

STATE OF ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

RSA Activity Center

Montgomery, Alabama

March 6, 2021

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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Proceedings taken before Tracye
Sadler Blackwell, CCR, RPR, ACCR No. 294, and
Commissioner for the State of Alabama at Large, at
the RSA Activity Center, 201 Dexter Avenue,
Montgomery, Alabama, on Saturday, March 6, 2021,
commencing at approximately 9:05 a.m.

1 BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

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Mr. Joseph Dobbs, Jr., Chairman,

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Commissioner Christopher M. Blankenship, Ex-Officio
Secretary

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

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

7

8 Mr. Patrick Cagle

9

Mr. Jeff Martin

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Mr. Raymond Jones, Jr.

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Mr. Grady Hartzog

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Mr. Ben C. Stimpson, Jr.

13

Mr. Gary Wolfe

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Mr. Tim Wood

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Mr. Greg Barksdale

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Mr. Brock Jones

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1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Welcome, everybody, to the
2 first Conservation Advisory Board for
3 this year, March 6th, 2021. I'm glad
4 with the trying circumstances that
5 everybody is able to make it and be here
6 with the traffic and that everybody is
7 safe.

8 In these still unusual times -- it's
9 not behind us yet -- please be diligent
10 and responsible to others. Wear your
11 face masks and distance where you can.
12 Let's be considerate.

13 Let me thank Betsy Jones this
14 morning for doing yeoman's work to
15 locate this venue for us, a venue that's
16 large enough and safe enough so that we
17 can have this meeting. Thank you,
18 Ms. Jones. As well as I thank Wanda and
19 her group who put this together -- help
20 put this together and manage the public
21 speaking/public comments portion. We
22 appreciate them very, very much.

23 The Lord has blessed us with pretty

1 fair weather today. So safe travels to
2 everybody going home.

3 We have some special attendees today
4 with us: Mr. Rick Pate, our
5 Commissioner of Agriculture. His office
6 has a lot of responsibilities, one that
7 I think of as weights and measures.
8 That's huge. That affects us every day.

9 Another attendee here today that we
10 haven't seen or don't see often is
11 representative Mr. Ed Oliver from
12 Alexander City. Thank you for being
13 here very much. We're glad to have you.

14 Also today, one of our tried and
15 true Board members, Dr. Gary Lemme,
16 who's the Director of the Alabama
17 Cooperative Extension Systems -- he is
18 retiring. This will be his last
19 meeting -- his last official meeting.
20 We will always welcome him back. His
21 counsel and involvement during his
22 tenure has been most professional, and
23 he will be missed, I promise you.

1 His successor, our new Board member,
2 is Dr. Phillips -- Dr. Steve Phillips.
3 He's joining us today. And let's
4 welcome Steve. Let's welcome
5 Dr. Phillips.

6 I don't have any other announcements
7 at this point. Anything from the Board
8 for announcements? Anything that I
9 haven't been made aware of?

10 (No response.)

11 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. So I'm going to do
12 something a little different today. For
13 the invocation -- I want us to have a
14 good, productive meeting. For the
15 invocation, I'm going to recite the
16 *23rd Psalm*. And then we'll stand
17 together with the *Pledge of Allegiance*,
18 and I'll ask Patrick Cagle to please
19 lead us in the *Pledge of Allegiance*.

20 But I'm going to recite the *23rd*
21 *Psalm*, and those of you who would like
22 to join me, please feel free.

23 (Recitation of *Psalm 23* led by

1 Chairman Dobbs.)

2 (Recitation of the *Pledge of*
3 *Allegiance* led by Mr. Cagle.)

4 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: We normally would read --
5 recite the *Sportsmen's Pledge*, but we're
6 going to wait and do that at our next
7 meeting. It's most appropriate at all
8 meetings, but today, just in the
9 interest of time -- we will do that at
10 our next meeting, which will be sometime
11 in May.

12 Mr. Secretary, do we have a quorum
13 today?

14 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Yes, sir, we do.

15 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. Very good.

16 The minutes of August 22, 2020, from
17 last year -- I know the Board has read
18 them. Are there any corrections?

19 (No response.)

20 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: If there are no corrections,
21 the Chair approves the minutes as
22 provided by Ms. Blackwell and perused by
23 Ms. Betsy Jones.

1 And I'm going to ask each Board
2 member to introduce themselves, give their
3 district, and give their district
4 reports. And we will start here with
5 Mr. Ben Stimpson.

6 MR. STIMPSON: Yeah. Ben Stimpson. I think
7 it's District 1, isn't it?

8 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, sir.

9 MR. STIMPSON: I'm from Mobile, Alabama.

10 Oh, district report. In my
11 district, it was again -- I think this
12 is the second meeting in a row I had
13 maybe one call on dog hunting, which is
14 outstanding. I've had one fisherman
15 call. And I had about 600 turkey calls.
16 And so everything was about turkeys in
17 our district.

18 MR. CAGLE: Patrick Cagle representing the 2nd
19 District. You know, I also talked a lot
20 of turkey. There's a lot of passionate
21 folks, and there were lively
22 discussions. But I find that as a
23 positive thing that people are so

1 passionate about, you know, our natural
2 resources and that resource in general.

3 I also talked to a few processors
4 and really was impressed with -- you
5 know, after the first few weeks how well
6 they were able to adapt to the
7 possession-transfer requirement. I also
8 appreciate the Department putting in the
9 call-in number which, you know, the
10 processors I talked to had really good
11 feedback and that helped.

12 MR. HARTZOG: I'm Grady Hartzog, District 2.

13 We had a -- I also talked to deer
14 processors. Most of the processors said
15 that they felt like maybe their numbers
16 were down just a small, small
17 percentage, but said it seemed like the
18 deer were healthier, in better shape,
19 the ones they were processing.

20 Eufaula was real fortunate last week
21 to sponsor a major bass tournament.
22 Y'all may have watched it on the Outdoor
23 TV series. We had anglers -- they had

1 to cancel a big tournament in Texas. So
2 Lakepoint State Park was smiling because
3 the parking lot was slam full. The
4 winning fisherman carried home a check
5 for \$300,000. And that was a big, big
6 boost to the economy. There's a bunch
7 of other tournaments scheduled.

