



Commission Meeting Minutes

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

523 E Capitol Avenue | Pierre, South Dakota 57501

April 9-10, 2026 | Matthews Training Center, Pierre, SD

REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING

Call Meeting to Order

Chair Rissler called the meeting to order at 1 pm CST at the Matthews Training Center, in Pierre, SD on April 9, 2026. Commissioners Stephanie Rissler, Bruce Cull, Travis Theel, Chuck Spring, Julie Bartling, Dean Kirkeby, and Kevin Nyberg were present. Commissioner Robert Whitmyre was present online on Thursday, April 9, 2026, and in person on Friday, April 10, 2026. With eight 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 58 total participants attending via Zoom or in person.

1. Conflict of Interest Disclosure [Action Item]

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

2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes [Action Item]

Chair Rissler called for any additions or corrections to the regular minutes of the March 2026 meeting. Minutes are available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/archives/>.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE MARCH 2026 REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Additional Salary Days [Action Item]

Chair Rissler called for additional salary days from the Commissioners. Additional days were submitted for approval for one day for Commissioners Nyberg, and Spring and two days for Commissioner Kirkeby.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY NYBERG TO APPROVE THE ADDITIONAL COMMISSIONER SALARY DAYS. The motion carried unanimously.

4. License List Request [Action Item]

Senior Staff Attorney, Nick Michels, presented to the commission a license list request from Thomas Druce. Mr. Michels explained that Mr. Druce's stated reasons for wanting a list of active license holders in the state did not fall under any of the categorical prohibitions laid out in ARSD 41:06:02:04 and that, consequently, the Department had no objection to granting Mr. Druce's request. The commission initially denied the license list request.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY NYBERG TO DENY THE LICENSE LIST REQUEST. The motion carried unanimously.

After clarifying testimony from the Department attorney, Michels, the commission voted to reconsider its initial denial.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BARTLING. The Motion carried unanimously.

The Commission then voted to approve the license list request.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY THEEL. Yea votes (5) Rissler, Bartling, Cull, Theel. Nay votes (2) Nyberg and Spring. The Motion carried by a vote of 5-2.

5. New Staff Introductions [Info Item]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, introduced two new employees in the Parks Division: Braedan Berthel, West Whitlocks Recreation Area Park Manager and Jeff Pommerville, Lewis & Clark Recreation Area Building Maintenance Specialist.



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Public Hearing

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 2:00 pm CST for discussion from those in attendance in matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda as finalization.

Agenda Item #8: Antelope and Turkey

No testimony provided.

Agenda Item #9: Deer

No testimony provided.

Agenda Item #10: Elk Hunting Seasons

2:02 pm: Ron Kolbeck of Salem, SD representing the SD Bowhunters Association testified in person in support of the elk finalization.

Agenda Item #11: Waterfowl Hunting Seasons

No testimony provided.

Agenda Item #12: Bighorn Sheep Hunting Season

No testimony provided.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the public hearing closed at 2:04 pm.

Open Forum

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 2:05 pm CST for discussion from those in attendance on matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda, not as a finalization or may not be on the agenda.

2:05 pm: Ron Kolbeck of Salem, SD representing the SD Bowhunters Association testified in person in support of the elk action plan.

2:08 pm: Jim Hutmacher of Chamberlain, SD testified in person in support of Petition 252 Walleye and Sauger Limit.

2:11 pm: Janet Moore of Rapid City, SD testified virtually in opposition of the coyote bounty, WDM plan, and in support of the use of lead free ammo.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the open forum at 2:14 pm CST.

6. Petition 251 Black Hills Elk Hunting

[Action Item: Petition]

Mr. Rittberger spoke to the commission on the reasons for bringing forward his petition. He explained landowners in Unit 4 of the Black Hills season are looking for ways to increase cow elk harvest and believes that starting at the same time as bull hunters will help. Director Kirschenmann spoke on behalf of the department and explained the unique situation of Unit 4 and the primary land ownership of privately owned and that access and opportunities are provided through private land. Due to the fact this request was brought forward by one of the landowners, it is important that the Commission and Department provide a public hearing to learn more from other landowners on the matter, as well as hunters. Kirschenmann provided the recommendation to the Commission that they accept the petition and move it into the rule promulgation process. The petition was accepted.



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MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY SPRING TO ACCEPT THE PETITION. The motion carried unanimously.

