

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL
Central Region Office
Robbinsville, New Jersey
June 11, 2024**

The regular meeting of the Fish and Game Council was held on the above date.

The meeting was called to order at 10:03 a.m. by Chairman Frank Virgilio.

Chairman Virgilio read aloud the following notice: In accordance with P.L. 1975, c. 231 notice of this meeting was filed with and posted at the Office of the Secretary of State on June 4, 2024 and delivered to the designated newspapers for Fish and Wildlife, the Newark Star Ledger and the Atlantic City Press on June 4, 2024.

Roll call was taken in attendance:

Chairman Frank Virgilio
Councilman James DeStephano
Councilman Mitchell Jones
Councilman Ed Kertz
Councilman Rick Lathrop
Councilman Rob Pollock- **Absent**
Councilman Bob Puskas- **Absent**
Councilman Loren Robinson
Councilman Ken Whildin – Late

Fish & Wildlife employees included: D. Golden, J. Hearon, G. Kopkash, A. Ivany, M. Monteschio, F. Panico, S. Crouse, B. Stoff, J. Powers, J. Sloan, J. Soell and D. Bajek.

There were several members of the public in attendance.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to approve the May 14th F&G Council minutes.

Councilman Robinson made a motion to approve the May 14, 2024, minutes, seconded by Councilman Jones. Vote taken. all approved, 1 abstention (Lathrop). Motion approved.

Chairman Virgilio welcomed everyone. Reflecting on Memorial Day and the anniversary of D-Day, let us pause to honor and remember the brave men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice. Their courage and commitment laid the foundation for the freedoms we enjoy today. As stewards of New Jersey's Fish and Wildlife, we are reminded of the precious natural heritage they fought to protect. Let us carry their legacy by dedicating ourselves to protecting and conserving our wildlife resources and ensuring that the beauty and bounty of our state's wildlife continue to thrive for future generations. Their sacrifice was for our freedom and the enduring splendor of the land and wildlife we so dearly loved.

Assistant Director Golden mentioned that over the past month he received a lot of good feedback with the Game Code and recognizes the Council for taking the time on the review. He also wanted to thank the staff for chasing down data and all their hard work.

Council Reports:

Agriculture Committee:

Councilman Jones reported planting season is winding down and Hay season is coming. He received a comment from a Burlington County Farmer that they got their Deer Depredation permit, and it was easy this time. He is seeing quite a few deer around and they are starting to get pretty good racks.

Councilman Kertz reported we started picking blueberries and everything else vegetable wise is getting ready for harvest. We are not seeing too many deer in zone 26.

Dr. Reist reported not much has changed since the last meeting. HPAV has been detected in cattle and the Department of Health along with USDA are offering PPE for stakeholders who are on the forefront, like masks/face shields and gloves. USDA veterinary services has put forward a fair amount of financial assistance for dairy farmers specifically.

Farmers/Sportsman Relations:

Councilman Jones mentioned the farmer turkey tags and lots of rabbits in the grass fields.

NJ State Federation of Sportsman's Clubs:

Councilman DeStephano reported he only attended the Trappers meeting where they discussed the Game Code Recommendations and a majority of them were in favor of the recommendations.

Councilman Robinson reported he attended meetings at Ocean County, Monmouth County, and Middlesex County and the State Federation meeting. Union County canceled their meeting, and he will be attending Hunterdon and Somerset County meetings this week. There was a trapping seminar given by Ron Jones this past Saturday.

Chairman Virgilio reported USF&WS planning session to implement Non-Lead Alternatives hands on demonstration pilot program. He attended Bob McDowell's celebration of life service and NJ Waterfowl Annual Dinner and Fundraiser. Bob McDowell's celebration of Life service was remarkable, and a sign was dedicated in his memory.

Finance Committee:

Councilman Robinson reported that we are planning a meeting before the July council meeting.

Assistant Commissioner Golden mentioned that we brought in a new employee into the Office of Accounting, Ishia Morton.

Game Committee: We met this morning and will have a presentation later today.

Endangered & Nongame Species Advisory Committee:

Councilman Lathrop reported that the proposed changes to the lists of endangered and nongame wildlife statuses are open to public comment. The rule amendment includes revised definitions, and new and changed statuses as a result of the Delphi status assessment process.

Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee: No report

Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee:

Councilman DeStephano reported they had a meeting last month and are in the process of reviewing changes they want to put out.

Law Enforcement Committee:

Chairman Virgilio reported they met today and will discuss later in the meeting.

Legislative Report:

Mary Monteschio reported RAWA is now up to 22 co-sponsors, none from NJ. The New Jersey Legislature is still working on the budget and is not scheduled for any meetings after that. The Legislature may be back in September.

