

Minutes of the Game, Fish, and Parks Commission June 4, 2020

Chairman Gary Jensen called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. CT via conference call. Commissioners Gary Jensen, Travis Bies, Mary Anne Boyd, Jon Locken, Russell Olson, Doug Sharp, Charles Spring, Robert Whitmyre. Public and staff were able to listen via SDPB livestream and participate via conference call with approximately 220 total participants.

DIVISION OF ADMINISTRATION

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

Chair Jensen called for conflicts of interest to be disclosed. None were presented.

Approval of Minutes

Jensen called for any additions or corrections to the May 7-8, 2020 meeting minutes or a motion for approval.

Motion by Boyd with second by Whitmyre TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE May 7-8, 2020 MEETING WITH MINOR REVISIONS. Motion carried unanimously.

Additional Commissioner Salary Days

No additional commissioner salary days were requested.

FY2021 Budget Discussion/Increase Adjustment

Chris Petersen, administration division director, detailed the FY2021 operating budget for GFP and outlined necessary budget adjustment to cover increased cost for employee health insurance benefits. He explained the legislative budget process and timeline for FY21 implementation.

Motion by Olson, second by Sharp TO AUTHORIZE THE DIVISION OF WILDLIFE OPERATIONS BUDGETS \$51,863,828, WILDLIFE CAPITOL DEVELOPMENT BUDGET OF \$2,562,500 and SNOWMOBILE TRAILS BUDGET OF \$1,386,351 AS PRESENTED FOR FY2021. Roll Call vote: Bies – yes; Boyd – yes; Locken – yes; Olson – yes; Sharp – yes; Spring – yes; Whitmyre – yes; Jensen – yes. Motion carried 8 yes and 0 no votes.

Covid 19 Update

Kevin Robling, deputy secretary provided an update on Covid 19 as it relates to department operations.

Pheasant Hunting Marketing Update

Emily Kiel provided a record and outline of the three different phases of the workgroup discussion to get to the point of being able to implement a robust and sophisticated marketing plan by the end of June. Kirk Hulstein and Mike Gussias provided an in-depth overview of the plan. "Hunt the Greatest" is a strategic, multi-channel campaign targeting three audiences — Traditionalists, Adventure Hunters and Lapsed Youth — over six months (for 3 years) and across more than 16 states. The campaign will incorporate tactics like social media influencers, press hostings,

programmatic TV, magazines, partnerships, radio, podcasts and addressable 1:1 digital. The campaign concept focuses on the thrilling experience of pheasant hunting in South Dakota by making it accessible to anyone. South Dakota is, after all, where one hunts the greatest land, lives the greatest traditions, and makes the greatest memories. Additionally, it was noted that both departments see this as a financial investment that will demonstrate growth over the next 3 years. And it is unlike anything GFP has ever done before, so while it may seem like a risk here in the beginning, it is one that is very much needed as we have continued to bleed from the drop in pheasant hunters in the last decade.

From here, the conversation shifted to the annual brood count survey. Secretary Kelly Hepler and Wildlife Director Tom Kirschenmann led this discussion with the Commission. It was announced that GFP will discontinue the annual brood count survey conducted annually in August. Multiple officials said the report has no impact on what they called the “biological side,” meaning how they set bird limits or season hunting dates. Additionally, when pheasant brood numbers are down, those reported numbers deter both residents and nonresidents from pheasant hunting. As Hepler stated during the meeting, “So you remove the biological side and you remove the marketing side of this, and so then the question really becomes what really is the purpose of it? There are probably some purposes out there, but it becomes more nice to know than need to know.” Three commissioners voiced their support to discontinue the survey and to do so without a public comment period.

Outdoor Campus West Update

Kevin Robling, deputy secretary provided an update on Outdoor Campus West

PETITIONS

Tom Kirschenmann, wildlife division director, provided information on the petition process and options available for commission action.

Nonresident Walleye/Sauger Fishing Season

Kirschenmann presented the petition submitted by Andrew Rick of Hartford, SD requesting Nonresident walleye/sauger fishing season of May 1 through December 31 on Missouri River from Fort Randall Dam to the Spillway LUA boat ramp, Francis Case Lake from Big Bend Dam through the point 2 miles downstream, and Lake Sharpe from Oahe Dam to the Highway 14 Bridge.

