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MINUTES

August 31, 2022

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission met in the Buffalo Barracks at Fort Robinson State Park Crawford, NE for the transaction of business, advance public notice having been given through release to news media and official public notice published in the Lincoln Journal Star on August 19, 2022.

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 A.M. Chairman Berggren advised this meeting was being held in conformance with the State Open Meeting Act and the act was available for review on the table at the back of the room. Members present: Chairman Pat Berggren, Broken Bow; Doug Zingula, Sidney; Rick Brandt, Lincoln; Ken Curry, Columbus; John Hoggatt, Kearney; Scott Cassels, Omaha; Dan Kreitman, Wahoo Donna Kush, Omaha; and Bob Allen, Eustis.

Minutes of the business meeting held June 17, 2022 were reviewed.

Motion by Mr. Curry and seconded by Mr. Brandt to approve the meeting minutes. Voting aye: Kush, Zingula, Allen, Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Brandt, and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Minutes of the special strategic planning meeting held on August 12, 2022 were reviewed.

Motion by Mr. Cassels and seconded by Mr. Zingula to approve the meeting minutes. Voting aye: Zingula, Allen, Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Brandt, Kush and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Financial vouchers for June and July were reviewed.

Motion by Mr. Allen and seconded by Mr. Hoggatt to approve the financial vouchers. Voting aye: Allen, Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Brandt, Kush, Zingula and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Director's Report

Director McCoy thanked Mike Morava, Jim Miller and all Fort Robinson staff for hosting us for these meetings and associated activities.

The Director shared the list of 11 awards received by our Communications Division at the recent Association of Conservation Information Conference in Nashville, TN.

Director McCoy reviewed some of the many upcoming events and hunting seasons.

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The Director announced the next Commission meetings will be in Broken Bow on October 20 and 21.

End Director's Report

Chairman Berggren read staff recommendations to call for a public hearing at the at the October Commission meeting to consider amendments to Chapter 3, Boating Regulations, Section 003 Equipment Standards.

Motion by Mr. Cassels, seconded by Ms. Kush to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Allen and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Chairman Berggren read staff recommendations to call for a public hearing at the at the October Commission meeting to consider amendments to Chapter 3, Boating Regulations, Section 012 Waters with Special Restrictions.

Motion by Mr. Curry, seconded by Mr. Cassels to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Curry, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Allen, Cassels and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Chairman Berggren read staff recommendations to call for a public hearing at the at the October Commission meeting to consider amendments to Chapter 3, Boating Regulations, Section 15, Special Rules and Regulations for Non-public Lake Associations.

Motion by Mr. Brandt, seconded by Ms. Kush to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Hoggatt, Kreitman, Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Allen, Cassels, Curry and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Chairman Berggren read staff recommendations to call for a public hearing at the at the October Commission meeting to consider amendments to Chapter 2, Fisheries regulations, Section 010 Special Fishing Permits.

Motion by Mr. Allen, seconded by Mr. Cassels to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Kreitman, Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Allen, Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Chairman Berggren read staff recommendations to call for a public hearing at the at the October Commission meeting to consider amendments to Chapter 4, Wildlife Regulations, Section 003. Antelope, Deer, and Elk.

Motion by Mr. Zingula, seconded by Mr. Brandt to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Allen, Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt, Kreitman and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Chairman Berggren read staff recommendations to call for a public hearing at the at the October Commission meeting to consider amendments to Fisheries C006 Sportfish.

Motion by Mr. Kreitman, seconded by Mr. Zingula to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Kush, Zingula, Allen, Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Brandt and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

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Chairman Berggren read staff recommendations to call for a public hearing at the at the October Commission meeting to consider amendments to Chapter 4, Wildlife Regulations, Section 001. General Wildlife Regulations.

Motion by Mr. Hoggatt, seconded by Mr. Zingula to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Zingula, Allen, Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Brandt, Kush and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

As it was too early to open the public hearings, Chairman Berggren moved down the agenda to the bighorn sheep lottery drawing. Commissioner Allen was selected to pull the winning ticket since it is his last year as a commissioner. The name drawn was Jerry Fischer from Denton. He was called from the meeting to notify him that he won.

The Chair opened the floor to public comments: Randy James from Crawford commented on the history of the James Ranch and how it became part of Fort Rob's history and the park. He feels that more financial resources should be allocated to Fort Rob for improved access to Soldier Creek, more grazing and land management opportunities as well as raising larger buffalo and longhorn herds.

Ross Elwood was present representing the Cowboy Trail West group. He commented on the trail improvements his group has made, 17 miles of the trail from Gordon to Rushville is completed. They maintain 30 miles of trail and are planning for the Hay Springs to mile marker 400 section next. They are looking for funding to do more miles.