Aaron Guikema from USDA reported a handful of wild bird species tested positive for HPAI. 120 samples were taken just this Spring between Black Vultures and a Gull species. USDA website is posting all the positive cases that come up by State.

Fish and wildlife Reports:

Business Administration:

Barb Stoff reported overall the numbers are same as last year with a 1% change. Hunting is down 1.1 %, fishing is up .06 %, Wildlife Management Area use and Horseback riding permits are up 33%, Shellfish is up 11.32% increase with saltwater registry being in the system. The Saltwater registry We are up 76% in vessel registration. saltwater registry compared to the previous system and this time last year, we are down 9.7% in individual registrations and up 76% in the for higher vessel registration. Maryellen Gorden and I will be doing an analysis to see if a lot of the four higher vessels folks already interact with our license system and therefore just saw it on there and got their stuff. We won't really know the numbers for the Saltwater Registry until the end of the year to compare it. She did find that OIT did not completely close the Saltwater Registry system, they closed a couple of the doors to it but if you googled it, you could still land on the hold registry, so around 1200 residents used the old system and that has since been completely turned off. Law Enforcement has been made aware of this. 65.5% of saltwater registries only get saltwater registry and do not have any other fishing/hunting licenses which equates to about 48,740 individuals.

Freshwater Fisheries:

Chief Crause reported on Spring Trout Stocking and wanted to Thank everyone, and a Job well done to everyone involved with this year's Spring Trout Stocking Program. This program truly takes a village. F&W staff from across several Bureaus were involved with stocking, loading, raising, checking waterbodies, coordinating, patrolling, posting, counting, repairing equipment, providing information, answering calls, or responding to emails, a huge debt of gratitude goes out to you for making the Spring Trout Stocking Program successful as always.

This year 592,700 production sized Rainbow trout along with 7,840 Broodstock were stocked during the 10-week season (3 Pre-season and 7 In-season weeks) that started on March 18th and concluded on May 24th. Goals were met and exceeded the 570,000 baselines with additional

production sized Rainbows that were stocked since May 3rd, bringing the total to 600,540 Rainbow trout that were stocked into public waters.

Hackettstown Hatchery – This is probably the busiest time of year. Exporting surplus Northern Pike to Connecticut and Rhode Island. Receiving shipments of Muskie eggs from PA, Channel Catfish, Fathead Minnows, Golden Shiners, and Mosquitofish from Arkansas. Stocking for Northern Pike, Muskie, and Tiger Muskie has taken place, as well as supplying various counties with mosquito-eating fish. Ponds are being drained, filled, and fertilized to stimulate plankton growth. Fish are being moved and set up for future production. Earth is being moved to convert 3 small ponds into one larger one. Needless to say it's a busy time of year and staff are doing an excellent job.

New Hires – We were able to backfill 4 hatchery positions. Brooke Wakefoose was also brought on as a Wildlife Worker to the Hackettstown Hatchery. Ross StCerny as an Agency Representative Trainee who comes highly recommended as a LM seasonal, and Thomas Goetschkes and Lynsey Bell as Wildlife Workers at the Pequest Trout Hatchery. Happy to report the hatcheries are fully staffed.

Fisheries Forums - The second Freshwater Fisheries Forum was held on May 16th. Attendance totaled 84 anglers. The agenda included Fish & Wildlife Update delivered by AD Barno, a review of the Coolwater Species sampling results from 2023, along with Lake Trout and Landlocked Salmon updates, along with a review of Freshwater Fishing Education Programs, and considerations for the Trout Stocking Program, followed with a Q&A period. Meetings were recorded and are made available on our website.

Fish Committee – I would like to schedule a meeting with the Fish Committee to discuss considerations for changes in the Fish Code.

Information & Education:

Chief Ivany reported the recent passing of Carole Skwarek who was a great naturalist and critical part of our team at the Pequest, Natural Resource Education Center for many years, and also Outdoor Writer John Punola.

The Marine digest is now out in hard copy. We continue working on the Hunting digest. We will be embarking on a large-scale promotional campaign for the Connecting Habitat Across NJ program (CHANJ) called the "Summer of CHANJ. The campaign will include a news release, social media posts, GovDelivery messages, website updates and outreach through the Office of Local Government Assistance.

May 19th was the Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament, which went well with more than 400 people participating. Our social media pages continue to grow in popularity, and we now have more than 50,000 followers on Facebook and nearly 17,000 on Instagram.