Motion by Sharp with second by Olson TO DENY THE PETITION. Roll Call vote: Bies – yes; Boyd – yes; Locken – yes; Olson – yes; Sharp – yes; Spring – yes; Whitmyre – yes; Jensen – yes. Motion carried 8 yes and 0 no votes.

Motioned by Whitmyre with second by Spring TO APPROVE RESOLUTION 20-11 (appendix A) DENYING THE PETITION TO ADJUST NONRESIDENT WALLEYE/SAUGER FISHING SEASON. Roll Call vote: Bies – yes; Boyd – yes; Locken – yes; Olson – yes; Sharp – yes; Spring – yes; Whitmyre – yes; Jensen – yes. Motion carried 8 yes and 0 no votes.

License Allocation - Preference

Kirschenmann presented the petition submitted by Jason Baldwin of Pierre, SD to give anyone with 20 plus years of preference a tag. In the 2020 archery elk draw for unit 2 there were 5 applicants that had 21 years of preference. None of those individuals drew a tag.

Motion by Sharp with second by Boyd TO DENY THE PETITION. Roll Call vote: Bies – yes; Boyd – yes; Locken – yes; Olson – yes; Sharp – yes; Spring – yes; Whitmyre – yes; Jensen – yes. Motion carried 8 yes and 0 no votes.

Motioned by Bies with second by Olson TO APPROVE RESOLUTION 20-12 (appendix B) DENYING THE PETITION TO ADJUST THE LICENSE ALLOCATION. Roll Call vote: Bies – yes; Boyd – yes; Locken – yes; Olson – yes; Sharp – yes; Spring – yes; Whitmyre – yes; Jensen – yes. Motion carried 8 yes and 0 no votes.

PROPOSALS

Nonresident Landowner Owned Land License Application

Chad Switzer, wildlife program administrator, presented the recommended changes to modify 41:06:02:03 (16) from

Resident-landowner-on-own land deer or antelope license, one-half the fee of the deer or antelope license which has been applied for;

To

Landowner-on-own land deer or antelope license, one-half the fee of the deer or antelope license which has been applied for;

Switzer explained that during the 2020 South Dakota Legislative Session, House Bill 1184 provides for nonresident landowner licenses to qualifying landowners for the West River deer hunting season and firearm antelope hunting season. House Bill 1184 indicated the GFP Commission shall promulgate rules, in accordance with Chapter 1-26, to establish fees for licenses issued under this section.

Motioned by Bies, second by Sharp TO MODIFY THE PROPOSED RULE AS RECOMMENDED. Roll Call vote: Bies – yes; Boyd – yes; Locken – yes; Olson – yes; Sharp – yes; Spring – yes; Whitmyre – yes; Jensen – yes. Motion carried 8 yes and 0 no votes.

Public Water Zoning – (withdrawn)

Use of Parks and Public Lands

Scott Simpson, parks and wildlife director, presented the recommended change to provide for an exemption to the requirement to purchase a park entrance license at North Point Recreation Area, Fort Randall South Shore Recreation Area, Randall Creek Recreation Area and Fort Randall Spillway Lakeside Use Area for enrolled members of the Yankton Sioux Tribe and their families. He explained this exemption would provide members of the Yankton Sioux Tribe and their immediate families greater access to local outdoor recreational opportunities. These four park units are located within proximity to the Yankton Sioux Tribe reservation area. This exemption does not apply to other fees such as camping, lodging, picnic shelter reservations, or equipment rentals.

Motioned by Boyd, second by Sharp TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED RULE AS RECOMMENDED. Roll Call vote: Bies – yes; Boyd – yes; Locken – yes; Olson – yes; Sharp – yes; Spring – yes; Whitmyre – yes; Jensen – yes. Motion carried 8 yes and 0 no votes.

River Otter Season (proposed in April - no action necessary)

Fall Turkey (proposed in April - no action necessary)

Lost License Replacement (proposed in April - no action necessary)

Administrative Rules Review ARSD 41:08, 41:09, 41:10 and 41:13 (proposed in April - no action necessary)

OPEN FORUM

Jensen opened the floor for discussion from those in attendance on matters of importance to them that may not be on the agenda.

