

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL
Central Region Office
Robbinsville, New Jersey
November 13, 2024**

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

The meeting was called to order at 10:06 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 October 31, 2024, and delivered to the designated newspapers for Fish and Wildlife, the Newark Star Ledger and the Atlantic City Press.

Roll call was taken in attendance:

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

Fish & Wildlife employees included: D. Golden, J. Hearon, G. Kopkash, A. Ivany, M. Monteschio, S. Crouse, J. Oxley, K. Clark, and D. Bajek.

There were several members of the public in attendance.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to approve the October 10th Joint F&G Council and Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee minutes.

Councilman Robinson made a motion to approve the October 10, 2024, minutes, seconded by Councilman Jones. Vote taken. All voted in the affirmative. Motion approved.

Chairman Virgilio welcomed everyone. “Just two days ago, we celebrated Veterans Day. Let us take a moment to remember our veterans and the sacrifices they made for our freedoms. We can be especially proud to remember Hector A. Cafferata, a former New Jersey Fish and Wildlife employee who shared extraordinary bravery and earned the Congressional Medal of Honor. Veterans like Hector remind us that dedication to service extends beyond any single day or event and spills over into our jobs, like our work protecting NJ wildlife. Hector, like all veterans, are reluctant to speak about their service. When Hector was asked about his Medal of Honor, he would just say,” I did my duty. I protected my fellow Marines. They protected me. I’m prouder of that than the government decision to give me the Medal of Honor.”

Assistant Commissioner Golden welcomed everyone. “November is the month of State Employee Recognition because there are a number of holidays that stack up this month. I would like to take a moment to recognize some of our programs based on the activities in the Fall. All our programs are moving right now doing different things. Between our last council meeting and this one we had a very successful and safe bear hunt, segment A. there was a harvest of 397 bears in that 1-week period, which totaled 23% harvest rate. This year is therefore unique as we are already surpassed by a 20% harvest rate so we will not have the 4-day hunt extension. In order for the hunt to be successful, it takes a lot of work. Our Bureau of Wildlife Management is out there getting everything set up at the check stations, our Bureau of Law Enforcement is out there making sure people are following the rules/regulations to stay safe and our Bureau of Information & Education is helping with the public education. Thank you all for helping NJ with another safe and successful bear hunt. We are also knee deep into pheasant stocking right now. We had a successful opening day, despite the need to adaptively manage some of the stocking based on the wildfire at Glassboro. Thank you to our Bureau of Land Management for all their efforts to stock as well as our Bureau of Information & Education and the Office of Business Administration.

This time of year, we are doing Fall Trout Stocking, our bureau of Freshwater Fisheries is really trying to get that right given the low flows. Again, adaptively managing with what nature puts in front of us. Thank you to Chief Crouse and the fishery staff as well as Land Management for helping with the stocking.

We are coming up to December and there has been a lot of talk about the December 2nd adoption of our new ENT rules. I would like to recognize the Endangered and Nongame Species program for their work and our Office of Fish and Wildlife Information Systems for assisting with the

landscape project which will come out simultaneously with the adoption. We have a lot of work going on this time of year.”

Council Reports:

Agriculture:

Councilman Jones reported it has been very dry, and most people are finishing up on harvests. Bear damage in the corn. More bear sightings and damage mean less deer damage. The deer harvest is going well. He attended the North Jersey Caucus meeting for the selection of a State Board Candidate last night.

Councilman Kertz reported it's dry in the South as well and there are a lot of acorns. Sportsmen are not seeing many deer. The harvests are just about finished.

Councilman Puskas reported it is dry. Farmers got cover crops and wheat planted, and the geese wiped it out already. There is a bird group watching one of his fields and they estimated that there were 1000 geese in the field the other day.

Dr. Reist reported dairy HPAI is still going strong. Farm workers are contracting it, and it is generally a mild disease. There is none in New Jersey as of yet. Milk silos are being tested for HPAI and USDA moving slowly on how to do the testing, various states are doing different things and testing in different ways. USDA's end result is they would like to test every tank and every dairy farm in the country.

