



Commission Meeting Minutes

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

523 E Capitol Avenue | Pierre, South Dakota 57501

January 9-10, 2025 | Ramkota Convention Center | Pierre, SD

REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING

Call Meeting to Order

Chair Rissler called the meeting to order at 1 pm CST at the Ramkota Convention Center in Pierre, SD on January 9, 2025. Commissioners Stephanie Rissler, Jim White, Travis Bies, Jon Locken, Bruce Cull, Travis Theel were present, with Robert Whitmyre joining virtually. Commissioner Julie Bartling was absent excused. With seven 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 83 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 2024 meeting. Minutes are available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/archives/>.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY BIES TO APPROVE THE DECEMBER 2024 REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Additional Salary Days [Action Item]

Chair Rissler called for additional salary days from the Commissioners, but none were brought forward.

4. Election of Officers [Action Item]

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

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

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

5. 2025 Legislative Session [Info Item]

Deputy Secretary Simpson gave a brief update on the legislative items being brought during the 2025 legislative session.

6. Staff Introductions [Info Item]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, introduced Kerri Richards the new Division Grant Specialist who will oversee the LWCF and RTP grant programs.

Director Kirschenmann introduced Daniel Cox, new Schools Coordinator at the Outdoor Campus West in Rapid City. Daniel has a bachelor's degree in Outdoor Recreation and a master's degree in business administration.

Open Forum

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 2:03 pm CST for discussion from those in attendance in matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda not as a finalization.

2:05 pm: Julie Anderson of Rapid City, SD testified virtually in opposition to mountain lion hunting season.



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2:07 pm: Nancy Hilding of Black Hawk, SD representing Prairie Hills Audubon Society testified virtually in opposition mountain lion hunting season and the nest predator bounty program.

2:11 pm: Bill Waeckerle of Pierre, SD testified in person in support of the walleye update.

The open forum closed at 2:15 pm CST.

7. Petition #231: Change East River Rifle Season to Muzzleloader [Action Item: Petition]

Deon Entringer of Colman, SD submitted petition #231 in which requested the Commission require the change of East River rifle season to East River muzzleloader.

Wildlife Director Kirschenmann introduced the petitioner and Mr. Entringer provided a summary of reasons why he desires the East River deer season to be changed and only allow muzzleloaders and shotguns, no rifles. Kirschenmann then provided some background information and shared a few explanations why the department is providing a recommendation of denial. Those included population management measures, the season is meeting the deer action plan goals, potential crowding due to increased licenses where situations will require a higher harvest, and the fact that this change would require some deer hunters to go purchase equipment they currently do not have. The commission voted unanimously to deny the petition.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY THEEL TO DENY PETITION #231. The motion carried unanimously.

RESOLUTION 25-01

WHEREAS, Deon Entringer of Colman, South Dakota, submitted a Petition to the Game, Fish and Parks Commission (Commission) dated December 12, 2024, requesting that the Game, Fish and Parks Commission create a new rule in ARSD § 41:06:21 (East River Deer Hunting Season) – to eliminate the use of rifles and only allow for muzzleloaders during the East River deer hunting season (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 eliminate the use of rifles and only allow for muzzleloaders during the East River deer hunting season; and

WHEREAS, there is no evidence of East River Deer firearm harvest limiting the ability to manage deer at desired population levels, and these license numbers can be changed at the hunting unit level; and

WHEREAS, harvest data suggests nearly 60% of East River Firearm Deer hunting units met or exceeded the 50% “buck” tag harvest success objective with an average success rate of 51%; and



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WHEREAS, in order to achieve the same harvest with a less efficient weapon like a muzzleloader or shotgun, license numbers would need to be increased, resulting in more hunter crowding; and

WHEREAS, each year, over 30,000 licenses are sold for the East River Firearm Deer season, and many of these hunters would have to purchase a new weapon and equipment if they could no longer use their high-powered rifle.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Commission does hereby deny the Petition for the reasons herein above 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, Deon Entringer of Colman, South Dakota.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY BIES TO ADOPT RESOLUTION 25-01. The motion carried unanimously.