Nancy Hilding, Black Hawk, SD, president of the Prairie Hills Audubon Society spoke regarding River Otter. She said the Management Plan is very unclear and difficult to figure out. She noted there were few sightings and no identification in the plan about reintroduction or recovery west river. It's questionable if there are even otter's west river so why open a season statewide.

George Vandell, Pierre, SD South Dakota Waterfowl Association, spoke in regards Waterfowl access plan that was recently made public. The plan is to recruit and retain both resident and nonresident hunters.

DIVISION OF PARKS AND RECREATION

Angostura Cabin Permit

Scott Simpson, Parks and Recreation Division Director, presented the request to approval of new MOU with Bureau of Reclamation for seasonal cabins at Angostura. He explained it's basically a 5 year extension with the only change being to tie future fee increases into the BOR land index.

Motion by Olson, second by Boyd TO AUTHORIZE GFP TO RENEW THE MOU WITH THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION FOR CABINS AT ANGOSTURA. Roll Call vote: Bies – yes; Boyd – yes; Locken – yes; Olson – yes; Sharp – yes; Spring – yes; Whitmyre – yes; Jensen – yes. Motion carried 8 yes and 0 no votes.

Operation of Park Facilities Update

Scott Simpson, Parks and Recreation Division Director, provided the Commission an update on park facility operations

Visitation and Sales Report

Al Nedved, parks and recreation deputy director, gave a report on revenue, camping and visitation through May. Revenue year to date is up 24% from last year, camping is up 47%, and visitations were up 43%. Use of day use facilities such as trails and boat ramps has been high. Camping and visitations were likely records for May. Memorial Day use was strong despite doom cool wet weather.

DIVISION OF WILDLIFE

3-Splash Waterfowl Hunting Package

Rocco Murano, senior wildlife biologist, and Taniya Bethke, education and outreach coordinator Bethke gave a brief update to the Commission regarding the progress of the 2-tiered duck regulation experiment recently approved by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Rocco said that the Central Flyway had been working on a similar proposal since 2014 and in April the Service Regulations Committee (SRC) had approved the evaluation plan developed by SDGFP and NGPC. Rocco explained how duck hunter numbers are declining and have kept pace with high duck numbers in recent years. Rocco went on to discuss the 2-regulation options SD and NE duck hunters will have pending each respective Commission's approval for the 2021/2022 duck season. Taniya explained how duck identification is a barrier to duck hunter R3 and that the 3-splash option will allow hunters to try the sport without fear of violation. Taniya also explained how this cooperative experiment will last a minimum of 4 years, undergo evaluation, and potentially be offered to other states and Flyways. She reiterated that the objective of this experiment is to recruit, retain, and reactivate prospective, current, and past duck hunters.

Flooding Impacts in the Northeast

Mike Klosowski, wildlife regional supervisor, spoke on a wildlife information item "flooding impacts in the northeast". The area is seeing record high water levels all over the northeast with Day County being the epicenter. Approximately 18 lake access points have been effected by flooding either limiting its use or having to be shutdown altogether. This has provided fewer access points for anglers further congregating people. Staff are currently prioritizing access areas and will start the repair process soon. The high water has also provided access to areas boaters haven't seen before. Landowners are seeing boaters closer to cattle operations and rural farmsteads causing negative interactions between the two. Game, Fish and Parks staff will be touring local farms to see first hand some of the issues facing producers. RS Mike Klosowski also asked boaters to recreate with respect and avoid farming operations that have been inundated with water.

AIS Field Operations for 2020

John Lott, fisheries chief, and Jona Ohm, communication director, presented information on a new state law grants the department the authority to establish Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination (WID) stations at locations other than boat ramps and requires boaters to stop at WID stations. Objectives for the WID program include preventing westward expansion, using WID stations to develop best management practices by boaters, and maximize contacts with boaters who use containment waters. Therefore, WID stations for central and eastern South Dakota will be placed on highways where the number of boats encountered can be maximized and stations in western SD and the Black Hills will focus on inspecting boats prior to launch. Key messages for the communications plan in 2020 include "Clean, Drain, and Dry, every time", "Don't move water" (bait-related), and "Inspections are easy, if you see a station you need to stop and do your part". Many different methods and tools are being used to share these messages including print and social media, banners and signage, ice box wraps, and Gas Station TV.

