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Fish and Game Commission



Wildlife Heritage and Conservation
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WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Committee Co-Chairs: Commissioner Williams and Commissioner Burns

September 13, 2017 Meeting Summary

The following is a summary of the meeting as prepared by staff.

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. by Commissioner Burns at the California Tower Highgrove, Room 200, 3737 Main Street, Riverside. Commissioner Burns gave welcoming remarks.

Erin Chappell introduced California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) staff and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) staff, and outlined the meeting procedures and guidelines, noting that the Committee is a non-decision making body that provides recommendations to the Commission. She reminded participants that the meeting was being audio-recorded and that the recording will be posted to the Commission website.

Committee Co-Chairs

Anthony Williams	Present
Russell Burns	Present

Commission Staff

Valerie Termini	Executive Director
Erin Chappell	Wildlife Advisor
Rick Pimentel	Analyst

DFW Staff

Stafford Lehr	Deputy Director, Wildlife and Fisheries Division
Kevin Shaffer	Chief, Fisheries Branch
Kari Lewis	Acting Chief, Wildlife Branch
Patrick Foy	Captain, Law Enforcement Division
Chris Stoots	Lieutenant, Law Enforcement Division

1. Approve agenda and order of items

The Committee co-chairs approved the agenda and order of items.

2. Public forum for items not on the agenda

Roy van de Hoek (Ballona Institute): Encouraged efforts to bring back species such as the sharp-tailed grouse, Guadalupe fur seal, butterflies, and pin cushion orchids. Noted appreciation for Commissioner Williams' engagement on the Ballona wetlands restoration and parking lot issues.

Marcia Hanscome (Ballona Institute): Concerned about impacts to wildlife associated with the restoration of Ballona wetlands as proposed under the anticipated draft environmental impact report (DEIR) and requested a delay in the release of the DEIR until the baseline is changed.

Winston Vickers (UC Davis): Provided information about mountain lions in the Santa Ana Mountains, including concerns about genetic isolation and need for habitat connectivity.

Vicki Long (The Cougar Connection): Concerned about the impacts of development and lack of habitat connectivity on mountain lions, in particular, connectivity issues within the I-15 corridor. Extended an invitation to the Commission to tour the area to get a better understanding of the issue.

David Warren (Sierra Club, Los Angeles Chapter): Noted homeless encampments in the area are interfering with mountain lion use of some corridors.

3. Identify and discuss initial recommendations for 2018-19 upland game bird regulations

Erin Chappell provided background information, noting the referral of Petition #2016-010 from the Commission to DFW for consideration in this package, and introduced Kari Lewis. Kari noted that DFW does not plan to propose any changes except possible changes to the sage grouse quotas, based on the spring survey data. Stafford Lehr discussed the sage grouse survey protocol and conservation framework.

Public Discussion

A stakeholder asked about the age and sex of harvested sage grouse; DFW did not have that information available. A stakeholder noted that hunted species are not listed as threatened or endangered. Stafford Lehr responded that DFW will recommend listing species as threatened or endangered as warranted but noted the important contributions of hunters in species recovery through conservation efforts. For example, through partnerships with the hunting community, the tule elk population has increased from fewer than 20 to more than 1700 animals. Likewise, conservation efforts for sage grouse are now focusing on improving the sage brush ecosystem, benefiting not only sage grouse, but also many other species. Another stakeholder expressed appreciation for the efforts of DFW and farmers and ranchers to conserve lands for sage grouse. Another stakeholder noted that DFW has been ultra-conservative with sage grouse management and that hunting organizations are supportive of this approach, given the concern for the species.

4. Discuss and approve recommendations for 2018-19 regulations

Erin Chappell provided background information, noting this is the last opportunity for WRC to make any recommendation on proposed regulation changes for four rulemaking packages before the notice hearing in December.

(A) Mammal hunting

Kari Lewis noted that DFW does not plan to propose any changes, beyond the anticipated changes to season and bag limits, pending completion of the management plans. Stafford noted that the elk management plan is close to completion, the deer plan will be next, followed by the antelope and sheep plans.

