

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
NJ FISH AND GAME COUNCIL  
Central Region Office  
Robbinsville, New Jersey  
May 13, 2025**

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

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 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 April 30, 2025, 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 Russ Furnari  
Councilman Rob Pollock  
Councilman Bob Puskas -**Absent**  
Councilman Loren Robinson  
Councilman Ken Whildin - **Absent**

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

There were several members of the public in attendance.

**Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to approve the April 8, 2025, F&G Council minutes.**

**Councilman Robinson made a motion to approve the April 8, 2025, minutes, seconded by Councilman Pollock. Vote taken. Motion approved.**

Chairman Virgilio welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of the NJ F&G Council. I hope you all had a chance to enjoy some of the recent spring weather. Today, we have several important items on our agenda, including updates on the 2025-2026 Migratory Bird Season regulations, the trout stocking program, and discussions regarding habitat conservation initiatives. Your expertise and insights on these matters are crucial as we continue our work to protect and enhance New Jersey's fish and wildlife populations for the benefit of current and future generations. Let's proceed with our agenda.

Assistant Commissioner Golden mentioned last week was Public Service Recognition Week. Thank you to all of the staff at F&W for all the hard work that you do. Last Wednesday was State Employee Recognition Day as well, we had two programs acknowledged by the Civil Service. Our Law Enforcement bureau had three officers given awards for leadership in a rescue of a missing person who went into diabetic shock and the officers found him and brought him to safety. Also, our shell recycling program was recognized and received a \$1 million dollar grant from NOAH.

### **Council Reports:**

#### **Agriculture:**

Councilman Kertz reported it has been dry in the South, and the fields are workable. It has been a hectic 2 months.

Councilman Jones reported not as dry in the North. We are seeing turkey and baby fawns out in the fields, as well as geese in the wheat fields. The bears are also out and about.

Dr. Reist reported that we were about to declare NJ HPAI free, then we got a case this week in from Canada in domestic ducks. New York, New Jersey and Maryland mitigate incursions coming into the country. We got it contained and depopulated.

**Farmer/Sportsman Relations:** No report

### **NJ Federation of Sportsman's Club:**

Councilman Robinson reported he attended a bunch of meetings. At the Somerset meeting, they asked for the deer depredation numbers, Megan Mills gave all the numbers at that meeting. Hunterdon County asked for the number of tournament permits issued at Round Valley that aren't theirs. At the Ocean County meeting they had the presentation on Wharton State Road Map and Handling of Wildlife. They would like a how to handle wildlife on the website and digest. I did not attend the Monmouth meeting but sent them notes. We had complaints about Cranford Lake, where they had trout gasping for air, maybe we can hold off on stocking it until the aerators are back in. The grant applications for the Community Based Deer Management were sent in. The 2026 County Hunt applications are available mid-July. The Middlesex meeting had an idea for the Pheasant Stamp, to offer a limited number of tags and then once they are gone you need to buy more. At the Cumberland meeting they discussed ticks and if you stick them to a piece of tape, you can send them to Rutgers for testing. We had our Law Enforcement meeting and will discuss later today under the License Restorations.

Chairman Virgilio reported he attended the Cumberland County meeting, they had an issue with the range in Millville, people using steel targets causing ricochet and are asking for CO's to go through the area on weekends. Also, they suggested a change in legislature for using purple paint for posting private property. All boundaries at entry points would have purple paint, like they do in PA. another issues that came up was Data collection on deer aging, there is a program in PA run by volunteers who are trained, maybe that is something NJ can do. He attended the Rehabbers meeting, it was a combination of rehabbers and trappers, they would like to see the application process simplified, highlight changes in red in the digest. The co-mingling of title 4 and title 23 haven't been able to separate the two. He attended the Federation Trappers meeting and the F&W Trapping Matters Workshop. Lastly, he attended the 2025 Jamboree Convention, with over 300 attendees and 30 vendors. He would like to give special thanks to F&W for their participation and work.

**Finance Committee:** No report

**Fish Committee:** No report

**Game Committee:** No report

### **Endangered and Non-Game Species Advisory Committee:**

Councilman Furnari reported they have a meeting tomorrow. The big issue is funding services in the federal budget, this will cause a big impact. Public interactions with nesting season, we are working with F&W to build other corridors in the action plan.

**Waterfowl Stamp Advisory Committee:** No report

**Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee:**

Councilman DeStephano reported they met all relevant bills in legislature that did not get enacted. We have two lists of rehabbers, one that is open to the public and one that is internal only. We would like to encourage more people to become rehabilitators.

