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Fish and Game Commission



*Wildlife Heritage and Conservation
Since 1870*

WILDLIFE RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Committee Co-Chairs: Commissioner Williams and Commissioner Burns

Meeting Summary

September 21, 2016, 10:00 a.m.

**Woodland Public Library – Leake Center Community Room
250 First Street, Woodland**

Following is a summary of the meeting as prepared by staff.

Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 10:02 am by Commissioner Williams. Self-introductions were made by Commissioner Williams and Commissioner Burns.

Erin Chappell introduced Fish and Game Commission (FGC) staff and Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) staff and outlined the meeting procedures and guidelines, noting that the Committee is a non-decision making body that provides recommendations to FGC. She reminded participants that the meeting was being audio-recorded and that both the audio-recording and a meeting summary prepared by staff will be posted to the FGC website.

Committee Co-Chairs

Anthony Williams	Present
Russell Burns	Present

Commission Staff

Valerie Termini	Executive Director
Erin Chappell	Wildlife Advisor
Caren Woodson	Analyst

DFW Staff

Gabe Tiffany	Deputy Director, Administration Division
Patrick Foy	Captain, Law Enforcement Division
Chris Stoots	Lieutenant, Law Enforcement Division
Kevin Shaffer	Acting Chief, Fisheries Branch
Craig Stowers	Environmental Program Manager, Wildlife Branch
Scott Gardner	Senior Environmental Scientist, Wildlife Branch

Marc Kenyon
Karen Mitchell
Chris Stermer
Matt Meshriy

Senior Environmental Scientist, Wildlife Branch
Senior Environmental Scientist, Fisheries Branch
Senior Environmental Scientist, Wildlife Branch
Environmental Scientist, Wildlife Branch

1. Approve agenda and order of items

The Co-Chairs approved the agenda and moved item 6 directly after item 3 (Note: for this summary, agenda items are presented in original order).

2. Public forum for items not on agenda

A commenter noted that some of the petitioners associated with the petition on striped bass and black bass (#2016-11) that was withdrawn at the last FGC meeting may take this matter to the legislature for consideration.

A commenter noted that they would like to see a study on lead in the condor range, steel shot is a fire danger, and their concerns about the non-lead coupon program. Commenter also raised concerns about the need to focus on issues far worse than the lead issue such as impacts to fawn survival due to increased predation, abandonment of dogs used for bear hunting, and impacts to deer and other wildlife from marijuana grows. Finally, commenter had a question about who authorizes the closing of county roads for private hunting as happened at Stewart's Gap.

A commenter raised an access issue at Tehama Wildlife Area since ATVs and quads were prohibited a few years ago and recommended that each wildlife area be evaluated for appropriate use. Captain Foy clarified that the recently adopted Lands Pass regulatory package had provisions to allow for use of ATVs and quads at the Tehama Wildlife Area.

A commenter requested that FGC give ferrets the same consideration and respect as other pets since there is no evidence of any massive ferret overpopulation anywhere. Commenter also noted that over the years more ferret stuff is sold in CA than anywhere else. Another commenter noted that they still have major concerns about legalizing ferrets given impacts to wildlife in other areas.

3. Discuss and approve recommendations for 2017-2018 regulations:

(A) Mammal hunting (Sections 360, et sec.)

Craig Stowers reported that DFW is only proposing the standard adjustments to the tag quotas for the 2017-2018 season. DFW will consider petition #2015-016, related to archery-only antlerless deer tags and addition of a traditional archery season, in this regulatory package, but noted that it would require approval from 37 counties and more data on antlerless deer numbers. For petition #2016-004, related to bear hunting in Modoc County, DFW noted that they are not planning to open those regulations as part of this package and that additional data on the bear population in Modoc County is needed. DFW is planning to conduct a two year study to gather data on the bear population in Modoc County. Results from that study would help inform any proposed changes to those regulations.

Public Discussion: A commenter noted the significant impact to landowners by the elk expansion and urged FGC and DFW to better match the quotas with the actual number available to reduce impact on resources. Craig responded that work on the new elk management plan continues and the draft will be available for public comment soon. Another commenter supported the previous comments and expressed support for moving forward with maximum hunting opportunities through the SHARE (Shared Habitat Alliance for Recreational Enhancement) program. Finally, there was a request for DFW to increase the quota in the B-zone to 40,000 to increase opportunity and revenue.

(B) Waterfowl hunting (Section 502)

Scott Gardner reported that the waterfowl regulations are set by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and DFW's proposal conforms to those regulations. In addition, DFW is considering a late season for white goose again this year to help alleviate impacts to private property.