Restricting Mule Deer Harvest (will be presented at a future meeting)

Review of River Otter Management Plan

Eileen Dowd-Stukel, wildlife biologist & Silka Kempema, wildlife biologist, provided an update to the river otter management plan has been drafted. It includes recent data and research conducted since the first plan was finalized in 2012. Objectives that address long-term monitoring, harvest, information and outreach as well as plan evaluation were identified.

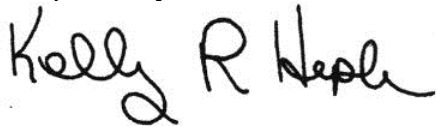
Licenses Sales Update

Heather Villa, wildlife administration chief, said License Sales are up for residents from 2019 in every category except for 1 day small game. Nonresident license sales are also up in every category except for Predator/Varmint. Resident license sales are at a five year high for combination licenses as well as fishing licenses compared to sales through May of previous years. Nonresident license sales are higher than 2019, but they are falling in between 2016-2018 for comparison. With 2019 having an extended winter and record water levels, it is to be expected that license numbers will be higher than 2019 and fall back into trend with previous years.

Adjourn

Meeting adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kelly R Hepler". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kelly R. Hepler, Department Secretary

Appendix A
RESOLUTION 20-11

WHEREAS, Andrew Rick of Hartford, South Dakota, submitted a Petition to the Game, Fish and Parks Commission (Commission) dated May 15, 2020, requesting that the Game, Fish and Parks Commission amend ARSD § 41:07:02:01 (Inland waters) – to create a resident only fishing season on the portions of the Missouri River for the reasons more fully set out in the petition (hereinafter referred to as “the Petition”); and

WHEREAS, all members of the Commission have been furnished with and have reviewed a copy of the Petition; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has been advised that a copy of the Petition has been served on all members of the Interim Rules Review Committee and Director of the Legislative Research Council as required by SDCL § 1-26-13; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has been advised that SDCL § 1-26-13 requires that within thirty (30) days of submission of a Petition, the Commission shall either “deny the petition in writing (stating its reasons for the denials) or shall initiate rule-making proceedings in accordance with SDCL 1-26-4.”; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has been advised and is of the opinion that a hearing on the Petition is neither statutorily required nor necessary; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has reviewed and carefully considered the requirements and procedures set out in SDCL §1-26-13 and the contents of the Petition, including the reasons advanced by Petitioner in support of creating a resident only fishing season; and

WHEREAS, South Dakota fisheries are managed for the enjoyment of all anglers, both resident and nonresident; and

WHEREAS, the majority of walleye/sauger harvest and angling pressure on the Missouri River takes place during the months of May, June and July; and

WHEREAS, spring angling pressure varies due to weather and fish populations; and

WHEREAS, South Dakota has removed all remaining season closures in recent years.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Commission does hereby deny the Petition for the reasons hereinabove stated in this Resolution, which said Resolution as adopted by the Commission shall constitute the Commission’s written denial of the Petition and its reasons therefore.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Petition, a record of the Commission’s discussions concerning same, and this Resolution be made a part of the Minutes of the Commission meeting at which this Resolution is adopted, and further, that the Department be and it is hereby authorized and directed in compliance with SDCL §1-26-13 to serve a

copy of an extract of that portion of the Commission minutes which pertain to the Commission's discussion of the Petition and its adoption of this Resolution, including a copy of the Resolution, on all members of the Interim Rules Review Committee and Director of the Legislative Research Council with copies also to be provided to the Petitioner, Andrew Rick of Hartford, South Dakota.

Appendix B
RESOLUTION 20-11

WHEREAS, Jason Baldwin of Pierre, South Dakota, submitted a Petition to the Game, Fish and Parks Commission (Commission) dated March 28, 2020, requesting that the Game, Fish and Parks Commission amend ARSD § 41:06:01:16 (Purchase and accrual of preference points) – to allow for any applicant with over 20 years of preference to receive a big game license from the available allotment for the reasons more fully set out in the petition (hereinafter referred to as “the Petition”); and

WHEREAS, all members of the Commission have been furnished with and have reviewed a copy of the Petition; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has been advised that a copy of the Petition has been served on all members of the Interim Rules Review Committee and Director of the Legislative Research Council as required by SDCL § 1-26-13; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has been advised that SDCL § 1-26-13 requires that within thirty (30) days of submission of a Petition, the Commission shall either “deny the petition in writing (stating its reasons for the denials) or shall initiate rule-making proceedings in accordance with SDCL 1-26-4.”; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has been advised and is of the opinion that a hearing on the Petition is neither statutorily required nor necessary; and

