if there were meat sales from the alligators and Mr. Kinler answered yes both the wild and farm raised are processed for their skin and meat. He then explained that for every 100 eggs a farmer hatches, he has to return 12 alligators to the wild at the 4 foot size. Chairman Crews asked if it was known how many of those released are returned by wild harvest and Mr. Kinler stated it was about 10 percent. The farm harvest has grown similar to the wild harvest. Now there are about 250,000 to 300,000 farm raised alligators harvested each year. The value of the resource last year amounted to about \$70 million to the farmers, hunters, landowners and trappers. The value for this year was expected to be reduced due to the lower prices. The total inventory was reduced by about 300,000 over the last 12 months and may continue to go down until egg collection begins again in July.

The nuisance alligator program had a network of 66 hunters that operates statewide. The Department receives between 2,000 and 3,000 complaint calls annually. With the low skin prices, a change was made in the process which allows the hunter to charge

an owner to remove small sized alligators for which they have no market.

The alligator program was basically self-funded by the industry, commented Mr. Kinler. In 1989, the Department established a tag fee so that when a hide leaves the state, the dealers pay a \$4 tag fee, a 25 cent severance tax, and if it is a live alligator, a \$4 labeling fee which was then deposited into the Alligator Resource Fund. About \$1.2 million per year is spent to run and manage the alligator program with no Conservation Fund dollars. The white alligators caught on Mandalay National Wildlife Refuge were caught by agents and donated to the Audubon Institute. Mr. Pellessier asked where was Mandalay and how many tanneries are in Louisiana. In Louisiana, there was only one functioning tannery. Chairman Crews asked if the international transport of raw or tanned hides was acceptable and he was told yes. Mr. Windham asked if it was still the case that the majority of hides were tanned in Europe. Mr. Kinler stated the majority were tanned in Europe and Singapore.

**Hurricane Recovery Funds Distribution Update** was presented by Mr. Joey Shepard with the Research and Assessment Division. The freshwater recreational funds, amounting to \$3.7 million, went to repair and refurbish rearing ponds at Booker Fowler Fish Hatchery. About 40 percent of the project was complete, having produced 4.5 million Florida largemouth bass fingerlings. Once the ponds were completed, more fish would be able to grow to a larger size so when released, there would be better survival rate. For the saltwater recreational side, \$1.5 million was allocated to artificial reefs. The Lake Pontchartrain Twin Span project was about \$900,000. There were 4 Lake Pontchartrain reef ball sites with 600 reef balls deployed in April and May 2009. Louisiana State University has 2 projects on saltwater bait research; one project was to create a consistently available list of bait fish through extension and research; and the other project looked at pathogens that may impact the cocahoe. The Marina Assistance Program had \$3.4 million dedicated to it and was launched in January 2009 to 58 marinas. The money has been distributed with a few marinas still being evaluated. A marina data base was being developed by LSU at a cost of \$50,000. About \$88,000 was spent on Elmer's Island road repairs. Chairman Crews asked who could he talk to about the dollars distributed to commercial fishermen, where did it go and how was it distributed. Mr. Shepard did not have the information with him, so Chairman Crews asked that this be available for the next meeting.

Mr. Doug Peters handled the next item, **Twin Spans Rubble to Reefs Project**. He reminded the Council, that in July the permit process began on the twin span reefs. There were now 2 permits; and a map was shown of where each was permitted between the Highway 11 and new Twin Spans that are being constructed now. The bridges will come down in 2 phases beginning in January with the demolition of the ends of the bridges. In that phase, there will be 36 spans and the south twin span reef would be developed first. The second phase would be bid out later in the year for the demolition of the main part of the twin span bridge, which will come out to 42 spans. These spans will go to the north reef site. Also, if St. Tammany Parish gets their pier project going, some of the spans could be used as artificial reefs around the pier if viable. Chairman Crews asked if the spans would be marked and Mr. Peters answered they were required to mark the reef sites when completed. He added that the contractor felt it would take 3-4 months to develop each reef site. A minimum of 6 feet of clearance must be maintained on top of the reefs. Mr. DeBlieux asked about the locations of the reefs and he was told that the spots were picked because there had clear bottoms. This was done in cooperation with CCA and NOAA. Mr. Windham asked about the status of the fishing pier associated with the twin spans. Mr. Peter stated the St. Tammany Parish was working with the Department of Transportation and Development to preserve a portion of the span.