Public Discussion: There was a suggestion to split the scaup season differently by ending the first half of the season a week earlier and adding it to beginning of second half. That proposal had support from another commenter. A commenter raised some questions about the late season white goose hunt, noting the description in the regulations is confusing, and suggested expanding it to public lands. In response, another commenter expressed concerns about opening public lands and asked if there was a way to leave the portion of the proposal related to open waters and Type C properties open until the data from this season is evaluated. Erin Chappell noted that there may not be enough time between the closing of this season and the timing of this regulatory package for that to occur.

(C) Klamath River sport fishing (Sections 7.50, et sec.)

Karen Mitchell reported that no changes beyond conformance with the federal regulations are proposed for the 2017-2018 season. She provided an overview of the timing and an update on the study on Blue Creek.

Public Discussion: no public comments

(D) Central Valley Chinook salmon

Karen Mitchell reported that no changes beyond conformance with the federal regulations are proposed for the 2017-2018 season and provided an overview of the timing.

Public Discussion: no public comments

Committee Recommendation: WRC recommends that FGC authorize staff to work with DFW to prepare the rulemaking packages for the items contained in A-D with the exception of petition 2016-004 related to bear hunting in Modoc County, which shall be considered by FGC when the DFW study is complete.

4. Wild pig management

(A) Dennis Orthmeyer, California State Director of USDA-Wildlife Services, presented on national and statewide wild pig control activities, research, and disease monitoring.

Public Discussion: A question was asked regarding the possible transfer of tuberculosis from pigs to cattle. Dennis responded that USDA had worked with the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) on that issue years ago and did not detect any transfers. There was another question regarding partnerships with the USFWS. Dennis responded that USDA works with USFWS as requested. Another commenter asked if they were looking at the impact of drought on the pig population. Dennis responded that there appears to be a slowing in the number of new pigs. DFW is still issuing depredation permits but the number of requests is down. Indications are that the drought is impacting the population but they expect it to be a short term impact with a rebound in the population as habitat conditions improve. A commenter noted that research topics should include fertility control. Dennis responded that fertility control is occurring at the federal level.

(B) Erin Chappell led a discussion about possible management options building off of the discussion at the May 2016 WRC meeting.

Goal: Erin framed the discussion around a central goal for wild pig management: *To reduce wild pig populations to benefit native species and their habitats and protect private property while maintaining hunting opportunities.*

Public discussion about the goal: A question was raised about whether public property was covered under the habitat piece. Another question was raised about incorporating the revenue stream into the goal. The last question was how this goal reconciles with wild pig as a game species.

Management Areas of Concern: Erin then broke the discussion down into six main management areas of concern: 1) status; 2) disposal; 3) method of take; 4) access; 5) import/transport; and 6) revenue. For each management area Erin provided an overview of the concerns raised and issues that need further consideration, as well as possible options to help address those concerns and contribute to achieving the overarching goal, followed by public discussion.

1) Public discussion about status:

A commenter requested clarification on the prohibited species status used in Louisiana and Montana. There was a question about whether prohibiting hunting takes away the financial incentive. There was another question of whether it would be easier for DFW to manage them if they were a non-game species. Craig Stowers responded that it would just eliminate the process associated with issuing depredation permits. Another question was raised about whether DFW has depredation records. Craig Stowers responded that there is a reporting requirement under the depredation permits.

2) Public discussion about disposal:

A commenter noted that this issue could be contentious and offered possible

option where DFW can match hunters with landowners and also suggested investigating more thoroughly the implications and laws concerning donation of meat to commercial kitchens, etc. In regards to the suggestion regarding the donation of meat, Dennis Orthmeyer noted that California doesn't have an 'equal to' agreement with USDA and that the transportation of pigs would require permits. Lieutenant Stoots also noted that since USDA regulates pork it can't be provided to commercial enterprises and clarified that under a depredation permit the landowner is required to use the carcass with some exceptions. A commenter suggested the consideration of creating opportunities for all, keeping tags inexpensive and asked if changing status to non-game would reduce hunting opportunities.

3) Public discussion about methods of take:

A proposed option to allow night hunting generated quite a bit of discussion. Commenters in support of night hunting noted it as an effective tool for reducing the pig population. Others raised concerns about the potential for an increase in poaching, the disruption to other native wildlife, and the potential take of non-target species. It was noted that night hunting is already permitted (for other species) so allowing pig hunting at night would not create new opportunities for poachers. Captain Foy noted that LED has some concerns associated with night hunting and that any provisions related to it would need to be carefully thought out. A commenter suggested looking to what provisions other states that permit night hunting use. Use of fertility management was also raised as a possible option. Dennis Orthmeyer noted the fertility management is still experimental and there are concerns about secondary consumption. Also, if you have take and treatment simultaneously you might inadvertently take a wild pig you've spent money to sterilize which defeats the purpose. Concerns about cost and feasibility were also raised. A commenter noted it should be considered as one of many management options.

