



Commission Meeting Minutes

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

523 E Capitol Avenue | Pierre, South Dakota 57501

November 6-7, 2025 | Outdoor Campus West, Rapid City, SD

REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING

Call Meeting to Order

Chair Rissler called the meeting to order at 2 pm MT via Zoom Webinar on November 6, 2025. Commissioners Stephanie Rissler, Bruce Cull, Jon Locken, Travis Theel, Jim White, and Julie Bartling were present online, verified by a roll call. With six commission members present or online, a quorum was established. The public and staff could listen via SDPB Livestream and participate via conference or in person, with approximately 110 total participants attending via Zoom or in person. On November 7, 2025 Commissioners Stephanie Rissler, Bruce Cull, Jon Locken, Travis Theel, Jim White, and Julie Bartling were present in person at the Outdoor Campus West. Again, a quorum was established with six Commissioners present.

1. Conflict of Interest Disclosure

[Action Item]

Chair Rissler requested the disclosure of any potential conflicts of interest, but none were brought forward.

Public Hearing

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 2:04 pm MT for discussion from those in attendance in matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda as finalization. No testimony was provided by the public, so the Public Hearing was closed at 2:05 pm MT.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the public hearing at 2:05 pm MT.

Open Forum

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 2:06 pm MT for discussion from those in attendance in matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda, not as a finalization or may not be on the agenda.

2:07 pm: Julie Anderson of Rapid City, SD testified in person regarding her concern of wildlife management.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the open forum at 2:11 pm MT.

2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

[Action Item]

Chair Rissler called for any additions or corrections to the regular minutes of the October 2025 meeting. Minutes are available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/archives/>.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE OCTOBER 2025 REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Additional Salary Days

[Action Item]

Chair Rissler called for additional salary days from the Commissioners. No salary days were brought forward.

4. New Staff Introductions

[Info Item]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, introduced three new employees, Mark Koch who serves as the Park Technician at Farm Island Rec. Area, Andrew Becker who serves as the Park Manager at Roy Lake State Park and Stacy Huisenga who serves as the Park Technician at Roy Lake State Park.

Director Kirschenmann introduced two new staff. Trey Kelderman, Wildlife Conservation Officer, stationed in Union County and Austin Hulsing, Resource Biologist, stationed at Cleghorn Fish Hatchery.



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5. 2026 Commission Schedule Review

Department Secretary, Kevin Robling, presented the commission with a proposed 2026 schedule for commission meetings. The schedule will be finalized at the December meeting.

6. Open Meetings Annual Review

General Counsel for the Department, Nick Michels, provided the Commissioners with "A Guide to South Dakota's Open Meetings Laws," which was prepared by the S.D. Attorney General's Office. Mr. Michels explained to the Commission that Senate Bill 74 from the 2025 legislative session (which is now codified at SDCL 1-25-13) requires an *annual review* of an explanation or other material published by the attorney general during an official meeting of any agency or political subdivision of the state that must provide public notice of its meetings. The Commissioners then took time to review the provided guide. Afterwards, each Commissioner present noted for the record that they had received the provided guide. It was also noted that the Commissioners reviewed the provided guide.

7. Custer State Park Bison Trophy and Non-Trophy Harvest [Action Item: Finalization]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented the finalization of a rule package for the Custer State Park Bison Bull hunts that initiated from a citizen petition requesting a 60% resident only preference in the first draw with the remaining 40% of the licenses being open to both residents and non-residents. Additionally, park staff evaluated the bison herd and range health and set a new maximum number of bison bull licenses at 15 for Trophy and 30 for Non-trophy that could be issued on an annual basis.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO APPROVE THE BISON BULL HUNTS. The motion carried unanimously.

8. Administrative Action for CSP Trophy and Non-Trophy Bison Hunt Seasons [Action Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, set the number of Trophy Bison Bull and Non-Trophy Bison Bull harvest rates at 12 and 25 respectfully for the 2026/27 and 2027/28 seasons. The Trophy number increased by 2 and the Non-Trophy by 5 from the past two season harvest years.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION. Motion carried unanimously.

9. Division Meeting Awards Recognition [Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, reviewed the 2025 staff recipients for the various Park Division Annual Awards as follows: Awards of Appreciation – 1) Ryan Wendinger, and 2) Rachel Comes; Seasonal of the Year – Genee Dorn; Volunteer of the Year – Robert Rutten; Teamwork Award – 1) Fiscal Office Team, and 2) Custer State Park Buffalo Roundup & Arts Festival Team; Innovative Programming – Jim Henning; and Distinguished Service – Pat Buscher.

10. Angostura Cabin 2-Year Rate Extension on BOR Property [Info Item: Parks]

Sean Blanchette, Parks Division Business Administrator, provided the commission background information on the private cabins located at Angostura Recreation Area. Blanchette explained the most recent rate increase approval in late 2023 of 5.4% annually for the remainder of the permit. Rates are adjusted using the Bureau of Reclamation Construction Cost Trend - Land Index for South Dakota. The Parks Division would like to find consistency in the rate adjustments at Angostura and Shadehill Recreation Areas. Staggered permit terms and annual fluctuations do not allow for that. Parks intends to extend the existing permits for 2 years at Angostura to match the Shadehill permit expiration date of 12/31/2027, then issue new 5-year permits at both areas with the 5-year rate schedule determined at the onset of the new permit. Blanchette indicated that all permit holders will be notified by letter of the plan, and they will return to the



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Commission in December to present the 5.4% rate increase for the next 2 years at Angostura for their approval.