WHEREAS, the Commission has reviewed and carefully considered the requirements and procedures set out in SDCL §1-26-13 and the contents of the Petition, including the reasons advanced by Petitioner in support of allowing applicants with over 20 years of preference to receive a big game license; and

WHEREAS, the Department and Commission have discussed preference points on numerous occasions and attempted to balance preference points with opportunity for all; and

WHEREAS, the current system of preference points and drawing for elk licenses does provide more licenses to applicants who have a higher number of preference points; and

WHEREAS, in recent years the concept of cubing preference points was implemented which helps assure applicants with more preference points have greater chances of drawing a preferred license; and

Whereas, drawing an elk license can be difficult due to the demand far surpassing the supply of available licenses while assuring a viable elk population and maximum hunting opportunities into the future.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Commission does hereby deny the Petition for the reasons hereinabove stated in this Resolution, which said Resolution as adopted by the Commission shall constitute the Commission’s written denial of the Petition and its reasons therefore.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Petition, a record of the Commission's discussions concerning same, and this Resolution be made a part of the Minutes of the Commission meeting at which this Resolution is adopted, and further, that the Department be and it is hereby authorized and directed in compliance with SDCL §1-26-13 to serve a copy of an extract of that portion of the Commission minutes which pertain to the Commission's discussion of the Petition and its adoption of this Resolution, including a copy of the Resolution, on all members of the Interim Rules Review Committee and Director of the Legislative Research Council with copies also to be provided to the Petitioner, Jason Baldwin of Pierre, South Dakota.

Public Comments

Fall Turkey

Mark Malone

Pierre SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Please reconsider the fall turkey season, specifically in the Black Hills. As an avid turkey hunter, the populations have been in constant decline for many years now and it is getting harder and harder to find birds to hunt. 15 years ago it wasn't uncommon for me to put a half dozen flocks to bed at night. This past opening morning, I had two found...one of which was on private land. The next night, we found one bird. This has become quite common and just proves that the numbers are so low that it is even tough for a seasoned veteran to find birds, much less an average father trying to find birds to take his kid on a mentored hunt.

I also have a good friend that has killed and guided to over a dozen gobbler kills this spring. He is of the same opinion about the population....it's way down. (I am not going to provide any testimony from him, just trying to give some information from more than one avid spring turkey hunter).

I understand that the fall season in the hills can be justified by the fact that many of the birds might not make it through the winter and might as well add to hunter opportunity in the fall (paraphrasing from former head SDGFP biologist), but even if a percentage of those hens made it through the winter, that allows those hens the opportunity to raise an extra brood, which creates that much more opportunity in future spring seasons.

Again, please help re-establish a stronger turkey population in the Black Hills and eliminate the fall season until the population can more easily support it.

Alfred Rude

Lead SD

Position: other

Comment:

I certainly hope that the commission opens the fall turkey season for the entire Black Hills. It has been disappointing the last couple years that hunting has been primarily south of Custer.

Adam Golay

Sioux Falls SD

Position: other

Comment:

Change the start date to the fall turkey season to start the same day as antelope season. That way antelope hunters that live in the eastern part of the state have an incentive to buy a fall turkey tag & they can combine that into 1 trip since it's 400-500 miles to drive for a Sioux Falls resident to antelope hunt. It use to start Oct 1st so I don't know what the reason was for moving it back to Nov 1st.

John Janecke

Winner SD

Position: other

Comment:

I can understand INCREASING the number of permits issued, but am totally at a loss as to closing Tripp County to turkey hunting. I have a spring turkey permit for Tripp County and am seeing and hearing many turkeys, both Toms and hens.

I hunt BOTH public and private ground and in both places there are MANY turkeys. I feel that Tripp County should remain OPEN to fall turkey hunting based on the many turkeys that are available, even before the nesting season is complete.

Compared to previous years when I was in the field, although rarely for turkey hunting, I am still observing more birds than I have seen or crossed paths with previously.

Based on these facts, I see no logical reason to close Tripp County to fall turkey hunting.

