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MINUTES
March 8, 2024

The Nebraska Game and Parks Commission met in the Hastings Convention Center Hastings, 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 February 1, 2024.

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 A.M. Chairman Zingula 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; Scott Cassels, Omaha; and Dan Hughes, Venango.

Minutes of the meeting held January 19, 2024, were reviewed.

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

Minutes of the special meeting held January 20 were reviewed.

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

Financial vouchers for January and February were reviewed.

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

Director's Report

The Director reviewed upcoming NGPC events, including the opening of Carl's at Mahoney State Park, the NASP state tournament March 16, fisheries public meetings, the kickoff of Trout in the Classroom and Spring outdoor discovery programs, and spring trout stockings.

The Director also reviewed the Wildlife and Sportfish Restoration Program and the dollars that it provides through grants for fish and wildlife conservation in Nebraska. The source of the grant funds is federally collected excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, hunting and fishing equipment and motorboat fuel that provides millions of dollars to the agency each year.

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The April Commission meeting will be at Ponca State Park on April 24 and 25.

End Director's Report

Chairman Zingula read the staff recommendation to call for a public hearing at the April Commission meeting to consider amendments to Commission Order C06, Antelope, Deer and Elk.

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

Because it was not yet time to open the first public hearing, the Chair moved to item 10 on the agenda. Planning and Programming Division Administrator Michelle Stryker reviewed staff recommendations for Commission approval of the Board Resolution to sign the project agreement for the Transportation Alternatives Program which will fund the surfacing of the Cowboy Trail from Rushville to Mile Marker 400, near Chadron.

Motion by Ms. Kush, seconded by Mr. Brandt to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Hughes, Brandt, Kush, Cassels, Curry, Hoggatt and Zingula; voting nay: Berggren. Motion carried.

Chairman Zingula opened the public hearing at 8:16 AM to consider Wildlife Regulations, Section 004, Threatened and Endangered Species, to reflect the changes in federal listing status to the Interior least tern, Northern long-eared bat, Colorado butterfly plant, Eastern black rail, and American burying beetle. Wildlife Division Administrator Alicia Hardin reviewed staff recommendations. There were no comments received prior to the meeting and no public testified at the hearing. The hearing was closed at 8:21 AM.

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

As it was not quite time for the second public hearing, Chairman Zingula moved to item 11 on the agenda. Wildlife Division Administrator Alicia Hardin reviewed staff recommendations for the Commission to approve the acquisition of the Jones Tract in Holt County, Nebraska as an addition to the O. Johnson Emerson Wildlife Management Area. Funding for this project is from a United States Fish and Wildlife grant.

Motion by Mr. Cassels, seconded by Mr. Berggren to approve staff recommendations. Voting aye: Kush, Zingula, Curry, Berggren, Hoggatt Brandt, and Cassels; voting nay: Hughes. Motion carried.

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Chairman Zingula moved to item 12 on the agenda. Fisheries Division Administrator Dean Rosenthal reviewed the results of the creel surveys done at Lake McConaughy which revealed where the surveyed fisherman fished on the lake and the fish they caught.

Chairman Zingula opened the public hearing to consider amendments to Chapter 4, Wildlife Regulations Section 006, Coot, Duck, Goose and Crow, to allow for eligibility requirements for Veterans and Active-Duty Military to be added to the Youth Waterfowl Hunting Season at 8:34 AM. Wildlife Division Administrator Alicia Hardin shared staff recommendations. There were no public comments prior to the hearing and Dustin McKenna of Lincoln NE testified in support and the public hearing was closed at 8:42 AM.