8 As to the turkey -- dog deer hunting
9 complaints, I only had one, which in my
10 district is a great accomplishment
11 because normally our district gets a lot
12 of complaints. I only had one. So I
13 think the dog hunters are really doing
14 their best to do a good job with their
15 turkey hunting -- I mean, with their dog
16 deer hunting, and I want to commend them
17 on doing that.

18 So other than that, like Ben said, a
19 few calls on fishing and this and that,
20 but the majority of the calls were on
21 the turkey. Thank you.

22 MR. MARTIN: Jeff Martin from District 3. I
23 know this pandemic has been rough, but I

1 called Chuck one day because I had
2 people fussing about the verification on
3 people fishing. Because on Logan Martin
4 Lake, I mean, we've set some records on
5 fishermen. Everybody I've talked to in
6 the hunting and fishing industry, their
7 only problem is (inaudible). So if
8 there's a silver lining in this, it may
9 be -- I know the hunters and fishers
10 were on a decline as part of our
11 numbers. Hopefully we can peak out and
12 we can settle somewhere in the middle.
13 Hopefully we can get some more hunters
14 and fishermen.

15 You know, it's the same as Grady and
16 everybody has said. I think I talked
17 with Lonnie one time this year, and come
18 to find out, that wasn't even a hunting
19 dog issue. The homeowner called back
20 and made a mistake. So that's
21 fantastic.

22 Yeah. Most of my calls have been on
23 turkeys. So hopefully we can make a

1 silver lining out of that and everybody
2 got to spend a lot of time out in the
3 woods and on the water.

4 MR. WOLFE: Gary Wolfe, District 1. We've had
5 a good year. The last two weeks -- I
6 think, as you were saying, the COVID
7 thing has kind of had everybody stuck
8 inside and everybody's been under
9 pressure and it's just really been hard
10 for everybody.

11 I think the last two weeks I talked
12 to a couple of game wardens and they
13 feel like that's what we saw in
14 Fairhope, in south Alabama, that
15 everybody has been cooped up and the
16 last two weeks have been like Fourth of
17 July. There are more cars and people
18 outside than I've really seen in a long
19 time. So I think there's going to be
20 some good things happening here and the
21 rest of the year.

22 The only things that we've had
23 happen in our area is -- one of the big

1 things was the ducks. I think the ducks
2 last year was kind of an "off" season
3 because it was so hot. And I think
4 Keith and the others have been doing a
5 good job about closing some waters down
6 there and doing some things and doing
7 some regulations that is hopefully going
8 to improve the duck hunting all over
9 south Alabama and all over Alabama. I
10 know they've been doing a lot of things
11 trying to help improve that situation.

12 The dog hunters -- I really want to
13 commend, like everybody else, the dog
14 hunters. I think they've done a great
15 job. I'm hearing nothing but good,
16 positive things, not a lot of
17 complaints. I haven't heard any
18 complaints this year. And the dog
19 hunters, I commend you for doing a great
20 job and standing up and meeting us
21 halfway and trying to do what's right.

22 I think the biggest thing right now
23 is the turkey hunting. I think that's

1 what a lot of you are here for today.
2 So hopefully today we can kind of come
3 to a compromise and meet halfway on this
4 turkey thing and get at least something
5 accomplished.

6 What I've been hearing in my
7 district is the big landowners, they
8 don't really have a problem with the
9 regulation too much. The small guy,
10 what I'm hearing, they're saying the
11 turkey population is down. So I think
12 that's what we've got to address. We
13 got to make it good for everybody to be
14 able to kill a turkey. And that's the
15 only reason I'm here is to make sure we
16 help everybody in this state. Thank
17 you.

18 MR. BROCK JONES: Brock Jones, District 7,
19 Greene County. I would like to echo
20 what Gary said about the turkey hunting
21 issue.

22 As far as deer season this year,
23 overall I think most would say it was a

1 good year for District 7. We've got a
2 lot of rivers in my district, and there
3 wasn't nearly as -- wasn't any flooding
4 this year compared to last year, which I
5 think had a lot to do with it.

6 The processors were initially
7 frustrated by the possession transfer,
8 but I think, as said earlier, they got
9 more comfortable with it. When the
10 "800" number was added back, that made a
11 big difference. And I think by the end
12 of the year they were satisfied.

13 Far and away the most calls I've
14 gotten has been about the turkey date
15 potential change. People talk to me all
16 the time about the predators, coyotes
17 and hogs and those concerns.

18 And the public lakes continue to be
19 very much an asset for my district;
20 Dallas County, Monroe County, Bibb
21 County. It's been all successful.
22 Crappie fishing is going real well now.
23 So no dog hunting complaints, which is

1 great. And that's all I've got.

2 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Start on this side,

3 Mr. Jones.

4 MR. RAYMOND JONES: Raymond Jones,

5 Congressional District Number 5. Had a
6 good year, particularly when it came to
7 the deer hunting. North Alabama has
8 been hit with several rounds of really
9 bad EHD, hemorrhagic disease outbreaks.
10 So that has kind of -- we're seeing that
11 kind of come back around. The deer are
12 beginning to recover. We're seeing much
13 older age class bucks.

14 The duck season was very, very poor.
15 It was -- I think most of that was
16 migration effect. We just did not have
17 a cold enough winter to bring ducks down
18 here and we -- so the duck hunting was
19 very poor.

20 I think the crane season has been
21 very popular up in north Alabama.

22 I know several people that got into that
23 lottery and killed their cranes. So

1 that's been a very good, positive thing
2 that we've seen up there.

3 Unfortunately, I did have some dog
4 complaints in Colbert County. We've
5 worked with Lonnie Miller and his group
6 to try to resolve some of those, but we
7 have had -- and this is now ongoing.
8 The past couple of years we've had a
9 series of complaints in that area. So
10 we'll be talking about that a little
11 later.

12 MR. BARKSDALE: I'm Greg Barksdale,
13 District 4. Sort of like everybody
14 else's district, shortly after our
15 meeting in August, I started getting
16 calls concerning the turkey hunting.

17 Then next on the list would probably
18 be the deer processors, a few of them
19 having issues with -- the first part of
20 the year with transfer of the Game Check
21 number and how that process needed to
22 work. But like everybody else, I think
23 after the first couple of weeks those

1 calls went away and everybody sort of
2 understood the process.