Public Discussion

A stakeholder expressed appreciation for the update on the status of the elk management plan and noted that the SHARE (Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement) Program is helping in Del Norte County and there is interest in expanding the program. A stakeholder asked whether the elk and antelope plans would include a chapter on the interaction with other species.

(B) Waterfowl hunting

Kari Lewis presented on a proposed change in the Northeastern Zone to create a 3-way split season for white-fronted geese, coinciding with the white goose season to address depredation issues in the Northeastern California Zone, except in the newly established Klamath Basin Special Management Area (SMA). The SMA would maintain the majority of hunt days during the general season.

Public Discussion

Two stakeholders expressed appreciation for DFW's efforts to work on the SMA to address concerns in the Northeastern California Zone. A stakeholder noted the potential for the Ballona Wetlands Ecological Reserve to provide habitat for migrating greater white fronted geese.

(C) Central Valley Chinook salmon sport fishing

Kevin Shaffer noted that DFW does not plan to propose any changes beyond the anticipated changes to season and bag limits, and that the Pacific Fisheries Management Council is just starting the pre-stock analyses.

Public Discussion

A stakeholder asked if there are any efforts planned to restore salmon in the Santa Margarita watershed. Kevin Shaffer responded that efforts related to steelhead are underway but not for salmon.

(D) Klamath River sport fishing

Kevin Shaffer noted that DFW does not plan to propose any changes beyond the anticipated changes to season and bag limits. He also discussed last year's closure and noted that salmon are just starting to return to the Trinity River.

No public comments.

Committee Recommendation

WRC recommends that the Commission authorize publication of a notice of its intent to amend regulations for mammal hunting, waterfowl hunting, Central Valley Chinook salmon sport fishing, and Klamath River sport fishing for the 2018-19 seasons, consistent with changes discussed during today's meeting.

5. Discuss and possible recommendation for phase 2 falconry regulation change options and potential timing

Erin Chappell provided background and an overview of the discussions at the January 2016 and May 2016 WRC meetings. She also noted that the Office of Administrative Law approved the most recent regulation changes adopted by Commission in December 2016, and that the new regulations will go into effect on October 1, 2017. Stafford Lehr reviewed four requests currently being discussed with stakeholders: (1) Petition #2016-014, related to rehabilitated raptors; (2) changes to the prairie falcon drawing; (3) goshawks in the Lake Tahoe Basin; and (4) peregrine falcons. Stafford Lehr requested additional time before moving forward with a possible WRC recommendation to give DFW time to identify any issues with implementation of the new regulations and to continue working with the falconers on the remaining issues.

Public Discussion

Two stakeholders expressed appreciation for DFW's efforts to work with the falconers on these issues and supported DFW's request for additional time. One stakeholder requested more transparency with the data collected by wildlife rehabilitators, noting that the data is valuable to researchers. Another stakeholder noted appreciation for DFW and Commission support of falconry, suggested allowing falconers to keep red-tailed hawks that cannot be relocated away from airports, and opposed the take of prairie falcon fledglings from the wild for falconry.

Committee Direction

The WRC co-chairs agreed to DFW's request for additional time and will revisit this issue at a future WRC meeting.

6. Discuss and possible recommendation for wild pig management proposal

Erin Chappell presented an overview of the process to date and highlighted changes to the staff proposal based on stakeholder input received during and after the May 2017 WRC meeting related to importation and transportation, recreational take, depredation, revenue, and the two proposed options.

Public Discussion

A stakeholder commented that the proposal has a measured, balanced approach and tone, and supports Option 2, the new designation, as wild pig is a non-native species that should not be classified with either native game or native nongame species. Another stakeholder commented that the proposal is headed in the right direction, noting that a majority of the hunting community agrees that a non-game designation (Option 1) is not appropriate and that special attention should be given to the title for the new designation (Option 2), suggesting “exotic game” or “invasive game” as possible options. The stakeholder further noted concerns about revenue associated with the validation fee, the need to address agricultural impacts, and support for increasing SHARE Program opportunities. Another stakeholder noted this has been a long process and the proposal presented today is a strong one. A stakeholder commented about the need for the Commission and DFW to be open and transparent about whether the goal is to eradicate wild pigs or not. A stakeholder suggested offering both the individual wild pig tag and the validation at the same time as an option, and asked how the proposal concluded that night hunting was a safety issue. DFW Law Enforcement Division staff explained that the proportion of hunting accidents at night are much higher than hunting accidents during the day, and gave several examples.