Mark Wickard of Bridgeport commented on Bridgeport SRA. He says staff has done a great job with the SRA, things look great, but the access road to the lake needs repairs. He said the city would help with resources to make that happen. He also commented that he does not agree with the elk draw for children, as he feels it should have a higher age limit for kids. He says many adults wait a lifetime for the opportunity, that this is more of an opportunity for the parents than for the children.

There being no more public comments, Chairman Berggren opened the public hearing to consider amendments to Commission Order CO2, Wild Turkey at 8:47 AM. Big Game Program Manager Luke Meduna reviewed staff recommendations. He also reviewed there were comments submitted prior to the meeting. For the public record there was one in favor and one opposed (attached to these minutes) and general comments that were mixed, but most favored the reductions in permits. There were other concerns voiced about season dates, predators, and reducing the harvest limit to 1. Three people testified at the meeting. Mark Wickard of Bridgeport feels that the non-resident bag limit should be 2, Scott Justice of Chadron stated that he thought staff should consider a reducing the season dates, that it starts too early. Les Wright of Crawford stated that he felt predators, especially mountain lions, have had a negative effect on turkey populations, but feels the limit should be 2 birds for non-residents rather than one, as out of state hunters may not come to Nebraska for just one bird. There was no other public testimony. After Meduna answered a variety of Commissioner questions, the public hearing was closed at 9:30 AM.

Motion by Mr. Allen and seconded by Mr. Curry to approve staff recommendations. Discussion ensued about the spring permit limit for non-residents. Mr. Zingula moved, and Hoggatt seconded, to amend the motion by changing the limit for non-residents from one to two permits for the spring turkey season. Following discussion, Allen called for a vote on the amendment. Voting

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aye: Cassels, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Kush, Allen and Zingula; voting nay: Curry, Brandt, and Berggren. Motion carried. The vote was called for the original motion to approve staff recommendations as amended with the non-resident limit of two permits for the spring season. Voting aye: Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Allen and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

The meeting was recessed for ten minutes.

Chairman Berggren opened the public hearing to consider amendments to Wildlife Commission Order CO14, Mountain Sheep, regarding the authorization of mountain sheep hunting permits for the 2023 season at 10:06 AM. Wildlife Division Administrator Alicia Hardin reviewed staff recommendations. There was no public testimony at the meeting. After discussion and addressing the Commissioners' questions, the hearing was closed at 10:31 AM.

Motion by Ms. Kush, seconded by Mr. Brandt to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Allen and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Budget and Fiscal Division Administrator Pat Cole reviewed staff recommendations to approve the proposed budget request for the FY24 and FY25 Biennium.

Motion by Mr. Curry, seconded by Mr. Kreitman to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Curry, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Allen, Cassels and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Parks Division Administrator Jeff Fields reviewed staff recommendations to approve hunting in some recommended state parks and state historical parks.

Motion by Mr. Curry, seconded by Mr. Brandt to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Hoggatt, Kreitman, Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Allen, Cassels, Curry and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Parks Division Administrator Jeff Fields reviewed the staff recommendation that the Commission approve the gift of the Fort Kearny Shooting Sports property consisting of land, associated improvements and equipment, located in Buffalo County, Nebraska, as offered by the Fort Kearny Shooting Sports Association. He answered Commissioner questions related to the 134-acre property.

Motion by Mr. Hoggatt, seconded by Ms. Kush to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Kreitman, Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Allen, Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Upland Habitat and Access Program Manager John Laux gave the upland game outlook and the Open Fields and Waters Report.

Committee reports were given by the respective chairpersons.

Executive Session

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Motion by Mr. Allen and seconded by Mr. Zingula to enter executive session for the purpose of discussing personnel at 11:45 PM, asking the Director and Deputy Director to participate. Voting aye: Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Allen, Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt, Kreitman and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

The Chairman called the meeting back into regular session at 12:17 PM.

Mr. Brandt moved, and Mr. Kreitman seconded, to leave executive session. Voting aye: Zingula, Allen, Cassels, Curry, Brandt, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Kush and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Adjournment

Motion by Mr. Allen and seconded by Mr. Cassels to adjourn. Voting aye: Allen, Cassels, Curry, Brandt, Hoggatt, Kreitman, Kush, Zingula, and Berggren; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

I hereby certify the foregoing is a true and correct copy of action taken by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission at its meeting held August 31, 2022.



Timothy McCoy, Director

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Official Public Record Comments:

August 5, 2022
Nebraska Game Fish & Parks
Sheri Henderson
2200 North 33rd Street
Lincoln/NE 68503-0370

Dear Commissioners,

Please accept the following comments for the hearing record concerning the proposed changes to wild turkey regulations (Order C02) that will be considered at the August meeting. As background, I am a nonresident who has been hunting turkeys in Nebraska for over 15 years. My background includes a M.S. in wildlife and working for numerous state and federal wildlife agencies with pheasant/ quail, waterfowl, ruffed grouse, and environmental review.