3 But by and far the biggest
4 conversations I've had this year are in
5 and around the turkey hunting.

6 MR. WOOD: I'm Tim Wood representing
7 District 7 from Selma and the Black
8 Belt. Like everybody else, the last six
9 months have been an awful lot of fun
10 visiting about turkeys, and we've had
11 some great, great conversations. And
12 whether we agreed to disagree, we left
13 as friends and it was -- it was really
14 some great conversation. And I think we
15 have great opportunity in the future.

16 As far as the transfer of
17 possessions, it was pretty heated at the
18 first of the season. And probably the
19 reason it was so heated at the
20 processors was most of those bringing
21 deer in had never Game-Checked. Once
22 they initially got set up to Game-Check,
23 people called me the second go-around

1 and said, man, this is easy, this is
2 great.

3 So one of the best things we did was
4 to pass that regulation, but also we got
5 some great, great information this year
6 on deer hunters. And I think, you know,
7 we'll probably cover that today.

8 As far as other conversations, I've
9 had visitations with reptile producers.
10 They were a little concerned about, I
11 guess, the regulations. And so we --
12 I've had some extensive visitation with
13 them out of Birmingham.

14 Also, from veterinarians to private
15 wildlife biologists to turkey
16 enthusiasts, I've met with -- I couldn't
17 tell you how many people met at my
18 office. Maybe I'm a little bit too
19 convenient right there on Highway 80.
20 But we also -- we had a lot of fun
21 visiting over this winter.

22 Deer season was really good. We --
23 the Black Belt had a really good deer

1 season. Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. That's it for the
3 Board members.

4 I'm Joey Dobbs. I represent the 6th
5 District. I want to mirror what
6 everybody says. It was a good deer
7 season, ducks were terrible, and a lot
8 of conversations about turkeys. And
9 I'll leave it at that. These gentlemen
10 did a great job.

11 I'll add on to what Tim said, that
12 at the beginning of the season with the
13 new regulation, unfortunately, part of
14 our information technology group --
15 something came apart and the online
16 Game-Checking didn't work. And Chuck's
17 group and the Commissioner worked very
18 hard to get a "1-800" number up and
19 forestalled any further declines.

20 But there was some confusion. Had that
21 not happened, I think it would have just
22 been a fabulous rollout. And we did get
23 great information. But Chuck will talk

1 about that more as we go on.

2 And let me back up and say that for
3 everybody out there, for you and your
4 friends, that these gentlemen, these
5 representatives here of Congressional
6 Districts -- get to know them. And
7 their districts are defined in the
8 *Digest*. Their contact information is in
9 there. And call them. They need things
10 to do. Use them. They have the
11 information.

12 And so with that said, there are --
13 the Directors of the Divisions that they
14 report to and that they talk about are
15 here today, and I'm going to introduce
16 them very briefly. And if they have
17 reports, that will come after the
18 Commissioner's Report.

19 But Mr. Scott Bannon with Marine
20 Resources Division, Mr. Greg Lein with
21 State Parks, Ms. Patti McCurdy with
22 State Lands, and Mr. Chuck Sykes with
23 Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries.

1 And with that, I'm going to ask the
2 Commissioner to give his report.

3 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: I think before I
4 give my report, I think Mr. Hartzog may
5 have something he would like to do.

6 MR. HARTZOG: Oh, okay. Thank you, Chris.

7 Dr. Lemme, would you please come
8 forward.

9 When Dr. Lemme first came on the
10 Board, he -- you learned right quick his
11 heart was in the right place. He loved
12 the resource. And the biggest thing I
13 liked about Dr. Lemme, one of the first
14 calls I got from him, he says you need
15 some help on trying to get some youth
16 hunting opportunities in my district
17 started. So he came down to Eufaula.
18 We had some good meetings.

19 We really hate to see him retire.
20 But as an award that you normally give
21 away to retiring members and since he
22 qualifies for the "Old Coot Award,"
23 we're going to present Dr. Lemme with

1 the "Old Coot Award." And thank you for
2 your friendship and thank you for your
3 service.

4 DR. LEMME: That's wonderful.

5 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Thank you, Grady.

6 Dr. Lemme, I do appreciate your
7 years of service on the Board. I wanted
8 that little fun, but we do have
9 something officially to recognize your
10 service.

11 One thing I do want to say about
12 Dr. Lemme is how much I've enjoyed
13 working with him. He's been on the
14 Board now for ten years as the Extension
15 Director in Alabama after a successful
16 career in other parts of the country.
17 So glad to see him serve here in Alabama
18 for ten years.

19 One thing I can say about Dr. Lemme
20 is he has the ability to take academic
21 information and research and translate
22 that into what everybody else can
23 understand, and in that world that is a

1 great skill. That's an extremely
2 important skill.

3 And I do appreciate you helping me
4 on several things, helping me to
5 understand things, and then how you've
6 worked well and have really been out --
7 as the Extension office should be, out
8 taking that research and taking the
9 information out to the public so that it
10 can be used for management or for
11 enhancement of people's properties and
12 their livestock and game.

13 So, Dr. Lemme, for your dedicated
14 service on the Conservation Advisory
15 Board from October 1st, 2011, through
16 February 28, 2021, thank you for your
17 service.

18 DR. LEMME: Thank you, sir.

19 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Hope you enjoy your
20 retirement. We all want to get there
21 one day.

22 DR. LEMME: Yes. I'd like to just say thank
23 you to everyone here. Made lots of good

1 friends that are out in the audience
2 there over these ten years. And I
3 commend our staff. You're very
4 professional. You work well with the
5 public, and that's really important.
6 But I want to thank everyone here for
7 your commitment to the stewardship of
8 our natural resources. God bless you
9 all.

10 I'm heading to the Cattlemen's
11 meeting. I heard they have good lunch.

12 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Dr. Lemme.

