

STATE OF ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Alabama State University
Abernathy Hall Auditorium
915 South Jackson Street
Montgomery, Alabama
March 11, 2023

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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Proceedings taken before Stacey L.
Johnson, Certified Court Reporter and
Commissioner for the State of Alabama at
Large, Alabama State University, Abernathy
Hall Auditorium, 915 South Jackson Street,
Montgomery, Alabama, Saturday, March 11,
2023, commencing at 9:00 a.m.

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BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Joseph Dobbs, Jr., Chairman

**Commissioner Christopher M. Blankenship,
Ex-Officio Secretary**

**Commissioner Rick Pate, Ex-Officio,
Department of Agriculture and Industries**

**Director J. Mike Phillips, Ex-Officio,
Alabama Cooperative Extension System**

Mr. Kevin Savoy

Mr. Grady Hartzog

Mr. Greg Barksdale

Mr. Jeff Martin

Mr. Brock Jones

Mr. Tim Wood

Mr. Raymond Jones, Jr.

Mr. Ben Stimpson

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1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Welcome,
2 everyone. Let's bring this meeting to
3 order of the first Conservation Advisory
4 Board meeting for 2023. Today's date is
5 March the 11th. We're glad you're all
6 here.

7 Let's be diligent today -- we
8 don't have a big crowd, but let's be
9 responsible and considerate to everyone in
10 all the things that we do.

11 I'd like to take a moment to give
12 special thanks to Dr. Quinton Ross, the
13 president of this university, and to
14 Ms. Crystal Moss, who is the event
15 coordinator who helped us today in a big
16 way, who helped Betsy and Wanda put this
17 together. It's a wonderful venue. Maybe
18 we can do it again here someday.

19 The Lord has blessed us with this
20 fair weather. I hope it stays that way.
21 And so safe travels home to all of you at
22 the end of the meeting.

23 I'm going to ask today Mr. Brock

1 Jones to please give our invocation.

2 MR. B. JONES: Let us pray.

3 (Invocation given by

4 Mr. Brock Jones.)

5 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Jones,
6 very much.

7 Today we are very pleased to have
8 the DCNR honor guard to help begin our
9 meeting. Please give your attention as
10 they post the colors.

11 (Presentation by the honor
12 guard.)

13 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'm going to ask
14 Mr. Greg Barksdale to please lead us in
15 the Pledge of Allegiance.

16 (Recitation of the Pledge
17 of Allegiance led by
18 Mr. Greg Barksdale.)

19 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Greg, very
20 much. That's most impressive. It always
21 is.

22 Again, I thank Dr. Ross for the
23 facility today. I appreciate our

1 Conservation Enforcement Officers being
2 here, the staff being here. Thank y'all
3 very much. Let me take a minute to thank
4 Ms. Wanda McCullers and her staff and
5 Betsy Jones who helps run and manage
6 things, and today she will be as well
7 keeping time on our clock, our three-
8 minute clock for public commentary.

9 On the agenda, we have the
10 Sportsmen's Pledge, and I'm going to go
11 through it for us today. I think it rings
12 true to what the purpose of good resource
13 forward-minded management represents. And
14 this is from 1908.

15 (Sportsmen's Pledge read
16 by Chairman Joseph
17 Dobbs.)

18 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: So let's have a
19 wonderful and productive meeting today.

20 And, Mr. Secretary, do we have a
21 quorum?

22 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Yes, sir,
23 Mr. Chairman, we do.

1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

2 I know that our Board members have
3 read and reviewed the minutes of our
4 May 21, 2022, meeting. Are there any
5 corrections?

6 There being no corrections, the
7 Chair approves the minutes as provided by
8 Ms. Stacey Johnson.

9 I'm going to ask each Board member
10 today to introduce themselves -- we will
11 start at the far end with Mr. Jeff
12 Martin -- and give, if they will, a
13 district report as brief as they'd like
14 for it to be.

15 MR. MARTIN: I am Jeff Martin. I
16 represent District 3.

17 You know, hunting was a little
18 slow this year just due to some weather.
19 It's been kind of a rainy season. It's
20 kind of bad.

21 As far as fishing goes, we've had
22 the carp season just come in. It seems to
23 be rocking and rolling on Logan Martin. I

1 had some issues with maybe some quality of
2 bass, but we're checking on that with
3 Fisheries. So all in all, it's been a
4 pretty good year.

5 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Jeff.

6 Go ahead, Greg.

7 MR. BARKSDALE: My name's Greg
8 Barksdale. I represent District 4.

9 It appears our deer season was
10 pretty good from stuff you see on social
11 media. I think everybody now has a camera
12 and takes a picture of whatever they
13 shoot. Didn't hear a lot from the duck
14 hunting. The fisheries around Smith Lake
15 and that part of the country seem to be
16 doing very well at this point in time.

17 And that's all I have today.

18 Thank you.

19 MR. WOOD: I'm Tim Wood. I represent
20 Congressional District 7, which is
21 basically the west half of the Black Belt.
22 I'm from Selma.

23 Deer season was pretty good.

1 Dallas County was down, but overall the
2 Black Belt had a good year in deer.
3 Fishing has become huge on Alabama rivers.
4 Miller's Ferry is doing a fantastic job of
5 publicizing and having tournaments there
6 as well as over in Montgomery and also on
7 the Tenn-Tom in Demopolis.

8 I tell you, the tornado -- we're
9 kind of digging out of the tornado right
10 now. We've got a lot of repairs to do at
11 some of our facilities.

12 But it looks like it's going to be
13 hopefully a good spring for turkeys. One
14 thing about it, there's been a lot of
15 interest generated on turkeys, a lot of
16 management practices going on, a lot of
17 burning, so we're looking forward to
18 seeing what we can do in the future with
19 our turkey populations.

20 MR. HARTZOG: My name is Grady
21 Hartzog. I represent District 2.

22 Hunting was good this year. I
23 talked with most of the processors, and I

1 only talked with one processor that felt
2 like he was a little down.

3 We had the -- something that we
4 can be proud of in our district. We had
5 the second largest youth hunt east of the
6 Mississippi hosted there on Barbour County
7 Management Area. I want to commend the
8 Department, the employees, because a lot
9 of wardens that helped with that took
10 actual days off to help with that. We had
11 several hundred kids there. A huge
12 success.

13 The same day -- just showing how
14 much was going on in our county, the same
15 day we had a massive bass tournament. The
16 whole parking lot at Lakepoint was full.
17 That evening, the state parks through --
18 was having a -- what is it, Greg -- the
19 presentation? The Department made an
20 excellent presentation on bear, and I
21 think I was told it was the second most
22 attended one they've had, you know, and
23 especially just coming out of COVID.

1 They're hoping to expand it. But I really
2 want to thank the Department officers that
3 spend their own time in trying to help the
4 youth and do what they do for the youth,
5 because if it's not for the youth, we
6 won't be here in the future. So anyway,
7 thank you and we thank all the officers.

8 One officer that I think
9 especially needs to be recognized is
10 Johnny Johnson. The couple that's been
11 doing this youth hunt for the last
12 25 years health has gotten real bad. He's
13 had -- one of the guys has had seven
14 operations since the first of the year.
15 They were really afraid because of his
16 health and all they wouldn't be able to
17 continue with it, and one of the officers
18 stepped forward. Johnny Johnson stepped
19 forward to take over to be in charge of
20 the event every year, and so I'd really
21 like for the Department to recognize
22 Johnny for his behalf in accepting the
23 challenge of that event because it is a

1 great event for kids and a great event for
2 the Department. And I just really
3 appreciate the work the Department does
4 when working with kids and also with the
5 personnel at the management area helping
6 out as much as they do. They moved all of
7 the trailers around setting up for Keith's
8 division, the archery division, they set
9 up all the -- help set up all the
10 trailers. They were a great, great help
11 out there. Without their help, it would
12 be -- it was a great success. But without
13 the Department's personnel -- and, like I
14 said, a lot of the officers took days off
15 in order to do that and they need to be
16 really commended for that, and I really
17 appreciate that.

18 So, Mr. Kevin, next.

19 MR. SAVOY: Thank you. I'm Kevin
20 Savoy, District 2. I live in Dothan,
21 Alabama.

22 We had a successful deer season
23 from all reports. Also a successful dove

1 season as well. Grady mentioned the
2 fishing tournaments on Lake Eufaula.
3 Those have been quite a success from
4 what -- as he mentioned.

5 Early reports that I'm hearing
6 from folks on -- that are scouting turkeys
7 seems to be positive. I'm hearing some
8 really good reports, so that's
9 encouraging. We'll see how that works out
10 in the next few weeks.

11 And that's about it for me. Thank
12 you.

13 MR. PATE: Hi, I'm Rick Pate. I'm the
14 Commissioner of Agriculture and
15 Industries, and I live in Lowndes County
16 in Tim's district.

17 MR. PHILLIPS: Good morning,
18 everybody. My name is Mike Phillips. I'm
19 the director of the Alabama Cooperative
20 Extension System and work with a lot of
21 specialists, especially on the aquaculture
22 side and wildlife side.

23 MR. STIMPSON: I'm Ben Stimpson. I'm

1 from Mobile District 1.

2 The Department has apparently been
3 doing a fantastic job this year because my
4 phone has been relatively quiet.

5 Everything is going very well and
6 everybody is excited about talking about
7 turkey season.

8 MR. R. JONES: I'm Raymond Jones. I
9 represent Congressional District Number 5,
10 which is in North Alabama.

11 Deer season our way was good.
12 Duck season was okay. We are seeing a lot
13 of turkeys, so the turkey population seems
14 to be doing well in our area of the state.

15 And that's it.

16 MR. B. JONES: Brock Jones,
17 District 6, which is most of Tuscaloosa,
18 Jefferson, and all of Shelby County, a
19 small sliver of Bibb County.

20 Deer season was average from what
21 I gathered from talking to people. Hogs
22 continue to be a problem. I've had many
23 compliments on our Conservation

1 Enforcement Officers, how quick they were
2 to react to any issues that took place and
3 their desire to help whenever needed.
4 Great job there. I compliment them.

