

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Regular Commission Meeting Minutes

Matthews Training Center | Pierre, South Dakota | January 11-12, 2024

Call Meeting to Order

Chair Rissler called the meeting to order at 1 pm CST at the Matthews Training Center located in the Joe Foss Building in Pierre, South Dakota, on January 11, 2024. Commissioners Stephanie Rissler, Julie Bartling, Jim White, Robert Whitmyre, Jon Locken, Travis Bies, Chuck Spring and Bruce Cull were present. [Note: Commissioner Cull had an excused absence on day two of the meeting.] With eight commission members present, a quorum was established. The public and staff can listen via SDPB Livestream and participate via conference or in person, with approximately 70 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 December 2023 meeting. Minutes are available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/archives/>.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE DECEMBER 2023 REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Additional Salary Days [Action Item]

Chair Rissler called for additional salary days from the Commissioners. Whitmyre, Bies, and Spring each submitted one additional salary days.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY WHITE TO APPROVE THE ADDITIONAL SALARY DAYS. The motion carried unanimously.

4. Election of Officers [Action Item]

Chair Rissler opened the floor to nominations for the Commission Officer Positions.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY WHITE TO NOMINATE RISSLER FOR CHAIR. The motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO NOMINATE BIES FOR VICE-CHAIR. The motion carried unanimously.

5. 2024 Legislative Item Update [Info Item]

Secretary Robling gave a brief update on the legislative items being brought during the 2024 legislative session.

6. Strategic Plan Year in Review [Action Item]

Deputy Secretary Simpson gave an overview of the Strategic Plan and the Department's achievements in 2023.

7. New Staff Introduction [Info Item]

Secretary Robling and Wildlife Director Kirschenmann introduced several new staff throughout the department to the Commissioners.

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Open Forum

Deputy Secretary Scott Simpson opened the floor at 2:01 pm CST 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.

- 2:03 pm: Bills Hinds, representing the Lake Oahe Walleye Restoration Coalition discussed the Aquatic Management Priorities.
- 2:07 pm: Bill Waeckerle, representing the Lake Oahe Walleye Restoration Coalition discussed the Aquatic Management Priorities.

Deputy Secretary Simpson closed the Open Forum at 2:11 pm CST.

8. Petition #207: Elk Preference Points

[Action Item]

Steven Swanson of Rapid City submitted Petition #207 in which requested the Commission to give one any elk tag to a hunter over the age of 65 and also has over 100 years of elk preference in different season.

Wildlife Director Kirschenmann informed the Commission that elk hunting in South Dakota exceeds supply and demand and continues to increase with limited opportunities to expand elk populations that allow hunting opportunities. He also stated that there were 53 individuals that were 65 years of age or older and held more than 100 combined elk preference points, and 165 that were younger than 65 years old that held more than 100 combined elk preference points. The average expected wait for drawing a Black Hills archery or firearm any elk license was 18 years, the average expected wait time for Custer State Park archery any elk license was 35 years, and the average expected wait for drawing a Custer State Park firearm any elk license was 52 years. The current license draw procedure produced all individuals with an opportunity to draw a license, but individuals with more preference points have a greater opportunity because preference points are cubed and a random draw is conducted using each preference point.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO DENY PETITION #207. The motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY BIES TO ADOPT RESOLUTION 24-01. The motion carried unanimously.

9. Petition #208: Landowner Own Land Deer Seasons

[Action Item]

Layton Hendrickson of Bison submitted Petition #208 in which requested the Commission make Landowners on their own land deer tags valid from September 1 to January 1, similar to the free antlerless tags. He requested that the Landowner on Own Land Deer Tags be only valid for a firearm during the standard rifle season and also valid with legal archery equipment for the remaining dates while keep this tag only valid for owned/operated land.

Wildlife Director Kirschenmann informed the commission that the intent of free antlerless licenses was established as a tool for landowners to address local deer numbers and associated depredation; whereas landowner own land licenses are to assure a landowner a guaranteed opportunity to hunt and harvest deer on their own land. A resident that obtains a landowner own land firearm any deer license can purchase an archery any deer license that is valid from September 1 to January 1. SD Codified Law § 41-6-19.3 limited landowner own land deer licenses to firearm season dates for West River Deer, East River Deer, and Black Hills Deer.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO DENY PETITION #208. The motion carried unanimously.