Farmer/Sportsman Relations:

Councilman Jones reported he will be attending the Farm Bureau Convention Monday and Tuesday and will hold a Sportsman Relations Committee meeting after session on Monday and the deer/wildlife resolutions are prior to that, so we should have the resolutions.

NJ State Federation of Sportsman's Clubs:

Councilman DeStephano reported he attended meetings at Bergen County, Sussex County, trappers meeting, Fur Harvesters Convention, and the Game Code Committee meeting. Rehabbers did meet and are working on new regulations. He also attended the non-lead presentation at Wallkill.

Councilman Robinson reported he attended meetings at Somerset County, Hunterdon, Ocean, Monmouth, Middlesex, all in-person and Union had a virtual meeting. At the Union Counties meeting they took 75 deer and 60 were donated, the best start they ever had. He attended the Game Committee meeting and the Law Enforcement meeting. He went to the Clint Wildlife Management Area for the Youth Pheasant Hunt. They had 32 registered hunters but only 24 showed up with 23 out of the 24 harvesting birds. They had 8 dog handlers and stocked 7 fields. We had comments to promote more for the Youth Pheasant hunt in Hunter Ed classes. Average age of new hunters is higher than “youth” maybe hold a New Hunters Day.

Councilman Whildin reported he attended Cumberland County Federation, and two meetings with a group of gun clubs from Cape May and Cumberland. They had some concern over the possible increase in permit and bow sales going up because of surrounding zones being closed due to EHD. We reached out to Chief Oxley and he provided us some numbers and the numbers did not indicate that was what’s happening. They were actually down a little bit, which eased their concerns.

Chairman Virgilio reported he attended the Governors Surf Tournament meeting where we discussed new rule changes to increase fairness, and we are also working on some procedural changes for judges. He is glad to announce the NJ HOFNOD will be participating in the first lead-free group to utilize lead-free tackle at the surf tournament. He attended the Game Committee meeting on pheasant stocking which will be presented later in this meeting. He attended the Law Enforcement meeting, and the 2025 State Federation for Sportsman’s Jamboree and a fundraising event with Redwing Shooting Clay, the Regional Trappers meeting, and a leadership meeting.

Finance Committee: Nor report

Game Committee: No report

Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee: No report

Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee:

Councilman DeStephano reported they had a meeting and are still working on vetting the rules and regulations.

Law Enforcement Committee:

Councilman Whildin reported they met earlier this week and will discuss during license restorations.

Legislative Report: No report

Fish & Wildlife Reports:

Office of Business Administration:

Chief Springer reported for the month of October Hunting license sales were steady with a slight increase of .31% and fishing licenses saw over a 4% increase in sales compared to last year. Overall sales are up with WMA permits seeing the highest increase at 38.5% over last year. Archery, firearms, trapping, fishing and trout stamps all had increases in sales. All-around sales experienced a slight decline. The Saltwater registry, 66.83% of the individuals only registered for the saltwater registry and did not purchase hunting/fishing or other permits.

Freshwater Fisheries:

Chief Crouse reported we are in a drought and he and Scott Collenburg have been participating in weekly meetings as part of the NJDEP Drought Response Advisory Group. Partners include the State Geologist, and representatives dealing with Water Resources, Water Allocation, Water Quality, Surface Water Permitting, Freshwater Biological Monitoring, and Water Monitoring and Standards. There are 4 stages of drought status in NJ. The first is “Normal”, then it goes to “Watch”, which is where it is now. A Watch is intended to bring public awareness of the lack of rain and encourages voluntary conservation. The next step is “Warning” which was put into effect by the Commissioner through an Administrative Order on November 14, which following a public meeting which occurred on November 12. Here consideration is given to reduce the established minimum passing flows within our drinking water supply systems. This includes but is not limited to Manasquan, Round Valley, and Spruce Run Reservoirs. Scott and Shawn have been reviewing proposed reductions in minimum passing flows and making recommendations to not allow them to become too excessive so that they cause ecological harm to the downstream riverine systems. Most of the reductions are in line with what was conducted during the last drought, in 2016. Two waters that we urged caution on were the Upper Saddle River and the Wanaque River, as they are both classified as Trout Production waters. Wild trout have been spawning and we have concerns that if flow is drastically reduced, the redds that are already set up may be impacted.