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

Chairman Zingula opened the public hearing to consider amendments to Wildlife Commission Orders C06-Coot, Duck, Goose and Crow for season dates and to allow for a special Waterfowl hunting season for Veteran and Active Military at 8:45 AM. Waterfowl Program Manager John McKinney reviewed staff recommendations and provided a summary of written public comments that were received: one comment was in support of the September 1 opener for early teal; comments for duck Zone 3 included two comments for opening earlier and one comment for opening later; and duck Zone 4 comments included 1 comment representing 29 people for opening the season earlier, 9 comments representing 38 people that agree with staff recommendations and 66 comments opening later than staff recommendations. There was a total of 83 comments representing 137 individuals.

Testifiers at the hearing were:

Hunter Runge of Kearney with Whiskey Slews Outfitting shared his hunting history and requested that Zone 4 season starts October 26 or later and to push back white fronts season two weeks so it is also later.

Adam Knecht of Omaha shared he would also like the season to be later with a November 5 start date in Zone 4.

Don Cox of Hastings said he was speaking on behalf of himself and his partners and they all support the staff recommendations for waterfowl.

Mike Mahoney of Omaha stated that they missed the early ducks last year and he supports staff recommendations for this year.

Isaac Brown with River Lodge Outfitters stated his preference is to have a later season in Zone 4 because last year they harvested 30% of their ducks in one week in January.

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John Svoboda of Omaha supported staff recommendations for ducks as he doesn't like late duck seasons, but he would like to see teal season moved up to September 1.

Chris Costa of Hastings prefers a later season in Zone 4 to run from November 19-January 31, or perhaps to do a split sometime in November to satisfy those that want to hunt early season too. PPRAs do not open until late November.

Jason Foster from Grand Island stated that he would like to push Zone 4 back for better Mallard hunting.

Ty Johnson of Grand Island feels this is a zone issue and not a date issue, he prefers a later season in Zone 4.

The Commissioners held a lengthy discussion regarding the comments and testimony.

Motion by Mr. Curry and seconded by Mr. Hughes to approve staff recommendations.

Motion made by Mr. Hoggatt seconded by Mr. Brandt to amend the motion to adjust teal season to start in the Low Plains September 1 for 16 days and High Plains September 1 running for 9 days. Voting aye: Hoggatt, Hughes, Berggren, Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Curry; and Cassels; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

Motion by Mr. Hoggatt and seconded by Ms. Kush to make another amendment to the motion changing the opening of Zone 4 making it a week later to October 26th to January 7th. Voting aye: Hughes, Berggren, Brandt, Kush, Cassels, and Zingula; voting nay: Curry. Motion carried.

Motion made by Mr. Berggren and seconded by Mr. Hoggatt to amend staff recommendations to push white front season opener back until October 12th through December 22 and January 25-February 9; Snow Goose to October 12th through January 8 and January 25th through February 9th. Voting aye: Berggren, Brandt, Kush, Cassels, Curry, Hughes, Kush and Zingula.

Voting aye on the staff recommendations, as amended: Berggren, Brandt, Kush, Cassels, Curry, Hughes and Zingula. Motion carried.

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After a 15-minute recess, Chairman Zingula opened the public comment period. Chad Gideon of Wood River was present to share that river otters have decimated the fish population in his pond. He requests the Commission allow the harvest of more than one otter per season and asked if he could get a depredation permit. The Chairman asked the Wildlife Division to work with him on this issue.

Budget and Fiscal Division Administrator Kay Mencl gave a year in review of permits and shared developments with the new permit system.

Executive Session

Motion by Mr. Cassels and seconded by Mr. Berggren to enter executive session for the purpose of discussing personnel at 11:42 AM. Voting aye: Hughes, Berggren, Brandt, Kush, Zingula, Curry; Hoggatt and Cassels; voting nay: None. Motion carried.

The Chairman called the meeting back into regular session at 12:30 PM.

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

Adjournment

Motion by Mr. Cassels and seconded by Ms. Kush to adjourn the meeting at 12:34 PM. Voting aye: Hughes, Brandt, Berggren, Kush, Zingula, Curry, Hoggatt, and Cassels; 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 March 8, 2024.

Timothy McCoy, Director

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