13 And thank you, Commissioner. And if
14 you're ready, would you like to give
15 your report.

16 And before you do, I'm going to
17 mention just very briefly that Patrick
18 Cagle has been a loyal serving member of
19 this Board. This is his last meeting.
20 We're going to miss Patrick very, very
21 much. He's going on to bigger and
22 better things, wonderful things. He's a
23 wonderful young man. We are so proud to

1 have had him here with his guidance and
2 leadership, and he's taught us all about
3 parliamentary rule and kept us on the
4 straight and narrow. Thank you,
5 Patrick.

6 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: So before I give my
7 Commissioner's Report, I just want to
8 make sure that -- and welcome,
9 Dr. Phillips. I know that you have big
10 shoes to fill literally and figuratively
11 in this role, and I look forward to
12 serving with you as well.

13 And I wanted to see if Commissioner
14 Pate had anything he wanted to share
15 before I gave my Commissioner's Report.

16 COMMISSIONER PATE: Thank you, Commissioner.

17 Yeah. I do want to apologize. I do
18 take this seriously serving on this
19 Board. I certainly never realized that
20 was part of being Commissioner of
21 Agriculture or the passion that people
22 bring to this. I guess I should have
23 known that as a hunter.

1 But I don't want -- mean this as any
2 disrespect, but I have to leave and
3 follow Dr. Lemme headed to the
4 Cattlemen's convention. And we've got
5 the Governor speaking at noon, and I
6 made that commitment way before I knew
7 the date of this meeting. And
8 Commissioner Blankenship and his staff
9 knew that, but I apologize. I'm going
10 to leave at ten, and I think I can make
11 it to downtown Birmingham by noon.

12 But I do want to say, you know, I
13 have had people -- you know, the
14 number-one calls I get -- when everybody
15 was giving their report -- it's normally
16 about deer farming and people approach
17 us because they think we might have some
18 role or should have some role. And
19 so -- and so we deal with that and
20 whatnot.

21 But I have heard from a lot of
22 people about the turkey hunting issue,
23 and I guess my advice -- and I think

1 it's kind of weak on my part not to be
2 here for that discussion, and I do
3 apologize. Yeah. It seemed to me this
4 would need a little more study and a
5 little more thought, but I've heard from
6 so many people on both sides of it. I
7 just -- and for me personally and the
8 Department of Ag, I think we would, you
9 know, take some slow steps at this
10 point. And so that would be my only
11 recommendation to the Board.

12 And, like I said, I apologize I
13 won't be here. I think it's bad for me
14 to have those comments and then leave.
15 But, anyway, that's the way it worked
16 out.

17 But I appreciate being a part of
18 this. If I can help you, let me know.
19 But that's all I had, Chris.

20 Thank you, Joey.

21 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Safe travels.

22 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Thank you,
23 Commissioner.

1 So I do have a somewhat lengthy
2 report that I want to give this morning
3 and cover a lot of different things. We
4 have a lot of good things going on in
5 the Department.

6 Hunting, fishing --

7 (Brief interruption for audio.)

8 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: There we go.

9 So hunting, fishing, shooting,
10 hiking, WMAs and Forever Wild property
11 usage were all up in 2020 due to the
12 COVID and people getting outside. We
13 saw massive amounts of use.

14 I want to thank -- publicly thank
15 Governor Ivey for her support for
16 outdoor recreation. She understands
17 that people needed this outlet for the
18 physical and mental health and that
19 outdoor spaces could be safely accessed.
20 And I appreciate her keeping that as
21 essential services all throughout the
22 COVID. I think all of us benefited from
23 that.

1 Chuck will talk a little bit about
2 license sales increases in his
3 presentation. So I'll leave that for
4 him and not steal his thunder. However,
5 I do want to say that we've hired over
6 15 Conservation Officers over the last
7 few months, and we're putting that
8 increased dollars from license sales to
9 work. It's the largest class that we've
10 had in 25 years. Very proud to increase
11 our enforcement presence and the good
12 work that they do in the field.

13 Many people talked about the "1-800"
14 number, reinstituting that during the
15 season. I think that really shows a
16 good nimbleness in our Department, that
17 when we see that there was an issue or a
18 problem that we didn't wait until after
19 the season or form some committee, that
20 we acted and did what we needed to do to
21 close up the gap so people -- we saw
22 that there was a problem not having that
23 "800" number in some of the rural areas.

1 After reinstating that, it was
2 very well received by the public and
3 then closed up any gaps that we had in
4 reporting. And I think that you'll see
5 from part of Chuck's presentation how
6 that translated into much better
7 compliance and increased reporting,
8 which ultimately the goal of that is for
9 us to have much better data on what's
10 being harvested so we can manage those
11 species.

12 Our State Parks revenue was up this
13 year overall, especially at the
14 campgrounds and golf courses and the
15 day-use area at the gated parks. You
16 know, we did struggle at some of the
17 lodges and restaurants due to COVID and
18 the restrictions there, but overall we
19 had a very good year. And we're putting
20 that money right back into the parks by
21 renovating the much needed properties.

22 I'm going to run down a quick list,
23 but over the last 18 months, we have

1 installed fiber to all of our 21 parks.
2 So as you hear, there's a lot of concern
3 around the state for broadband
4 connectivity in the rural areas. I
5 think that's an amazing feat that we've
6 been able to run fiber to all of our
7 parks and to have that to run our
8 operations and for our guests.

9 We're now in the process of building
10 out Wi-Fi networks within the
11 campgrounds and the other lodging
12 facilities within the parks.

13 We have a new online reservation
14 system that started last spring. Really
15 in the middle of all the COVID and
16 everything that was going on, we turned
17 on the new reservation system. So now
18 all overnight accommodations in our
19 state parks can be booked online.

20 That's, again, another really good thing
21 for our state, for the public, and it
22 helps drive business and produce funds.

23 With those additional funds from the

1 year we've had, we are renovating the
2 cabins at Lakepoint State Park. We've
3 built a new upper and lower campground
4 at Cheaha. We're now doing new
5 electrical service in the campground at
6 Monte Sano to move that up to 50 amp.

7 Joe Wheeler -- if you'll recall, in
8 December of 2019 we had a tornado that
9 went through Joe Wheeler State Park and
10 destroyed two-thirds of our campground
11 and our day-use area. We have signed a
12 contract, and we have two-thirds of that
13 campground being rebuilt. That is
14 underway now.