Hopefully the commissioners will be briefed on the appropriate facts to make a reasonable decision on the proposed turkey regulation changes. Facts such as: permits sold for each year over the last 5 years to residents and nonresidents/ number of 1st/ 2nd, and 3rd permits issued/ success rate on each permit, adult turkey mortality in a given year, etc. If you do not have the data then any decisions should be delayed until it is provided.

From what I understand/ turkey populations are primarily driven by habitat/ predators/ nesting success, and poult recruitment into the adult population. Turkey populations fluctuate based on recruitment of poults into the adult population. The more hens in the spring population the greater potential for recruitment. Male turkeys fertilize numerous hens each spring and can be harvested at a high rate with minimal impact on future populations. Adult turkey mortality is roughly 50% (insert NE number) from one year to the next.

The covid effect of increased hunting pressure due to people being out of work, working from home, and not being able to do other activities can increase harvest and is a temporary blip in the data. Recent drought and other weather patterns have negatively impacted nesting success and turkey populations in some areas in recent years. Before making any regulation changes/ I propose waiting three years to see if permit sales go down along with hunting pressure and harvest. If weather is favorable for nesting the population has potential to rebound quickly. If you must make changes then I propose the following:

Spring season:

Resident: Unlimited. Personal limit of two permits. Plus one landowner permit

Nonresident: Unlimited. Personal limit of two permits.

*Reducing nonresidents to one permit is a drastic over-reaction. A high percentage of nonresidents will not travel to Nebraska for one permit. This will significantly decrease permit revenue since nonresidents currently pay \$128 per permit while residents only pay \$30. As an example, I spent three weeks hunting turkeys in Nebraska last spring and spent approximately \$1,400. Approximate expenditures included/ \$384 to permits, \$350 camping/ \$500 gas/ plus groceries, restaurants, and miscellaneous.

**As mentioned earlier, harvesting male turkeys does not have a significant impact on future turkey populations because approximately 50% of the birds would die of other causes (predators, weather/disease, car strikes, etc.) and population recruitment is from nesting hens. Limiting permits is unlikely to significantly increase the population. It may have a minor increase in older male turkeys.

***Another option is to remove two weeks at the end of the firearm season to reduce harvest. This would also reduce interference/stress on nesting hens/poults.

Fall Season:

Resident: Unlimited. Personal limit one permit by archery only.

Nonresident: Unlimited. Personal limit one permit by archery only.

*This will allow for a reduced harvest of hen turkeys that are the basis for future nesting/poult recruitment into the population. The fall season has the greatest impact on future turkey populations due to the hen harvest. Another option is to limit fall harvest to bearded birds only as this would protect unbearded hens and many Jake turkeys (hard to see their beards in fall) from harvest. The commission needs to make a reasonable decision that is based on data and turkey biology. Overreacting due to the covid effect is not a good decision. The Nebraska Game Fish & Parks staff made a reasonable proposal that was voted against. Listen to the expert staff as they have an understanding of hunters/ data, and turkey biology.

Sincerely,

Kevin Mixon
205 Harbor Hill Dr.
Mankato/ MN 56001

From: Jeff Mullinix <jeff@popupblind.com>
Sent: Monday, August 29, 2022 8:27 AM
To: Meduna, Luke <luke.meduna@nebraska.gov>
Subject: Turkey hunting regulations

Luke,

With the upcoming meeting regarding Turkey regulations in Nebraska I wanted to make my thoughts known.

First, thanks for what you do at the state of Nebraska to protect and grow our resources, sometimes it may seem like a thankless job. It is highly important and noticed.

I would like to see a 1 bird harvest with no hens. I don't have access to the data you have but this is based on me hunting 5 different areas within an hour of Columbus. Properties that include the Platte

river, Loup river and properties off the river in the rolling hills. We have seen a noticeable and drastic reduction to bird numbers in all of these locations. I myself have not purchased a turkey tag, I'm simply along for the photo's and content when I go with other family members and friends. This alarming decline over the last 5-7 years has me thinking it would be better to do more than not enough to protect the turkey populations in Nebraska. As a side note, I hunt from opening day archery till the last week of the season with someone every year.

I realize not every place is affected equally through the state and maybe bringing back units is something to think about in the future to address this issue. As with many animals being hunted in Nebraska, the hunter only plays a certain part in the management of the population. Many of the issues affecting the population are more difficult to control, but regardless of what percentage of the population the hunter affects, it's something you can control. We need the dominate toms to breed hens, and left to their own devices it appears in some cases hunters, maybe due to the fact they just don't know, will harvest all the toms in the flock and leave the hens unbred.

Please make this part of the public record.

Good hunting,

Jeff Mullinix