8. Bear Butte Public Use Restriction

[Action Item: Proposal]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented a rule prohibiting the leaving of human remains at Bear Butte. In 2002, at the request of the tribal groups representing the Bear Butte forum, the Commission approved this same rule as proposed. In 2019 as part of a Dept. rule cleanup process this rule was inadvertently repealed. Bear Butte is viewed as a spiritual worship area by the various tribal groups, and they desire that death is not represented in any form at this site.

MOTIONED BY WHITE, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO APPROVE THE PROPOSAL FOR MARCH FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

9. Public Lands and Waters

[Action Item: Proposal]

Law enforcement section chief Sam Schelhaas presented a proposal to adjust two boating rules. The first rule addressed was 41:04:05:02.01 which pertains to special use personal floatation devices. The second rule addressed was 41:04:05:03 which pertains to fire extinguishers on boats. Both proposed changes would harmonize the administrative rule with the Federal regulations.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY BIES TO APPROVE THE PROPOSAL FOR MARCH FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

10. Prairie Elk Hunting Season

[Action Item: Proposal]

Andrew Norton, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented the two-year recommendations for elk hunting seasons, which will be addressed in 2026. Due to landowner concerns about elk depredation, there is a push to expand hunting opportunities in certain West River counties for 2025. The Commission approved a proposal that includes: expanding the PRE-WRA unit to cover all counties west of the Missouri River that currently do not have an elk hunting season; extending the elk hunting season in PRE-27A (Fall River County) by two months, with season dates set from September 1 to December 31; and offering resident-only antlerless elk licenses to qualifying landowners and operators in PRE-27A.



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MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY BIES TO ADOPT THE PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

11. Bighorn Sheep Season

[Action Item: Proposal]

John Kanta, Terrestrial Section Chief, presented changes to bighorn sheep hunting to expand the unit boundary for BHS-BH4 and clean up unit descriptions.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO ADOPT THE PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

12. Mountain Goat Hunting Season

[Action Item: Proposal]

John Kanta, Terrestrial Section Chief, spoke on mountain goat hunting season for 2025-2026.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN AS THERE WERE NO CHANGES TO THE PROPOSAL. FINALIZATION WILL TAKE PLACE IN APRIL 2025.

13. Special Deer and Special Antelope

[Action Item: Proposal]

Andrew Norton, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented about the special deer and special antelope hunting seasons and no changes were recommended for 2025 and 2026.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN AS THERE WERE NO CHANGES TO THE PROPOSAL. FINALIZATION WILL TAKE PLACE IN APRIL 2025.

14. Waterfowl Hunting Seasons

[Action Item: Proposal]

Andrew Norton, Senior Wildlife Biologist, brought forward proposals on waterfowl hunting seasons.

14a. Duck Hunting Seasons

Andrew Norton described based on US Fish and Wildlife Service Federal Waterfowl Register regulation changes, there was a recommendation to increase the Northern Pintail daily bag from 1 to 3 and reduce the number of days for the bonus Teal hunting season from 16 to 9 days.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY THEEL TO ADOPT THE PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

14b. August Management Take

Andrew Norton presented season information on August management take.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN AS THERE WERE NO CHANGES TO THE PROPOSAL. FINALIZATION WILL TAKE PLACE IN APRIL 2025.

14c. Early Fall Canada Goose, Goose Hunting Season, Special Canada Goose Hunting

Andrew Norton also shared information about the recommendation to remove goose hunting seasons specific to Bennett County and integrate goose hunting opportunity in Bennett County into the larger goose Unit 2. This would result in an increased number of days individuals can hunt Canada geese in Bennett County and hunters would no longer be required to obtain a permit to hunt in Bennett County.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BIES TO ADOPT THE EARLY FALL CANADA GOOSE PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.