5 And that's about all I have.

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, gentlemen.
7 Those are good reports. I appreciate it.
8 And I've asked before, mentioned to you,
9 these are the folks that are in your
10 districts. Contact them with issues, with
11 good thoughts, with compliments. We love
12 to hear it. Things really are very good.
13 I think they are. A measure of that --
14 simple measure is there aren't many people
15 here that have issues, and I'm very happy
16 with that. But contact these guys.

17 And then we're going -- we're not
18 going to hear today from the directors.
19 There are no reports, but I want to
20 introduce them if I can. Mr. Scott Bannon
21 from Marine Resources. He's in Mobile and
22 manages all of our Red Snapper and
23 everything that goes with that and what a

1 great but challenging job that is.
2 Mr. Greg Lein with State Parks. They're
3 coming online and just absolutely doing
4 great. I'm not taking the Commissioner's
5 stuff away. I'm just so proud of all
6 these folks. Patti McCurdy with State
7 Lands. What's happening there, it's just
8 wonderful. And Chuck Sykes with Wildlife
9 and Freshwater Fisheries. All of that is
10 just -- we're innovative. We've been
11 fortunate to get to go to other states and
12 have meetings with groups of surrounding
13 states, and it's amazing at those meetings
14 when they sit there and look and talk
15 about the programs and opportunities that
16 the State of Alabama has and how we're
17 managing our resources. We're leading,
18 and it makes me very happy. Good people
19 to work with. Download the latest Alabama
20 app and Outdoor Alabama and all of this is
21 there.

22 Thank you for letting me run on.

23 Commissioner, your update, please.

1 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Thank you,
2 Mr. Dobbs.

3 I also would like to recognize our
4 Deputy Commissioner, Ed Poolos, and our
5 general counsel, Charlanna Skaggs. With
6 the division directors and our senior
7 staff, we're really, really blessed with a
8 great group of people to work with every
9 day that are passionate about the outdoors
10 and really care about what we do, about
11 the resources, and the people that use
12 those resources. I couldn't ask for a
13 better group.

14 In lieu of the directors giving a
15 report today, I'm just going to hit some
16 highlights because there are people that
17 are having some issues with different
18 things related to what we do, and I want
19 to leave plenty of time for the public
20 comment and make sure that they have the
21 ability to be heard and so we'll know
22 things that we can address to continue to
23 make things better in our state.

1 Again, I thank President Ross for
2 allowing us to meet here. This is a
3 beautiful campus right here in the middle
4 of Montgomery. I appreciate what they do
5 to educate people here at Alabama State
6 University and thank them for opening
7 their facility for us.

8 We don't plan to have any
9 legislation that we will introduce as a
10 department this year. We've had some
11 success in the legislature over the last
12 quadrennium, and we'll keep everybody up
13 to date on any legislation that is
14 introduced that does impact us or that
15 deals with the department, but we don't
16 plan to have any departmental legislation.

17 The Governor issued several
18 executive orders when she began this term.
19 One of those executive orders is a Red
20 Tape Reduction executive order that she
21 issued this week and so we're still
22 working to totally understand that and see
23 how that's going to impact our agency, but

1 one of the things included in that was a
2 moratorium for a certain amount of time on
3 any new regulations and then for us to
4 look at the regulations that we do have
5 and see where we can repeal some of those
6 or reduce regulatory impacts on businesses
7 and individuals. So I say all that to say
8 there may be a time when we're not able to
9 pass any regulations except for seasons
10 and bag limits and some other exempted
11 things, but we're working through that.
12 I'll keep you all up to date on that.

13 I want to give a quick overview of
14 each of the divisions. Our State Parks
15 Division -- since we met last, the State
16 of Alabama and the people voted to pass an
17 80-million-dollar bond for State Parks
18 last May. We got those funds in November,
19 and we've already gone to work at state
20 parks all over the state in doing
21 construction and upgrades. We have
22 three years to use those funds, and so
23 we'll see a lot of work happening in all

1 of our parks over the next three years so
2 you'll see a lot of construction going on.
3 We're partnering with ADEM on some water
4 and sewer projects at our state parks
5 through their Clean Water Fund and their
6 drinking water programs. I appreciate
7 that partnership to help us in our parks.

8 We've -- kind of groundbreaking, I
9 told you about last year on using the
10 rubber modified asphalt for projects that
11 we did at Gunterville and at DeSoto, and
12 this year we're paving all the roads at
13 Joe Wheeler State Park with that rubber
14 modified asphalt in conjunction again with
15 ADEM in a partnership with them.

16 The cabins at the Gulf that were
17 destroyed in Hurricane Sally are being
18 rebuilt. That construction is well
19 underway, and we hope to have those back
20 open by the fall. We're building back
21 what was there and then adding some
22 additional cabins on that footprint.
23 Really excited about how those are

1 looking. That's going to be really nice.

2 And then if you've been to
3 Gulf Shores, you've seen the pier that was
4 damaged in Hurricane Sally. We have the
5 design for the pier repairs. We have the
6 permits that we need from the Corps of
7 Engineers and NOAA Fisheries, and that is
8 out for bid currently. Those bids close
9 at the end of the month, and so hopefully,
10 we'll be awarding a contract for
11 construction and then the pier repairs to
12 start later this fall as well.

13 All parks but one were profitable
14 in 2022. One of our parks where we had
15 the cabins closed for renovations, that
16 impacted the profitability of that one
17 park, but I'm very pleased with the -- how
18 our parks are operating and so many people
19 still are using those parks that started
20 during COVID are still coming out. And
21 we're seeing a good participation in
22 day-use areas at the golf courses. We've
23 just done an RFP and hired a firm to

1 handle all of our electronic reservation
2 system and really integrate it into all of
3 the things that we do at the parks -- the
4 reservation system, the check-in, the
5 point of sale, the golf courses, the food
6 and beverage totally integrated through
7 all of our operations -- and that will
8 make us more efficient and allow us to be
9 able to track things much better and
10 increase the profitability of our parks.
11 We're putting that money right back into
12 operations and maintenance.

13 In our State Lands Division that's
14 Ms. McCurdy's division, Forever Wild Field
15 Trial Area in Hale County is -- we're
16 doing some improvements there. We host
17 about 35 big dog trial events there every
18 year, and the trails and the landscape is
19 first class, world renowned for the things
20 that we host there, and we're going to try
21 and bring the facilities there up to the
22 same class as the trails. When Forever
23 Wild and our State Lands Division

1 purchased that several years ago, it was
2 an old Department of Corrections facility
3 in great need of improvements, so we're
4 making those improvements now. We're also
5 making improvements in our trail
6 amenities, Forever Wild properties, that
7 include signage, parking lots, and other
8 things to make all of those tracts more
9 accessible to the public.

10 On the offshore oil and gas, we
11 don't talk about that very much here, but
12 just thought it was noteworthy that
13 yesterday I got a call from the director
14 of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management,
15 and there will be a lease sale on the
16 offshore oil and gas leases between now
17 and September. That's the first lease
18 sale that we've had under this
19 presidential administration, so I'm glad
20 to see those lease sales start back up
21 again. That translates into some money
22 for the state through the Gulf of Mexico
23 Energy Security Act, GOMESA, that's

1 managed through our State Lands Division,
2 and we should see from the lease sale a
3 good return on that for next year's GOMESA
4 funds.

5 Today we've done about 120 million
6 dollars in GOMESA-funded projects in
7 Mobile and Baldwin Counties since 2019, so
8 it's a significant amount of work. And
9 then there will be the pier management
10 project in Orange Beach, Gulf Shores, and
11 Gulf State Park and Dauphin Island this
12 fall, and those are permitted through our
13 State Lands Division and is a good
14 partnership between those two cities and
15 the State Parks Division to fund that, as
16 well as some money from the National Fish
17 and Wildlife Foundation for the project on
18 Dauphin Island.

19 For the Marine Resources Division,
20 this past year we -- between our division
21 and the public where we permit artificial
22 reefs, we've deployed almost 2,000
23 artificial reefs in 2022. And we plan to

1 do a great deal of work in 2023 and 2024
2 with some National Fish and Wildlife
3 Foundation artificial reef funds, probably
4 about eight million dollars' worth of
5 additional reef work.

6 The Red Snapper season and the
7 quota, as you've probably read in the
8 paper and some other things, we have been
9 working with the federal government for
10 many years on Red Snapper management and
11 on being able to manage the fishery off
12 the coast of Alabama. However, NOAA
13 Fisheries sets the quota and gives us the
14 amount of fish that we can manage off of
15 our coast. There's been some work to
16 calibrate between different reporting
17 systems, our state, Snapper Check, and the
18 federal MRIP program, that's been going on
19 for several years. This year, they've
20 completed that recalibration and it's
21 caused us to have a reduction in our quota
22 of about 500,000 pounds, which has the
23 potential to impact our season length.

1 But looking at the last two years and what
2 we caught and how we've managed that, we
3 still think we're going to be okay with a
4 good, long season for Red Snapper. We
5 anticipate opening that on Memorial Day
6 weekend again this year, and it will be
7 open on four-day weekends every weekend
8 after Memorial Day until we're projected
9 to reach our quota. If things happen and
10 we're not reaching our quota, we do have
11 the ability to go back and make some
12 changes in the season to allow more
13 fishing days or to increase the bag limit
14 to make sure that our people have maximum
15 access to the quota that we've been given.

16 And I want to give a quick update
17 on the oyster season and the oyster
18 resources. As you recall from several
19 years ago at this meeting, Scott Bannon
20 stood up and said we did not have an
21 oyster season at all that year because we
22 didn't have enough oyster resources to be
23 able to harvest. With the work that we've

1 done with shell planting, with some other
2 work that's taken place, our oyster
3 resources -- and really just to be frank
4 with you, God's doing a good job of
5 keeping the salinities where they need to
6 be and there's -- you can -- man can do
7 certain things, but when it comes to
8 oysters, it's really more of a God-given
9 set of circumstances that make those
10 either thrive or not. So we've done
11 everything that we can to put our Mobile
12 Bay and the Cedar Point reef in a very
13 good place for it to flourish with the
14 right conditions. And so those conditions
15 have been good the last few years, and
16 we're starting to see a real impact on
17 growth of oysters and increasing that from
18 having a season with zero harvest to this
19 past year a little over 50,000 sacks that
20 were harvested.