**Law Enforcement Committee:**

Councilman Robinson reported they met and will discuss later in the meeting.

**Public Member:**

Councilman Pollock wanted to thank Law for patrolling for people who are illegally taking fish.

**Legislative Report:**

Mary Monteschio reported that the NJ Legislature is still having budget hearings and dropping bills left and right. On the Federal side, there are two bills of note: HR1897, ESA Amendments of 2025, is sitting in the House; and S1649, which amends the Internal Revenue Code to close an excise tax loophole, sits in Senate Finance Committee.

**Fish & Wildlife Reports:**

**Business Administration:**

Chief Springer reported that overall hunting sales are down by 2.8% over this time last year. Freshwater fishing sales on their own are up by 2.69% and when you add in the all-around licenses the increase drops about 2.2% Buddy license sales increased by 58.8%, which translates to approximately 500 additional licenses sold over the same period last year. Trout stamp sales are up 5.87%. The saltwater registry, who only bought Saltwater registry and bought no other shellfish is at 60%.

**Freshwater Fisheries:**

Chief Crause gave an update on the Fish Code- We received the legal review on Friday. There the increase drops were 2 comments, so we are hopeful that we have addressed their last comments.

Anticipated Rule schedule.

- We should be ready to submit to Commissioner this week.
- Date signature-ready proposal or adoption document and briefing ready to submit to Governor's office (at least 30 calendar days before filing deadline): June 2, 2025
- Target filing date for NJ Register: July 18, 2025
- Target NJ Register publication date: August 18, 2025
- Public hearing date, if any: September 10, 2025
- Date of close of comment period (at least 60 days): October 16, 2025
- Mandatory deadline, if applicable: Adoption must occur by December 10, 2025 so Fish and Wildlife can make its Fishing Digest deadline.

**Opening Day Angler Count** - Volunteers were slow to report back to us. The report was recently drafted and will be finalized shortly. A PDF will be sent to the Council when complete, and a hard copy will be supplied at next Council meeting.

- 42 Waterbodies covered, 37 Lakes/Ponds and 5 Rivers
- 1,101 Anglers surveyed, slightly below average of 1,389
- 971 anglers on Lakes/Ponds, 130 on rivers/streams
- Average catch rate of 0.62 fish/angler, over the average of 0.56
- Blair Lake(6.3 fish/angler), Mountain Farm Pond(3.7), and Gloucester City Pond(2.) were most successful catch rate.
- Dahnert's Lake (55 anglers), Pemberton Lake(51), Ponderlodge Pond(49), and Shaw's Mill Pond(95) were most attended.

**Questions about Catch and Release season for Walleye** – There is a Catch & Release (C&R) season for Walleye from March 1 through April 30. There are four considerations I would like to lay out. First, it is a misconception that the closed season is intended to protect the actual spawn. NJ Walleye populations are maintained almost exclusively through stocking. Natural recruitment of Walleye has been deemed insignificant to maintain populations. Walleye need adequate forage in NJ and the places we stock have good Alewife populations as forage. However, Alewife actually feed on Walleye fry as well, and literature tells us that Walleye recruitment is limited in lakes with significant Alewife populations. NJ populations are maintained with stocking fingerling Walleye which are too large for Alewives (and several other predators) to consume. The second point is that the C&R season is actually in place to prohibit the exploitation of Walleye that congregate in tributaries to spawn. Years ago, Law Enforcement had issues with anglers catching and/or illegally snagging Walleye from several locations in streams that flow into Walleye stocked waters. These tributaries are also where we set our trap nets that are used to collect broodstock Walleye during their run. Third, we anesthetize Walleye with a chemical referred to as MS-222. This is an approved method that is safe, however specifications indicate that when used on fish, there should be a 21 day withdraw period in which the fish should not be consumed by people. Prohibiting the take during the C&R period allows hatchery staff to release broodstock back into their lake of origin immediately without the concern of human consumption. This third point is not why we have a C&R period, (prevention of exploitation when congregated is), however it allows staff the ability to return the Walleye quickly, without having to hold them for 21 days. Finally, rather than complicate the regulations and have different Walleye regulations on different inland waters based on where they

congregate or where we collect broodstock, we have one universal regulation, making the rules easier for anglers. A proposal to remove the C&R season and allow harvest is brought up periodically, but has been dismissed by staff, due primarily to concerns brought forward by the Bureau of Law Enforcement.