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MOTIONED BY WHITE, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO ADOPT THE GOOSE HUNTING PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY BIES TO ADOPT THE SPECIAL CANADA GOOSE HUNTING PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

14d. Spring Light Goose Hunting Seasons

Andrew Norton presented season information on spring light goose conservation order.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN AS THERE WERE NO CHANGES TO THE PROPOSAL. FINALIZATION WILL TAKE PLACE IN APRIL 2025.

14e. Sandhill Crane Hunting Season

Andrew Norton shared season information on sandhill crane hunting.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN AS THERE WERE NO CHANGES TO THE PROPOSAL. FINALIZATION WILL TAKE PLACE IN APRIL 2025.

14f. Tundra Swan Hunting Season

Andrew Norton presented information on the tundra swan hunting season.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN AS THERE WERE NO CHANGES TO THE PROPOSAL. FINALIZATION WILL TAKE PLACE IN APRIL 2025.

14g. Youth Waterfowl Hunting Season

Andrew Norton spoke on the youth waterfowl hunting season.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN AS THERE WERE NO CHANGES TO THE PROPOSAL. FINALIZATION WILL TAKE PLACE IN APRIL 2025.

14h. Nonresident Waterfowl Hunting Season

Andrew Norton presented changes proposed to the nonresident waterfowl hunting season.

MOTIONED BY LOCKEN, SECONDED BY THEEL TO ADOPT THE NONRESIDENT WATERFOWL HUNTING SEASON PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

15. Mountain Lion Hunting Season

[Action Item: Proposal]

Terrestrial Section Chief, John Kanta, spoke on changes to the mountain lion hunting season.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY BIES TO ADOPT THE PROPOSAL FOR MARCH FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

16. Spring Creek Restaurant Prospectus

[Action Item: Parks & Recreation]

Sean Blanchette, State Parks Business Administrator, presented a request for authorization to advertise a prospectus for the restaurant operation at Spring Creek Recreation Area. Blanchette provided a history of past operations and previous lease terms. New terms proposed for future operations include a base term of 3 years with renewal options for up to 5 years total, as well as the implementation of a Franchise Fee of 4% of Gross Receipts. Blanchette also indicated that the convenience store, which is currently self-operated by Park staff, will be offered as an optional opportunity. The prospectus will be advertised for a minimum of 30 days with the intent to receive proposals and make an approval recommendation at the March 2025 GFP Commission Meeting.



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MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY THEEL TO ADVERTISE PROSPECTUS FOR APPROVAL IN MARCH. The motion carried unanimously.

17. Snowmobile Season Forecast

[Info Item: Parks & Recreation]

Ryan Raynor, Snowmobile Trails Coordinator, provided an overview of Snowmobile Program budget, operations and projects being discussed. GFP staff work closely with a Governor Appointed Snowmobile Advisory Council and the South Dakota Snowmobile Association to make sure snowmobiler's best interests are being considered when making decisions on budgets, trail reroutes, projects and more. Shoulder season operations keep staff busy as both the Black Hills and East River operations require year-round responsibilities including trail and equipment maintenance and working with landowners, along with the Black Hills National Forest Service. GFP staff are looking to update an Economic Impact Study, work with Black Hills Badlands and Tourism to help promote the 350-mile trail system in the Black Hills and explore different options to collect data on trail use in the Black Hills.

18. 2024 Outreach Programs and Event Numbers

[Info Item: Parks & Recreation]

April Larson, Marketing Coordinator, Rachel Comes, Volunteer Coordinator, and Brandon Maas, HuntSAFE Coordinator, shared updates on 2024 South Dakota State Parks events and outreach, highlighting the 3,752 programs held with 127,435 participants. Parks staff led 2,031 of these events, reaching 91,570 attendees and strengthening partnerships between the Wildlife and Parks Divisions. HuntSAFE saw growth through additional classes and a new free online course, while park entrance license programs like Library Checkout, Go Fourth, and Park Rx continued to connect new audiences to outdoor experiences.