21 And I appreciate the work that the
22 Marine Resources Division has done. The
23 oyster -- most of the stuff that we do in

1 management, as you're well aware, is a
2 marathon and not a sprint. We have to
3 look at things from a macro level and how
4 those are being managed so that we have
5 those resources not only now, but in the
6 future, so it is a very art -- a little
7 science and a little art on how we manage
8 all of our resources, but oysters in
9 particular is extremely complicated, and I
10 appreciate the work that they've done to
11 get us to where we were with over 50,000
12 sacks harvested this year and looking like
13 that's going to be the trend over the next
14 few years if we don't have some type of
15 disaster, a flood, or something. But
16 we're really seeing that resource come
17 back and looking forward to continued
18 access to that as well.

19 On our Wildlife and Freshwater
20 Fisheries side, everybody kind of talked
21 about the deer season. And I can't read
22 my writing, so I've got to put my glasses
23 on. A lot of habitat work is being done

1 on ducks and quail, and I'll probably
2 share a little bit more of that at the May
3 meeting or get Chuck to talk a little bit
4 about some of the species and habitat work
5 that's being done that's not deer and
6 turkey, which is what most everybody wants
7 to talk about at these, but there's a lot
8 of other stuff going on by our staff.

9 We've added land at several WMAs
10 and SOAs in cooperation with Forever Wild.
11 The night hunting for hogs and coyotes has
12 been very popular. We sold quite a few
13 licenses for that and that has become a
14 good recreational activity outside of the
15 normal deer and turkey seasons. We've got
16 a lot of boating access projects, not only
17 in Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, but
18 in State Lands and Marine Resources
19 Division, to try and get people out on the
20 water to be able to partake in the great
21 natural resources we have in Alabama.
22 We've got projects at Mink Creek,
23 Lake Martin, Mount Vernon, just completed

1 a great project in Demopolis, got work
2 going on at Dauphin Island, Weeks Bay,
3 Lake Wedowee, and many more, many more of
4 those projects either underway or in the
5 hopper.

6 I want to recognize Chuck Sykes to
7 give a CWD update. I think it would be
8 better coming from him so he can tell us
9 where we are on CWD. But I'd also like to
10 recognize Chuck is going to be the
11 incoming president of AFWA, the
12 Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies,
13 and he'll be representing the state of
14 Alabama as the president of AFWA, keeping
15 everybody in the whole country safe and
16 giving them plenty of ideas and sharing
17 what we've done in Alabama. I'm very
18 proud of Chuck for that, and that's a good
19 recognition from his peers all over the
20 country to have elected him as the chair
21 of AFWA. So congratulations on that. I
22 know you'll do us a good job. So give us
23 a CWD update, Chuck.

1 MR. SYKES: Thank you, Commissioner.

2 As y'all know, we announced in
3 January of 2022 that we found our first
4 case of CWD up in Lauderdale County. This
5 shouldn't have been a surprise to anyone.
6 We had a very well thought out, very well
7 crafted, strategic response plan,
8 marketing plan trying to educate people,
9 let them know that it was coming. It came
10 in where we thought it would. We found
11 two last year, which I think that was the
12 best case of a bad scenario.

13 This year, we've tested a little
14 more than 3600 deer statewide, more than
15 1100 just in the CMZ up in Lauderdale and
16 Colbert Counties. We've still got 28
17 samples pending that have not been tested
18 yet from the last week of deer season, but
19 out of those 1100 up in that area, we've
20 only found one other positive animal. So,
21 again, nobody wants it here, but one out
22 of 1100, I'll take those odds. So I think
23 we're in as good a place as we can be in.

1 I do want to commend the hunters
2 up in that area. Once all the social
3 media conspiracy theorists settled down
4 and people took a breath, the hunters have
5 responded extremely well with working with
6 our staff at mandatory check stations,
7 dropping off at our freezer locations. It
8 went extremely well.

9 The only thing that we are
10 recommending to do this year different
11 from last year is we're going to add the
12 entire county of Lauderdale into the high-
13 risk zone and a portion of Colbert County
14 into the high-risk zone. The major reason
15 for doing that is through talking with
16 hunters in this area coming to our check
17 stations, there was mainly one deer
18 processor in that whole area that can take
19 deer. By extending that HRZ, it takes in
20 two more processors and several
21 taxidermists, so it allows the hunters a
22 little more flexibility as to where they
23 can take their animals. The one processor

1 up there would get overloaded with deer
2 and it shut down and it left hunters with
3 no place to go. So this is not a
4 punishment. This is not anything to add
5 more regulation. This is just simply a
6 measure to help hunters be a little more
7 free to move around in Lauderdale County
8 and get deer processed and get it to the
9 taxidermist.

10 Thank you.

11 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Thank you.

12 Mr. Chairman, I did leave one
13 thing out on oysters -- and I apologize
14 for doing this out of order -- but the
15 Natural Resource Damage Assessment Trustee
16 Implementation Group, the region-wide
17 implementation group, we're working with
18 all of the five states on some oyster
19 restoration projects, and from that, we
20 hope this year to have about seven million
21 dollars that we can use to do oyster
22 planning and resource work through the
23 region-wide TIG. I did leave that out.

1 Not only are we -- have we done a lot of
2 work, we have a lot of work planned in
3 2023 and 2024.

4 Thank you.

5 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you,
6 Commissioner. That's a lot, but that's
7 not the whole iceberg. There's so many
8 good things going on. I'm proud to be
9 associated with it.

10 Our next agenda item is the public
11 commentary, and it is very important to
12 this Board as people come up to speak --
13 and I'm going to invite the speakers up in
14 a moment -- but as the speakers come to
15 the podium, I ask you as always -- and
16 there's only 46 or 47 people here, so we
17 shouldn't have any issues -- just be
18 respectful, reserve your comments to
19 outside. And one thing so that
20 Ms. Johnson doesn't send me a mean email,
21 please refer -- speakers refer all of your
22 questions to the Chair, and the Board will
23 ask the Chair for a chance to respond.

1 Don't engage directly with the Board
2 members unless the Chair gives you that
3 opportunity.

4 Our first speaker today is
5 Mr. Brian Travis. And as he comes,
6 Mr. Travis and other speakers, you have
7 three minutes, and Ms. Jones is going to
8 keep the clock there that I can see that.
9 I reserve the right to give you another
10 moment to make a specific point if you
11 need to.

12 MR. TRAVIS: I didn't write anything
13 down or print out any papers. I come to
14 talk about rehabbing rabies vector species
15 in Alabama. I was talking -- or asked at
16 y'all's last meeting with the Alabama
17 Conservation Society or Wildlife
18 Rehabilitation Society, and they said that
19 y'all said that there was -- that the USDA
20 said that they recommended that Alabama
21 not allow it. So I wrote APHIS, Tanya
22 Espinosa, and the project manager, Amy
23 Gilbert, and she said that she did not

1 recommend any such thing to Alabama.

2 Also, I would like to know why
3 y'all keep blaming it on -- which I know
4 rabies is a problem. I know it's, you
5 know, a hundred percent lethal if it's not
6 treated. But they said there's no
7 pandemic of rabies in Alabama on the
8 emails they sent me. They said it's east
9 of the Coosa and in the southern states.
10 I don't understand how you can have
11 hunters hunt year-round with their dogs,
12 you know, and you've seen them shoot
13 raccoons out of trees, wounding them so
14 their dogs can tear them apart. What risk
15 is greater -- or what makes it more
16 dangerous to a rehabber that's trained to
17 rehab RVS than to a hunter and his dogs?
18 What's the difference? It makes no sense.

19 I kind of got involved with this
20 two years ago because my wife was
21 depressed and we bought two raccoons from
22 a USDA breeder. She brought them to us in
23 Alabama, and the game warden took them,

1 took them to the woods, put a bullet in
2 their head is what they said. But y'all's
3 own policy says that if an animal should
4 be tested for rabies, they shouldn't be
5 shot in the head. That's y'all's own
6 policy. Another thing it says that y'all
7 are charged by law to make sure -- it's
8 charged by law to protect, manage, and
9 enhance the state's fish and wildlife
10 resources. Y'all set up here today and
11 all you talked about was hunting and how
12 good deer season was and turkey season
13 was, but I never heard any one of you say
14 how many animals were saved or how many
15 animals were helped. You know, turkey
16 season everybody wants to blame it on the
17 raccoons, the possums eating eggs, stuff
18 like that, but if you research it, it says
19 the number 1 cause of the turkey
20 population declining is the harvest.

21 MS. JONES: Time.

22 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Anything
23 that you can add in one sentence?

1 MR. TRAVIS: If I can say one thing in
2 one sentence, Mr. Blankenship, I would ask
3 you to reconsider -- I know you spoke with
4 Mr. Robbins on allowing rehab for RVS
5 species with certain policies in place.

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. That was
7 your specific point.

8 Thank you.

9 Our next speaker is Mr. Brandon
10 Jackson.

11 MR. JACKSON: Brandon Jackson from
12 Walker County. I wanted to thank you for
13 the work that you're doing to benefit the
14 trout fishery in our area. I did provide
15 you with a handout, and it's got some
16 numbers that I'd like to share.

17 We have great Conservation
18 officers. They've done great work there.
19 We've got a no culling regulation that's
20 continued to prove effective over the
21 years that it's been in place. Recently,
22 we had a two-rod regulation that's really
23 helped to reduce some of the user conflict

1 that we were seeing. We're not seeing as
2 much anymore.

