

Fish & Wildlife Board
APPROVED Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, June 18, 2008

The Fish & Wildlife Board convened a meeting at 5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, June 18, 2008, in the Skylight conference room at the State Office Complex in Waterbury, Vermont.

Attendees:

Board Members: Brian Ames, Vice Chair; R. Keith Armstrong; Jeremy Baker; Wayne Barrows; Walt Driscoll; Ed Gallo; Cyndy Jones; Craig O. Lantagne; Craig Lefevre; Claude Rainville; John Roy; Jeff Salvador; and Robert Shannon.

Absent: Dana Kittell, Chair.

Department Employees: Commissioner Wayne Laroche, Col. Robert Rooks, Major David LeCours, John Austin, Shawn Haskell, Tom Decker, David Englander, and Cathy Merrill.

Visitors: Doug Barrows from Maine; Roy Kilburn, representing the Whistling Arrow Archery Club; Clint Gray, President, Vermont Bearhound Assn. (VBA); and VBA Board Members Sally Greenwood, Gary Greenwood, and Stuart Kinney.

Vice Chair Ames called the meeting to order at 5:05 p.m.

Approval of May 21, 2008 Minutes

Rainville moved to accept the minutes, which was seconded by Driscoll. The minutes were unanimously approved as written (Baker and Armstrong were not present for this vote).

Third Vote: 2008 Moose Season Proposal

John Austin, Interim Director of Wildlife, informed the Board that the Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (LCAR) approved the 2008 moose season proposal with no changes. However, LCAR members expressed concern that the moose permit applications were available prior to the rule being promulgated. Austin said the disparity is due to the biological data not being available until several weeks after the moose season ends. Austin said the moose team will be thinking creatively over the summer regarding this issue and will make recommendations to the Board on how to address this concern. One remedy may be to have a two year moose rule.

Commissioner Laroche said applications are available earlier as a marketing tool and as a convenience for the hunting community. Extending the deadline to submit applications would make it difficult to administratively process the large number of applications in a shortened timeframe.

Lefevre made a motion to accept the 2008 moose season proposal, which was seconded by Roy. The rule was unanimously approved (Baker and Armstrong were not present for this vote).

Update: Captive Hunt Regulation

Austin reported that the Department has made progress on preparing a proposed captive hunt regulation. Industry representatives failed to provide information to the Department on what they would like to see in the rule, ignoring three agreed-to deadlines. The Department has developed a new rule that it believes addresses LCAR's concerns, and will present it to the Board at its July meeting.

Commissioner Laroche said Department staff will meet with Agency of Agriculture staff to interface with that Agency to ensure the proposal is compatible with Agriculture's regulations.

Shannon said he and Board Member Barrows attended the meeting with industry representatives; there was no misunderstanding of the process, and the industry representatives were well aware that the Department and Board fully intended to move forward with a rule.

The Department will send the draft regulation to the Board and industry representatives prior to the Board's July meeting, and will offer again to sit down with industry representatives prior to the July meeting.

Discussion – Update and Review: 2008 Deer Season Proposal

Shawn Haskell, Wildlife Biologist for the Department, gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Board which outlined the models he and the Deer Team use in estimating deer populations.

A lengthy discussion followed on deer density objectives, deer yards, distribution of hunter surveys, a proposed third deer tag, and hunting season proposals in adjoining states.

Barrows distributed "questions about the herd size compared to tag sales and success rates" that he had prepared.

Baker asked if the Department's proposal would change after the public hearings. Commissioner Laroche said the Department will listen to the public input, however, he did not see the Department backing away from the proposed numbers; Shawn Haskell said he could not in good conscience recommend less antlerless permits for southern Vermont. Baker faulted the Department for a lack of transparency and for not informing the public of its goals for the deer herd. However, Baker also said that antler restriction proponents should have realized that more antlerless deer would have to be harvested once the antler restriction passed.

Shannon asked that Haskell and the Commissioner attend the Board's public hearings scheduled for Rutland and Lyndonville, and suggested Haskell give a 30 minute presentation on deer management minus the statistics.