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MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY SPRING TO ADOPT RESOLUTION 24-02 DENYING PETITION #208. The motion carried unanimously.

10. Bighorn Sheep Hunting Season Proposal

[Action Item]

Chad Lehman, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented to the Commission a summary of the latest bighorn sheep management in the form of fall and winter survey counts and harvest recommendations. Following the conclusion of the presentation, Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, brought forth the Department recommendations to increase the number of bighorn sheep licenses from 11 to 16. Specifically, recommendations were to increase 4 ram licenses in the Hell Canyon unit (BH4) to 8 licenses and 3 ram licenses in the Custer State Park unit (CU1) to 4 licenses. There was also discussion about providing ram hunting opportunity for the Rapid City unit (BH1). Any potential changes to license numbers and the Bighorn Sheep Hunting Seasons will be further discussed at the March Commission meeting.

MOTIONED BY WHITE, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED CHANGES, BRINGING FINALIZATION IN THE APRIL 2024 MEETING. The motion carried unanimously.

11. Waterfowl Hunting Seasons Proposals

[Action Item]

Rocco Morona, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented to the Commission a Waterfowl Status and Season Setting presentation. He gave the Commission a quick overview of the migratory bird regulatory and season setting process. He explained flyway and federal responsibilities and how they dovetailed into South Dakotas state season setting process. Rocco next explained how habitat and population numbers are estimated annually through operational monitoring programs. The results of the 2023 habitat and population survey were then discussed. The Commission was next briefed on federal waterfowl season frameworks and how they served as the bounds from which we select our seasons and how we can always be more conservative than federal frameworks but not more liberal. Rocco then went through the Adaptive Harvest Management process and explained the decision matrix for the upcoming duck season indicating a liberal harvest package was recommended. Rocco next discussed duck hunter trends and the long term declines that SD is seeing in resident duck hunter participation. Switching gears to geese, Rocco explained Canada goose population trends and how an issue with the visual correction factor in the 2022 survey inflated (402,000) the estimate beyond what was reasonable. We seem to have had a good survey in 2023 and the estimate of 145,000 fell in line with what we saw from a goose depredation standpoint. Lastly, Rocco gave an update on the 3-duck regulation experiment. He indicated that things were going very well and that we set a record as far as registered 3 duck hunters which translates into 8% of all migratory bird certified hunters.

Following the presentation, Wildlife Director Kirschenmann and Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, brought forth several proposals on the Waterfowl Hunting Seasons. GFP recommendations were shared to remove 20 counties from August Management Take and no other changes were recommended. After Commission discussion, the August Management Take unit change recommendation was proposed, in addition to a proposal to increase nonresident waterfowl licenses by 5% which would result in an increase of 315 licenses. Future changes to the Waterfowl Hunting Seasons will be discussed during the March Commission meeting.

11a. Duck Hunting Season

No action taken as there were no proposed changes from last year.

11b. August Management Take

Proposed changes from last year would be to remove Aurora, Beadle, Bon Homme, Brookings, Clay, Davison, Hanson, Hutchinson, Jerauld, Kingsbury, Lake, Lincoln, McCook, Miner, Minnehaha,

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Moody, Sanborn, Turner, Union, and Yankton counties from the August Management Take Hunting Season unit.

MOTIONED BY BARLTING, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED CHANGES, BRINGING FINALIZATION IN THE APRIL 2024 MEETING. The motion carried unanimously.

11c. Early Fall Canada Goose

No action taken as there were no proposed changes from last year.

11d. Goose Hunting Season

No action taken as there were no proposed changes from last year.

11e. Special Goose Hunting Season

No action taken as there were no proposed changes from last year.

11f. Spring Light Goose Hunting Season

No action taken as there were no proposed changes from last year.

11g. Sandhill Crane Hunting Season

No action taken as there were no proposed changes from last year.

11h. Tundra Swan Hunting Season

No action taken as there were no proposed changes from last year.

