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Fish and Game Commission



*Celebrating 150 Years of
Wildlife Heritage and Conservation!*

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WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Committee Co-Chairs: Commissioner Burns and President Sklar

May 14, 2020 Meeting Summary

Following is a summary of the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission) Wildlife Resources Committee (WRC) meeting as prepared by staff. An audio recording of the meeting is available upon request.

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m. by Co-Chair Sklar, who gave welcoming remarks.

Wildlife Advisor Ari Cornman outlined meeting procedures and guidelines for participating in Committee discussions, noting that the Committee is a non-decision-making body that provides recommendations to the Commission on wildlife and inland fisheries items. He introduced Commission staff and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) staff. The following Committee members, and Commission and Department staff, attended:

Committee Co-Chairs

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| Eric Sklar | Present |
| Russell Burns | Present |

Commission Staff

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| Melissa Miller-Henson | Executive Director |
| Rachel Ballanti | Deputy Executive Director |
| Ari Cornman | Wildlife Advisor |
| Cynthia McKeith | Staff Services Analyst |

Department Staff

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| Stafford Lehr | Deputy Director, Wildlife and Fisheries Branch |
| David Bess | Chief, Law Enforcement Division |
| Jennifer Ikemoto | Assistant Chief, Law Enforcement Division |
| Kevin Shaffer | Acting Branch Chief, Wildlife Branch |
| Roger Bloom | Acting Branch Chief, Fisheries Branch |
| Chris Stoots | Captain, Law Enforcement Division |
| Randy Lovell | Statewide Aquaculture Coordinator |

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 representative from Friends of Del Norte thanked the Commission for the transparency and inclusiveness of its mission, while also expressing concerns about the processing and distribution of comments that were submitted previously. Another commenter raised concerns about comment letters submitted to the Commission and asked that the Department provide information to the Commission and public prior to Commission comment deadlines.

3. Department updates

(A) Wildlife Branch

Kevin Shaffer spoke about the safety of Department personnel and the public during the COVID-19 pandemic and expressed concerns about getting all the data necessary to inform regulations. He mentioned that the Department's attention is focused on human-wildlife conflict, status reviews, and wildfires. He affirmed that the Department is working diligently on elk wildlife disease issues.

Stafford Lehr stated that the Department is striving to provide information timely to the public, ideally well-ahead of a Commission meeting. He committed to discussing relevant information in the local working group for the elk north coast management unit and encouraged stakeholders to participate in that group, including its efforts to develop a local elk management plan. Concurrently, the Department is working diligently on Treponeme-associated hoof disease (TAHD) issues and will bring information to light as it is formulated. Stafford highlighted the attention on other wildlife diseases, including chronic wasting disease, wild sheep diseases, and a new disease called rabbit hemorrhagic disease.

(B) Fisheries Branch

Roger Bloom highlighted the ongoing sport fish simplification initiative, the recent emergency closures due to COVID-19, work with stakeholders regarding Department-permitted events, and ongoing work regarding species petitioned for listing under the California Endangered Species Act. He touched on the challenges that COVID-19 and remote working have created for Fisheries Branch operations. He raised concerns about lower snowpack levels and potential wildfire issues.

(C) Law Enforcement Division

Chief Bess spoke about large crowds recreating and the public education that wildlife officers have been engaged in regarding physical distancing and other safety measures. Officers have participated in security details with the U.S. Coast Guard, provided security for COVID-19 task centers, and worked with other agencies on state park closures.

Discussion

A representative of the Friends of Del Norte stated that it and the Environmental Protection Information Center would like to be invited to the local elk working group. She advocated for contact tracing of elk with TAHD and focusing resources on the disease. Another

commenter spoke about the sportfish simplification regulations and stated they looked forward to continuing the dialogue with the Department.

Stafford committed to providing information to the Commission and public about TAHD. He also stated that the Department looks to local boards of supervisors for help setting up and facilitating local public meetings, and that the Department would reach out to both groups.

4. Initial vetting of regulations

(A) Mammal Hunting

Kevin Shaffer stated that the Department may be looking at potential reductions to northern California deer hunts, adjustments to sheep hunts, and a reduction to pronghorn antelope allowances in Zone 3.