7. Petition 252 Walleye and Sauger Limit

[Action Item: Petition]

Chris Longhenry, Fisheries Regional Supervisor from the Chamberlain office, presented historical Walleye angler use, catch rates, and harvest information for Lake Francis Case. He also explained the general movement trends for Walleye in the reservoir: they tend to move to the upper section in late fall, stay through early spring, and move toward the lower section during the summer. He acknowledged that during warmer springs, the upper part of the lake may have the only few open boat ramps, which concentrate fishing pressure. However, historical data shows that fishing pressure in May and June has a greater impact on the Walleye population, supporting the current regulations for the harvest levels seen on Lake Francis Case.

Mr. Chmela explained his purpose for bringing this petition to the Commission. He shared that over the past few years the weather has turned nicer earlier in the year, resulting in higher fishing pressure on the north half of Lake Francis Case. Concerns exist that this early pressure is resulting in fewer fish to catch during May, June, and July, and anglers are leaving the area to go fish in other locations. His limit change would help provide for more fish later in the year and ensure there would be fish to catch for locals and those who come to the area. Chris Longhenry, GFP Area Fish Supervisor from Chamberlain, provided a presentation to the Commission on past studies and explained that the limit change will not have an impact on the number of fish available later in the season. His presentation explained multiple variables that impact fish caught throughout the year, and that this type of management activity has been tried before with little success. Director Kirschenmann provided the recommendation to the Commission to deny the petition based on the information presented. It was also discussed for the Department to look at survey methods that could obtain some new information on fishing pressure during this time of the year to coincide with a new fish tagging study being implemented. The Commission denied the petition.

MOTIONED BY NYBERG, SECONDED BY KIRKEBY TO DENY THE WALLEYE AND SAUGER LIMIT PETITION. Yea votes (6) Rissler, Cull, Nyberg, Kirkeby, Spring, Theel. Nay votes (1) Bartling. The motion carried.

RESOLUTION 26-02

WHEREAS, Wes Chmela of Oacoma, South Dakota, submitted a Petition to the Game, Fish and Parks Commission (Commission) dated March 20, 2026, requesting that the Game, Fish and Parks Commission amend ARSD § 41:07:03:03 (Daily, possession, and length limit restrictions on special management waters) – to change the daily limit of walleye/sauger to 2 for boat and shore fisherman for the area of Lake Francis case from the highway 44 bridge upstream to big bend dam Jan 1 – April 1, or to close walleye harvest for boat anglers for the area of Lake Francis case from the highway 44 bridge upstream to big bend dam Jan 1 – April 1, 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



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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 to change the daily limit or prohibit walleye harvest for the area of Lake Francis case from the highway44 bridge upstream to big bend dam Jan 1 – April 1; and

WHEREAS, the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (Department) believes the current walleye harvest limit on Lake Francis Case is appropriate; and

WHEREAS, differential daily limits on select portions of waterbodies will complicate angler compliance and enforcement of regulations; and

WHEREAS, angler use and walleye harvest during January through March is typically a low percentage of the overall use and harvest on Lake Francis Case; and

WHEREAS, the petition is specifically designed to increase May – June walleye catch rates in the Chamberlain area, however this is unlikely to occur due to walleye post spawn movements throughout the reservoir and natural annual catch rate variability caused by midsummer prey fish availability; and

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, Wes Chmela of Oacoma, South Dakota.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE WALLEYE AND SAUGER LIMIT RESOLUTION. Motion carried unanimously.

8. Antelope and Turkey

[Action Item: Finalization]

The commission finalized rule modifications to antelope and turkey draws presented by Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator. The changes will allow an individual to select a second choice within the first Antelope draw if they chose the Special Antelope hunting unit. This will result in a delay to the Special Antelope draw from mid-April to early-July, and it will be included as a unit option in the firearm Antelope Hunting Season draw. The Nonresident Archery Antelope on public and private land draw will also be delayed to early-July. The rule changes also resulted in the removal of the 3rd antelope draw, which has not been necessary in recent years.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE ANTELOPE AND TURKEY APPLICATION FOR LICENSE FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

9. Deer

[Action Item: Finalization]

The commission finalized rule modifications to align the Landowner Free Antlerless Whitetail unit to match the Archery and Muzzleloader Antlerless Whitetail units presented by Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator. GFP staff recommended restricting Archery and Muzzleloader licenses to buck only and the commission discussed license reductions for East River and West River Deer Hunting Season units. The



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changes to deer license types and license numbers would occur via administrative action at the May meeting.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE DEER APPLICATION FOR LICENSE FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

10. Elk Hunting Seasons

[Action Item: Finalization]