19. State Park Maintenance Skills Education Training

[Info Item: Parks & Recreation]

Derek Dorr, SE Regional Supervisor, presented an informational item explaining some maintenance training made available to GFP staff on basic trade skills needed within the department. The course curriculum is set up for 32 hours of trades education consisting of, 16-hour general construction, 2 hours of plumbing, 2 hours of diesel/small engines, 8 hours of electrical, and 4 hours of welding. To date 54 employees have attended training with 19 more planning to attend this February.

20. Year End Reports

[Info Item: Parks & Recreation]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented the December monthly and final year-end report numbers for the Division of Parks & Recreation related to revenue, visitation and camping units. The Parks Division had a great year with revenue up 13% in December and over 5% for CY2024. Visitation was down 8% for the month of Dec. but overall, for CY2024 visitations were nearly 8 million strong representing a 10% increase over the last 13-year average. Camping units continue to be strong with December numbers being up 18% for the month and the CY2024 numbers up 2% which is nearly 6,500 additional camping units for the year. The 2025 Division goals were also shared with the Commission at the end of the presentation.

21. Bighorn Sheep Auction License

[Action Item: Wildlife]

John Kanta, Terrestrial Section Chief, shared starting in 2013 GFP has made a bighorn sheep license available for auction by a non-profit organization. Administrative rule states that if three or more bighorn sheep licenses are offered by the commission, one of those licenses shall be made available for auction. The entity auctioning the license must agree to give 100% of the proceeds back to GFP. This year GFP received four applications for the auction license. The commission selected the Midwest Chapter of the Wild Sheep Foundation to auction the license.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY WHITE TO AWARD MIDWEST WILD SHEEP FOUNDATION A BIGHORN SHEEP LICENSE FOR AUCTION. The motion carried unanimously.



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22. Turkey Hunter Recruitment License

[Action Item: Wildlife]

Terrestrial Section Chief, John Kanta spoke about starting in 2023 the commission adopted rules to offer the opportunity for non-profit organizations to sponsor youth turkey hunters on turkey hunts. The organizations can select up to two youth to sponsor on a mentor turkey hunt. The commission may issue no more than ten turkey recruitment licenses. This year GFP received three applications for turkey hunter recruitment licenses. The commission approved all three.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BIES TO AWARD THREE TURKEY HUNTER RECRUITMENT LICENSES. The motion carried unanimously.

23. Walworth County Swan Lake Land Exchange

[Info Item: Wildlife]

A proposed land exchange was shared by Ryan Wendinger, habitat program administrator, at Swan Lake in Walworth County. The proposal is for GFP to exchange 1/3 of an acre with an adjoining private landowner in return for acquiring a 1/3 of an acre. This exchange is of mutual interest and would shift an access lane to the south away from a hunting lodge building site and improve access to GFP and our users by avoiding a wetland. The properties were evaluated by a certified appraiser and determined to be of equal value. The Commission will be asked at the March meeting to approve or deny the exchange.

24. Lake Faulkton and Twin Lake Diversion Land Disposals

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Ryan Wendinger, habitat program administrator, shared a proposal to dispose of property at Lake Faulkton in Faulk County and the Twin Lakes Diversion Ditch in Spink County. The property to be disposed of at Lake Faulkton includes approximately 56 lake lots that have been grouped into 19 parcels that combined equal around 25 acres. The total combined appraised value of these parcels is \$248,000. The Twin Lakes Diversion Ditch, originally acquired to as part of a project to divert water to Twin Lakes, is located in Spink County approximately 2.5 miles southwest of Twin Lakes. The diversion structures have been removed as they were need of major repairs/replacement and the ditch was no longer functioning. There are two parcels, one at 2.28 and one at 15.4 acres, that are to be disposed of as they are no longer needed by the department. The total appraised value of both is \$45,000. The Commission will be asked at the March meeting to approve or deny the disposals of these properties, upon approval, parcels will be sold at public auction with bids starting at appraised value.