Lost License Replacement

Robert Rauenhorst

Chamberlain SD

Position: support

Comment:

I applaud this decision and hope everyone supports it. There should no be a penalty for a simple mistake.

Other

Steve Gates

Mitchell SD

Position: other

Comment:

When are the comfort stations going to be open at the state parks? It doesn't make sense to limit people to vault toilets with no water or soap. This causes a bottle neck for everyone without access to a toilet and causes unsanitary conditions.

Timothy Hurlbert

Hermosa SD

Position: other

Comment:

I support the the move to a 25 mph raise in boat speed on Deerfield Lake as it takes to long to cross the lake at the current 5 mph. I am a disabled vet unable to walk . I do believe any higher speeds would be a problem. Even a 10 or 15 Mph would be ok but generally a boat will not plane and creates more wake at those speeds.

River Otter Season

Todd Chamley

Trent SD

Position: support

Comment:

Thank you commissioners for allowing us the opportunity to harvest some of these beautiful creatures. Having lived, fished, trapped, and hunted my for as long as I can remember of my forty five years, within one mile of the Big Sioux river I assure you I am grateful and excited! It is hopefully a resource that we can continue to harvest with an increase in allotted tags annually as more information is gathered. Spending roughly 200+ days a year on or in this watershed it is very evident that they are flourishing. Their isn't a private fish pond or body of water around here that doesn't feel the effects of their rapidly spreading population.

John Hopple

Black Hawk SD

Position: support

Comment:

Hello Secretary Helper, Chairman Jensen and Commissioners. The South Dakota Trappers Association strongly supports this proposal. The story of the river otter is a success story. The otters have reached a level where reasonable harvest limits should be enacted. In addition to creating an interest in trapping (recruitment item) the science gathered from the body turn in requirement will prove to be vital to the future continued success of the otter. A much more diverse collection of information from different areas of the state will only enhance the information flow for GFP Biologists. Yes, the SDTA supports this proposal.

Public Comments

Other

Jodean Joy

Miller SD

Position: other

Comment:

We are volunteers at a West Bend. When the emergency alert came the other day people were very concerned. It needs to begin with "This is a test." It needs to be repeated several times through out the warning. Please address this with whoever does the alerts. Thank you and may God bless your efforts.

Brad Crouche

Mitchell SD

Position: other

Comment:

Hope this doesn't fall on deaf ears (it has for the last couple of years)
Could you consider dropping the legal fps for air rifles from the now 1,000 fps to a more reasonable mathematical equation such as foot pound of energy. I have a \$1,000 air rifle in 22 cal that will shoot dime sized groups all day at 30 yards and beyond that I can not legally hunt with, yet someone who can't hit pie plate three times in row with a 1000 fps rifle can legally try his luck. My rifle will generate in the neighborhood of 22 foot pound of energy at the muzzle and estimating 16 fpe at 40 yards or so and it only takes 6 fps to kill game such as rabbits, squirrels, coons ect.
I believe in Europe they have a 600 fps limit on all air guns and they are all very capable of taking small game. I know a few years ago it was voted down when someone wanted to bring the limit from 1000 to 600 fps but 40% is a big jump if it were voted on without doing some homework. Please think about it, discuss it, and take a look a some YOU TUBE videos. Air rifles that generate 5 to 6 hundred fps are adequate for taking game at a reasonable range and modern air rifles are absolutely astonishing performers at most ranges. My rifle has the power and the accuracy to make clean one shot kills yet falls 80 to 120 fps short depending on the weight of the pellet.
Thank you for your time
Brad Croucher

Raymond Martinmaas

Orient SD

Position: other

Comment:

Disabled hunter access

River Otter Season

Daniel Bjerke

Rapid City SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

I am a property owner in Grant County that has the South Fork of Yellowbank River running through it. This property has been in our family since the late 1930s. The number of river otters that I have seen in my 71 years I counted on one hand. It is such a rare sighting to see a river otter on our property that I don't know why a season would even be under consideration. In reviewing the data available on verified sightings in South Dakota over the period of 2014-2019, there were less than 50 sightings per year. I would like to know who is requesting this season? Is it the trappers? I am opposed to having a season of river otters. Dan Bjerke

Marlin Bjerke

Clear Lake SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Having lived in Deuel County nearly all my life and spending a considerable amount of time around the south fork of the Yellowbanks River, it was a rare site to see a river otter. Not sure why you would even consider opening a season on this rare animal. I am strongly opposed to killing of any river otters in South Dakota.

