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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 20, 2018 Meeting Summary

Following is a summary of the Wildlife Resources Committee (WRC) meeting as prepared by staff. An audio recording of the full meeting may be accessed online at www.fgc.ca.gov/meetings.

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Commissioner Williams at the Natural Resources Building, 12th Floor Conference Room, 1416 Ninth Street, Sacramento. Commissioner Williams gave welcoming remarks.

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

The following individuals were in attendance:

Committee Co-Chairs

Anthony Williams	Present
Russell Burns	Absent

Commission Staff

Valerie Termini	Executive Director
Melissa Miller-Henson	Deputy Executive Director
Ari Cornman	Wildlife Advisor
Craig Castleton	Regulatory Analyst
Sergey Kinchak	Staff Services Analyst

Department Staff

Kevin Shaffer	Chief, Fisheries Branch
Kari Lewis	Chief, Wildlife Branch
Patrick Foy	Captain, Law Enforcement Division
Erin Chappell	Nongame Program Manager, Wildlife Branch

Brad Burkholder	Environmental Program Manager, Wildlife Branch
Eric Larson	Environmental Program Manager, Bay-Delta Region
Karen Mitchell	Senior Environmental Scientist, Fisheries Branch
Scott Gardner	Senior Environmental Scientist, Wildlife Branch

1. Approve agenda and order of items

The Committee approved the agenda and order of items.

2. Public comment for items not on the agenda

A commenter discussed ferrets and asked to see evidence of a “verifiable, self-sustaining, feral ferret colony” and gave several comments in support of allowing ferrets as pets.

A commenter spoke about regulations for individual bag limits versus boat limits when fishing for finfish. He was advised that the request would require a regulation change and that he would need to petition the Commission for the change.

A commenter highlighted the wildlife habitat lost to recent large wildfires and suggested that hunting in fire-damaged areas should be closed for the next season until assessments can be conducted on the impacts to wildlife.

3. Department updates

(A) Wildlife Branch

Kari Lewis indicated that the elk management plan is nearing completion, and progress is being made on the bighorn sheep and deer management plans. The Department has recently hired a human dimensions expert and an R3 (recruit, retain and reactivate) coordinator.

Kari also discussed DFW’s response to the wildfires. Kevin Shaffer highlighted that the joint Commission/State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection policy was an effective tool, but that implementation may have waned over the years.

(B) Fisheries Branch

Kevin Shaffer discussed the strategic trout and trout hatchery plan, and that there will be future opportunities for input in early 2019. Karen Mitchell gave a presentation on the sportfish regulation revisions project under development by the Department.

(C) Law Enforcement Division

Patrick Foy mentioned that new wildlife officers are being added to the field after graduation from the academy and asked the fishing guides for patience as the new officers become more proficient in their jobs. He also highlighted the work of the Department Wildlife Investigations Lab in poaching and wildlife attack verification analyses.

Public Discussion

A commenter asked how academy classes were filling up. Patrick explained the academy

cycle and a brief overview of the recruiting process. Another commenter brought up the problem of recruitment and retention issues. Another commenter asked about who is selected to be field training officers, and Patrick explained the selection process.

4. Initial recommendations for 2019-20 regulations

Upland (resident) game birds was the only rulemaking on the calendar for initial vetting. Scott Gardner gave a presentation on upland game bird populations, focusing on sage grouse and pheasants.

Public Discussion

Commissioner Williams asked about the prospects for next year's sage grouse tags, and Scott talked about the social and biological factors surrounding hunting recommendations from Department. A participant asked about increasing shooting hours for wild turkey; Scott enumerated some of the concerns with the idea, but stated that the Department would continue to speak with stakeholders about expanding turkey hunting opportunities. A commenter suggested that wildlife area managers be given the discretion to determine end times for hunting. Another commenter indicated that Pheasants Forever would be willing to supply birds for introduction on public lands.

5. Committee recommendations for annual regulations

Ari Cornman provided some background and introduced the topic.

(A) Mammal hunting

Brad Burkholder gave a presentation and stated that the Department would be revisiting tag quotas and hunt zones for some species, including bighorn sheep and elk. No changes to deer or antelope were anticipated.

Public Discussion

Several participants expressed the judgment that elk and bighorn sheep populations could support higher quotas in some areas, especially for mature rams, and that some hunt zones could be split into smaller hunt periods or reconfigured. Another commenter pointed out that other states have higher relative sheep quotas. Brad indicated that the Department wants to plan for the long-term health of herds, but is in general agreement with trying to increase hunting opportunities, including sheep fund-raising tags. Other commenters gave specific recommendations and urged completion of the bighorn sheep management plan. A participant asked about elk depredation, and Brad responded that there has been an increase on the north coast and in the La Panza area. A commenter recommended a thorough assessment of wildlife populations in areas burned by wildfires, a hiatus on hunting in those areas, and habitat assessments for various life history factors.

(B) Waterfowl hunting

Brad enumerated three waterfowl recommendations: (1) a falconry-only season, (2) allowing "small" in addition to "large" Canada geese in the Northeastern Zone and

Klamath Basin Special Management Area (SMA), and (3) adjusting the timing of Imperial County SMA.

Public Discussion

A non-governmental organization participant indicated that he believed his members would likely support the proposals.

(C) Central Valley Chinook salmon sport fishing

Karen Mitchell talked about the plans for regulatory options in the Central Valley Chinook salmon fishery, including the possibility of a jack fishery.