15 We're spending about \$1.8 million to
16 renovate the chalets at Guntersville
17 State Park. They have renovations at
18 Desoto Falls and the Little River -- the
19 day-use area and going to have other
20 continued work there this spring.

21 We've reopened Buck's Pocket State
22 Park after many years of it being closed
23 as kind of an offshoot of Guntersville

1 State Park. It's going very well.

2 We're building a new campground at
3 Cathedral Caverns State Park. They only
4 had the cave up there. There was no
5 campground. We've received a grant to
6 pay for a good portion of that to add
7 that campground.

8 And at Meaher State Park on the
9 Causeway down in Mobile, we just signed
10 a grant yesterday and received a grant.
11 We're adding 60 campsites and six new
12 cabins, a new bathhouse, and other
13 improvements at Meaher State Park, about
14 a \$3.5 million project.

15 So just to give you a little bit of
16 an overview of all the good work that's
17 going on around the state as we put --
18 as we have money and find opportunity to
19 do those renovations at our state parks.

20 Speaking of natural disasters, with
21 the hurricane -- Hurricane Sally and
22 Hurricane Zeta did have some impact on
23 our facilities. The Lodge at Gulf State

1 Park was built to a specific standard.
2 It was built to the certified FORTIFIED
3 building standard. It was the first
4 hospitality building in the world that
5 was built to that standard, and it
6 was -- we built it that way so that when
7 we had hurricanes or different things
8 that it would withstand those and spent
9 a little more money up front to do it
10 right and that we would be able to -- it
11 would fare well during those storms.

12 During Hurricane Sally, it only had
13 some minor cosmetic damage. The
14 building and the facility stood up just
15 like we expected it, which was kind of
16 an outlier in a lot of the other damage
17 that we had down there. I think it
18 showed that if you build something right
19 to these standards, that it's
20 sustainable and good use of the funds.

21 That was the good news. We had a
22 lot of other damage at Gulf State Park,
23 but we're trying to turn those lemons

1 into lemonade. We are renovating all of
2 the 13 lakeside cottages. They had some
3 water damage. And the risk management
4 insurance to the State has been very
5 responsive enabling us to renovate those
6 cottages -- all 11 cottages -- and
7 they'll hopefully be open by June.

8 The 16 lakeside cabins that were
9 built in the '70s, those were mostly
10 destroyed by the hurricane. And so
11 we're rebuilding those up almost from
12 the floor up, and those will be
13 essentially brand new. And that will
14 take a little bit over a year probably
15 to get all those put back. Had to put a
16 new roof on the beach pavilion.

17 And as many of you might have seen
18 from some of the early pictures after
19 the hurricane, the Gulf State Park Pier
20 did sustain some pretty substantial
21 damage at the end. As irony would have
22 it, we were planning to have a
23 ribbon-cutting on the new \$2.4 million

1 renovation of the pier the morning of
2 the hurricane. That was -- obviously we
3 cancelled the ribbon-cutting and then
4 woke up the next day to see that the
5 pier was severely damaged.

6 But we have, with our staff and the
7 contractor, put the pier back together
8 out to where the pilings were damaged at
9 the end, had it inspected, made sure it
10 was safe, and have reopened the pier out
11 about two-thirds of the length of the
12 pier. We're doing engineering and
13 design, and we will fix the rest of it.
14 But we're also doing some work at the
15 headquarters building that was damaged
16 at Gulf State Park.

17 And then we have a really good
18 project we had already started before
19 the hurricane to redo the Lake Shelby
20 day-use area, upgrade the pavilion
21 amenities, rework the parking at several
22 locations, build a new dog park, build a
23 new state-of-the-art playground. All

1 that was already underway before the
2 storm. And it delayed it by a month or
3 so, but all that's working well.

4 So I say all that to say, by the end
5 of next year almost everything at Gulf
6 State Park will be new or almost new and
7 really be something we can continue to
8 be really proud of to have that in our
9 system and will generate good income
10 that we'll continue to put back into the
11 parks.

12 I'll give a quick legislative
13 update. We had one bill this year that
14 was primarily a Department bill when we
15 started the session. That was for a new
16 Lifetime Disabled Veterans Hunting and
17 Fishing License. That passed last week
18 and is now on its way to the Governor to
19 be signed.

20 After the session started, we've had
21 a lot of interest and calls to do
22 something about feral swine and to
23 create some type of a night hunting

1 season for feral swine and coyotes. So
2 we have -- we drafted a bill. And that
3 has been introduced and now has passed
4 both the committee in the Senate and the
5 committee in the House and now is
6 awaiting floor action in both houses on
7 that. But that's been very well
8 received by the legislature in order for
9 us to have more predator control.

10 We're working on legislation to help
11 with additional renovation dollars for
12 State Parks. That's -- working on that
13 now. Not at a point where we can
14 present that.

15 And there has been a bill that -- a
16 draft of a bill for dog hunting
17 responsibility is what it's called.
18 It's in circulation amongst some of the
19 different groups of people. I want to
20 be clear, that's not a DCNR bill that we
21 have not sponsored or agreed upon. But
22 it's not to the point where it's been
23 introduced or even drawn up, as far as I

1 know, into a bill by the Legislative
2 Reference Service. If it gets to that
3 point, I'll send it to the Board for
4 your information.

5 Forever Wild and Wildlife and
6 Freshwater Fisheries have partnered
7 extensively over the last couple of
8 years to leverage funds to add more than
9 25,000 acres to public hunting
10 opportunities around the state,
11 including -- specifically in some
12 underserved areas like Russell County,
13 Dallas County, Butler County, some areas
14 in Baldwin County and Monroe County, and
15 more is in store during 2021 working in
16 partnership to continue that good work.

17 Speaking of Monroe County, our State
18 Lands Division and our Wildlife and
19 Freshwater Fisheries Division recently
20 received the Fish and Wildlife Service
21 Regional Director's Award for their
22 combined work in the Redhills area of
23 Monroe County. That continues

1 protecting habitat for the Red Hills
2 Salamander, Alabama's official
3 amphibian.

4 So we now have over 12,000 acres in
5 that area that is to protect that
6 critical habitat, but, also, almost as
7 important, that area is open for
8 hunting. That not only protects the
9 salamander but provides some really
10 great property in a great part of the
11 state for public hunting.