Discussion

A representative of the Public Interest Coalition spoke against the use of dogs to hunt deer. A stakeholder expressed the hope that some information on TAHD would be presented at the next meeting.

A representative of the California Rifle and Pistol Association and the California Bowmen Hunters/ State Archery Association urged consideration of a one-power scope on archery equipment and an increase of SHARE archery tags.

A representative for the Friends of Del Norte asked for clarification on whether projected hunting decreases included elk, requested more information on herds in general, and advocated for a new environmental document that takes TAHD into account and has a plan for preventing spread of the disease. Kevin clarified that the data analysis in question is for deer only and not elk. Another commenter echoed concerns for the effects of TAHD on elk herds and the lack of information from the Department, encouraged the use of elk-proof fencing where appropriate, and requested that the Department void the 2020 hunting regulations and reconsider them in light of the disease.

Co-Chair Burns asked about previous discussions surrounding scopes on archery equipment and muzzleloaders; Stafford clarified that low-power optics are allowed on muzzleloaders now and that the Department would need to consider the suggestion internally. Co-Chair Burns suggested that crossbows could be included in the conversations.

(B) Waterfowl Hunting

Kevin stated that the Department is working with the federal government on a framework for waterfowl, given the lack of data this year. The Department may propose slight changes to goose season.

Discussion

The California Waterfowl Association stated that it would like clarification on whether goose adjustments would require approval from the Pacific Flyway Council and raised concerns regarding light goose overabundance. Stafford answered that the goose date adjustments were within State authority. He mentioned that the white goose depredation order is a federal issue and requires National Environmental Policy Act review, but staff at the U.S.

Fish and Wildlife Service is stretched thin; therefore, the Department is concentrating on pintail duck issues.

(C) Klamath River Basin, Central Valley, and Miscellaneous Sport Fishing

Roger Bloom mentioned the upcoming effort for anadromous sport fishing regulation simplification. He also mentioned that the Department would be evaluating the inland fishing boat limit concept. The Department will be monitoring the fishing season on the Klamath Rivr, including the new jack size, for next-year's recommendation.

Discussion

A representative of the Northern California Guides and Sportsmen's Association (NGASA) indicated a strong desire for the Department to consider boat limits and to have a dialogue as soon as possible.

A representative of California Bowmen Hunters/State Archery Association recommended exempting carp from the wanton waste rules and allowing bowfishing of gizzard shad.

Roger reiterated that the Department is committed to evaluating the boat limits issue. Ari Cornman provided some history and context to the boat limits issue. The NGASA representative asked whether a new petition was required, and Ari responded that it was unnecessary – the Department and Commission staff are committed to evaluating the issue as they are able, and discussions could occur to potentially chart a way forward.

5. Bullfrogs and non-native turtles

Ari Cornman stated that the agency team made significant progress on its situation analysis. Commission staff was contacted by an importer, who has agreed to be part of the industry group, which will allow that team to start meeting. Once all three stakeholder groups have met, it will allow staff to implement its legislative strategy as well. Commission staff will vet a draft timeline with the full Commission at its June meeting.

Discussion

A stakeholder asked what can be done if it is known that a person is breeding bullfrogs. Stafford suggested that the stakeholder get in touch with him or contact CalTIP by phone, text or online (details at <https://wildlife.ca.gov/enforcement/caltip>); commercial breeding of bullfrogs requires an aquaculture permit. Stafford spoke about the heightened sense of awareness surrounding wildlife diseases.

Another stakeholder complimented Commission staff on the meeting preparations under the extraordinary circumstances.

6. Future agenda items

The next WRC meeting is scheduled for September 17, 2020 in Sacramento; topics for discussion will include potential recommendations for mammal hunting, waterfowl hunting, Central Valley sport fishing, Klamath River Basin sport fishing and general sport fishing, as well as initial vetting for upland game bird hunting and an update on the bullfrog and non-native turtle project.

Discussion

A stakeholder praised the technology used for the meeting and encouraged the use of video in the future. The Co-Chairs thanked Commission staff and stakeholders.

Adjourn

The Committee adjourned at 10:56 a.m.