11i. Youth Waterfowl Hunting Season

No action taken as there were no proposed changes from last year.

11j. Nonresident Waterfowl Hunting Season

The department brought forth no recommended changes from last year. Discussion by Commissioners requested the Department add 5% more licenses to both the 3-day and 10-day nonresident waterfowl seasons.

A MOTION BY BIES, WITH A SECOND BY SPRING TO INCREASE THE NONRESIDENT WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON WAS WITHDRAWN AFTER DISCUSSION THAT THE DEPARTMENT WOULD BRING BACK A PROPOSAL ON LATER IN THE MEETING FOR THE COMMISSION TO APPROVE.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO TABLE 11J TO LATER IN THE MEETING. The motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY WHITE TO APPROVE THE NEWLY AMENDED NONRESIDENT WATERFOWL PROPOSAL, WHICH INCREASED THE TOTAL NONRESIDENT WATERFOWL LICENSES BY 315 LICENSES, 210 FOR THE 10-DAY AND 105 FOR THE 3-DAY MAKING THE TOTAL ALLOCATED NONRESIDENT WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON 6,615 LICENSES. Motion carried unanimously.

12. Elk Hunting Season Proposals

[Action Item]

Wildlife Director Kirschenmann and Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, brought forth several proposals on the Elk Hunting Seasons. Elk harvest and population survey information will be available during the March Commission meeting, so no license changes were recommended during the January Commission meeting. However, GPF recommendations to increase the maximum number of licenses that could be allocated to a season were proposed. These changes would allow the Commission flexibility in the future to take Administrative Action to modify the number of licenses in a unit, without having to go through

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the Administrative Rule promulgation process. GFP will provide specific license number recommendations for 2024 and 2025 during the March Commission meeting.

12a. Custer State Park Early Elk Hunting Season

Proposed changes from last year were to increase the maximum number of licenses from ten to twenty “any elk” licenses and provide the option for up to twenty “antlerless elk” licenses. Actual license number recommendations for the next two years will be provided during the March commission meeting after population surveys have been completed.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED CHANGES AND BRING FINALIZATION TO THE APRIL 2024 MEETING. The motion carried unanimously.

12b. Custer State Park Elk Hunting Season

Proposed changes from last year were to increase the maximum number of licenses from twenty to thirty “any elk” licenses and the option to provide up to thirty “antlerless elk” licenses. Actual license number recommendations for the next two years will be provided during the March commission meeting after population surveys have been completed.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BIES TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED CHANGES AND BRING FINALIZATION TO THE APRIL 2024 MEETING. The motion carried unanimously.

12c. Special Custer State Park Antlerless Elk Hunting Season

Proposed changes from last year were to specify the option to provide up to twenty “antlerless elk” licenses. Actual license number two years will be provided during the March commission meeting after population surveys have been completed.

MOTIONED BY WHITE, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED CHANGES AND BRING FINALIZATION TO THE APRIL 2024 MEETING. The motion carried unanimously.

12d. Archery (Black Hills) Elk Hunting Season

Proposed changes from last year were to (1) increase the maximum number of “any elk” licenses from 200 to 300 and “antlerless elk” licenses from 150 to 300. Actual license number recommendations for the next two years will be provided during the March commission meeting after population surveys have been completed. (2) Clean-up Administrative Rule to match unit boundary descriptions for Black Hills Archery Elk with Black Hills Firearm Elk.

MOTIONED BY SPRING, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED CHANGES AND BRING FINALIZATION TO THE APRIL 2024 MEETING. The motion carried unanimously.

12e. Black Hills (Firearm) Elk Hunting Season

Proposed changes from last year were to Increase the maximum number of “any elk” licenses from 600 to 800 and “antlerless elk” licenses from 1,200 to 1,500. Actual license number recommendations for the next two years will be provided during the March commission meeting after population surveys have been completed.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY WHITMYRE TO APPROVE THE PROPOSED CHANGES AND BRING FINALIZATION TO THE APRIL 2024 MEETING. The motion carried unanimously.

12f. Prairie Elk Hunting Season

Proposed changes from last year were to Increase the maximum number of “any elk” licenses from 150 to 200 and “antlerless elk” licenses from 300 to 400. Actual license number recommendations

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for the next two years will be provided during the March commission meeting after population surveys have been completed.