25. Ice Fishing Access

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Jake Davis, Fisheries Program Administrator, presented to the Commission a summary of efforts made by the Department to provide ice fishing access. Across the state, 240 areas are maintained for ice fishing access. Information on locations of maintained ice fishing access areas can be found on the Public Fishing Access map under the "Ice Fish" tab on the Department website.

26. Lake Oahe Fishery Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Dylan Gravenhof, wildlife biologist, presented walleye relative abundance on the lower end of Lake Oahe was up in 2024 compared to the previous year and the highest abundance observed over the last eight years. Walleye growth on lower Lake Oahe continues to be good and is above objective and walleye condition continues to be good. Walleye abundance on upper Lake Oahe was down slightly in 2024 but still substantially higher than 2017 – 2022. Walleye growth on upper Oahe is still below objective but continues to improve the last 2 years. Walleye condition on upper Oahe is still considered good. Approximately 2.9 million fingerling walleyes were stocked on lower Oahe in 2024 and 2,226 adult prespawm Gizzard Shad were stocked across all of Lake Oahe. The stocking plans for Lake Oahe in 2025 include goals of stocking 1,750 (or more) adult Gizzard shad across the whole lake and 3.2 million walleye fingerlings on upper Oahe. Angling pressure on Oahe was up slightly in 2024 compared to the previous year.



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27. Mountain Goat Action Plan

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Chad Lehman, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented information on the Mountain Goat Action Plan. A brief history summarizing surveys and harvest was presented. For the management of mountain goats, it is recommended that harvest will not exceed 4% of the minimum number counted within the mountain goat core area as determined during bi-annual surveys. When the minimum number counted reaches less than 50 individuals the season will be closed. Other demographic data can be used in assessing season closures and the season can be closed with minimum counts of greater than 50. Currently the season for mountain goats is closed and the commission will now take comments during the comment period before the Mountain Goat Action Plan can be adopted.

28. Waterfowl Status Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Senior Waterfowl Biologist, Rocco Murano gave a brief overview of migratory birds management authority and the Flyway system of cooperative management. Rocco then outlined the federal framework for duck season lengths and daily bag limits with regards to current population levels. Staff recommended waterfowl season structure was explained and Commission members had an opportunity to ask questions. Rocco explained the reasoning for the proposed changes in northern pintail daily bag and bonus blue winged teal season length. Next, Rocco outlined recommended goose regulations and articulated the need for proposed changes to Unit 3 and Special Canada goose hunting seasons.

29. Public Lands Available for Big Game Hunting

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Andrew Norton, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented information about deer hunter numbers and available land to hunt that is publicly accessible.

30. 2024 Habitat Stamp Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Program Administrators Ryan Wendinger and Jake Davis presented updates on 2024 Habitat Stamp projects. Terrestrial projects focused on both Game Production Area habitat improvements and funding Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program payments. Aquatics projects focused on dam maintenance, angler access and fish habitat. Expenditures totaled nearly 2.7 million dollars in 2024 and information on completed projects can be found on the Habitat Stamp Projects Dashboard.

31. License Sales Reports

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Director Kirschenmann ended the January meeting with a brief summary of the 2024 license year sales report. In all, licenses numbers were strong for both upland game and fishing. Trends continue in a positive direction and is a result of South Dakota resources and opportunities.

32. Adjourn

[Action Item]

A Regular Commission Meeting will be held on March 6-7, 2025, at the Ramkota Convention Center, in Pierre, starting at 1 pm CST.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 10:59 AM CST ON JANUARY 10, 2025. Motion carried unanimously.

Submitted respectfully,

Kevin Robling, Department Secretary