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MINUTES  
August 4, 2023

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission met in the meeting room at Niobrara Lodge, Valentine, 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 July 20, 2023.

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 A.M. Chairman Cassels 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: Pat Berggren, Broken Bow; Doug Zingula, Sidney; Rick Brandt, Lincoln; Ken Curry, Columbus; John Hoggatt, Kearney; Donna Kush, Omaha; and Scott Cassels, Omaha. Dan Hughes, Venango; was absent.

Minutes of the business meeting held June 9, 2023, were reviewed.

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

Financial vouchers for June and July were reviewed.

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

#### Director's Report

Director McCoy thanked the Parks staff for the tour of Smith Falls on Thursday and Fisheries staff from Valentine and North Platte for the great fish fry the evening before.

McCoy presented the Midwest Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies Fisheries Biologist of the Year Award to Keith Koupal, NGPC Fish and Wildlife Specialist. Keith was chosen from among his peers in the midwestern states for this award.

Director McCoy also shared news of a Transportation Alternatives Program grant the agency received to finish 26 miles of the cowboy trail from Rushville to the end of our ownership at mile marker 400 near Chadron. The project cost will be split with a 20% NGPC match and is estimated at 1.6 million dollars.

The Director reviewed some upcoming NGPC events and hunting seasons, including the next

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Commission meeting that will be held at Fort Robinson State Park near Crawford October 12 and 13, 2023.

End Director's Report

Chairman Cassels read staff recommendations to call for a public hearing at the October Commission meeting to consider amendments to Chapter 1 Administration Regulations, Chapter 1, Section 006, Rules relating to fees for licenses and permits.

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

Chairman Cassels read staff recommendations to call for a public hearing at the October Commission meeting to consider amendments to Fisheries Commission Order C06 Sportfishing.

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

With a few minutes before the public hearing could begin, Commissioner Hoggatt shared information about an October 7 event in Kearney. The Pawnee at Fort Kearny-Share the history, share the harvest. This 8 AM- 5 PM event will be held at the Fort Kearny State Historical Park

Chairman Cassels opened the public hearing at 8:15 AM to consider amendments to Wildlife Regulations Section 014 Mountain Sheep, regarding the authorization of mountain sheep hunting permits for the 2024 season. Big Game Disease and Research Program Manager Todd Nordeen shared staff recommendations that one lottery tag and one auction tag be granted for the 2024 season. No public testimony was offered before or during the hearing. The hearing was closed at 8:22 AM.

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

Chairman Cassels moved to item 13 on the agenda. Outdoor Education Specialist Amanda Filipi reported on the Dark Skies Project and programs. Merritt Reservoir was named as an International Dark Skies Park a couple of years ago. Filipi shared some of the measures required to be a dark skies park regarding lighting, etc. to eliminate and reduce light pollution. She also shared some of the special programming that is offered at the park to celebrate the dark skies designation.

Chairman Cassels opened the public hearing at 8:33 AM to consider amendments to Wildlife Regulations Section 014, Mountain Sheep regarding adding a new resident management lottery. Wildlife Division Administrator Alicia Hardin reviewed staff recommendations that would add a new resident management lottery application period if a sheep management hunt was authorized (in Commission Orders CO14). An example of when this could be used includes disease/culling the herd to prevent spread to other animals. There were no public comments received prior to this hearing and there was no public testimony at the hearing. The public hearing was closed at 8:55 AM.

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

Chairman Cassels opened the public hearing at 8:57 AM Title 163, Nebraska Administrative Code Chapter 5, Parks Regulations Section 001 General regulations governing the administration and use of state park property, to increase park entry permit fees effective January 1, 2024. Parks Division Administrator Jeff Fields and Assistant Parks Division Administrator Justin Bogue reviewed staff research and recommendations to increase permit fees as follows: Vehicles registered and licensed in Nebraska, annual permit from thirty dollars (\$30.00) to thirty-five dollars (\$35.00) and a temporary (daily) permit from six dollars (\$6.00) to seven (\$7.00). Vehicles not registered and licensed in Nebraska, annual permit from sixty dollars (\$60.00) to seventy dollars (\$70.00) and a temporary (daily) from twelve (\$12.00) to fourteen dollars (\$14.00) The duplicate permit will increase from fifteen (\$15.00) to seventeen dollars and fifty cents (\$17.50) for vehicles registered and licensed in Nebraska and from thirty (\$30.00) to thirty-five dollars (\$35.00) for vehicles not registered and licensed in Nebraska. Six comments were received prior to the meeting via contact us submissions. Five of them were in opposition due to the added expense and one was in support of just raising non-resident permits. No public testified at the hearing and the hearing was closed at 9:21 AM.

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

There was a fifteen-minute recess.

Public Comment Period-No one from public wanted to comment.

Parks Division Administrator Jeff Fields reviewed staff recommendations for Commission approval to apply for a 2023 Recreational Trails Program (RTP) funding to enhance the entrance area of the new Smith Falls State Park walkway, replace decking on the access bridge and provide interpretive signage on new viewing decks and nearby trails. This will further enhance the improvements at Smith Falls as part of the Smith Falls Concept Plan.

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

Parks Division Administrator Jeff Fields reviewed staff recommendations for Commission approval that hunting be allowed in specific State Parks and State Historical Parks. Other than a couple of changes related to deer and turkey mentored hunts and hunter limits on deer hunting in Ponca and Niobrara State Parks, there are no real significant changes from previous seasons.

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Motion by Mr. Berggren and seconded by Mr. Hoggatt to approve staff recommendations “starting no later than Tuesday after Labor Day for the 2023-2024 seasons.” Voting aye: Berggren, Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Curry; Hoggatt and Cassels; Hughes was absent; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Parks Regional Superintendent Bill Oligmueller reviewed staff recommendations for Commission approval for a permanent easement request from the Southern Public Power District for installation of an anchor for a new power pole for an overhead power line at Mormon Island State Recreation Area in Hall County.

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

Communications Assistant Administrator Jeff Rawlinson reviewed the shooting range plan, survey results and the Buffalo Bill SHP shooting range project. The Buffalo Bill shooting range project will a motif and amenities consistent with the history and character of the Buffalo Bill era.

Fish and Wildlife Specialist Keith Koupal reviewed the Merritt Muskie Research results with the Commissioners. The study included the use of pit tags to monitor existing fish for longevity and other purposes as well as trying to determine if muskie can reproduce naturally and, if so, how that might change our rearing and stocking regimen.

#### Executive Session

Motion by Mr. Zingula and seconded by Ms. Kush to enter executive session for the purpose of discussing personnel at 10:48 AM, asking the Directors to participate. Voting aye: Curry, Hoggatt, Brandt, Berggren, Kush, Zingula, and Cassels; Hughes was absent; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

The Chairman called the meeting back into regular session at 11:25 AM.

#### Adjournment

Motion by Ms. Kush and seconded by Mr. Zingula to adjourn the meeting. Voting aye: Hoggatt, Brandt, Berggren, Kush, Zingula, Curry and Cassels; Hughes was absent; 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 4, 2023.

  
Timothy McCoy, Director

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