Ames said there would need to be a clear transition from the Department's presentation and questions/answers, to the Board hearing portion of the meeting, which would be to only hear testimony.

Ames took note of who would attend each meeting (Baker is on vacation and will be unavailable for both).

Lyndonville: Gallo, Roy, Jones, Lefevre, Driscoll, and Lantagne.

Rutland: Ames, Shannon, Salvador, Barrows, Armstrong, and Rainville.

Ames will check with Chair Kittell; if he is not available for those meetings, someone will need to Chair the meetings in his absence.

Armstrong addressed the Board regarding the recent press coverage concerning comments he made about Commissioner Laroche and the proposal to issue 3,200 antlerless permits in Zone N.

Armstrong said Commissioner Laroche and Shawn Haskell had visited the Bennington area and his land to look at deer habitat prior to the article being published, and although he still disagrees with the increase in antlerless permits, he has a new respect for both the Commissioner and Haskell.

Ames thought the Board and Department could now get beyond the issue.

Vermont Bearhound Association

Clint Gray, President of the Vermont Bearhound Association, distributed a chart which calculated black bear population in the state.

Mr. Gray said there is a limited amount of bear in the state, and the Association would like to see the prohibition of guiding bear hunts for hire. Currently only guiding for hire with dogs is illegal; the Association would like to see all guided black bear hunts prohibited.

Col. Rooks said this change could be made by rule or by a change in statute. David Englander asked Mr. Gray to provide the Association's request to the Board in writing.

Stuart Kinney, VBA Board member, addressed the Board regarding internet advertisements for guided bear hunts on posted land, and is concerned that the bear population cannot withstand this hunting pressure; he also said some landowners are feeding bear for photographic opportunities.

Mr. Kinney described a bear trap designed in Ontario that the Association would like to give to the Department for its use in removing nuisance bear. It was suggested that the Association speak directly to the Department about this issue.

Roundtable

Gallo was dismayed that there was still no formal process in place to handle petitions, and asked that it be on the agenda for the July Board meeting.

Jones was concerned about the lack of accessibility for fishing along the highways, and it appears that the Vermont Agency of Transportation is limiting access by its placement of guardrails. Austin said District fisheries biologists have raised this issue with VTrans with little progress. Commissioner Laroche will discuss this issue with Department staff and may speak to his counterpart at VTrans to see what, if anything, can be done. It was noted by Col. Rooks that some landowners may be requesting VTrans place guardrails to restrict public access across private lands.

Jones also noted that Shawn Haskell made the comment that R&L Archery was “pushing for a three deer limit” at a recent public meeting, and said she hoped that commercial businesses were not pushing their agendas on the Department. Commissioner Laroche responded that commercial businesses’ opinions carry no more weight than any others.

Driscoll asked for bear population numbers and the numbers of nuisance bear complaints. The bear population numbers are on the Department’s website and Col. Rooks will provide the complaint numbers at the July meeting.

Shannon gave the Board an update on a Wanton Waste Rule Committee meeting that was held this week. At some point the Department will come back to the Board with a draft regulation; in the meantime, the Board should be aware of how other states are dealing with this issue.

Barrows asked for moose/vehicle collision statistics; Col. Rooks responded the collisions are running the same as last year; however, June is the highest mortality month. Moose/vehicle collisions usually run 225-230 per year. Barrows said if the Department knew it was going to propose a three deer limit, it should have been mentioned at the public deer meetings held in the spring.

Next Meeting – Date Change

Due to David Englander’s unavailability for the July 16 meeting, a vote was taken whether to move the meeting to July 9. The majority of the Board approved of the change, so the next meeting will be held on Wednesday, July 9, in the Skylight conference room at the State Office Complex in Waterbury.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/cpm

Catherine Pirie Merrill
Executive Staff Assistant
Fish & Wildlife Department

The mission of the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department is the conservation of all species of fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the people of Vermont.