Fall Trout Stocking

Chief Crouse would like to give a huge shoutout to Fish & Wildlife staff for making this year’s 2024 Fall Trout Stocking Program a successful one. It’s a vast feat of coordination to get it done right, and he thanks all our dedicated staff for providing a wonderful opportunity for all of New Jersey’s Anglers during this scenic time of year. This year’s program saw 20,580 2-year-old Rainbow Trout being stocked along with 935 3-year-old broodstock into New Jersey public waters during October 15th - 16th (Ponds and Lakes), and 21st - 24th (Rivers and Streams). For the

past 2 years, these trout stocked for the Fall Program have been raised and cared for 7 days a week/365 days a year by dedicated staff at the Pequest Trout Hatchery and due to production cycles, these fish need to be stocked during this time of year. Monitoring of stream flows was necessary due to the low flow conditions in many of the Fall Trout Stocked rivers and streams. Freshwater Fisheries Biologists and their staff did a great job checking the waters in their regions and determining what river sections were suitable for stocking this Fall. Biologists deemed it necessary to delay stocking the rivers and streams for 2 weeks from the week of October 8th to the week of October 21st. Staff from F&W's Bureau of Land Management did a tremendous job as always getting most locations stocked for the anglers. Staff from the Bureau of Information and Education worked across multiple stages to provide up-to-date information on stocking changes so anglers could be effective at locating and catching these great looking trout. Finally, Conservation Police Officers, from the Bureau of Law Enforcement, did a great job patrolling the waters and interacting with New Jersey's angling public. Chief Crouse would like to also thank everyone for their patience with the changes this fall, as they were dealing with the drought and had to make the best choices for the fish, their anglers, and their program.

PERCH Program

Unfortunately, the PERCH (Pond Enhancement & Revitalization for Community & Habitat) did not get funded by the NRCS RCPP grant program (Natural Resources Conservation Service) (Regional Conservation Partnership Program). Grant reviewers gave valuable feedback that will enhance our application for a future submittal.

Fish Code

Chief Crouse also reported that he and his staff are very busy drafting the Fish Code proposal document. The draft should be complete for legal review by December 6th.

Information & Education:

Chief Ivany reported that the 2025 Wildlife Habitat Supporter Program stamp is now in production. Bobcat is the featured species and work on all three Fish & Wildlife Digests - Freshwater, Marine and Hunting editions, is occurring. The Fish & Wildlife Outreach Trailer has been on the road and at multiple events this fall. The Trailer will be at the upcoming NJ League of Municipalities Conference in Atlantic City from November 19 – 21.

Hunter Education and Trapper Education classes continued to be busy and very popular. Hunter Ed classes will run for about one more week as we wrap up another fantastic Hunter Education season. We have seen a slight increase in students this month. Thank you to staff and the great volunteers who assisted with the program. We look forward to classes starting back up in the Spring of 25.

The R3 Hunting & Shooting Program is also very busy this time of year: A Women's Introduction to Sporting Clays Workshop took place at Freehold Fin, Fur and Feather Sportsmen's Club of New Jersey. The women shooters who attended, gained the experience of shooting a sporting clays course with experienced instructors. The R3 Program looks to offer more shooting events in the future. Two deer Butchering Workshops took place at The Buck Stop in Elmer and Bringhurst Meats in Berlin. There was a total of 49 participants who attended the workshops with over 200 applicants who applied. Two more deer butchering workshops are scheduled for November 23rd at Growmark in Bloomsbury and one December 7th at the Heritage Guild in Branchburg. R3 is taking applications now for those 2 northern workshops and applications are flooding in.

The R3 Hunting & Shooting Program conducted two Mentored Squirrel Hunts (One at Clinton WMA and one at Assunpink WMA.) 18 new squirrel hunters harvested 2 squirrels with all 18 stating they are ready to head out to hunt on their own.