Deane Bjerke

Buffalo WY

Position: oppose

Comment:

I am a landowner in Grant County with a river going through the property. I know of only one sighting of a river otter on our property. It seems to me this is a political thing rather than a game management plan. I live in Wyoming where we have many more river otters than South Dakota. No one here has even suggested a season on river otters. I cannot believe the river population has reached a point where some need to be eliminated. We would like to see more on our property. Because they are territorial, I am not worried about too many on our property.

Paul Lepisto

Pierre SD

Position: oppose

Comment:

Please see the attached comments on behalf of Kelly Kistner, President of the South Dakota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America, on the river otter proposal. Thank you.

Ray Maize

Pierre SD

Position: support

Comment:

I support a River Otter Season based on South Dakota Game Fish and Parks studies of the population of the River Otter since they have been introduced by the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe over twenty years ago.

Steven Peterson

Ramona SD

Position: support

Comment:

The river otter is a valuable resource to the trappers of South Dakota. I am 100% in favor of our South Dakota outdoor enthusiasts being able to tag and keep the otter they catch.



SOUTH DAKOTA
DIVISION

The Izaak Walton League of America

DEFENDERS OF SOIL, AIR, WOODS, WATERS, AND WILDLIFE

May 29, 2020

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission
523 East Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501

Dear Commissioners,

The South Dakota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America (Division) thanks you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed river otter trapping season. This proposal, if adopted, would establish a state-wide trapping season in November and December or until 15 otters are reported to the Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP).

While the Division supports responsible trapping and sustainable harvest of furbearers; we strongly oppose this proposal and ask you to reject it as we believe this goes too far, too fast.

During your May meeting this commission voted to delist the river otter and then later approved development of this proposal. The Division believes this marked the first time a governing game and fish body ever delisted then approved development of a proposed harvest season on that specie during the same meeting.

The state's river otter management plan, currently undergoing revision, states otters are difficult to monitor making development of a suitable monitoring program a "challenge". The Division agrees with the GFP that a healthy, growing population of otters would be a welcomed addition to watersheds across our state.

The current population of river otters in South Dakota emanated from a reintroduction effort conducted by the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe in Moody County along the Big Sioux River in 1998 and 1999.

Current findings show much more suitable otter habitat and most of the documented otter sighting are in watersheds in eastern and northeastern South Dakota. We believe this makes opening even a limited state-wide season extremely premature.

The existing science and data show the river otter population in the western two thirds of the state is very low or non-existent. We're concerned the current relatively small population of otters couldn't withstand even a "limited" harvest without suffering a major setback at a time the GFP would like to see the specie expand its range into new areas in the state.

The reason given for this proposed trapping season is the GFP has received about 16 incidentally taken otters in each of the last five years, mostly taken during the beaver trapping season. The Division is concerned that same level of incidental take will continue and coupled with this proposed trapping season could result in possibly doubling the annual harvest of otters before information could get out that shuts down this season. The higher harvest could lower, not expand, the current river otter population.

Otters require high water quality and access to open water year-round in order to survive and successfully reproduce. Increased surface and tile drainage and grassland conversion are contributing to a decline in water quality in many of the state's watersheds. That factor, combined with the ongoing riparian habitat loss and fluctuating water levels due to our highly varied climate, makes accurately predicting long-term river otter population growth very difficult.

We ask that the following be addressed before a river otter trapping season is considered:

- Research possible impacts of agricultural run-off on otters
- Development of a peer reviewed otter monitoring program
- Establish peer reviewed otter survey methods to accurately determine population
- Peer reviewed otter population goals and objectives and how they can be achieved
- Methodology to track otter reproduction and population movements
- Coordination of otter management with agencies, tribes and other stakeholders
- A plan to inform trappers on ways to avoid incidental otter catches
- A public outreach program to educate the public about otters

Until the above steps are implemented, the South Dakota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America respectfully requests the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Commission reject this and any other otter trapping proposal.

Thank you for your time and consideration and for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,



Kelly Kistner

National IWLA President and President of the South Dakota Division of the IWLA

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