

NJ Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
April 5, 2023
Microsoft Teams Meeting
NJ Fish and Wildlife

WRAC Purpose: The purpose of the WRAC is to provide advice and assistance to New Jersey Fish and Wildlife (NJFW) to improve the wildlife rehabilitation program and the care that is provided to injured and orphaned wildlife.

Committee Members Present: Michael O'Malley, Diane Nickerson, Lisa DeLambert, Giselle Chazotte-Smisko, Heather Freeman, Tracy Leaver, Vicki Schmidt, Jim DeStephano (arrived 4:37PM), Dr. Erica Miller (arrived 5:17PM)

Committee Members Absent: Dr. Jennifer Norton

NJFW Employees: Krista Laws, Katherine Szostak

Members of the Public: Lori Swanson, Chris Soucy

Meeting called to order at 4:06 PM.

- A motion was made by T. Leaver and seconded by M. O'Malley to approve the November 30, 2022 minutes. A vote was taken with all in favor.
- Public comments were made by L. Swanson and C. Soucy.
- K. Laws reported on the proposed regulations to combine game with exotic and nongame species. The rewrite to better organize the rule proposal and make it more user-friendly is moving forward, albeit slowly. She attended a rule proposal meeting two weeks prior.
- There were no updates on Assembly bills.
- T. Leaver reported that she would be picking up the NJFW training again in September after the busy rehabilitation season.
- G. Chazotte-Smisko reported that she had spoken with Kathy Clark of NJFW and set up a capture and transport session specifically for raptors at Raptor Trust with herself and Cathy Malok in March. That session had 25-26 attendees, mostly DEP volunteers and some ACOs. She also reached out to Lisa Perry with the Association of ACOs. G. Chazotte-Smisko and C. Malok are both willing to do a whole session for ACOs who want to come, as well as for individuals who would like a follow-up session. K. Laws suggested distributing future session information to wildlife rehabilitators so that their volunteers may attend. M. O'Malley said that NJAWR would also be happy to share with their membership. G. Chazotte-Smisko promised to send the list of those who passed the most recent course to K. Laws for purposes of updating the Wildlife Conservation Corps transporter list.
- There were no updates on the pest control regulations. D. Nickerson will send an email out toward the fall to gauge continued interest in the matter.
- There were no veterinarians available at this time to provide a report. D. Nickerson is aware that HPAI is still here. L. DeLambert will check to see if anyone in NJ is still interested in testing. PA was embargoed by TX, so quarantines were implemented by county in PA. T. Leaver asked about dolphins with HPAI. L. DeLambert knows who is doing some testing but is not sure if HPAI

testing is included. T. Leaver also asked about any other mammals being affected by HPAI. L. DeLambert isn't aware of any but will get back to us with a link to a map.