The Tuckahoe Waterfowl Hunting Program kicked off the 2024 season during the first segment of the south zone. Program hunters are still *very satisfied* with the Program with quite a few ducks being harvested.

Hunter Education Administrator Joe Leskie would like to recognize his staff members Keith Griglak and Sam Forlenza for their assistance with the 2024 Take A Kid Pheasant Hunt that just took place last weekend. He'd also like to thank Courtney Venuti for all her hard work and dedication in coordinating this event. 237 Youth hunters registered for the event (up from previous years) and the youth hunters who attended had great hunts throughout the state.

Thank you also to Bureau of Land Management staff who did a great job stocking the pheasants for the Youth event.

Law Enforcement:

Chief Panico reported most of the staff is transitioning to pheasant patrols for opening day. He is glad to report no major incidents, and everyone had fun. On the personnel side, there are two new officers in the Cape May Police Academy who will be graduating in the second week of January. There are also two new recruits who start November 30th and go to the Cape May Police Academy in the 3rd week of January. Working with the Land Management staff, Captain Quirk was able to get a really good State Vendor to help with the removal of large item stuff on WMAs. We had issues with boats and trailers which are really difficult to remove. Working with the Land Management staff and they have a really good thing going now with this vendor and it is a good step forward.

Land Management:

Assistant Director Hearon reported Pete Winkler will be the new Chief of Lands Management. We are deep in stocking, and all went as planned. We are dealing with fires and anticipate resuming stocking on Saturday, but no stocking will be done where the core fire was. Thanks to I&E for helping with getting the information out to the public. Opening Day car count we had 2400 cars compared to 2531 last year. Glassboro was not included in this year's count, even with that if you look across the last 10-years it looks about the same. We were successful in receiving 10 million for the RCPP for the removal of Warrentville Dam, that gives us about half of the funding, and we are currently in negotiations with a couple of other agencies with grant opportunities, one specifically is Noah and if eligible would give us an additional 8 million dollars. Round Valley docks are anticipated to be completed by the end of the year. The Southern region was down on the number of employees but now we are back to almost a full staff.

Wildlife Management:

Chief Oxley reported we had a successful bear hunt this year with a total of 397 bears harvested. Thank you to the staff in both BWM and BLE for their long hours throughout the entire week. Zone 2 and 3 we had 116 compared to 115 last year all numbers totaled 23%, so we will not have the extension.

We had 11 CAT 1 bears, and no traps were set. Waterfowl, pre-season banding is wrapped up with 596 ducks, 399 mallards, 183 wood ducks, 9 American black ducks, and 5 hybrid mallards at 32 different stations throughout the state. We had our Waterfowl biologist Austin Damminger attend the Waterfowl Decoy show where he attended the Waterfowl identification class and had 20 new waterfowl hunters present. We have a new biologist starting on December 2 who will be working out of the Tuckahoe office to backfill Ted Nichols' position.

Deer season is going great, we are up 7.75% harvested. He attended the Trapping classes at the Jamesburg location and the agency did a great job. Seeing the number of volunteers and I&E staff, you can tell they really enjoy what they do.

Endangered and Nongame Species Program:

Chief Clark reported that staff are continuing to work on the State Wildlife Action Plan revision, including working with staff from all bureaus. ENSP staff are compiling and editing "Actions," and the next step will be taking it to all staff and our advisory group to prioritize them. ENSP staff are working with I&E and our contractor on website design as the forum for presenting all aspects of the Wildlife Action Plan including species, threats, and habitats. Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) was a major problem with the peregrine falcon population in 2024. Half of the nesting birds disappeared/died between 2023 and 2024; a population drop not seen in the last 40 years. In NJ they are still on the Endangered Species list, so we will be continuing

surveillance in 2025. In regulation news, species status changes will be adopted on December 2 (revised to be January 6, 2025) and will go into effect. That includes delisting of bald eagle from the Endangered Species list to Special Concern status, and moving osprey off the list to stable. MacKenzie Hall has just completed a Fall Swarm Survey of bats as they enter caves for winter hibernation. This is a survey ENSP does every 4-5 years to monitor bat populations. ENSP staff has coordinated the inspection of more than 200 bridge structures this year and have now inspected a total of over 685 bridges and found that bats occupy 7% of these bridge structures. This is important because many NJ bat species are going to be listed as either endangered or special concern and all bridge structures are subject to maintenance by NJDOT and federal agencies.