11. CSP Resort RFP Update

[Info Item: Parks]

Sean Blanchette, Parks Division Business Administrator, provided an update to the Custer State Park Resorts RFP preparation process. Axias Inc. will conduct their final site visit the week of 11/17 for the facilities condition assessment with roughly 25 of 175 structures remaining to be inspected. Axias is on track to provide the final report in January, with the information to be incorporated into the upcoming concession lease. Blanchette stated that GFP has engaged C-BIZ to conduct the Personal Property valuation with a site visit scheduled for the week of November 17th and a report deliverable in early December. The Department and the Concessionaire have mutually engaged Simpson & Associate from Rapid City to conduct Possessory Interest appraisal. The site visit is complete, and a final report is expected in the coming days. Blanchette also reminded the Commission that they will be afforded time to review the draft RFP when completed in early 2026.

12. 2025 Mid-Week and Weekend Camping Units

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, reviewed data from this past summer indicating where decreases had occurred between mid-week and weekend camping units in 2025. Mid-week camping units saw a decrease of 9% as compared to the past 3-year average, with weekend units decreasing 2.9% for the same 3-year average. Park staff will be looking at individual park data to help them analyze what they might provide in incentives for the 2026 season to increase the mid-week camping unit numbers.

13. October Camping Unit and Revenue Reports

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented the October monthly and year-to-date report numbers for the Division of Parks & Recreation related to camping units and revenue. October camping units were down 5% for the month and remain at a 5% decrease YTD. The Parks Division revenue is up 3% overall for the month of October and 17% YTD. The standard graphs and charts were shared with the Commission to depict how park revenue has come in for the Division overall and the impact of the new non-resident park entrance license fees as compared to other entrance fees. Information was also shared on shoulder season months (May, September and October) camping units for the past 14 years with the trend line increasing over that time period.

14. Jackrabbit Trapping and Hunting Seasons

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Alex Solem, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented on the general ecology of jackrabbits in South Dakota. He discussed their habitat needs regarding large intact grasslands and the effects of hunting on their populations. Regarding the request to close the season to allow populations to increase, Alex discussed the limited effect of hunting as a population regulator and the limited authority the Commission would have based on Codified law. GFP believes habitat is the limiting factor in jackrabbit populations.

15. Hemorrhagic Disease Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

GFP Senior Wildlife Biologist Byron Buckley provided a brief update on the current status of Hemorrhagic Disease in South Dakota. A brief biological background was provided on Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD) and Blue Tongue disease, collectively called HD. Currently, there are 269 reported/confirmed HD mortalities (263 white tailed deer, 5 mule deer, and 1 pronghorn). This is lower than the 2024 HD outbreak of 401 (398 white tailed deer, 2 mule deer, and 1 pronghorn). The HD outbreaks are generally localized in nature, which can significantly impact deer in specific locations. GFP biologists monitor the impact of these disease outbreaks and adjust the tag/licenses to correspond with loss of deer numbers or allow tag/license returns in these affected areas. With the colder temperatures projected for the entire state (Nov 9 -10), this should cause a die-off of the virus-carrying insects.



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16. CWD Action Plan

[Info Item: Wildlife]

GFP Senior Wildlife Biologist Byron Buckley provided the GFP Commission with the proposed CWD Action Plan for 2025-2029. Much of the action plan will remain the same, including regulations and CWD testing and sampling. Updates were made to the scientific information regarding a best management practice of not providing feed for cervids due to the increase in CWD prion transmission at these locations, and specifically on the feeder itself. An additional update to the action plan was to incorporate current CWD research on cow elk survival related to CWD and a companion study to assess environmental CWD in the Black Hills. Future endeavors will incorporate human dimensions work to understand public opinions and targeted outreach and communication for CWD management.

17. Hunting Reports From the Field & 18. License Sales Reports

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Director Kirschenmann provided the Commission a presentation providing information on opening weekend success, license sales for opening weekend of the pheasant season, license sales year to date, and landowner testimonials. Landowner testimonials came from across central and eastern SD and the general theme was an overwhelming response of seeing more birds this year than the past 10 years. Positive reports and excitement for the pheasant season. In general, license sales remain strong for the license year which will end on December 14. December 15 marks the beginning of the new license year.

19. Adjourn

[Action Item]

A Regular Commission Meeting will be held on December 4-5, 2025, at the South Dakota State Capitol Building, Room 414 in Pierre, SD starting at 1 pm CST.

MOTIONED BY WHITE, SECONDED BY THEEL TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 11:35 AM MT ON NOVEMBER 7, 2025. Motion carried unanimously.

Submitted respectfully,

Kevin Robling, Department Secretary