12 Speaking of awards, the DCNR
13 Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries
14 Division has received the Diversity in
15 Conservation Award from the Association
16 of Fish & Wildlife Agencies for the
17 second consecutive year. I think we'll
18 win it again this year. So we may be
19 three years in a row recognized by -- as
20 the agency in the country that is
21 providing the most opportunities for
22 diversity in our employment and in our
23 programs.

1 Red snapper season went well in
2 2020. Having State management of the
3 fishery allowed us to continue to add
4 days to the season to allow fishing
5 opportunities for anglers to reach our
6 quota.

7 So breaking that down, as we had
8 State management, as we had hurricanes
9 and other things that made it where the
10 days that were open for fishing -- you
11 couldn't go fishing -- instead of losing
12 those days or losing those fish, we were
13 able to continue moving those days. The
14 Marine Resources Division did very well
15 with that to make sure that our anglers
16 had access to all of the quota that was
17 allocated for Alabama.

18 Our oyster harvest this year was
19 double what it was last year, just over
20 23,000 sacks. Our hope for 2021 is to
21 maybe double that harvest again if
22 conditions hold. So thank you for the
23 work on rebuilding our oyster reefs

1 after the devastation from the droughts
2 and floods in the late 2000s, early
3 teens.

4 I tell you, God has richly blessed
5 us to be able to live in Alabama. If
6 you live in Alabama and you do anything
7 outside, the Department of Conservation
8 touches your life somewhere. It's
9 important for us to provide information
10 to the public on the work that's going
11 on in the state, the opportunities for
12 people, and for us to all hopefully
13 realize and appreciate what wonderful
14 opportunities we have here compared to
15 some of the other places around the
16 country.

17 In that vein, we revamped our old
18 Information and Education section into a
19 new Communications and Marketing section
20 that's headed by Mr. Billy Pope. This
21 section better aligns with the new goals
22 that we've set to market DCNR in our
23 offerings as well as communicate better

1 with our constituents.

2 Billy -- I saw Billy taking the
3 pictures earlier. I always hate to
4 single out staff members because we have
5 1100 really great staff members. But I
6 think that the work that's been done
7 after -- over the last year has really
8 been impressive. And I wanted to
9 recognize that and recognize the sea
10 change that we've made in our outlook
11 and in our public dissemination of
12 information.

13 Billy has developed a great
14 partnership with Academy Sports, iHeart
15 Radio, and is promoting all of our
16 divisions on social, digital, and other
17 media. Doing a fantastic job, he and
18 his staff, of really thinking outside
19 the government box. And I hope that
20 you're seeing some of that work as you
21 access the *Outdoor Alabama* app and
22 website and social media pages.

23 We're doing some things to promote

1 not only the work of the Department but
2 to help with landowners. One example is
3 the article that came out yesterday.
4 Mr. David Rainer's article was about
5 prescribed fire and the importance of
6 prescribed fire for land management and
7 habitat management. So we're trying to
8 do things like that where we get that
9 information -- so not only what we're
10 doing on public lands but also helping
11 private landowners and others see the
12 importance of habitat management for
13 wildlife as well as for the forestry and
14 the other parts of landownership.

15 Our State Lands Division has managed
16 projects totaling about \$78 million over
17 the last three years with GOMESA funds.
18 Our Deepwater Horizon section that's
19 headed by Amy Hunter has done tremendous
20 work. Alabama leads all the states in
21 the percentage of the Natural Resource
22 Damage Assessment dollars that we've put
23 to work. We have more federal RESTORE

1 and Treasury projects from Deepwater
2 Horizon oil spill approved than any
3 other state.

4 I'll give a more complete report on
5 that at the May meeting in the interest
6 of time. I think it's important for
7 you-all to see the work that the
8 Department is managing. But just know
9 that it's over \$700 million of work
10 that's being managed by the Department
11 of Conservation Deepwater Horizon
12 section with six employees. So I think
13 that is a good testament to wise use of
14 our funds and doing really, really good
15 work for Alabama.

16 There's much more I could share, but
17 then it might just look like bragging.
18 But I think this gives a good overview
19 of the work of the Department that maybe
20 you don't always get to see on a
21 day-to-day basis. So I just wanted you
22 to know what a great staff we have and
23 the tremendous work of the Division

1 Directors, the Deputy Commissioner, and
2 all of our staff in trying to better the
3 resources and the lives of Alabamians.

4 So thank you, Mr. Chairman, for
5 giving me a little extra time this
6 morning to talk about that.

7 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you so much. What a
8 great report. A lot of wonderful and
9 interesting information, and all of it
10 is very good.

11 And congratulations, Billy. I just
12 think that's super, the work that you're
13 doing. Thank you very much.

14 Today we have a very special guest
15 from the U.S. Geological Survey,
16 Dr. Barry Grand, who is going to speak
17 with us this morning.

18 Dr. Grand.

19 (Presentation attached to the
20 minutes due to audio/technical
21 issues.)

22 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Dr. Grand, very,
23 very much.

1 I'm going to open the floor to the
2 Board for some questions or comments.

3 Anything from anybody for Dr. Grand,
4 knowing that our communication
5 capabilities are a little stretched?

6 Dr. Grand, I have a question. Just
7 do you -- how much money did we spend --
8 did the State spend on the turkey
9 research?

10 DR. GRAND: I believe the federal aid
11 contribution (audio distortion) two and
12 a half million, and then there were
13 matching funds from Auburn that were
14 contributed as well.

15 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: So two and a half million
16 plus some matching funds?

17 DR. GRAND: Yes, sir.

18 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. Thank you. And this
19 has been going on for five years is what
20 I'm gathering.

21 DR. GRAND: We actually started this work in
22 2015 and then add four years of field
23 research and a year of startup where we

1 were trying to assess the problem and
2 another year extension on the end where
3 we were (audio distortion) some of the
4 analysis.

5 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Super. Thank you.

6 Any other questions?

7 (No response.)

8 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Dr. Grand, very
9 much for taking your time and presenting
10 this data. Thank you so much.

11 DR. GRAND: Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Our next order of business is
13 public commentary, and, of course,
14 that's very important to this Board.