3 According to a 2007 report
4 entitled Economic Impacts of Trout
5 Stocking on Tailwaters in the Southeast
6 Aquatic Resource Partnership, Alabama
7 anglers have the following expenditures
8 per trip to the Sipsev Fork for trout:
9 \$25.26 for food, lodging, transportation.
10 When you include fishing supplies, that
11 number goes up to \$47.42. When you
12 include all those plus some other tertiary
13 expenses, their number was \$61.91 per
14 angler, per trip. That amount of
15 expenditure was 33 percent higher than the
16 average for the Southeast. So Georgia,
17 Tennessee, those other states, when we
18 averaged all of those together, our
19 anglers are spending 33 percent more per
20 trip to come fish on the Sipsev Fork.

21 If we use Alabama Power's daily
22 use numbers, we're seeing that they
23 reported about 60 people per day utilizing

1 the waterway. Most of them fishing but
2 some of them not, so we can -- but we can
3 take that as a baseline. You get \$3,600
4 per day, you have \$108,000 per month,
5 \$1,314,000 per year.

6 There's a big opportunity in this
7 area, and one of the ways that we can
8 improve it -- I was able to talk with
9 Chief Greene and Deputy Commissioner
10 Poolos, and we talked about being able to
11 stock some more fish this year. So we're
12 going to work on some funding trying to
13 help get that done because it is a
14 pressing and immediate need. What's
15 happening is we don't get as many fish
16 during the middle of the summer when we
17 have the highest number of anglers, and
18 that's having a very negative effect on
19 angler participation and enjoyment. And
20 so if we can get more fish, we feel like
21 we can in a temporary measure benefit
22 those people who are spending \$63 a trip.
23 And nobody wants to pay that type of money

1 and that type of time and not have the
2 opportunities that they feel should be
3 afforded.

4 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Brandon.
5 You're working with Chief Greene. You're
6 satisfied with that?

7 MR. JACKSON: Uh-huh.

8 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.
9 I appreciate you coming here always.

10 Our next speaker is Mr. Chip
11 Dillard.

12 MR. DILLARD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 I'm Chip Dillard. I'm from
14 Vestavia in Jefferson County. I've got
15 some handouts for you guys. If y'all
16 could pull those out, the highlighted
17 section real quick. We've got a lot of
18 infield CEOs in the house. You guys don't
19 get thanked very often, but I appreciate
20 what you guys do.

21 Basically I guess I'm looking for
22 clarification on the ability to hunt
23 coyotes at night. And under the

1 220-2-.27, there's a specific wording in
2 there that says feral swine and coyotes
3 are species for which the necessity of
4 demonstrating specific damage is not
5 required.

6 So I know this last year and --
7 you know, whenever we started the night
8 hunting license, people have been denied
9 permits. If the cattleman calls up -- I
10 had one particular one that had a dead
11 calf -- picture of the dead calf, sent it
12 in and I was copied on the email -- he was
13 still denied a permit for somebody to come
14 out there and act as an agent to night
15 hunt.

16 The equipment's gotten a lot
17 better. I know this question may be for
18 you, Chuck -- I'm not sure -- as far as
19 clarification of the reg, but, you know,
20 we've got adjoining states there.

21 Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana,
22 Texas have night hunting year-round, and
23 I'd love that. But right now, I just

1 would love the possibility for somebody
2 that calls me or some of my fellow Alabama
3 coyote hunters to be able to come help
4 them. And right now what you guys have
5 set up, they're not allowed to do that
6 because you aren't issuing those permits.
7 And so I want some clarification on the
8 reg and how it's interpreted by the Board,
9 and that's -- that's what I want.

10 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. So I
11 understand what you're asking,
12 Mr. Dillard. What I will recommend to the
13 Board and to the Commissioner is that
14 Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries put
15 together an answer with regard to the
16 regulation and that will be part of our
17 comments and new business at the May
18 meeting, if that's okay.

19 MR. DILLARD: Yeah, that's fine,
20 Mr. Chairman.

21 One other question I had if you
22 could tack in there for me -- or two
23 questions -- is addressing -- I've had a

1 lot of people ask us can we shoot beavers
2 at night. You know, I've had a lot of
3 people ask me that. Could you include
4 that as well as a question to be
5 clarified?

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, I will. I will
7 ask them. Of course, they're hearing you,
8 but I've made a note of that and I will
9 ask that question as well.

10 MR. DILLARD: Okay. Is my time up?

11 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Your time is up.

12 MR. DILLARD: One more thing? Can
13 I --

14 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. One more
15 thing.

16 MR. DILLARD: This is a question from
17 my trapping friends. They just wanted to
18 know -- and I don't have a dog in this
19 fight -- but they wanted to know if it's
20 legal to pen deer, can you not pen a
21 coyote for the extraction of -- you know,
22 for collecting urine to make lures for
23 trappers.

1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. Noted.
2 And thank you. Thank you for coming and
3 thank you for the handout.

4 MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman, can you
5 have them turn that speaker up for us old
6 guys? We're having a hard time.

7 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: You can't turn it up.
8 I will have them stand closer to it.

9 Our next speaker is James Johnson.

10 MR. JOHNSON: Good morning. Before I
11 tell you about myself, let me tell you
12 about two other men named Bill and Dave.

13 The story is a few years back.
14 Bill worked for the railroad, and he
15 worked on a piece of track with a crew
16 when they heard a train approaching on a
17 parallel track. When the train got
18 closer, they noticed it wasn't a train, it
19 was just one car, but it belonged to the
20 president of the railroad. The train the
21 men were working on stopped. The
22 president of the railroad stepped off the
23 train, stretched out, looked down and

1 said, Bill. Bill looks up and says, Dave.
2 Dave gets off the train, and the two men
3 come down and they embrace arm around
4 their shoulders and walk off. They visit.
5 They laugh. They come back. Dave gets on
6 the train and it leaves. The crew who did
7 not know anything about this said, Bill,
8 you never told us you knew the president
9 of the railroad. You guys are tight.
10 What's going on? He said, well, about
11 25 years ago, Dave and I started working
12 on the railroad on the same day, on the
13 same crew. He said over time, we kind of
14 drifted apart. I haven't seen him in a
15 long time. That wasn't enough for the
16 crew. They finally had to ask, man, if
17 you guys started on the same crew, same
18 day 25 years ago, how is it that he is now
19 president of the railroad and you're still
20 working on the crew. Bill said don't
21 think I haven't asked that myself many
22 times, but I do know the answer. He said,
23 25 years ago, I started to work for the

1 railroad for \$3.13 cents an hour. Dave
2 started to build the railroad.

3 My name's James Johnson. I work
4 for Pheasants Forever and Quail Forever.
5 I'm out of the national office. I want to
6 give you a very quick update on some
7 things that we think are exciting but also
8 could happen in Alabama.

9 Firstly, I started my career in
10 law enforcement in Texas several years
11 ago, border patrol, CBP. These green
12 uniforms are bringing back a few memories
13 to me. I went into Pheasants Forever and
14 Quail Forever about six years ago on a
15 national campaign, five-year campaign and
16 fundraiser for 500 million dollars. We
17 wrapped it up here just in the middle of
18 last month as a success. Our main thing
19 that we were trying to do was put habitat
20 on the ground -- more habitat on the
21 ground for birds, bees, and butterflies,
22 youth education, and advocacy. Our goal
23 was to put over these five years -- these

1 last five years put nine million acres of
2 habitat on the ground, new habitat for
3 birds, bees, and butterflies. We hit 11.
4 Our goal is to reach kindergarten to
5 eighth-grade students, teach them about
6 pollination and cultivation of land and
7 conservation. We're doing 1.5 million.
8 We got 1.8. So it was a huge success.

9 Now, that's as of last month. Now
10 we're putting emphasis on doing a couple
11 of other things that will help give us
12 some other areas. We're going to target
13 some other areas to build wildlife for
14 birds, bees, and butterflies. Guess what,
15 Alabama's on top of the list.

16 MS. JONES: Time.

17 MR. JOHNSON: May I finish my sentence
18 real quick?

19 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, please.

20 MR. JOHNSON: So we're looking at
21 coming into Alabama to bring in more
22 birds, bees, and butterflies here
23 immediately. We're going to get new

1 people on the ground. We've started a
2 brand-new chapter in Birmingham. We're
3 looking at two more chapters. I will be
4 coming down personally over the next
5 three months. Alabama is going to be our
6 target over the next year. On behalf of
7 the people here in Alabama, we're going to
8 give more than for birds, bees, and
9 butterflies. We're going to work hard
10 together with everyone here to do that.

11 Thank you for your attention,
12 Mr. Chairman. Thank you for your time.

13 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you,
14 Mr. Johnson, and thank you for your
15 efforts and congratulations and good luck
16 going forward.

17 Our next speaker is Mr. Matt
18 Whitfield.

19 MR. WHITFIELD: My name is Matt
20 Whitfield. I'm a falconer in
21 DeKalb County. I am the president of the
22 Alabama Hawking Association and a
23 representative of the Alabama Falconry and

1 Raptor Council, and I am a licensed
2 falconer and small game hunter in Alabama.
3 I'm speaking to you on behalf of the
4 falconers in our state.

5 Falconry is a long-time practiced
6 hunting sport and is recognized worldwide
7 as an intangible cultural heritage.
8 Falconry is defined as hunting with a
9 trained raptor to pursue wild game. In
10 Alabama, falconry is a hunting sport which
11 is regulated under Alabama Administrative
12 Code R. 220-2-.02 paragraph 9, which
13 defines the regulated hunting and trapping
14 seasons, bag limits, and permit
15 requirements for falconry. Falconers have
16 a deep respect for the raptors we use and
17 the game we hunt, and we are very careful
18 to follow and respect these regulations.
19 We want what's best for birds under our
20 care, and falconers strive to hunt with
21 them as much as possible and present as
22 many successful hunting opportunities as
23 we can.

1 I'm going to skip on to the point
2 here. Y'all have got the paper. You can
3 read. But what we want to propose is
4 falconry to not be regulated under
5 traditional gun hunting restrictions in
6 relation to the time of day and from a
7 vehicle, around businesses, things like
8 that. We know that these restrictions are
9 appropriately applied to gun hunters for
10 there are dangers, you know, from
11 discharging firearms and these styles of
12 hunting. However, when practiced by a
13 falconer, these styles are not dangerous
14 to us or the public around us and can be
15 beneficial. Other states, falconry is
16 practiced at night and from moving
17 vehicles, ATVs, or things like that.
18 Currently, these forms of hunting are
19 against regulation for Alabama falconers,
20 which is justly applied to the majority of
21 gun hunters, but the sport of falconry and
22 Alabama licensed falconers are limited by
23 these regulations.