THE APPROVAL OF THE PROPOSED CHANGES AND BRING FINALIZATION TO THE APRIL 2024 MEETING CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

13. Lewis & Clark Marina Slip Fees

[Action Item]

Sean Blanchette, Staff Specialist, Division of Parks and Recreation introduced Chris Donlin and Heath Denney of Lewis and Clark Marina. Blanchette provided an overview of the Lewis and Clark Marina operation and concession lease background information, which includes the requirement for Commission approval of any slip fee increases more than 3% starting in 2023. Blanchette explained that the slip fee increases are related to an ongoing marina renovation project which includes a complete replacement of the majority of the marina docks and land-based components at the expense of the Concessionaire. The rates subject to Commission approval were provided in the Commission Book. The final phase of dock replacements and fee increase proposal is expected in the 2024-2025 off season. Donlin provided the status of the project and explained several factors which have led to delays in implementation and resulting increased costs. Denney provided information on slip allocation processes and slip options for marina tenants if the price of their current slip became prohibitive.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE SLIP FEE INCREASES TO LEWIS & CLARK MARINA SLIPS. The motion carried unanimously.

14. End of Year Volunteer Report

[Info Item]

Rachel Comes, Statewide Volunteer Coordinator, presented the Commissioners with an overview of the 2023 End of Year Volunteer Report.

15. Outreach and Event Attendance

[Info Item]

April Larson, Marketing Coordinator, and Shala Larson, R3 and Relevancy Manager, reported on the 2023 educational programming and event participation. In 2023, South Dakota Game Fish and Parks held 3,663 programs with 97,439 participants. Of the reported programs, Parks staff hosted 1,941 events, reaching 63,983 participants. Educational and event programming is a great partnership between Wildlife and Park Divisions. Many outreach events are held in South Dakota State Parks because of the recreational opportunities and resources available. Both the Wildlife Division and the Parks Division continue to focus on recruitment by teaching skills to encourage new hunting, fishing, and park entrance license sales and increase park visitation. Environmental education, fishing, hunting skills, and outdoor skills have the highest percentage of programs.

16. 2024 Parks Theme Announcement

[Info Item]

Nick Harrington, Communications Manager, and Rachel Comes, Statewide Parks Volunteer Coordinator, announced the Parks Theme for 2024 is 'Reeling in the Memories.'

COMMISSIONER CULL RECEIVED AN EXCUSED ABSENCE ON DAY TWO.

17. Parks and Recreation Staff Division Awards

Parks & Recreation Director VanMeeteren provided the Commission with the 2023 Division Award winners who were celebrated at the Parks Division annual conference that was held virtually on Dec. 5, 2023. Award recipients were: Award of Appreciation (2) – Good Earth Park Manager Jim Henning and DCOS John Murphy; Seasonal of the Year - Tom Zerr of Indian Creek Recreation Area; Volunteers of the Year – John and Sue Hefner of Pease Creek Recreation Area; Teamwork Award (2) – Advance Training Project held at

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Spring Creek Recreation Area – Shane Swenson, Bailey Biegler, Mark Crawford & Jason Cox and Fort George Aquatic Access Project – Chris Corder, Kyle Potter, Forrest Chapman, Ryan Raynor, Doug Boes, Katelyn Mann, Paul Sedljamer, Keith Garrigan and Carter Kniecht; Innovative Programming Award – Park Manager Brad Nelson – Rocky Point Recreation Area Wounded Warrior Archery Antelope Hunt; and the Distinguished Service Award – Regional Park Supervisor Willy Collignon.

18. End of the Year Parks Sales Report

[Info Item]

Parks & Recreation Director VanMeeteren provided the Commission with an overview of how the Division ended the year with park revenue, visitation and camping units, highlighting some of the trends in these numbers over the past 20 years.