Land Management:

Assistant Director Hearon reported there are a lot of open spaces, we are working on filling staff, those positions are at the Governor's office. We just finished Spring planting, which includes all your pheasant fields, habitat projects across the state and we are moving on to boat ramps which are in full swing. The statewide dam inspection happens annually, and staff is in full swing there. The Glassboro project or mitigation is complete except for a small additional planting to be done in the Fall. We sent several staff for wetlands training at Rutgers, and we will be set to do our own wetlands delineations. We are finalizing the new farm services contract guidelines which will give us the ability to hire out for boom mowing and planting of fields. Staff proposing 3D archery range at Colliers Mills and will be an 18-target range. Eagle scout project this weekend, Stafford range was closed, they built new shooting tables for us. The target land acquisition, no one is exempt as it is all hands-on deck, and we are making progress. On the Dam front, we are working to remove the dam from the Buckhorn WMA and contractors are meeting this week.

Law Enforcement:

Chief Panico reported field staff fully transitioned into summer patrol which is really WMA base. It is outreach season for us, they will be attending a few County fairs and some National Nights Out. On the personnel side, we have 3 rising seniors who are getting shipped around the state to see various things we do in Law Enforcement, but they are also getting a taste of what the rest of the Division does. internship. We are still juggling two different hirings at once, we made job offering to three new CPO's which they accepted and have a tentative start date in July with August academy. The NOB we had closed June 1st. so we are weeding through those resumes to invite the next batch to go to the PT assessment. We have been working with Cape May Police Academy to try to get Colliers Mills Training Facility less of a satellite facility for Cape May, mostly to help with the training of Wildlife Control folks.

Wildlife Management:

Chief Oxley reported it is Springtime so there is a lot of bear activity going on. May 21, Sparta PD dispatched a bear that had made home entry and yesterday in Essex County as well. We have received a total of 180 bear calls, nine were Cat1 calls, 77 were Cat2, and 93 were Cat3. Currently research trapping is taking place.

The deer staff continue to work on Game Code changes and staff are also currently reviewing and rewarding funds for Community Based Deer Management Grant program.

Wild Turkey research project telemetry studies and data continue, and we do have some preliminary Spring gobbler harvest information.

Coyote to date we had 574 harvested.

Waterfowl, we have a division personnel completed the NJ portion of the annual Atlantic Flyway Waterfowl Survey and staff assisted Non-Game in their Migratory Shorebird Survey.

Endangered and Nongame Species Program:

Assistant Director Hearon reported we are in full swing with field season. Staff are finalizing the draft intertidal "shore protection" rules and look forward to proposal and adoption before next field season.

New Business:

Hooked on Fishing Not on Drugs:

Liz Jackson gave a presentation on HOFNOD which goals are to encourage school aged children to avoid tobacco, drugs, and alcohol usage by providing alternative activities like learning to fish, appreciating aquatic and environmental resources while developing positive life skills.

Lunch: 11:30 – 12:30

License Restorations:

Kevin Thompson – Present

Captain Soell read aloud the statement for the revocation appeal for Mr. Thompson who was present. Mr. Thompson was convicted on February 2,2021 of violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 23:7A-2, Hindering the lawful taking of wildlife by theft of personal or real property. A second violation on January 8,2024 of violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 23:7A-2 – Hindering the lawful taking of wildlife by theft of personal or real property.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to open the floor for discussion.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to open the floor for discussion, seconded by Councilman DeStephano. Vote taken, all in favor; motion approved.

After the council discussed Mr. Thompson’s violations, Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to close the floor for discussion.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to close the floor for discussion, seconded by Councilman Kertz. vote taken, all in favor; motion approved.

Chairman Virgilio stated that the council has three options, reinstate, continue revocation, or delay for additional information. If there is a motion to reinstate, for the record justification is needed.

Councilman Robinson made a motion Not to reinstate Mr. Thompson’s license, seconded by Councilman Kertz. vote taken, 6-in favor, 1 abstention (Whildin); motion carried.

Tamaz Lanchava – Not Present

Captain Soell read aloud the statement for the revocation appeal for Mr. Lanchava who was not present. Mr. Lanchava was convicted on November 29,2021 of violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 7:25-5.23 (A), illegal missile for small game hunting. A second violation on January 19,2024 of

violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 7:25-5.33 (A) –Fail to posse Pheasant/Quail stamp. A third violation on January 19,2024 of N.J.S.A/N.J.A.C. 23:3-1- hunt without a license.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to open the floor for discussion.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to open the floor for discussion, seconded by Councilman Jones. Vote taken, all in favor; motion approved.

After the council discussed Mr. Lanchava’s violations, Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to close the floor for discussion.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to close the floor for discussion, seconded by Councilman DeStephano. vote taken, all in favor; motion approved.

Chairman Virgilio stated that the council has three options, reinstate, continue revocation, or delay for additional information. If there is a motion to reinstate, for the record justification is needed.

Councilman Robinson made a motion Not to reinstate Mr. Lanchava’s license, seconded by Councilman Jones. vote taken, all in favor; motion approved.