**Wildlife Division Reorganization** began with Mr. John Robinette stating he worked a long time in Lake Charles as a Biologist Manager and was now the Biologist Program Manager over Private Lands under the new reorganization. The Wildlife Division reorganized due to budget problems and staff was juggling too much in order to get their jobs done. A flow chart of the division prior to reorganizing was shown. Then Mr. Robinette stated they developed 2 Director positions for education, technical assistance and habitat stewardship. The state was divided into Gulf Coastal Plains and Mississippi Alluvial Valley and would operate basically on eco-regions. Offices were located in Minden, Monroe, Alexandria, Lake Charles, Opelousas and Hammond. Staff from the Ferriday Office would be moved to either the Alexandria, Monroe or Opelousas Office. A new facility would open in Hammond to house Wildlife staff from Baton Rouge. Mr. Robinette then talked mainly about the Technical Assistance Program and how it provides one on one professional, technical assistance to private landowners and government and non-government entities. This program included 13 biologists and would continue to give harvest recommendations

for all species of animals such as deer and turkeys. For turkey management, there will be no more stockings in the state since population was stable. But now there was a slight decline in the population all throughout the southern states. The piney woods area of southwest Louisiana was leading the state with poult counts ranging at about 3 poults per hen. The staff banned turkeys (gobblers only) for 3 years on private lands to see what the mortality rate was. At least 30 percent of the standing gobbler population can be harvested with no effect on the population. From the returns on the banned turkeys, the rate was 20 percent. This year work will begin on Kisatchie National Forest to see what was the gobbler harvest rate. Then Mr. Robinette explained that his staff would also work with the waterfowl biologists and help them count birds, especially geese. For the Upland Game Program, the biologists would concentrate on quail, which is a species that was declining rapidly. Help will continue for those working with dove fields. The public dove hunt held in 2009 on 880 acres in southwest Louisiana killed almost 1500 doves in one day. Another program that staff will help with was food plot management whether for deer, turkey or quail. Also, the wood duck banding program would continue to see what the effects of the 3 bird bag limit may have on the population. Another banding project was on 300 adult doves each year. Wildlife diseases, especially Chronic Wasting Disease and Blue Tongue in deer, was monitored in Louisiana. The Chronic Wasting Disease was now in 13 states affecting deer and elk in pen raised facilities. In 2000, the Department did away with permitting deer pens in Louisiana, but there are several that have been "grandfathered" in. Mr. Robinette then talked about the Native Grass Programs and the burn program. Federal programs discussed were to restore the prairie lands in southwest Louisiana and help individuals with moist soil units. Nuisance control programs were available for coyotes, bobcats (1 can be harvested per year) and hogs (can be taken at night with a permit and can be shot year round in daylight hours), bear, cougar and any other protected animal. Mr. Robinette then explained that DNA samples from the cougar killed in Bossier City were sent to Texas, Colorado and Florida but did not match any of those cougars. But while in Florida, DNA samples were matched with cats from Honduras. Other activities included establishing wildlife viewing areas, and issuing tags for alligators, working with USDA programs which are federally funded. Surveys to landowners will be conducted to find out how many are aware of the federal programs, so they can help the landowner maintain wildlife on their property. Chairman Crews asked if a brochure was available on the

programs, and Mr. Robinette commented there was a brochure in the packet along with a contact list for the biologists. He added staff was writing brochures on 12 different subjects, such as coyotes, doves, wetland, wildlife corridors, etc. Chairman Crews noted there was the Louisiana Landowners Association. Mr. Robinette stated they would be working with that group doing a survey with them. Chairman Crews asked Mr. Robinette that information on projects he explained could be given to Mr. Boehringer and then filtered to the Committee Members for dissemination. Mr. Pellessier asked if the quail burn program on Kisatchie was around Woodworth. Mr. Robinette answered the program area was below Fort Polk. He added they attempted to work with Kisatchie, but there was a lot of bureaucracy problems.

At this point, Chairman Crews had roll call hoping another member would show, but there was no quorum for the meeting. He emphasized to the members present that the information made available to them should be filtered to their constituents.

Then for **Public Comments**, Chairman Crews asked Secretary Robert Barham about the Department's finances. Secretary Barham stated the Department would be challenged for the next 2 years with a larger deficit occurring in 2011-12 than the current year. A portion of dedicated funds were lost but may come back to the Department if they are spent on hunting and fishing. But any monies available, the State would be looking for. The Department has a hiring freeze in place and was operating as tightly as possible. He added that he thought everything should be okay. A part of the Streamlining Commission's report was to dismantle the Department and put it with the Department of Agriculture and other agencies. Secretary Barham explained he did not take that too well. Chairman Crews noted, when needed, they would be glad to help the Department.

Mr. Joe Herring talked about the history of the pelican and the efforts by the Department. He noted Wildlife and Fisheries deserves a lot of credit for what it has done in the past, but very little was being given.

The Council set the **next meeting date** for Tuesday, March 16, 2010.

Chairman Crews **Adjourned** the meeting.