15 MR. RAYMOND JONES: Mr. Chairman, Directors'
16 reports.

17 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Chuck has got his
18 presentation first.

19 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'm so sorry. I'm sitting
20 here reading that. I wrote myself a
21 note.

22 Yes. I'm going to ask the Directors
23 today in attendance -- and they seem all

1 to be here -- if they have any updates
2 or Division reports.

3 I'll start with Mr. Scott Bannon.

4 DIRECTOR BANNON: Is it working?

5 All right. I'll talk pretty
6 quickly. The Commissioner covered most
7 of the highlights. But COVID had an
8 impact this year, same as everybody
9 else. We had -- fortunately we've been
10 blessed with very few illnesses within
11 the Division.

12 We did see a slight drop in license
13 sales during the initial phase. Then we
14 saw an increase over the season -- not
15 with non-resident. That stayed fairly
16 flat. But with our resident licenses,
17 we saw about a 20-percent increase in
18 license sales throughout the season.

19 Boating activity was dramatically
20 increased. I think someone mentioned it
21 with -- they saw it on the freshwater
22 lakes and things. Which if ALEA were
23 here, they would say it increased the

1 boating accidents as well. So that was
2 a concern for our enforcement guys out
3 on the water to be aware of that.

4 But during the snapper season we saw
5 that -- we saw a tremendous increase
6 of -- up to about 800 vessel trips on
7 some of the peak days. That can equate
8 to about 3- or 4,000 people a day
9 fishing for red snapper.

10 Again, with the flexibility of the
11 State management, we closed a little
12 earlier than projected and then we
13 reopened in the fall. The challenge
14 there were storms and some weather that
15 challenged us throughout the season.
16 But all in all, it was a 25-day season
17 and then with about 17 days tacked onto
18 the end as we tried to fish out the rest
19 of the quota that we were allotted for
20 last year.

21 Moving into this year, we have not
22 set a red snapper fishing season because
23 we're having some -- I'll use the mild

1 term "discussions" at the Gulf Council
2 level and with federal government about
3 what happens with this season. There's
4 a method that's long and drawn out
5 called calibration that they want to
6 apply to the state of Alabama, and that
7 could reduce our season by about half.
8 And if we reduce our season by half, we
9 like to panic fish in Alabama, so we
10 would probably fish that in about four
11 days.

12 So our senior biologist is here.
13 Our chief biological -- of the
14 biological section, Kevin Anson, sits on
15 the Council, and he's done a great job
16 of working on some processes to get
17 through that. So the Gulf Council meets
18 in mid April, and that is after we have
19 what we call the Great Red Snapper Count
20 which is going to show that there's
21 conservatively three times the number of
22 red snapper in the Gulf of Mexico.

23 The federal government has to

1 provide us with the assessment. There's
2 what we call an interim analysis coming
3 out of the tight time crunch between now
4 and that April meeting and a lot of
5 information coming out and a lot of
6 networking between the different states
7 about how we move forward with this.

8 So our goal is that we avoid a
9 reduction in season. So there will be
10 more on that later. Unfortunately, I
11 just don't have any information to give
12 you on that.

13 We had instituted the Gulf Reef Fish
14 Endorsement last year. And so this was
15 the first full season with that. And we
16 saw sales of around 24,000 for private
17 angler and about 400 for the for-hire
18 industry, which all of our federally
19 permitted charter boats all purchased
20 the permit, as they should have. So we
21 were very pleased with the compliance
22 among the for-hire fleet. And then the
23 others were State -- commercial party

1 boats that work in State waters.

2 So all in all, that went really
3 well. We're using that money this year
4 for some advertising in other parts of
5 the state and expanding our advertising.
6 We just really didn't have a budget for
7 that before. And that money is being
8 spent specifically to target reef fish
9 fishing. So those of you in north
10 Alabama may start to hear a little more
11 about reef fish fishing.

12 There is a lifetime version that was
13 passed last year. So now that's
14 available. That was the one comment we
15 got from lifetime license holders was
16 they would like to have a lifetime reef
17 endorsement. So we added that. And
18 that just started. So I haven't even
19 checked to see if we've sold any yet.
20 But a limited number of people had asked
21 for that.

22 The Board and -- with our
23 regulations, we had changed some size

1 and bag limits for spotted seatrout and
2 flounder the last couple of years.
3 That's still -- we get a lot of
4 questions about do you see any results
5 of that. It's too early. It takes a
6 couple of years before you can really
7 look at the trends. Last year is going
8 to be a little bit of an anomaly most
9 likely in your landings because of the
10 increased amount of fishing pressure,
11 again, because outdoor activities were
12 considered to be safe and healthy.

13 But on the flounder side and the
14 trout, we are raising those in our
15 hatchery, the Claude Peteet Mariculture
16 Center that's in Gulf Shores. And,
17 Board members, you're welcome to set up
18 a visit anytime. But we just released,
19 I think, 34,000 flounder this week.
20 They're probably about 1-inch, I guess,
21 give or take, that were spawned in the
22 hatchery. And there's about that many
23 or more that are going to be released in

1 probably the next two to three weeks.

2 So we're trying to get where we do
3 that a couple of times a year. We're
4 working with Auburn, doing some
5 cryogenic studies and some other things
6 so that -- doing some genetic studies.
7 So there's a lot of activity going on in
8 there. The third species we have in
9 there is Florida pompano.

10 So our oyster season, as the
11 Commissioner mentioned, we think went
12 very well. We doubled our harvest this
13 year. We instituted a grid system this
14 year, which was kind of new. But it
15 was -- we had a challenge that we
16 couldn't move oyster harvest into
17 specific areas to make sure that people
18 were maximizing their opportunities. So
19 we created a grid system.

20 And we have on our *Outdoor*
21 *Alabama.com* -- you can go there and see
22 the grid system. You can turn on your
23 location services. You can tell if

1 you're in an open area or closed area
2 and you can go back to the same spots.
3 It's a lot of information for catchers
4 who choose to use it.

5 But it helped us narrow down -- we
6 can close individual grids to move
7 people to areas to maximize the yield.
8 Before our areas were too large. So if
9 they were working one side of it and
10 working it a little harder than they
11 need to and there's another area where
12 they're not working, we can now narrow
13 that down and keep them harvesting. And
14 we think that added about -- about 6- or
15 7,000 sacks this year being able to do
16 that. So we hope to see that increase.