Anthony Lavecchio - Present

Captain Soell read aloud the statement for the revocation appeal for Mr. Lavecchio who was present. Mr. Lavecchio was convicted on September 13,2021 of violation N.J.S.A/N.J.A.C. 23:3-1.a .Hunt without a license. A second violation on December 15,2023 of violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 7:25-18.1 (j) – Take/possess undersized or over the limit striped bass/hybrid.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to open the floor for discussion.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to open the floor for discussion, seconded by Councilman Jones. Vote taken, all in favor; motion approved.

After the council discussed Mr. Lavecchio’s violations, Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to close the floor for discussion.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to close the floor for discussion, seconded by Councilman DeStephano. vote taken, all in favor; motion approved.

Chairman Virgilio stated that the council has three options, reinstate, continue revocation, or delay for additional information. If there is a motion to reinstate, for the record justification is needed.

Councilman Whildin made a motion Not to reinstate Mr. Lavecchio’s license, seconded by Councilman Robinson. vote taken, all in favor; motion approved.

Redi Saliasi – Not Present

Captain Soell read aloud the statement for the revocation appeal for Mr. Saliasi who was not present. Mr. Saliasi was convicted on August 9,2021 of violation N.J.S.A/N.J.A.C. 7:25-6.3 (c), Possession of undersized trophy size trout. A second violation on January 8,2024 of violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 23:3-1.a– Did fish without a valid 2024 license.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to open the floor for discussion.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to open the floor for discussion, seconded by Councilman DeStephano. Vote taken, all in favor; motion approved.

After the council discussed Mr. Saliasi’s violations, Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to close the floor for discussion.

A motion was made by Councilman Robinson to close the floor for discussion, seconded by Councilman Kertz. vote taken, all in favor; motion approved.

Chairman Virgilio stated that the council has three options, reinstate, continue revocation, or delay for additional information. If there is a motion to reinstate, for the record justification is needed.

Councilman Robinson made a motion Delay for additional information, seconded by Councilman Kertz. vote taken, all in favor; motion carried.

2024 Season Options for 2 Deer Zones with Declining Harvests- Zone 45 & 46

Jodi Powers gave a presentation on the options for zones 45 and 46 that have declining harvests. . The recommendations presented were for zone 45- 2024/2025 deer season will be open for Fall Bow and Six-day firearm only and closed for all other deer seasons. For zone 46- 2024/2025 deer season will be open for Fall Bow and six-day firearm only and closed for all other deer seasons.

Council discussion took place

Public Comment on Deer Zones 45 & 46: No Comment

Councilman Jones made a motion to close the season for this year for zones 45 and 46 and only open for 6-day Firearm as presented, seconded by Councilman Robinson. Vote taken; all in favor. Motion approved

Additional 2025 Game Committee Recommendations:

Jodi Powers gave a presentation on the 2025 Game Committee Recommendations which include: Antler point restriction, exempt Union County, Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, and Morris County Parks Commission properties from the APR regulation in DMZs and 13. Incorporate Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge into Zone 13, eliminate DMZ 38, Hunters would still be required to obtain a special permit issued by GSNWR. Liberalizing current restrictions but still different from Reg set 8 and exempt from APR regulations.

Joint Base MDL (DMZ 37 & 53)

Combine DMZs 37 & 53 in to one new DMZ, same regulations for both, all current access allowance for each area within JBMDL will be handled internally, obtain a letter from JBMDL Commanding Officer confirming approval of change

Six-day Firearm Season- require bow hunters to wear Hunter Orange

Coyote/Fox- Ammunition #4 fine shot to #3 buck for both Day and Night, allow coyote to be taken during rabbit season Sept 30 – Feb 24 and extend 1-week.

Woodchuck- allow .25 caliber air gun.

Turkey – remove blinds from any WMA and Parks properties at the end of legal hunting hours each day, and additional turkey for farmers during the Spring Gobbler Season.

Council discussion took place.

Public Comment: No Comments

Chairman Virgilio asked council to vote on the cancellation of the August F&G meeting due to vacations.

Councilman Kertz made a motion to cancel the August F&G meeting, seconded by Councilman Lathrop. Vote taken; all approved.

Captain Soell provided additional pictures and information regarding Mr. Saliasi's case.

Councilman DeStephano made a motion to reopen License restorations for Mr. Saliasi, seconded by Councilman Whildin. Vote taken all in favor; motion carries.

After reviewing the pictures provided by Law Enforcement, Chairman Virgilio stated that the council has three options, reinstate, continue revocation, or delay for additional information. If there is a motion to reinstate, for the record justification is needed.

Councilman Robinson made a motion Not to reinstate Mr. Saliasi's license, seconded by Councilman Whildin. Vote taken; all in favor, motion approved.

Councilman DeStephano made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:49 pm., seconded by Councilman Jones. Vote taken; all approved.

Next meeting will be July 9,2024 at 10:00 am. at the Assunpink office.