**Invasive Species** – With the help of I&E we are updating our website and with the help of the Office of Information Systems we will be launching a new AIS Reporting Form. Fishing regulations require anglers to report potentially dangerous fish. Similar to the Wildlife Tracker app, this form will allow people to identify the location and attach photographs to be confirmed by staff experts.

**PFOS Sampling and Monitoring Coordination** – PFOS contamination of soil and groundwater near the Musconetcong River near Route 31. Staff engaged in multiple meetings with NJDEP Science & Research, who are in charge of fish consumption advisories. Fish (NJDEP) and water sampling (USEPA) took place on May 1 to determine extent of contamination. Fish will be collected 2 more times in an attempt to determine not only PFOS levels, but to try to determine the rate of uptake.

**Fish Kills** – There have been seven Fish Kills reported to BFF in the last 2 weeks. Archway Lake (Waterford Twp.), Sunset Lake (Asbury Park), New Market Pond (Piscataway), Creighton Lake (), Munsee Pond (), and Nomahegan Park Pond (Cranford). They have been for different reasons, including low dissolved oxygen. Nomahegan Park Pond was reported to us by Union County Parks staff on May 6<sup>th</sup>. Trout were congregating near a stormwater effluent pipe. We had a few hot days, then some runoff as the fish were seeking flowing water. Unfortunately, their aeration system was not installed yet, but was being installed on Tuesday. None were dead at that point, and it was anticipated that conditions would improve with the aeration. Union County staff indicated they would keep an eye on it and salvage any fish if necessary. However, a fish kill was reported to us over the weekend.

**Incerpi Award to Lisa Barno** - The Northeast Fisheries Administrators Association (NEFAA) has established an award to honor outstanding performance in fisheries management in the region. The award is named after Angelo Incerpi, who during his career was a State of Vermont Fisheries biologist, Maine Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Biologist, active participant on the Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission, chair of the New England Salmonid Health Committee, charter NEFAA member and former American Fisheries Society Section Representative. The Angelo Incerpi Fisheries Conservation Award will be given to an individual from the region who has made significant contributions that further Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies objectives by advancing the conservation and management of fisheries and their habitats and has provided guidance and initiative for actions that achieve these objectives within and outside the recipient's jurisdiction. The fisheries chiefs voted unanimously in favor of Lisa Barno. Unfortunately, she was unable to make it to the event, however Chief Crouse accepted the award on her behalf.

## **Information & Education:**

Chief Ivany reported that I&E presented the Garden State Deer Classic at the New Jersey State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs Jamboree in Gloucester County on April 26. Fish & Wildlife staff also provided displays focusing on educational programs, law enforcement and freshwater and marine fisheries. The Deer Classic awards ceremony was held on site as well. Thanks to the Bureau of Land Management for providing invaluable assistance with the setup and breakdown of the Deer Classic display. The Mobile Outreach Trailer was also on the road this day at the NJDEP Earth Day celebration at Liberty State Park in Jersey City.

The Governor's Surf Fishing Tournament will be held on Sunday, May 18 at Island Beach State Park. More than 300 people have registered so far, up from 224 in 2024.

The Marine Digest is now available online and on shelves.

Several I&E staff received awards recognizing their outstanding work this reporting period. Karen Byrne and Sam Forlenza received awards at the 2025 New Jersey State Federation of Sportsmen's Clubs convention. Karen Byrne was awarded The Jeannette A. Vreeland Award, which is presented to a woman, who has achieved significant results toward conservation, wildlife management and/or the enhancement of hunting, fishing and trapping in the State of New Jersey. Sam Forlenza was awarded The Regional President's Award which is presented to a person, group, or company whose material contribution(s) stood out, providing exceptional support for their Region. In addition, Craig Decker, the Bureau of Information and Education's lead educator of the National Archery in the Schools Program and a hunter education instructor, was honored by the International Hunter Education Association with the SigSauer Hunting 2024-2025 New Jersey State Instructor of the Year award. Craig's dedication to hunter education and his commitment to fostering safe, ethical hunting practices have made a meaningful impact on the Garden State's outdoor community. Congratulations to Karen, Sam and Craig for these well-deserved honors!

The Hooked-on Fishing Not on Drugs program has achieved its goal of having Youth Fishing Challenge sites in all 21 Counties in New Jersey for the upcoming Hooked on Fishing 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Youth Fishing Challenge to be held on Free Fishing Day Saturday June 7<sup>th</sup> and on Sunday June 8<sup>th</sup>. This year there are 50 sites across the State of New Jersey which is the most we have ever had. Many thanks to Program Coordinator Liz Jackson for her efforts to engage volunteer leaders to help run this event, which gets children outdoors interacting with the environment.