Commissioner Williams noted the lack of strategies to address wild pig management and asked if it would be possible to direct some of the revenue generated from the sale of wild pig tags toward resources to address impacts from wild pigs. Stafford Lehr responded that the Wildlife Branch is planning to develop a strategic plan for the Big Game Management Account to look at all the programs, noting the need to address the damage wild pigs are causing on the landscape.

Committee Recommendation

WRC recommends that the Commission forward the proposal on wild pig management with Option 2 to California State Assembly Member Bigelow for consideration.

7. Predator Policy Workgroup

- (A) Predator Policy Workgroup member presentations on draft terrestrial predator policy and regulatory proposals**
- (B) Discuss and possible recommendation for terrestrial predator policy and regulatory proposals**

Erin Chappell provided an overview of the July 2017 Predator Policy Workgroup (PPWG) meeting outcomes and an update on the draft PPWG report developed following the meeting. Erin explained that PPWG was unable to finalize the report in time for this WRC meeting and that a majority of PPWG members were requesting additional time to complete the report. As a result, no presentations were made and, without a PPWG report, there was no discussion of the policy or potential regulatory proposals.

Public Discussion

Three PPWG members spoke in support of having additional time to finalize the report, noting

that the draft report is close to being complete and they would like the opportunity to complete it so all the effort that has gone into this process is not delegitimized. However, the members noted staff workload should be a consideration. A PPWG reviewer commented that the reviewers have not had an opportunity to comment on the PPWG report and reminded the group of the original issues and intent behind the workgroup. A stakeholder presented on coyote populations, noting the need to manage the populations to protect threatened and endangered species.

Committee Direction

WRC agreed to the PPWG request for additional time to complete the report with stipulations: (1) a PPWG meeting will be held before Thanksgiving; (2) PPWG must finalize the report at that meeting; (3) no changes will be made to the report after the meeting; (4) once finalized, the report will be sent to the reviewers to provide them with an opportunity to comment on the report; and (5) PPWG members will be given time to present the report at the January 2018 WRC meeting, as originally proposed for this meeting. The WRC co-chairs also noted that if PPWG is unable to finalize the report at its final meeting, WRC would proceed without the report.

8. Delta Fisheries Forum

(A) Staff report on Delta Fisheries Forum

Erin Chappell presented an overview of the Delta Fisheries Forum held in May 2017, highlighting staff recommendations from the staff report on possible next steps.

(B) Discuss and possible recommendation for next steps

Public Discussion

A stakeholder supported the staff recommendation for a delta fisheries management policy, noted the importance of research to inform management decisions, presented a proposal related to scientific collecting permits, and suggested ways the Commission could encourage DFW to facilitate additional research. Another stakeholder encouraged the Commission to meet with Peter Moyle (UC Davis) and other specialists on this issue.

Committee Recommendation

WRC recommends that the Commission adopt the recommendations as presented in the staff report.

9. Future agenda items

(A) Review work plan agenda topics and timeline

Erin Chappell reviewed the current work plan and proposed agenda topics for the January 2018 WRC meeting, which include discussions of upland game bird and sport fishing regulations, Russian River sport fishing regulations, and lead ban implementation. Staff proposed expanding Russian River sport fishing regulations to

coastal low-flow regulations to include an update and discussion of the DFW coastal streams workshop scheduled for this fall. Staff also proposed adding PPWG per WRC direction under Agenda Item 7.

No public comments

(B) Potential new agenda topics for Commission consideration

No public comments.

Committee Recommendation

WRC recommends that the Commission approve changing the Russian River sport fishing agenda topic to coastal streams low-flow regulations and adding PPWG to the work plan for January 2018.

Adjourn

Commissioner Burns adjourned the meeting at 2:48 p.m.