Finalizations on elk hunting seasons were presented by Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator. The commission finalized rule modifications to allow Landowner-Own-Land Antlerless Elk licenses to be available to qualifying resident landowners in any Prairie Elk Hunting unit. The commission also finalized rule modifications to create an East River Elk Hunting unit, excluding Crow Creek Reservation, and aligned all Prairie Elk Hunting Season dates to September 1 to December 31. In Custer State Park, the commission finalized rule modifications to open the CSP Special Antlerless Elk Hunting Season, with a modification from the proposed rule change to split the antlerless season into two seasons. License number changes for all elk seasons were approved via administrative action to manage elk populations toward hunting unit objectives.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE ELK APPLICATION FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY SPRING TO APPROVE THE SPECIAL CSP ELK HUNTING SEASON FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY CULL TO AMEND AND APPROVE THE SPECIAL CSP ELK HUNTING SEASON FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY NYBERG TO APPROVE THE PRAIRIE ELK HUNTING SEASON FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE BLACK HILLS, CUSTER STATE PARK AND PRAIRIE ELK LICENSE FINALIZATIONS. Motion carried unanimously.

11. Waterfowl Hunting Seasons

[Action Item: Finalization]

The commission finalized rule modifications to reduce the daily bag limit from fifteen to eight for the August Management Take and Early Canada Goose Hunting Season presented by Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator. In addition, the rules were modified to remove five counties from the August Management Take to reduce Canada goose harvest in those areas.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY NYBERG TO APPROVE THE AUGUST MANAGEMENT TAKE AND EARLY FALL CANADA GOOSE FINALIZATIONS. Motion carried unanimously.

12. Bighorn Sheep Hunting Season

[Action Item: Finalization]

The commission approved administrative action to increase the number of bighorn sheep licenses from seven to eight presented by Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator. The additional license will be available in Unit BH4 for a total of two licenses in this unit which includes the Rapid City, Deadwood, and Hell Canyon herds.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY SPRING TO APPROVE THE BIGHORN SHEEP HUNTING SEASON FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.



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13. Lake Francis Case Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Amy Gebhard, Fisheries Biologist from the Chamberlain Office, provided the Commission with an update on Lake Francis Case. The September 2025 lake survey indicated that Walleye abundance is currently above the 9-year average, with growth and condition remaining within typical parameters. Furthermore, creel surveys conducted from April through July reflected typical levels of angler effort and harvest, with Walleye catch rates aligning with the 30-year average of approximately one Walleye per hour.

14. Walleye Spawning 2026

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Jake Davis, Fisheries Program Administrator, presented to the Commission an update on walleye spawning operations. Egg requests for 2026 are just over 93 million to meet the request of around 43.5 million walleye/saugeye fry and juveniles to stock 94 waters across the state. Egg collection efforts will start around 4/12 and continue until egg needs are met. Eggs will also be provided by the states of Nebraska, Minnesota, and Iowa, and will be raised at all three state facilities and Gavin's Points National Fish Hatchery. Fish stocking of both hatchery and trap and transfer products has also been occurring and will continue into May.

15. Pete Lien and Sons Shooting Complex Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

John Kanta, Terrestrial Section Chief and Mike Klosowski, Regional Supervisor, gave an update on the Pete Lien & Sons Shooting Sports Complex. The shooting complex has been open since early November 2025. Visitation has far exceeded expectations with over 30,000 visits since opening. There are a number of events and competitions scheduled throughout 2026. Law enforcement agencies from a number of different agencies are training and qualifying on a weekly basis. There is a tremendous amount of excitement for the facility and visitors express great appreciation for the shooting complex.

16. License Sales Report

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Director Kirschenmann provided a summary to the Commission on license sales from the beginning of the license year (December 15) through the month of March. Overall, small game and fishing license sales are good. Small game is ahead for both Resident and Nonresident sales, and fishing license sales have picked up over the last month due to nice weather. Kirschenmann explained the department does not expect a lot of change for small game sales over the next month or two, but will continue to monitor fishing license sales. The next few months are important as application periods and drawings occur for elk and combined deer draw.

17. Dock 44 Prospectus

[Action Item: Parks]

Sean Blanchette, Parks Division Business Administrator, provided a background of the Dock 44 Marina concession operation at Snake Creek Recreation Area. Because the current lease is in the final year, the Department has conducted an appraisal of the facilities and has developed a prospectus for the business opportunity to be publicly advertised. Blanchette described the required purchase of the Possessory interest, as well as an overview of the current lease's required minimum services and fee structures. The Department is not proposing any reductions to the current level of services or any adjustment to the 5.5% Franchise Fee or the 1.5% Repair and Maintenance Reserve in the draft contract, which will be advertised at a 10-year term. Blanchette stated that the prospectus would be released the day after Commission approval, with interested parties having roughly 80 days to respond, with a late June deadline. Blanchette requested authorization to advertise the prospectus with the draft lease terms and prospectus advertisement timeline discussed with the Commission.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING , SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE DOCK 44 PROSPECTUS RELEASE TO THE PUBLIC. Motion carried unanimously.