The R3 Hunting and Shooting Program held its 5th Annual Women's Mentored Turkey Hunt on April 27 - 29, 2025 for 8 Women hunters. This event was made possible through valuable partnerships with Landis Sewerage Authority who provided hunting access to their property, Good Sports Gunning Club who allowed the use of their club for pre-hunt and range sessions, and R3 Program hunting mentors from Fish & Wildlife and volunteers from NWTF-New Jersey Tri-County Longbeards. Also, a special thank you to Parvin State Park who provided staff and hunters with some great lodging.

The participants learned about turkey biology, shotgun patterning, turkey calling, scouting, hunting techniques and equipment before heading into the woods for two incredible days of hunting. All participants had action on both days and after two turkeys were harvested, techniques on field dressing and processing, along with tips and ideas on how to utilize different parts of the harvest were discussed.

**Land Management:**

Chief Winkler reported trout stocking and finishing up next week. Crews are planning Spring plots and farmers are out planting their crops. We had a pre-bid meeting for the Conservation Center renovations. We continue to work on our budget and grant narrative, the Whisper Grant. Round Valley dock is on order; there were some changes to the design. We have two land exchanges moving forward; surveys were completed for the Forked River Game Farm and the other was Fish and Wildlife and New Egypt Raceway. Lastly, staff attended the Deer Classic.

**Law Enforcement:**

Chief Panico reported our two newest officers are in the second phase of training, and we have two graduating from the Police Academy next month. We are looking to hire three more, with interviews in progress. For staff on the Inland side, we have turkey time and WMA's, as the same with South and Central. Marine we have blackfish and stripped bass and we are getting more involved with oysters. We are using our new CAD system but are not giving out e-summons yet.

**Wildlife Management:**

Chief Oxley reported that the deer project staff attended the County Federation meetings and provided harvest updates. Staff conducted spotlight counts at Liberty State Park, actual deer counted were 85, density estimate generated by Distance Program was 137.6 deer per mile. We have a meeting with Parks staff to discuss options, most likely a managed controlled hunt. Staff completed spotlight counts on deer management zones 45 & 46 to continue to evaluate the health of the herd in these two limited hunt zones. With harvest data, there is no change at this time. The CBDMP grant closed May 9<sup>th</sup>, applications are being processed and analyzed.

Turkey- we have 80 hens. 12 hens are incubating currently with 3 in the North and 9 in the South. Staff reached out to Wharton Superintendent, and we are waiting to hear back.

Coyote- we have 645 coyote reported harvested hunting and trapping September 28, 2024 – March 15, 2025. Incidentals during turkey season will be tallied the end of May.

Waterfowl- all 92 plots were surveyed mid-April through mid-May throughout the state. The survey has been conducted by all Atlantic Flyway states since 1989.

Bear- we had 13 CAT 1 calls from March – April, which is up 9 from same time last year. Staff met with ESU to discuss DNA analysis project.



Game Code- this is still with OLA but giving a heads up that they have at least 95 comments to address.

Staff- we have 7 staff members who attended Safe Capture Immobilization Training in CT last week, so we now have a total of 17 staff members certified. This helps bolster support and contingencies, eventually have better coverage throughout the state and decrease the response times and milage

### **Endangered and Nongame Species Program:**

Chief Clark reported that staff are working with other bureaus on the Wildlife Action Plan revision. Most recently, we received input from staff as well as from stakeholders on prioritization of actions. We will be going into final stages of action review by in-house staff experts, and when we have a final draft it will go out on the website for public review and comment. We are working with I&E and our contractor to build our State Wildlife Action Plan website.

We are monitoring the NJ Peregrine Falcon population that, at its peak a few years ago was about 40 nesting pairs. This year, we are monitoring just 11, and only three are on the Atlantic Coast where the effects of Avian Influenza (carried by shorebirds) are the greatest. Peregrines nesting in the inland and northeast parts of the state are less exposed to the virus through their food because shorebirds are a much lower part of their diet.

We are working with the US Fish & Wildlife Service and in the State of Delaware to survey migrating shorebirds. We will conduct three aerial surveys (the first to start this week) and fly the next 2 weeks. Typically, we document the peak of the shorebird migration in Delaware Bay in the last full week of May. As in previous years, we have contracted the survey of horseshoe crab eggs in Delaware Bay beaches as a measure of food availability for shorebirds. We are also contracting the shorebird steward program to Conserve Wildlife Foundation, which reduces disturbance to feeding shorebirds. Last week we learned the President's "skinny budget" has zeroed-out funding for State Wildlife Grants and funding under the Endangered Species Act. These funds are very important to the Endangered & Nongame Species Program, and we are hoping organizations like AFWA (Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies) and others will speak up to influence Congress to maintain funding.