New Business:

2025 Pheasant Stocking:

Assistant Director Hearon gave a presentation on the 2025 Upland Bird Stocking Program and Schedule.

License Restorations:

Michael Kalicharan – Present

Captain Soell read aloud the statement for the revocation appeal for Mr. Kalicharan who was present. Mr. Kalicharan was convicted on September 22, 2021 of violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 7:25- 5.25(b), Failure to check in deer. A second violation on January 1, 2024 of violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 7:25- 5.23(p)– possession of shotgun shells without rifle sight.

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. Kalicharan'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 Jones. 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. Kalicharan's license, seconded by Councilman Robinson. vote taken, 4-in favor; 3-oppose (DeStephano, Jones, Puskas); motion carried.

Shawn Bailo – Not-Present

Captain Soell read aloud the statement for the revocation appeal for Mr. Bailo who was present. Mr. Bailo was convicted on October 26, 2023 of violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 23:4-24, Prohibited hunting on Sunday. A second violation on November 16, 2023 of violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 23:4-24 – Prohibited hunting on Sunday

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. Bailo'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. Bailo's license, seconded by Councilman Kertz. vote taken, all in favor; motion carried.

Lunch: 12:04 – 1:00

Chairman Virgilio asked council to review the 2025 meeting schedule and change the following dates:

December 10, 2024- change to Monday December 16, 2024

October 14, 2025 – change to October 7, 2025

December 9, 2025 – change to December 16, 2025

Council discussion took place, and all agree.

Community Based Deer Management Application:

Mercer County Park:

Brian Schumm read aloud the Community Based Deer Management Plan. The application seeks councils' approval for an exception to hunting in daylight hours past the closure of the Winter bow and shotgun season. Scorpion Outdoors would be provided with access to cull deer on 6 county owned properties totaling 1320 acres. The Mercer County Park Commission has passed a resolution endorsing the application on September 25, 2024. The goal is to improve forest health. Success of the program is being monitored through vegetation surveys, the number of deer moved annually between CBDM permit activities and traditional harvest as well as local deer density surveys. Based on the high deer densities in Hopewell and on Mercer County Parks property, NJDEP

Fish & Wildlife recommends that the Fish & Game Council approve the application from the Mercer County Parks Commission.

- Exceptions to N.J.S.A. the Council would approve are: 23:4-45 Hunting by daylight and at designated times only. Exceptions to the Game Code the Council would approve are the season dates listed in: 7:25-5.26 White-tailed deer winter bow season and 7:25-5.29 White-tailed deer shotgun permit season.

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

Public Comment Mercer- CBDM:

No comments

Councilman Robinson made a motion to accept Mercer Counties CBDM application as presented, seconded by Councilman Jones. Vote taken; all approved.

Old Business:

2025 Game Code Update:

Chief Oxley reported we are waiting for the Office of Legal Affairs to get their edits back to us. We have a meeting scheduled for later this week. We did receive edits back from the Attorney General's Office. Hopefully by next week we will have everything back and cleaned up.

Greenwood Lake Update:

Assistant Commissioner Golden reported that Land Use Regulation Program to design a ramp and parking that is permittable up in the Highlands Region. The design we have has a total of 19

trailer spots and 17 standard parking spots. That design is now incorporated into a scope of work that will go out to bid. The scope of work is with Treasury, once that is finalized it will go out to bid and we will ask to share that with the council so you can see the design. From a timeline perspective, the best case we are looking at a year with a price of 1 million dollars to get it fully constructed.

Public Comment: No Comment

Our next meeting will be Monday December 16,2024 at 10:00 am. at the Assunpink office.

Councilman Kertz made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 1:22 pm. Seconded by Councilman Jones. Vote taken; all approved.