1 So the exemption that I'm
2 proposing today is that we could practice
3 these things outside of traditional gun
4 hunting regulations, and one of the things
5 that we'd like to add under Alabama
6 Administrative Code R. 220-2-.02
7 paragraph stating: A falconry permit
8 holder may use a raptor in pursuit of
9 rabbits only during periods of sunset to
10 sunrise on private land with the aid of
11 artificial light, no dogs or firearms.
12 And then also a falconry permit holder may
13 use a raptor in search of legal game from
14 a vehicle obviously on private land to
15 that degree.

16 So that's all I have. If you have
17 any questions...

18 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Thank you
19 for your time. They have heard you.
20 Thank you.

21 Our next speaker is Mr. Luke
22 Parker.

23 MR. PARKER: I've got some handouts.

1 I'm talking about legalizing spear hunting
2 in Alabama.

3 Good morning. Thank you for the
4 time. Thank you for all that you do for
5 the state of Alabama. My name is Luke,
6 and I reside in Cullman, Alabama. My
7 purpose for being here today is to
8 hopefully shed some light on spear hunting
9 and the push for getting it legalized in
10 Alabama once again, specifically for
11 white-tailed deer.

12 THE REPORTER: Slow down.

13 MR. PARKER: In the late 1990s,
14 Alabama became the first state to legalize
15 the use of spears for deer hunting. This,
16 of course, ruffled feathers of the Humane
17 Society being that their intent is to
18 eventually put an end to all hunting.
19 Fortunately, everything must have stayed
20 pretty quiet because spear hunting for
21 deer remained legal up until 2018. This
22 change put an end to a goal that I had set
23 and tried to achieve for years, which was

1 to spear a white-tailed deer. I wasn't
2 necessarily given a clear answer on why it
3 was outlawed other than not wanting to
4 cause issues with the Humane Society and
5 animal rights activists.

6 Now, if I may, I would like to
7 address some thoughts that most people
8 have on this topic. Some individuals,
9 like those in the Humane Society, think
10 it's barbaric and that people are running
11 around like cavemen throwing spears hoping
12 that they hit an animal, but I can tell
13 you from personal experience that this is
14 definitely not the case. Spear hunters
15 may be the most patient and responsible
16 hunters in the woods who take it
17 seriously. This is because there are so
18 many factors that actually have to align
19 and come in in order to even have an
20 opportunity to take an animal with a
21 spear. This is much different than a gun
22 or a bow where you have a major advantage
23 no matter how far the animal is.

1 Essentially with a spear having a max
2 range of ten yards, we actually make it
3 harder on ourselves and easier for the
4 deer.

5 THE REPORTER: Slow down.

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Luke, I'll give you
7 30 extra seconds if you'll slow down so
8 she can get that.

9 MR. PARKER: I'm sorry. For anyone
10 who thinks that you can just run outside
11 and kill a deer with a spear has an
12 extreme misunderstanding on the topic.

13 Another thought that some have is
14 that spear hunting is unethical. Again,
15 this is just simply not true. Alabama
16 spear hunter Gene Morris took over 500 big
17 game animals with a spear and has a museum
18 in our great state to prove it. He talks
19 about his experience in the Washington
20 Post saying -- and I quote -- when I throw
21 a spear, it's such a devastating blow that
22 the massiveness of the impact and killing
23 power far exceeds most bullets or arrows.

1 Let me explain it like this. No matter
2 what weapon we choose as a hunter, as a
3 hunter, we need to make sure that we've
4 practiced and are comfortable enough to
5 take an animal with whatever weapon we
6 choose. Spear hunting should be no
7 different. It's extremely ethical. My
8 spear of choice was a seven-
9 and-a-half-foot, two-pound Samburu spear
10 made by Cold Steel specifically designed
11 to take down big game.

12 The last thought that may come to
13 us is why, why does this even matter, why
14 bring up spear hunting when there are only
15 a few people doing it. To answer this, I
16 can only speak for myself. I've learned
17 to respect everything God gave us and grew
18 to love the thrill of the chase. I grew
19 to love the challenge of successfully
20 harvesting an animal. I was encouraged by
21 people like Gene Morris, Tim Wells from
22 Illinois, and even Andy Coates who I've
23 talked to personally who have all proven

1 that taking a deer with a spear is indeed
2 possible and can arguably be one of the
3 most challenging and most ethical ways of
4 hunting.

5 Thank you for your time.

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.
7 Thank you for coming.

8 Our next speaker is Mr. Koty
9 McCarley.

10 MR. MCCARLEY: Thank you, Chairman.

11 My name is Koty McCarley. I'm
12 here from Hodges, Alabama, located in
13 Franklin County.

14 I'm here today with a request to
15 expand the dog deer hunting permit system
16 into Franklin County. I'm primarily
17 focusing this request on two clubs within
18 the county. Both of these clubs would
19 meet the requirements of the permit if it
20 was just made available to us. This is
21 the exact same request that I presented
22 and was denied at last year's first CAB
23 meeting. I won't go into a lot of detail

1 because you've already heard it. You have
2 it in your handouts. But I do want to
3 mention a few key points, and I have some
4 questions regarding the denial of this
5 request.

6 Deer hunting with dogs in
7 Franklin County was completely closed in
8 2002. The permit system has never been
9 made available for Franklin County. The
10 permit system was created and is governed
11 by the Department. It can be suspended,
12 restricted, or revoked by the Department.
13 The permit system is currently available
14 for 15 counties. My first question:
15 Considering the authority that the
16 Department has with this system, why are
17 we, the hunters of Franklin County, being
18 denied an equal opportunity to hunt by
19 this permit system that is currently being
20 used in 15 other counties?

21 My second question: As mentioned
22 above, dog deer season was closed in
23 Franklin County 2002, 21 years ago. Why

1 are today's generation of hunters being
2 punished for the actions of the previous
3 generation?

4 My third question: Doesn't the
5 new generation deserve the opportunity to
6 prove that by utilizing today's technology
7 of trained and tracked GPS collars that we
8 can hunt deer with dogs the right way?

9 And lastly, the definition of
10 hunting as written by the Department
11 regulations, it uses the word pursuing.
12 With that, if a person is pursuing a deer
13 with a dog, they are then hunting a deer
14 with a dog according to the definition.
15 People all across the state are using dogs
16 to track and recover deer that have been
17 shot. These people are essentially
18 pursuing a deer with a dog. Therefore,
19 they are hunting a deer with a dog
20 according to the definition by the
21 Department. These actions are taking
22 place in areas closed to deer hunting and
23 during times when dog deer season is

1 closed. And so DCNR allows or overlooks
2 these seemingly illegal actions of
3 tracking and recovering deer by using a
4 dog.

5 My last question: How could these
6 seemingly illegal actions be allowed --

7 MS. JONES: Time.

8 MR. MCCARLEY: -- or overlooked while
9 at the same time the Department denies the
10 opportunity for us to have a deer season?

11 Now, let me be clear, please. I
12 am not against making all possible efforts
13 to recover a wounded deer. I think those
14 efforts should be made. However, I am
15 against a double standard by the
16 Department for overlooking one action but
17 not giving opportunity for the other.

18 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Koty.
19 Appreciate you coming. This, of course,
20 has been delivered to Wildlife and
21 Freshwater Fisheries and the four
22 questions or three questions that you've
23 asked, I'm sure that they will take that

1 under advisement.

2 MR. MCCARLEY: Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you for coming.

4 Our next speaker is Ms. Susan
5 Morrow.

6 MS. MORROW: Well, thank you,
7 Chairman.

8 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. It's
9 always a pleasure to have you here.

10 MS. MORROW: Thank you, Board.

11 I just want to say that our dog
12 hunters have really tightened down.
13 They're true dog hunters. In the last
14 couple of years, most of the clubs won't
15 let you turn a dog loose if you don't have
16 a GPS collar. And it's good. The
17 complaints are down. We're doing
18 everything that we need to do to keep what
19 we want to do and what we love alive. And
20 I just want to thank y'all for not putting
21 any more restrictions on us. And you,
22 too, Chuck. Thank you.

23 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Susan.

1 Thank you for being here.

2 Our next speaker is Mr. Donald
3 Nelson.

4 MR. NELSON: Joey, you had to put me
5 behind Ms. Susan. You know I have a
6 disadvantage.

7 Mr. Chairman, Commissioner, and
8 Board members, I'm Donald Nelson from
9 Creola. I'm very happy to hear
10 Mr. Blankenship's comments about the
11 GOMESA program, because what I'm here for
12 this morning is that my city is applying
13 for a grant through that program.

14 You have a coin and my business
15 card. The coin has the Gateway to the
16 Delta, the Dolly Parton bridge just as a
17 reminder. The card is I'm extending an
18 invitation to all of y'all if you have the
19 opportunity to come to Creola to visit
20 that site. I'll take you to lunch. One
21 thing the card don't do, now, it won't get
22 you out of jail. They did give the mayor
23 a ticket for speeding, so they're pretty

1 hard down there. But we'll be pursuing
2 that.

3 I have a situation where we have a
4 bear habitat, a migratory area for the
5 bears. In that particular area, you're
6 not allowed, whether it be Forever Wild or
7 the city or whomever, to look at
8 purchasing that property. They have a
9 habitat for wood ducks. My vision is like
10 what you see at Orange Beach, walking
11 path, bicycle path, eco-friendly area. So
12 I'll be around at the end of the meeting
13 to talk to y'all about that, but we are
14 applying as we speak right now for a
15 grant. Glad to hear what you're doing at
16 Orange Beach and all the other areas there
17 to preserve wildlife.