- K. Laws went over WRAC terms. Most terms expired during the pandemic. The plan is to keep the terms staggered, as occurred when the Committee was initially formed. A request was recently sent out for four positions: two mammal rehabilitator representatives, one reptile rehabilitator representative, and one avian rehabilitator representative. Six applications were received for the four positions. H. Freeman will continue in the reptile rehabilitator representative position. D. Nickerson will remain in the same avian rehabilitator representative position. M. O'Malley will remain in the same mammal rehabilitator representative position. Carol Dragland did not reapply for the mammal rehabilitator representative position that she held, and V. Schmidt will be filling that position. Each term lasts for 3 years. Requests for nominations for additional expired positions will be sent out before the next meeting.
- K. Laws reported that the WRAC Chair position also expired. A motion was made by T. Leaver and seconded by H. Freeman to nominate D. Nickerson as Chair. A vote was taken with all in favor, except for D. Nickerson who abstained. Motion passed. M. O'Malley promised to be Chair next year. The Chair position only lasts for one year.
- K. Laws explained that she and K. Szostak are correcting an inconsistency across NJFW-issued permits, specifically as it concerns animal exhibition. Wildlife rehabilitators with non-releasable game species, including birds, used for educational purposes already had Animal Exhibitor Permits. Wildlife rehabilitators with non-releasable nongame species have had Scientific Holding Permits. Per the New Jersey Possession of Nongame & Exotic Wildlife Regulations at N.J.A.C. 7:25-4 et seq., an Animal Exhibitor Permit is "issued to exhibitors of exotic mammals, birds, reptiles or amphibians, or nongame species other than zoos. Traveling exhibits, small exhibitions not qualifying as zoos, and circuses are included, including importation, exportation, and sale of species listed in the permit." Per those same regulations, the Scientific Holding Permit is "issued to qualified persons holding exotic mammals, birds, reptiles or amphibians, or nongame species for scientific observation, captive breeding attempts and other scientific or educational study." A Scientific Holding Permit, by its definition, does not allow for exhibition. Furthermore, no scientific study is conducted on animals being used for education by wildlife rehabilitators.
 - Educational programs are separate from wildlife rehabilitation programs, and therefore fees may be charged for educational programs.
 - Anyone with non-releasable mammals also needs an Exhibitor Permit from USDA. Those with non-releasable eagles used for education have a Live Eagle Exhibition Permit from USFWS. The language is "Exhibition" across the board. NJFW is just making things consistent across its permits and adhering to its own regulations. The Animal Exhibitor Permit is under the same set of regulations as the Scientific Holding permit; it is simply a different permit category.
 - The Wildlife Permits Unit has a manual for employees, so anyone who takes over permits in the future will be learning from the same source.
 - The requirement for off-site exhibit reporting to NJFW has always existed. Scientific Holding permittees conducting exhibits were not notifying NJFW to provide the opportunity to inspect since they were not actually supposed to be exhibiting under that type of permit. K. Szostak further explained activity notification forms. D. Nickerson explained that she sends the list of programs she already has to NJFW at the start of the month. If anything is added, she includes that in the next month's report.
 - K. Laws noted two matters to address in the future. She will confirm that wildlife rehabilitation facilities are covered for non-releasable birds re: Wild Bird Act in the new regulations. Additionally, there is no separate permit category for surrogate animals in

wildlife rehabilitation. This question also came up at the NWRA Symposium this year, and USFWS also does not have a permit category for surrogates. It is possible that a provision about surrogates may be added to Animal Exhibitor Permits in the future.

- K. Laws mentioned that the policy that created the WRAC was last updated in 2013. Updates to that policy need to be made. K. Laws will work on editing the policy before the next meeting.
- K. Laws read off the WRAC Code of Conduct. K. Laws will send the Code to all members to sign this time, and going forward, it will simply need to be signed at the start of each term.
- Dr. E. Miller gave a disease update. Pennsylvania is experiencing a bad distemper season, with multiple cases in raccoons, skunks, and gray foxes in the last few weeks alone. She recommended providing vaccinations to incoming wildlife as often as possible. HPAI is still here and going strong. Pennsylvania has several high suspect red fox kits with HPAI (positive rapid tests, waiting on PCR tests). Dr. E. Miller advised that it would be wise to quarantine foxes upon intake, if possible. There was one case where seals were suspected to have transmitted HPAI to each other. Most mammals are catching HPAI by consuming other infected animals. COVID-19 in deer is following the same strains as those in humans. There is proof that deer are transmitting COVID-19 to each other, but there is no evidence that deer are spreading the virus back to humans. T. Leaver asked about dolphin HPAI cases in NJ. Dr. E. Miller is not aware of any in NJ but does know of cases elsewhere.
- K. Laws mentioned that in past years, WRAC veterinarians have confirmed the veterinarians listed on wildlife rehabilitators' renewal forms. She will forward the 2023 list to Dr. E. Miller and Dr. J. Norton.
- A motion was made by G. Chazotte-Smisko and seconded by M. O'Malley to adjourn the meeting. A vote was taken with all in favor.
- Meeting adjourned at 5:29PM.