

APRIL, 2010 NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION (NRC) MEETING

The newly established Committee on Parks met for the first time. This is the only NRC committee whose membership is made up of Commissioners and appointees from the general public. The 2010 recreational plans were discussed along with the urban outreach schedule for this summer.

The Recreational Passport legislation was reviewed. This is the replacement for the parks permit. The optional ten dollar add-on to your vehicle registration will allow you to have access to the state parks and boat launches. This is a good deal for those utilizing the facilities and a good opportunity to support the state parks for the rest of the citizens. If you don't opt-in on the ten dollars and later decide to visit one of the facilities you will have to pay eight dollars for each visit. The fee for non-residents remains the same. The ten dollars will go into a protected restricted fund to be distributed as follows:

- 80% rebuild/maintain state parks & recreational areas.
- 10% grants to city, county, local parks.
- 7% forest campgrounds, pathways & non-motorized trails.
- 2.75% state park cultural & historic resources.
- 0.25% promote the recreational passport.

The Wildlife and Fisheries Committee reviewed the Deer Range Improvement fund (\$2.6 million in spending) and the Turkey fund (\$1.7 million in spending) budgets and spending priorities. Habitat was the main priority addressed.

The Deer Management Plan was presented. The plan includes; maintaining the population at appropriate levels, promote deer hunting, habitat management through the use of sound scientific methods.

The early and late antlerless seasons will have identical areas. The number of permits will be increased and the taking of an antlerless deer will be allowed as part of the combo license in certain areas during the antlerless seasons. Be sure you know the rules before you take an antlerless deer.

The fall turkey regulations include an extended season (September 15 thru November 14). Multiple licenses will be available – one per day - and no applications will be required for the southern area on private land. Again be sure of your status before hunting.

The bear regulations were presented with two options. One was to leave the regulations unchanged and the other was to split the licenses between private and public areas. The Commission, after some discussion, decided to address the issues by leaving the regulations unchanged and appointing a task force to review the nuisance bear problems and private property licensing. It was noted during this review, that the questionnaires returned by bear hunters indicate the bear population to be at an acceptable level. Similar results came from the questionnaires returned by property owners. Personal contacts by the Commissioners pretty much agree with the results of the questionnaires. However, during the public appearance portion of the meeting the bear population was questioned. Sixteen people commented that the bear population was down 25% to 35% across the state from DNRE estimates. When challenged for support for the statement, none could substantiate their comments. Some were concerned about what the task force will propose. The task force meetings, of course, are open to the public.

In my opinion there should not be a split between private and public land licensing for any wildlife. Wildlife does not honor boundaries. I should be able to by a

license and hunt anywhere, limited only by the regulations related to population levels and my ability to get access to property. Special licensing for population control is an exception. In addition, separating the licensing between private and public lands complicates the licensing process and law enforcement. Both of these cost money and I'd rather see the funds go to biologists rather than the clerical staff. As far as the nuisance bear issue, I would hope the task force determines who is to blame – the bear or the person who does (stupid) things to attract bears.

As far as the bear population is concerned, I tend toward the DNRE estimates, particularly when they are backed by hunters and property owners. The estimates may not be perfect, but until a better method of estimating is found it's the best we have. I suspect the majority of those disputing the numbers are guides and have a financial interest in keeping the population high so their success rate is high. More bears = a higher success rate = happy customers = more business. I have seen similar discussions with charter captains when it comes to planting fish. It is not that these people don't perform a service; it is that their contribution to wildlife management discussions should be couched by the financial interest they have in the decisions. Follow the money.

In addition to the bear discussions, the public appearances included a number of crossbow supporters and providers. I sat through thirty minutes of requests for full inclusion of crossbows during the archery season when, as I recall, there will not be any changes for two more years. I guess the politicians aren't the only ones who start too early.

The late turkey season regulations had proponents and opponents. Last year I put in a request for a longer season (September 15th thru the end of the year) and multiple licenses, providing the

population, by area, could sustain the harvest. I had opposition from those who believe the young turkeys would not survive if the hen was taken and people would shoot baby turkeys. This same opposition was presented at the meeting. I will refrain from expressing my feelings about these comments because the president of the National Wild Turkey Federation in Michigan refuted the comments as being without merit and somewhat ridiculous. Made me happy. At least I got half the season I asked for and the opportunity to harvest more than one turkey.

In closing, we need to be ever watchful in the management of our natural resources. Commercialization can change the direction under the guise of economics with the results not being in the best interest of the resources. Most of the comments I hear about planting more fish, increasing antler size or maintaining a high population are rooted in economic gain for someone. The three strikes that cause people to drop out of our fraternity are: The lack of a reasonable opportunity for success; Over-complicated rules; Excessive cost in time and/or money. I think that if the resources were maintained at the carrying capacity of the habitat and the rules were made exclusively for the protection of the resource, time and money would no longer be a concern and participation would increase.

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