18 The second thing, just to let you
19 know, your Conservation officers -- to
20 brag on -- in Barbour County did a
21 fantastic job, very professional, very
22 appreciative of them. I had a hiccup with
23 my club. Over the years, I've always

1 shared with Mr. Grady when we've had some
2 problems. Well, I found out this morning
3 I had a problem. You can rest assured
4 that that one problem we had will be
5 corrected, because once again, it's a
6 privilege that y'all allow us to hunt.
7 I've been there about 60 years, so we want
8 to continue that privilege and allow us to
9 do that.

10 With GOMESA, I appreciate your
11 support. And once again, I'll be hanging
12 around -- and maybe -- if anybody wants to
13 talk about it, especially our reps from
14 Mobile. We're talking about Exit 19.
15 We've got the bears. I would love to see
16 the Gopher Tortoises reintroduced to our
17 area that we're talking about. I've got
18 the wood ducks, and I'm thinking about --
19 I would love to extend the county's kayak
20 trail up Gunnison Creek.

21 Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you,
23 Mr. Nelson. You are a credit to our

1 sport, you're a credit to the state and
2 your city of Creola. Good luck with that.

3 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Mr. Nelson,
4 will you make sure before you go today to
5 speak with Director McCurdy and let her
6 know about the projects so we'll be on the
7 lookout for that?

8 MR. NELSON: We went through a list of
9 the grant writers. She's working on that
10 as we speak. I know there's a deadline,
11 and we'll talk about that. And, like I
12 said, once again, we want to help our
13 wildlife. What's happening is it's
14 getting encroached in Mobile County.
15 That's just natural, building up homes and
16 subdivisions.

17 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: It sounds
18 like a good project, and I -- talk with
19 her and we'll make sure. And thank you
20 very much for the Challenger. That's a
21 good one. I collect those all over the
22 state, and I like yours a lot. That's
23 very nice.

1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Hold on, Mr. Nelson,
2 for a question from Mr. Jones.

3 MR. B. JONES: This is not a question.
4 It's a delayed response to Ms. Morrow. I
5 just wanted to say I've been on the Board
6 off and on for about 12 years, and the
7 progress that the dog hunter relationship
8 has been with everyone is, to me, the most
9 encouraging thing since I've been on the
10 Board. It's fantastic. Y'all have done a
11 great job.

12 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

13 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you,
14 Mr. Nelson. Thank you very much.

15 Our next speaker is Lane Stephens.

16 MR. STEPHENS: Good morning,
17 Mr. Chairman, Commissioner, Board members.

18 I'm Lane Stephens with SCG
19 Governmental Affairs. I am here
20 representing the Alabama Dog Hunters
21 Association.

22 First, I'd like to thank the
23 Commissioner and his staff for allowing

1 the association to hold the two hunts in
2 conjunction with your staff in Geneva for
3 this past year. During the adult hunt, 14
4 fine bucks were harvested during that
5 hunt. And then we had a kids hunt,
6 children's hunt. A lot of shooting took
7 place. Those youth were able to harvest
8 four during that hunt. So, you know, even
9 if they don't have a success, they get to
10 pull the trigger and have a good time.

11 Understanding the stipulations
12 that have been placed upon you by the
13 Governor with no new regulations, I'll
14 tell you that the association will be back
15 and have a bill filed in this session. We
16 have a House member who is going to be
17 filing the bill I'm still working on as
18 soon as possible. And whenever we had
19 legislation two years ago, this will be
20 shortened somewhat from that. It will be
21 focused on the issue of deer dog trespass
22 and providing the agency and your officers
23 with the ability to write citations for

1 those people who purposely cast their dogs
2 on someone's property where they don't
3 have permission to be or purposefully
4 allow those dogs to enter that property.
5 We think that that's something -- you
6 know, if someone's got private property
7 rights and they don't want people on their
8 land, your agency ought to have the
9 ability to write citations for that today.
10 That would be the main focus of that
11 legislation.

12 Two years ago, we lost the
13 legislation on blood trackers. That's
14 being removed from the bill. We're not
15 going to try to tackle that issue. It's
16 going to be more streamlined.

17 The bill two years ago also
18 required GPS collars. We've taken that
19 out because we heard from some legislators
20 who feel that their constituents may not
21 be able to afford it, so we're willing to
22 streamline this bill. And, again, it will
23 be filed, and we look forward to working

1 with you through the session.

2 Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Lane, very
4 much. We appreciate that and appreciate
5 you being here and being the voice for the
6 Alabama Dog Hunters Association.

7 Our next speaker is Mr. David
8 Clapp.

9 MR. CLAPP: Thank you, good morning.
10 My name is David Clapp. I have property
11 in Clay County, Alabama. And the lady
12 asked me up front when I was registering
13 to speak, if I was going to speak on dog
14 hunting, and I said yes. So she said,
15 well, are you for or against it. And
16 that's a hard question to answer, and so I
17 wrote I'm for it as long as it's not on my
18 property and imposing on our rights to
19 hunt.

20 My property is on Horns Valley
21 Road in Clay County. We border the
22 Talladega National Forest on three sides.
23 We've had it for 15 years. We've been

1 managing the property. It is a marathon,
2 not a sprint. So we've been doing that as
3 a family. And we partner with the
4 Talladega National Forest for burn
5 agreements to manage the property together
6 with them. We've had a very serious issue
7 with dog hunting ever since I've had it.
8 We've had years where we haven't seen any
9 deer, you know, constant dogs running
10 across our property from the national
11 forest. And it's, you know, my
12 perspective -- I'm not an expert on dog
13 hunting -- but that it's just not a
14 practical area, at least if people are
15 going to be wanton and reckless to use the
16 term that you described earlier.

17 I came several years ago. I've
18 stood before you a few times. I'm really
19 grateful for Jeff and the support he's
20 provided. The limitation on the days and
21 the hours did seem to help quite a bit,
22 and we've finally started to see progress
23 after ten years of really leaning into our

1 problem. The relaxation of those in the
2 last year or two has made it worse. Last
3 year was a horrible year for us in terms
4 of incursions on our property.

5 Lonnie and Jeff and I have had a
6 number of conversations and I'm really
7 grateful for the support that Lonnie and
8 the Alabama Dog Hunters Association has
9 provided to me with my specific issue. We
10 had a great meeting on my property several
11 weeks ago with Jeff and I would say my
12 friend Lonnie, and I really believe that
13 the Alabama Dog Hunters Association is
14 opposed to what's happening in my
15 situation specifically. So it's a pretty
16 specific issue that I think has just been
17 happening over the years with people that
18 are being reckless about it.

19 My ask is that the Conservation
20 Advisory Board and the Alabama Dog Hunters
21 Association just continue to work to drive
22 out the bad actors or the bad actions. I
23 was really grateful that one of the

1 members said to me, you know, the years of
2 saying dogs can't read property signs or,
3 well, I can only hunt for two days now so
4 it's kind of your tough luck, that's
5 unreasonable, and I was really grateful to
6 hear that from Lonnie.

7 MS. JONES: Time.

8 MR. CLAPP: And so my hope is that --

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Go ahead. Finish up.

10 MR. CLAPP: My hope and my ask is that
11 the Conservation Advisory Board and the
12 Alabama Dog Hunters Association will work
13 together to trim back this behavior of, I
14 think, people that just aren't taking this
15 issue seriously, whether it's trimming
16 hours back or speaking to people that, you
17 know, aren't willing to do this
18 responsibly. That's my ask. I'm
19 grateful, I'm hopeful, and I need your
20 help.

21 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. What I
22 would recommend again as you've done is
23 continue your dialogue with Mr. Martin and

1 with Mr. Miller and work to get whatever
2 works in your area for you and let
3 Mr. Martin bring that back to this Board
4 again.

5 MR. MARTIN: Mr. Chairman?

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, Mr. Martin.

7 MR. MARTIN: Dave has been very
8 patient and very -- just very willing to
9 help and he was -- I asked him to give us
10 one more year. We met with Lonnie.
11 Lonnie had several of the Board members
12 from that association up there that met
13 with Dave. They've been -- Lonnie and his
14 group have been very good about correcting
15 the problem before it becomes a fire.
16 Lonnie and that crew are very aware. I
17 told them that day if we don't get this
18 straightened out, next year I will propose
19 to close that section down of Talladega
20 National Forest.

21 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. There is
22 part of your answer. And then, of course,
23 that will be up to the Board and the

1 Department. So good luck. Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Our next speaker is
3 Ms. Sheila Gray.

4 MS. GRAY: Sheila Gray from Munford,
5 Talladega County.

6 First of all, Mr. Chairman,
7 Commissioner, Board members, Conservation
8 officers and law enforcement agencies, we
9 send our heartfelt condolences on the loss
10 of Officer Greg Gilliland.

11 And with that being said, we live,
12 hunt, and fish in Talladega County. Since
13 we bought our first property, we've had a
14 continuing issue with hunters running
15 their dogs through it. Granted, we're in
16 a different part on the opposite end of --
17 we're on the Talladega side of the forest,
18 Munford side. We lease additional
19 property adjacent to ours as well.

20 Throughout the years, it's very difficult
21 to hunt our property because the dogs run
22 through them during deer season. The
23 presence of the deer dogs in the middle of

1 our hunts completely destroys the hunt,
2 interferes with our right to quietly enjoy
3 our property. We've always purchased our
4 hunting and fishing licenses even though
5 we only hunt our properties. It's our way
6 of supporting the Alabama Department of
7 Conservation and Natural Resources, which,
8 in turn, supports our right to hunt and
9 fish.

10 We spend a lot of money on
11 equipment, building food plots, providing
12 supplemental food for much of the wildlife
13 in hopes of harvesting an animal for the
14 table. Running dogs across the lands that
15 we've worked hard to prepare disturbs the
16 wild game on the entire property and
17 adversely affects our possible hunting
18 success. At what point does the State
19 consider deer dog hunting an interference
20 with our right to lawfully hunt our own
21 property? The dogs don't know where they
22 can go. The deer dog hunters can't
23 possibly think that this does not

1 adversely affect our efforts to enjoy and
2 hunt our property. Wherever the dogs are
3 released, the hunters know the dogs will
4 run deer through private property knowing
5 full well we and other property owners
6 will be interrupted. That's where our
7 hunt ends and the deer dog hunters' hunt
8 continues.