19. Youth Turkey Recruitment License

[Action Item]

Wildlife Deputy Director Switzer reported to the Commission that there are ten total Youth Turkey Recruitment licenses available and no more than two can be issued to any organization. This year, there were four applicants for eight licenses. The applicants were Pheasants Forever, Delta Waterfowl Foundation, Midwest Chapter of Wild Sheep Foundation, and the Lake County Long Beards.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY BARLTING TO APPROVE TWO YOUTH TURKEY RECRUITMENT LICENSES EACH TO PHEASANTS FOREVER, DELTA WATERFOWL FOUNDATION, MIDWEST CHAPTER OF WILD SHEEP FOUNDATION, AND THE LAKE COUNTY LONG BEARDS. The motion carried unanimously.

20. Bighorn Sheep Auction License

[Action Item]

Wildlife Deputy Director Switzer discussed the Bighorn Sheep Auction License with the Commissioners. He reported that anytime there is at least three bighorn sheep licenses available for the regular draw, a bighorn sheep license can be allocated an eligible organization as an auction license to promote the work the department does for bighorn sheep management. The department recommended the license be open to any bighorn sheep hunting unit. This year, the department received two applications from Midwest Chapter of Wildlife Sheep Foundation and the Iowa Foundation for North American Wild Sheep.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO APPROVE THE BIGHORN SHEEP AUCTION LICENSE FOR THE MIDWEST CHAPTER OF WILDLIFE SHEEP FOUNDATION. The motion carried unanimously.

21. Aquatic Management Priorities

[Action Item]

Aquatics Section Chief John Lott presented the Aquatics Management Priorities to the Commission. He reported that 25 comments were received from the public in association with the call for public comment on aquatic management priorities for 2024. In addition to comments received by email, the Rooster Bait shop asked for comments through their Facebook site and written comments were gathered in the store. Upon review of comments, an additional priority of improving shore and ice fishing access for the Black Hills Fisheries Management Area was added to the list of priorities for Commission consideration. Additionally, statewide measurable outcomes for aquatic management efforts were included in the 2024 plan, including benchmarks for angler satisfaction, license sales, and angler days, implementation of the aquatic habitat stamp plan, and increasing fish rearing capacity to consistently meet area fisheries manager's stocking requests by 2029. The commission adopted aquatic management priorities, as modified.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY WHITMYRE TO ADOPT THE AQUATIC MANAGEMENT PRIORITIES. The motion carried unanimously.

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22. 2023 Habitat Stamp Projects

Jason Jungwirth, Senior Wildlife Biologist and Ryan Wendinger, Habitat Program Administrator, discussed the 2023 Habitat Stamp Projects with the Commission. Terrestrial project accomplishments that were completed during 2023 using Habitat Stamp funds were shared. This included projects on GPAs such as 888 acres of grass seedings, 68 acres of trees planted, 257 acres of food plots, and 6 road access projects to name a few. Additionally, Habitat Stamp Funds were used for CREP and WIA payments. In 2023, approximately \$800,000 were used to make annual payments on CREP contracts on 18,400 acres. Around \$900,000 was issued under the WIA program for signing bonuses for new or extended long term access contracts. Over 58,000 acres of permanent habitat were encompassed with these contracts that have an average contract length of 8 years.

Aquatic project accomplishments that were completed during 2023 using Habitat Stamp funds were also shared. This included dam infrastructure maintenance that was done on 3 dams with a total of 24 of the 86 being worked on since 2020. There was also 7 boat ramp improvement and development projects. Twelve habitat and improvement projects were completed with 9 being fish habitat structure placements, an aeration project, a water quality project, and a fencing project. And there was 36 total access and trail improvement and development projects which consisted of 6 docks, 6 piers, 1 ADA ramp and 21 other access related projects.

A statewide map was shared showing Habitat Stamp project locations across the state for 2023 and a map showing all projects since inception. The Habitat Stamp Dashboard was also shared as an option for the public to view project information.

23. Hunting Season Report & License Sales Update

[Info Item]

Wildlife Deputy Director Switzer gave a report on the hunting season and license sales.


24. Adjourn

[Action Item]

Next meeting is scheduled for March 7-8, 2024, at the Missouri Avenue Event Center in Pierre, SD.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY BIES TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 9:52 AM CST ON JANUARY 12, 2024. Motion carried unanimously.

Submitted respectfully,



Kevin Robling, Department Secretary