Public Discussion

A participant asked about the range being considered for jacks, that there were claims of overfishing despite hatcheries euthanizing large numbers of fish, asked for more time for stakeholder involvement, and recounted the economic impacts of reduced fishing opportunities. Karen indicated that Department staff had not met yet to discuss the issue, but the range of jacks was likely going to be 0-4. Kevin clarified that overfishing of salmon was not due to recreational anglers. Valerie Termini clarified that the term “overfishing” is a specifically-defined term from the Magnuson–Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

(D) Klamath River Basin salmon sport fishing

Karen Mitchell introduced the topic.

Public Discussion

A commenter thanked the Department for its compliance program, which puts large amounts of water back in the rivers. Another commenter asked for jacks in the Klamath system, said that the one-fish limit was a positive to encourage longer seasons, and asked for an adult “clipped” fish.

Committee Recommendation

WRC recommended that the Commission authorize publication of notices of intent to amend mammal hunting, waterfowl hunting, Central Valley Chinook salmon sport fishing, and Klamath River Basin salmon sport fishing regulations for the 2019-20 seasons.

6. Low-flow regulations on coastal streams

(A) FGC Petition #2015-14: Mendocino, Sonoma and Marin counties’ coastal streams

(B) FGC Petition #2015-15: Russian River

Ari Cornman provided background information, and Commissioner Williams expressed particular interest in the Department’s stakeholder engagement efforts. Kevin Shaffer provided an overview of the petitions, stakeholder engagement efforts, and Department

recommendations to deny the petitions based on a number of factors. Ari noted that the Commission staff recommendation was to approve the Department's recommendation.

Public Discussion

Commissioner Williams thanked the Department for providing the abundance of data and information in support of the recommendation. A participant asked if the State Water Resources Control Board had offered (or been in discussion) to purchase more water gauges. Kevin said that he believed they had, but would check. Eric Larson stressed that management in these rivers is an adaptive process.

Committee Direction

WRC recommended that the Commission deny petitions #2015-14 and #2015-15.

7. Deer and elk tag validation regulations

Patrick Foy explained that the regulatory language that identifies which firefighters are eligible to validate harvested deer and elk is outdated. He recommended specifying a "full-time firefighter" or something similar.

Public Discussion

A commenter stated that current regulations specify county firefighters and suggested adding city firefighters as well. Patrick explained concerns that some individuals who sign off on harvest tags may not fully understand what they are signing off on (e.g., a spike buck); current regulations do not address this issue.

Committee Recommendation

WRC recommended that the Commission authorize publication of a notice of its intent to amend deer and elk tag validation regulations as proposed.

8. Archery equipment and crossbow regulations

Patrick Foy explained that current regulations require a bow that can cast an arrow 130 yards. Other states do not use this measure – most use a 30- to 40-pound draw rate. Forty pounds was indicated as the preferred weight, but there were also concerns about the mobility impaired community that might warrant a lesser draw weight.

Public Discussion

Commenters stated that the Department was waiting for some more data, but were generally supportive of a 40-pound weight.

Committee Recommendation

WRC recommended that the Commission authorize publication of a notice of its intent to amend archery equipment and crossbow regulations as proposed.

9. Bullfrogs and non-native turtles

Ari Cornman gave a presentation outlining the environmental issues with bullfrogs and non-native turtles, as well as reviewing the stakeholder engagement plan that was presented to the Commission last year. He also presented an updated timeline that would be presented to the Commission for approval in October 2018.

Public Discussion

Commissioner Williams asked about referring the issue to the WRC. A commenter gave a history of the issue before the Commission, stated that it was a mistake to involve diverse stakeholders, and supported a ban on the importation of bullfrogs. A participant requested to represent a constituency on the stakeholder group. Commissioner Williams expressed that diverse perspectives should be sought, and perhaps part of the problem in the past is that all stakeholders had not been represented.

10. Delta Fisheries Management Policy

Ari Cornman presented a background and history of the issue. He introduced a draft Delta Fisheries Management Policy that was developed to implement the first recommendation from the Delta Fisheries Forum.

Public Discussion

Commissioner Williams conveyed his desire to have a high-level dialogue about the policy rather than discuss details, and that WRC will have more discussions about it in the future. A commenter said that the policy should address aquatic vegetation. Another commenter expressed concerns that anglers had been noticing dead fish and wildlife in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta. Kevin Shaffer affirmed that the Department is aware of the issue and is engaged with other agencies in exploring the problem. Another commenter encouraged interagency collaboration.

One commenter suggested that the policy be grounded in scientific objectivity; Ari agreed but pointed out that the policy needs to encapsulate scientific uncertainties as well. Another suggestion was that the Commission grapple over whether to prioritize listed species over other species. Kevin Shaffer and Valerie Termini gave some context to the policy. Ari raised the prospect of repealing the Commission's striped bass policy along with the adoption of the Delta fisheries management policy.

11. Future agenda items

- (A) Review work plan agenda topics and timeline**
- (B) Potential new agenda topics for FGC consideration**

Topics identified for the next WRC meeting included:

- Agency updates
- Upland game bird annual package
- Delta Fisheries Management Policy
- Sport fish regulation revisions

Public Discussion

No comments received.

Adjourn

The Committee adjourned at 4:22 p.m.