9 We understand the heritage and
10 tradition of hunting with dogs can be a
11 personal issue. However, there seems to
12 be a total disregard for people who own
13 property. When that happens, heritage has
14 very little to do with it. Hunting and
15 fishing as a whole are vital parts of our
16 heritage, not just deer dog hunting.

17 There seems to be no adequate remedy for
18 us as this regularly interferes with our
19 peaceful and quiet enjoyment of our
20 private properties. We're asking this
21 Advisory Board for relief in this matter.
22 If the deer hunting with dogs is legal and
23 if the dog owners cannot be charged with

1 trespassing for their dogs coming out of
2 the private property, where is the relief
3 for us? All we want to do is quietly hunt
4 what we have worked for. We enjoy waiting
5 and watching for the natural movement of
6 the deer. We're very selective of the
7 deer we harvest. We have to watch these
8 dogs run across our properties. The
9 hunters drive their vehicles in the
10 direction while others wait and shoot what
11 comes their way. Talladega County does
12 not have a leash law, nor have they
13 adopted the State of Alabama's leash law.

14 And with that, we have
15 attachments. My packet is a manilla
16 envelope. And I thank you for your time.

17 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Hold one moment.
18 Have you spoken with Mr. Martin?

19 MR. MARTIN: No.

20 MS. GRAY: No, sir.

21 MR. MARTIN: If you would, get with me
22 and Lonnie after the meeting. Anybody in
23 the Talladega National Forest if you're

1 having issues if you'll meet with me and
2 Lonnie. I'm just telling you. And Susan
3 does a good job as well. She's not up in
4 my area. Lonnie is and he is fantastic
5 about getting the fires put out and so are
6 a lot of dog hunters up in that area.
7 There's a -- I would say 85 or 90 percent
8 are trying to do the right thing and
9 they're trying to help police the ones
10 that are not. So like Dave, I'm fully
11 confident that Lonnie and his guys will
12 take care of it. So if you will get with
13 me after the meeting, we'll be glad to try
14 to get your problem solved.

15 MS. GRAY: Yes, sir. Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Ms. Gray.
17 Good luck. And Mr. Martin is your
18 congressional representative. He's in
19 your district, so please contact him.

20 Thank you.

21 Our next speaker is Mr. Chris
22 Turner.

23 MR. TURNER: Chris Turner. I'm from

1 the Munford area, Talladega County.

2 I personally own property in this
3 area. We lease several hundred acres in
4 this area and have private property that I
5 have permission to hunt as well. For the
6 last 28 years, I've had problems daily
7 during deer season with people hunting
8 with dogs either in the Talladega National
9 Forest or coming to the road that I reside
10 on and turning their dogs loose on our
11 road. This method of hunting interferes
12 with my ability, my family, and guests to
13 quietly enjoy my own property and hunt
14 wildlife thereon.

15 These dogs and dogs in general are
16 not welcome upon my land. They're
17 continuously released in the national
18 forest on the edge of our property line.
19 I've been personally told by these dog
20 hunters that the reason why they turn
21 their dogs loose on the edge of our
22 property line is that we can plant food
23 plots and have supplemental bait and feed

1 the deer on our property and they cannot
2 do it in the national forest. And that
3 type of conduct is a nuisance to myself
4 and my guests, you know, when they do
5 that. These people have exhibited a
6 cavalier, almost outlaw attitude and have
7 taken no precautions to keep dogs from
8 entering my property. They have no
9 respect for me to quietly and peacefully
10 enjoy my own property. These people will
11 sit on the public roadway that I live on,
12 and this can be very intimidating while
13 trying to hunt safely on my own property
14 not knowing if they are going to fire
15 across the road onto my property where
16 myself or my children are hunting or even
17 towards my home. When confronting these
18 people they all state, we're not hunting.
19 We're catching our dogs. These dogs are
20 an instrumentality to my hunt. They end
21 my hunt every time. I've told the
22 numerous dog hunters to keep their dogs
23 off my property.

1 Running dogs across the land,
2 being hunted by still hunters, disturbs
3 the wild game on the entire property and
4 adversely affects the hunting success for
5 those engaged in still hunting. I spend
6 thousands of dollars each year in leasing
7 land, planting food plots, and providing
8 supplemental food for the wildlife and
9 game in our area. This behavior regularly
10 interferes with my attempt to peacefully,
11 quietly, and successfully hunt my own
12 property.

13 Over the years, I've had numerous
14 complaints with our Conservation officer,
15 Greg Gilliland, who was a great friend of
16 mine. Greg would come out and attempt to
17 catch these dog hunters illegally dropping
18 tailgate on my property. They would do it
19 at night the day before. The day before,
20 they would come on the road that we live
21 on, turn their dogs loose to push the deer
22 towards the national forest. I've been
23 told by several of them that that's how

1 they do it. We always missed the
2 opportunity to catch them in the act. Dog
3 hunting in the Talladega National Forest
4 is a nuisance and is an invasion of my
5 property, disrupting the natural movement
6 of the deer for an indeterminate amount of
7 time. These dogs coming from the national
8 forest ruin my effort to hunt on my
9 chosen, lawful manner of still hunting on
10 my own property that I paid for and
11 expended money and time to prepare for
12 hunting. When these dogs --

13 MS. JONES: Time.

14 MR. TURNER: Can I finish?

15 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes.

16 MR. TURNER: I've got one more
17 question as far as, like, the -- the
18 strategic surveillance and the response
19 plan. He brought up earlier about the
20 chronic waste disease. Does that -- you
21 know, practice to contain that, does
22 that -- you know, running dogs can, we --
23 you know, is that part of the plan, you

1 know, in those areas? You know, it's up
2 in north Alabama, Limestone County. You
3 know, is that plan, you know, to stop dogs
4 pushing, you know? Can we contain that,
5 you know, by the -- is that a good method
6 of containing that CWD?

7 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Well, I'm guessing
8 your question is do dogs push deer out of
9 the containment area?

10 MR. TURNER: Yes.

11 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I couldn't answer
12 that question.

13 MR. TURNER: Yes, how far deer are
14 chased by dogs, it can be up to 15, 20
15 miles, you know. If you take movement of
16 animals from, you know, certain directions
17 down, you could push it down into our area
18 as well.

19 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, sir. Common
20 sense would dictate that. I don't know
21 the answer to that. Is that your final
22 point?

23 MR. TURNER: Yes.

1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.
2 Have you spoken with Mr. Martin as well?

3 MR. TURNER: No, sir, but I've talked
4 to Jerry Fincher and Shawn Nixon, you
5 know, as well.

6 MR. MARTIN: If you would get with me
7 after the meeting as well and Lonnie, and
8 we'll -- and what I keep referring to
9 Lonnie for, we like to try to put these
10 fires out before, you know --

11 MR. TURNER: And in my pamphlet, y'all
12 see the pictures that I've provided, you
13 know, of how they will drive down, they
14 line up, and turn them loose.

15 MR. MARTIN: Okay.

16 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Our next speaker is
17 Mr. Avery Bates. You didn't think I'd
18 forget you.

19 MR. BATES: I have many years of
20 seeing you.

21 I'm vice president of Organized
22 Seafood Association and am here to say we
23 have had a couple good years of oystering,

1 but I do appreciate the '23/'24 planting
2 program for the oyster industry and I
3 really appreciate what the Wildlife
4 Federation has done. And I want to tell
5 you what, we appreciate everything
6 y'all -- we've got another 150,000 to put
7 in reef areas for us to work on. Our
8 people has been cut down on time, and
9 we've got a group here that's about --
10 he's a professional oysterman like I was
11 for many years, but we need to be building
12 back our reefs, both for recreational and
13 commercial fishermen and quality of water,
14 everything that -- we're behind time
15 really in planting real good productive
16 areas.

17 We also need to get better water
18 around the mouth of Bayou La Batre by
19 extending that pipeline out to 15 foot.
20 We've got the money. It's been allocated
21 for years. It's been okayed. Something's
22 holding it up. Chris, could you help us
23 try to find out and push that pipeline

1 out, which is the Bayou La Batre outfall
2 line? It's been okayed by everybody. It
3 just needs to go in place so we can
4 upgrade some of these areas so we can
5 plant. We can recoup Little River area
6 and get Mobile Bay looking a little better
7 too because of the amount of outfall
8 that's coming in through that line. And
9 it's in four and a half foot of water. So
10 we want to get that out so we can
11 biologically get better water for our
12 little crustaceans and stuff in that area.
13 So we want to thank y'all for all you do
14 for us. We thank our farming people down
15 there. We just had a meeting with them.

16 We're glad that y'all are looking
17 into seafood that comes in from foreign
18 countries. We've got more seafood coming
19 in this nation now through the shrimp and
20 stuff that's being poured in here. We
21 definitely want you to keep checking for
22 chloramphenicol and stuff, different
23 chemicals that's growing in these ponds

1 that we do not need here in America. We
2 want to keep our fishermen going. We
3 thank y'all for having a fishing industry
4 here. The only few -- and not -- game
5 fishing status flounder, I've been asked
6 that a thousand times. I say, no, we've
7 got some management programs. We hope we
8 can loosen some of these programs up,
9 these regulations, that our fishermen can
10 catch a few more fish because it is a
11 great thing to be able to catch a flounder
12 or a mackerel. Thank you for not years
13 ago making sheepshead a game fish and
14 mackerel a game fish. That entails more
15 food for y'all and the people of Alabama.
16 Keep us fishing.

17 Don't forget, we've got a big
18 dinner coming up on the 22nd. That's our
19 Seafood Bash as we call it in Montgomery.
20 Please come.

21 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Bates.
22 Thank you, Avery, for being here. It's
23 always a pleasure to have you here.

1 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP:

2 Mr. Chairman?

3 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, sir.

4 CHAIRMAN BLANKENSHIP: Avery, what day
5 did you say that Seafood Bash is on? I
6 don't want to miss that. What day is that
7 Seafood Bash?