4) Public discussion about import/transport:

There was some support for an option to prohibit the import and transport of wild pigs but how wild pigs are defined would need to be clear to avoid issues with the import and transport of domestic pigs, including domestic swine that use Russian boar genes. Suggestions were raised about options for marking domestic pigs to help distinguish wild pigs from domestic stock (e.g., One suggestion was to require pigs be branded like cattle and describe in travel manifest what is being transported). Note: these options would need to be implemented by CDFA and would require coordination between CDFA and DFW.

5) Public discussion about revenue:

A question was raised regarding how much DFW spends on mitigating the environmental impacts from pigs compared to the revenues generated. Craig Stowers did not have specific numbers and noted that there are both direct and indirect costs plus all the LED costs but that what is spent to mitigate the impact outweighs the revenues generated. Also discussed was a potential option to switch from tags to a validation stamp. There is still uncertainty about the potential impacts, either positive or negative, which need to be considered. The issue of how the revenue generated by the sale

of wild pig tags is handled generated a lot of discussion. Some want to have revenue remain in the Big Game Management Account (BGMA) while others would like to see the revenue be used on directed efforts to mitigate wild pig damage and reducing their population. Commissioner Williams noted his assumption that the portion of pig funds in the BGMA does not go to pig management and remediation but the revenues that exists now should be protected and available. If switch to a validation it would need to be priced to generate at least \$1.2 million per year. One option to consider is the possibility of using any funds in excess of the target to support wild pig management and eradication programs to help reduce the cost of impacts.

In wrapping up the discussion, Erin provided three potential management options moving forward which ranged from making minor modifications to the existing statutes and regulations to more substantial modifications.

Committee Discussion: Commission Burns noted all the good questions raised during the discussion and that there is a lot good information to review over the coming months. He asked if we can determine how many tags are sold to help inform decision regarding a validation stamp versus tags. Craig Stowers noted that DFW does have that data and will put in a request for it. Commission Williams agreed that it was a good discussion and acknowledged that there is still a lot of work to be done. He posed a question to the group on whether the issue can be solved using minor modifications to which there was no response. He noted the consensus that maintaining current status is not viable but noted that revenue is a sticking point that warrants further conversation. There was some support expressed for further exploring a moderate and more substantial modification to the existing statues and regulations. Erin Chappell offered to go back and further refine the moderate and substantial options for further discussion at the Jan 2017 WRC meeting. Commissioner Williams wrapped up the discussion stating Erin will come back with some additional data, options, and fodder for discussion at the Jan 2017 WRC meeting, noting he would like to begin the focused discussion on all matters aside from the revenue but to continue discussion about revenue separately.

5. Predator Policy Workgroup

- (A) DFW staff gave three presentations on current knowledge about mesocarnivores and overview of the Human Dimensions Program:
 - Chris Stermer gave an overview of DFW predator monitoring efforts, ecological relationships between predators, and the statewide camera trap survey efforts.
 - Matt Meshriy presented information on the trap and hunting harvest data for the eight priority species under consideration by the Predator Policy Workgroup: coyote, bobcat, long and short-tailed weasel, mink, raccoon, badger, and gray fox.
 - Marc Kenyon gave an overview of the DFW Human Dimensions Unit.
- (B) Erin gave a brief update on the recent Predator Policy Workgroup activities and announced the next meeting is scheduled for September 28, 2016 in Davis.

6. DFW presentation on the Hatchery and Inland Fisheries Fund

Gabe Tiffany gave an update on the fiscal status of the Hatchery and Inland Fisheries Fund in response to requests from members of the Legislature and stakeholders regarding concerns raised during consideration of AB 1834.

Public Discussion: Commission Williams asked about the potential impacts to the fund if AB 1834 had been approved. Gabe responded that since it would lower license fees for some that it could reduce revenue over time. A stakeholder noted that they met with Department of Finance and legislative staff and they are satisfied with DFW's fiscal analysis, but noted the projected budget shortfall of the DFW Preservation Fund is still a concern. They suggested DFW work with stakeholders to develop a prioritization list of projects. Gabe thanked the stakeholder for highlighting the issue and for the help with revolving the matter and noted that discussions about the Preservation Fund will need to wait until the draft budget is released in January. A question was raised about the causes of the projected shortfall and questioned some of the projects funded. Gabe responded that appropriations for the fund have been reduced in recent years and the all projects are consistent with the statute. A commented noted the broader need to set fees to cover expenses per legislation, for the entire range of programs regardless of policy desires.

Committee Direction: The Co-Chairs directed staff to prepare a letter of response to the members of the Legislature that requested the fund review, to summarize today's discussion and to clarify the status of the fund. Executive Director Termini will send the letter.

7. Future agenda items

- (A) Review work plan agenda topics and timeline

Erin Chappell reviewed the WRC work plan agenda topics and timeline.

- (B) Potential new agenda topics for FGC consideration

No new agenda topics were proposed for consideration.

Adjournment

Commissioner Williams adjourned the meeting at 3:59 p.m.