### **New Business:**

#### **Freshwater Fishing Regulations Demo:**

Kevin Blyth gave a presentation on the Freshwater Fishing App.

**Lunch- 12:14 – 1:00**

**Resident & Atlantic Population Canada Goose & Migratory Bird Season 2025-2026:**

Austin Damminger gave a presentation on the 2025-2026 Migratory Bird Season and Resident & Atlantic Population Canada Goose.

**Public Comment on 2025-2026 Migratory Bird Season:**

Adam Semmick first wanted to thank the Council for their public service and dedication. He commented permits should not be zone specific for youth tags.

Barbara Sachau commented she is upset by the killing of animals. She also mentioned that population figures are not accurate, and bird populations are declining.

Anthony Capaccio commented he has been deer hunting in South Jersey for 50-years and would like the F&G Council to include ALL the South Jersey Deer management zones in the multi - zone deer permit program. He feels the entire state would be fairly represented.

Chairman Virgilio asked the council for a motion.

**Councilman Robinson made a motion to accept the 2025-2026 Migratory Bird Season as presented, seconded by Councilman Kertz. Vote taken; all approved.**

**License Restorations:**

**Carl Czerepak – Not Present**

Captain Soell read aloud the statement for the revocation appeal for Mr. Czerepak who was not present. Mr. Czerepak was convicted on November 21, 2022 of violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 7:25- 5.6, Take/possess bear or bobcat unlawfully. A second violation on March 12, 2024 of violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 7:25- 5.13(1)19– completely field dress migratory bird, N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 23:4-47 Possession of illegal deer parts, and N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 7:25- 5.25(b) Over the bag limit for deer (fall bow) .

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. Czerepak'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 Robinson made a motion Not to reinstate Mr. Czerpak's license, seconded by Councilman Jones. vote taken, 4-in favor; 3-oppose (DeStephano, Jones, Puskas); motion carried.**

#### **Quyen Phu – Not Present**

Captain Soell read aloud the statement for the revocation appeal for Mr. Phu who was not present. Mr. Phu was convicted on April 15, 2021 of violation N.J.S.A/N.J.A.C. 7:25- 18.1(c) Possession of illegal tautog. A second violation on November 27, 2024 of violation N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 7:25- 18.1(c) Possession of illegal tautog, and N.J.S.A./N.J.A.C. 23:10-5 Interfere with a Conservation Officer.

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. Phu'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 Robinson made a motion Not to reinstate Mr. Phu's license, seconded by Councilman Jones. vote taken, all in favor. Motion approved.**

**Old Business:****Wharton State Forest Vehicle Access Update:**

Assistant Commissioner Golden reported they presented this at the last Federation meeting on the road maps similar to the presentation that council saw and asked members what certain roads are closed that they would like to see access.

**Oak Ridge Reservoir Update:**

Assistant Director Meistrell reported we have been back and forth with Dam Safety Watershed. Water was lowered and we went to see if there were any fish kills. We confirmed Newark Watershed got a permit from Dam Safety to lower and make repairs. F&W will draft a letter of what will happen if they do not comply in the future. Last week the reservoir was filled back up between 16-17%, they should be increasing the filling this week. This process gave us an internal opportunity to close some gaps that we have in regard of communication between F&W and Dam Safety.

**Delaware Bay Artificial Reef Update:**

Assistant Director Hearon reported it was completed yesterday about 75 different loads of material/barge loads at approximately 75 tons per barge load. Just under 1200 tons of material to the reef. We have no final number yet but as of yesterday, we are all wrapped up.

**Greenwood Lake Access:**

Assistant Commissioner Golden reported the boat ramp right now we are trying to get the architectural engineer selection done, probably around 2-4 weeks and we should have the notice to proceed. There has been 900k obligated for this work with one design change, a floating dock. Timewise estimate from where we are right now, around 200 days for design then do a bid which will take around 2- months and then construction, so a total time of over a year before we have a constructed ramp.

**Public Comment:**

Barbara Sachau commented she is opposed to killing all animals and would like the total number of farmers with depredation permits and how to get names.

Adam Sennick thanked the council for their turkey concern.

Chairman Virgilio asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

**Councilman Furnari made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:19 p.m. seconded by Councilman DeStephano. All approve.**

**Next meeting: June 10, 2025 at 10:00 a.m. the Assunpink Office – in-person**