8 MR. BATES: On the 22nd of March.
9 We'll have fresh Alabama seafood and Gulf
10 Coast seafood. We hope we have some
11 oyster season -- or oysters there. Those
12 are on the half shell.

13 CHAIRMAN BLANKENSHIP: Mr. Chairman, I
14 just want to give a quick update. You
15 asked about -- if it's okay -- on the --

16 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, I'd like to hear
17 that.

18 CHAIRMAN BLANKENSHIP: So that project
19 is being managed through our Deepwater
20 Horizon section. We've just gotten the
21 increase from the U.S. Department of
22 Treasury on that project to 19 million
23 dollars, which is what it's going to take

1 to do that work. It's being implemented
2 by the Bayou La Batre Utilities. So we
3 have provided that funding to them. They
4 are, my understanding, still waiting on
5 the permit from the Corps of Engineers,
6 and as soon as they get that permit,
7 they'll be ready to bid it and make that
8 happen. Hopefully, in 2023, that project
9 will finally get done.

10 MR. BATES: That's good news to us.
11 Cleaner water makes the best oysters and
12 better seafood. And if y'all can get that
13 done for us or push it along, Chris, we
14 appreciate it.

15 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Sounds like it's
16 going to happen. Thank you.

17 MR. BATES: Sounds like it is. We
18 need all the help we can get down there.

19 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Avery.
20 Thank you very much.

21 Our next speaker is Kerry
22 Mitchell.

23 MS. MITCHELL: Hello. How are y'all?

1 My name is Kerry Mitchell. Me and my
2 husband, we are both commercial fishermen,
3 oysters, shrimp, crab.

4 I've supplied y'all with some
5 paperwork. We had a petition out. I have
6 over 700 signatures. We are trying to get
7 our oyster reef opened for a full season.
8 We have a seven-month season from October
9 1st till April 30th. This season we got
10 61 days is what we had to work. That was
11 44,409 sacks. Oysters in our community
12 are very important. Opening this reef and
13 letting us work will not only help the
14 commercial fishermen but will also help
15 the local community, local small
16 businesses, shops. I mean, it just goes
17 on and on.

18 You know, this is our livelihood,
19 our careers. We need a full season. And
20 I've had this petition out for a while.
21 We've been in contact with the news.
22 We've talked to Mr. Kevin Anson. We just
23 want to try to work with y'all and y'all

1 work with us to get us working longer.
2 There's an abundance of oysters. I mean,
3 the reef's doing really, really well. My
4 husband can catch his limit in 30
5 minutes -- that's over, what,
6 500 pounds -- and be back in two hours
7 from when we left, you know, and we just
8 would like to get a chance to work, you
9 know, our full season. We never do. You
10 know, the reef has had issues in the past,
11 but I do believe it's coming back really
12 strong, you know.

13 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. They've
14 heard you. I'm sure that Director Bannon
15 understands and the Commissioner, of
16 course, understands. They're very close
17 to this issue. One thing that I know -- I
18 don't know much about oysters except that
19 I like them -- is that this Department and
20 Marine Resources micro manages that to
21 maintain that level of harvestability,
22 that capability.

23 MS. MITCHELL: Also, I would like to

1 say one more thing if I can.

2 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes.

3 MS. MITCHELL: I just have some
4 questions about some of the funding that's
5 sent down for Wildlife, Fisheries,
6 spillway floodwater money.

7 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'm sorry?

8 MS. MITCHELL: Spillway floodwater,
9 2019. I've been watching since this was
10 released. It's on the Alabama Outdoor
11 website. It says the application will be
12 posted soon. We've never heard nothing
13 else about it. I know this money is
14 supposed to be for resources to help the
15 fishermen to, you know, update their
16 businesses or whatnot. I know other
17 states have received their fundings, and I
18 was just trying to find out what is the
19 deal.

20 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Director
21 Bannon was in Washington this past week
22 working on that to try and find out
23 through the Office of Management and

1 Budget when they're going to release those
2 funds. Would you be prepared to -- I hate
3 to call you on the spot, but are you
4 prepared to give an update on that?

5 MR. BANNON: So Alabama applied for
6 the 2019 spillway funding. It's about
7 eight million dollars that's coming to the
8 state. We were the first state to get it
9 in the works. It has cleared the Office
10 of Management and Budget, which is a black
11 hole in DC that nobody really understands.

12 It is now with NOAA Fisheries. We
13 met with them on Monday. January 5th, I
14 had an email that said the money was
15 imminent -- apparently, our definitions of
16 imminent are different -- but they were
17 going to check on that. The other states
18 have not received their funding. They're
19 actually behind where Alabama is, but we
20 all anticipate during this year that money
21 should be released. We actually
22 anticipate that it should be out before
23 May. And as soon as that money is

1 released, the application will be opened
2 up on the website. So I'll use the word
3 imminent, and we'll follow the federal
4 definition. But I believe it will be here
5 before May.

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.
7 Ms. Mitchell, does that answer your
8 question?

9 MS. MITCHELL: Yes, sir.

10 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much
11 and thank you for being here today.

12 Our next speaker is Mr. Michael
13 Williams.

14 MR. WILLIAMS: How are y'all doing?
15 I'm Michael Williams. I'm one of the
16 fishermen in south Alabama.

17 We get a six-month oyster season,
18 October to April. We don't really get
19 that full season because we get freshwater
20 closures. We've had a closure -- this
21 season already has closed for a month,
22 maybe a month and two weeks, so we lose
23 that time right there to fish.

1 Another thing I want to talk about
2 is the grid system they've got us on. I
3 can't make money on a grid system. I've
4 got tides and winds pushing me. I've got
5 lines and lines. If I cross that line and
6 I'm in closed waters, I get a ticket.
7 I've never had to fish in this way. I've
8 fished for 30 years. They've got us in
9 little one-acre boxes. We're going to
10 devastate that little spot. And I just
11 want to do away with the grid system and
12 go back to the way we fished for 30 years.
13 It's never hurt nothing. All we do is
14 make the reefs better. We ain't killing
15 nothing, and we need to be managed. And
16 that's pretty much all I have to say. The
17 grid system's got me starved out and I
18 can't -- I got tides and winds pushing me
19 across the lines. I can't sit and look at
20 a phone and try to fish oysters. There's
21 no way possible. If we ain't looking at
22 our phone, we've got to work. We've got
23 to manually catch them on the boat. I

1 can't be worried about crossing a line.
2 And if there's thick oysters on the other
3 side of that line, I'm naturally going to
4 go to them thick oysters. I'm not going
5 to be scratching on baby oysters. I don't
6 want to catch baby oysters. I want to
7 catch big, full-size oysters. And I would
8 appreciate that, if somebody would look
9 into that grid system.

10 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Your
11 point is made, and we hear that. And I'm
12 certain that Mr. Anson is aware. Thank
13 you.

14 That concludes -- unless there's
15 anything further from the Board with
16 regard to rebuttal, that concludes our
17 public comments today.

18 Our next agenda item is unfinished
19 business. Is there any unfinished
20 business?

21 The only unfinished business is --
22 and I believe that the requests for
23 information from the Department have all

1 been complied with, so we will move on to
2 new business, today's new business.

3 Is there any new business before
4 this Board?

5 MR. R. JONES: Mr. Chairman?

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, Mr. Jones.

7 MR. R. JONES: I'd like to make a
8 motion. In accordance with the
9 requirements of the Alabama State
10 Legislature, I'd like to make a motion to
11 approve and increase all licensing fees
12 levied by the Department of Conservation
13 and Natural Resources where applicable
14 based on the increases in the Consumer
15 Price Index as published and using the
16 formulas for said increases as previously
17 approved.

18 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. There's a
19 motion on the floor. I'm going to ask for
20 a second.

21 MR. STIMPSON: Second.

22 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Second from
23 Mr. Stimpson.

1 Mr. Jones, would you read that
2 motion one more time, please.

3 MR. R. JONES: In accordance with the
4 requirements of the Alabama State
5 Legislature, I make a motion to approve an
6 increase in all licenses and fees levied
7 by the Department of Conservation and
8 Natural Resources where applicable based
9 on the increases in the Consumer Price
10 Index as published and using the formulas
11 for said increases as previously approved.

12 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. The
13 motion is before the Board for the vote.

14 All those in favor of the motion
15 raise your hands.

16 The ayes carry. The motion is
17 passed.

18 Are there any other motions?

19 Mr. Hartzog?

20 MR. HARTZOG: Not actually a motion,
21 but I would like for the Department to
22 look into something since I'm the old man
23 on the Board that can't hear. But anyway,

1 one situation I've run into is used to be
2 we had what -- Raymond and several of us
3 are big waterfowlers and used to have
4 actually a duck stamp with a physical duck
5 stamp. You could go to the probate office
6 and buy it. You now have to buy it
7 online. Once you pass 65, which I'm past
8 that, I can -- I'm still required to buy a
9 federal duck stamp, but I would love to
10 buy an Alabama duck stamp. They add more
11 money into the duck stamp program, and
12 yet, the way the system is set up, I can't
13 even make -- voluntarily buy a duck stamp
14 because it has to go through the computer
15 system. So if the Department could
16 possibly look at updating the computer
17 system or making it where people over 65
18 could voluntarily buy a duck stamp to add
19 to the duck stamp dollars to add to more
20 conservation work for the State if they'd
21 look into that for us.

22 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. We will
23 direct them or ask them to, and we will

1 review it and get back with you at the
2 next meeting, if that's okay.

3 MR. HARTZOG: Yeah, that's fine.

4 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. Any other
5 business before the Board?

6 Any thoughts?

7 There are no announcements today
8 that I'm aware of. So the date and
9 location of our next meeting is going to
10 be May the 20th. It is in Huntsville. It
11 will be downtown Huntsville probably. So
12 you can make your plans.

13 Y'all have safe travels home and
14 be safe. And thank you for being here.

15 This meeting is adjourned.

16 (Proceedings concluded at
17 10:45 a.m.)
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