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18. Custer State Park Wind and Fire Damage Update

[Info Item: Parks]

Matt Snyder, West Regional Park Supervisor, updated the Commission on cleanup efforts from the December 18 windstorm. All day use facilities and trails are open for use. Staff are still working on fine cleanup of campgrounds. Two salvage contracts are underway. Baker Timber is in the process of clearing downed trees along the northern end of the Wildlife Loop Road. Morgon Logging is working south along HWY 87. Both contractors have removed several tons of material. An update on the Qury Fire was also provided. The Qury fire burned just over 1,200 acres in the park. No structures were impacted and the fire stayed on the forest floor. The fire did burn up approximately 3 miles of boundary fence on the West side of the park. Staff are currently working on replacing this section of fence.

19. Missouri River Outlook

[Info Item: Parks]

Pat Buscher, Central Region Park's Supervisor, updated the GFP Commission on the current status of the Missouri River Reservoirs and the season's forecast based upon April 2026 US Army Corps of Engineers data. With reduced mountain snowpack, roughly 70% of normal, the Corps forecast reduced inflows coming into the 3 mainstem reservoirs of Fort Peck in Montana, Garrison in North Dakota, and Oahe in SD. Lake Oahe is predicted to experience reduced inflows, resulting in decreasing water level elevations but providing a serviceable amount of water to keep the vast majority of boat ramps and marinas open and functional on Lake Oahe. The 3 reservoirs downstream from Oahe will experience similar balanced flows in the Sharpe, Frances Case, and Lewis and Clark reservoirs. The area throughout the central Missouri River corridor, experienced a rather dry winter and spring to date, but look forward to improved spring and summer moisture.

20. Adventure 250 Program

[Info Item: Parks]

Heather Berg, Parks GIS Program Specialist, and Rachel Comes, Volunteer Coordinator, presented an overview of the 2026 annual park theme, *Adventure 250: Make Your History in South Dakota State Parks*, which aligns with national and state celebrations of America's 250th anniversary and will run from Open House Weekend through Labor Day. The presentation highlighted how the program is designed to encourage repeat visitation, outdoor recreation, and meaningful connections to state parks through a wide variety of themed and accessible activities for all ages. Participants can complete and submit adventures to earn points, with incentives including weekly prize drawings, regional engagement opportunities, and grand prize packages for those reaching 250 points, as well as guaranteed rewards through the Adventure 250 Club. The program will be supported by an interactive map, weekly promotions, and sponsorship from Independent Insurance Agents of South Dakota, with an emphasis on enhancing visitor engagement and showcasing unique experiences across all parks.

21. Manager's Conference – Investing In Our Employees

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, explained the purpose and goals of the annual Park Managers Conference that was held April 7-9. Approx. 80 Parks Division staff attended the conference this week, which included 4 speaker presentations, a tour of area parks, and 5 roundtable discussions held with staff to receive their input.

22. ARPA Summary

[Info Item: Parks]

Adam Kulesa, Planning and Development Administrator of Parks & Recreation, provided a brief update on the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds appropriated to the South Dakota Game, Fish & Parks. 93% of the projects are complete, and the remaining projects are scheduled to finish during the spring of 2026. Approximately 17.4 million dollars in funds will be utilized upon completion to improve drinking water and wastewater systems across the state.



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23. Tagged Fish Program

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, outlined the 2026 goals for the tagged fish program, the 8 water bodies that will be stocked with tagged fish, a participant survey, and how the department will market the program to attract anglers to state parks.

24. March and YTD Camping Unit and Revenue Reports

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented the March monthly and year-to-date report numbers for the Division of Parks & Recreation related to camping units and revenue. March camping units were up 54% for the month and 45% YTD. The Parks Division revenue was down 1% overall for the month of March but is up 1% YTD. Annual park license sales remain very strong especially double license sales that have been promoted this spring to customers making camping reservations. The 3-year historical comparisons indicating revenue and permit sales were shared along with data on lodging and camping units.

25. Adjourn

[Action Item]

A Regular Commission Meeting will be held on May 7-8 at the Custer State Park Event Barn, Custer, SD starting at 1 pm MT.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 10:00 AM CST ON April 10, 2026. Motion carried unanimously.

Submitted respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kevin Robling".

Kevin Robling, Department Secretary