17 We have some other RESTORE projects
18 working to help with our oyster reefs
19 that we just started this last year, our
20 mounds and furrows project. We're
21 looking at elevating some bottom and
22 trying to get those oysters into more
23 oxygenated water so they survive better

1 and to increase natural production.

2 We have an oyster hatchery project
3 that has had some slight delays. So
4 we're working on that. But we should
5 start our own hatchery in Gulf Shores
6 where we are creating larval oysters and
7 putting them on a shell and then putting
8 those out on the public oyster reefs.
9 All in all, that was a pretty good
10 season.

11 The storms did impact us this year
12 naturally on the Gulf Coast.
13 Unfortunately, you heard what happened
14 to the Gulf State Park. We had some
15 public access boat ramps that suffered
16 some damage. Most of it has been
17 relatively minor.

18 Weeks Bay, we have to put some
19 gravel out there. Be careful because
20 you'll lose your vehicle in some of
21 those potholes. But we're a couple of
22 weeks away from refurbishing that
23 parking lot.

1 The primary one was the Fort Morgan
2 boat ramp was silted in and there was
3 sand on the ramps. So we have a
4 contractor. We're trying to keep the
5 ramp clear. We just finished signing
6 the contracts to have it dredged out.
7 There's been -- if you've had larger
8 boats, it's been a little more difficult
9 to launch there on the lower tides
10 because of the depth, but that should be
11 corrected here shortly.

12 The Pines boat ramp is a small boat
13 ramp. We've closed it until it can be
14 repaired.

15 Boggy Point, which is probably our
16 most active next to some of those on
17 Dauphin Island, had some minor damage,
18 but we're going to get that repaired
19 soon.

20 And we are actually adding a
21 section -- there's so much commercial
22 activity going on with the launching of
23 piles of lumbers that needs to be done

1 by the water that we're creating a pad
2 where they can launch from there and not
3 negatively impact the docks and things
4 there that cost a lot of money to build
5 so that we can help the community
6 rebuild faster and more efficiently.
7 And that's coming in the next couple of
8 weeks.

9 Our Dauphin Island office suffered a
10 tremendous amount of damage. We lost a
11 roof. We lost every single dock. We
12 lost a lot of shoreline. So as of
13 Monday, we're going to close that office
14 because now our construction projects
15 are coming together. We'll still be
16 available via phone and online to do
17 license sales. We still have our Gulf
18 Shores office that's available. But
19 there's -- we lost our air-conditioning.

20 So there's a lot going on on that
21 particular piece of property that was --
22 most of that was storm related. And so
23 I think when we come out on the other

1 side, we're going to have a brand-new
2 shiny piece of property that we're
3 excited about.

4 And then a big one for the south
5 part of the state is the Fort Morgan
6 fishing pier that's located right next
7 to the Fort Morgan boat ramp. We
8 started a project last year to rebuild
9 that and it's underway. And then there
10 were some delays in delivery of steel
11 due to COVID, and then we had some
12 storms. So the new proposed completion
13 date is about the beginning of July, so
14 peak activity season. A lot of interest
15 in having that pier being rebuilt.

16 Once it's done, it's going to be --
17 it's encapsulating the previous pier to
18 preserve some of the historic portions
19 of that. And it will be a
20 concrete-and-steel pier that we
21 anticipate can survive most hurricanes.
22 I'm not going to say "all." But it has
23 a life expectancy of the next -- about

1 40 years. So if it can get through the
2 next couple of years, it will get to the
3 Commissioner and my retirements.

4 And I believe that concludes my
5 report unless you have any other
6 questions.

7 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Thank you,
8 Colonel Bannon.

9 Open it up to the Board. Any
10 questions for Colonel Bannon?

11 Grady.

12 MR. HARTZOG: Scott, I'll get you to answer a
13 question that I was going to ask you
14 later on the proposed changes that you
15 got in here. You know, talking about
16 oysters and several others will be
17 published using a news release, but you
18 explained when you were saying you were
19 going to have it on the computer where
20 you would show the different things.
21 But wouldn't it be good to complete that
22 sentence that they define that in there
23 so if John Doe --

1 other sections without the -- the press
2 release -- even though it's pretty quick
3 and timely, but that's why it's in
4 there.

5 MR. HARTZOG: Yeah. I agree with taking it
6 out in a press release, but wouldn't you
7 want to include a sentence in there so
8 if somebody comes in from Louisiana or
9 Mississippi or whatever and you tell
10 them to go look at the website?

11 DIRECTOR BANNON: Well, they have to check
12 in -- like it's already a rule they have
13 to come to the OMS -- I mean, we can --
14 and our Legal folks are here, so we
15 could run that by them. I mean, we can
16 put whatever in there to make sure it's
17 efficient and effective.

18 And then the -- you did see the
19 addition of recreational harvest of
20 oysters. It was one thing that has
21 become a little more popular. And so we
22 want to -- we've never counted those
23 oysters in the past, and so now we want

1 to be able -- in our management system
2 we had never included recreational
3 harvest of oysters.

4 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any additional questions of
5 Colonel Bannon?

6 MR. HARTZOG: Thank you.

7 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

8 Mr. Greg Lein, do you have a report
9 that you would like to give?

10 DIRECTOR LEIN: Good morning.

11 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Good morning.

12 DIRECTOR LEIN: I just want to reiterate what
13 the Commissioner presented earlier. He
14 gave an excellent overview of life in
15 the Parks system the last year. It has
16 been a very interesting year for us in
17 the Parks system, record revenue, record
18 re-investment of that revenue in the
19 Parks system to make it better for the
20 public, and most interestingly record
21 attendance.

22 And the most fascinating thing about
23 that record attendance is that many of

1 our visitors this year were first-time
2 visitors to the Parks system, and a lot
3 of that was because they felt like they
4 didn't have any other options to get out
5 and enjoy the great outdoors. And
6 repeatedly, as the Commissioner has
7 said, we went out of our way within the
8 Department to remind the public that
9 being outside was a safe place during
10 this unusual year, and they came out to
11 the Parks system in droves. And so it's
12 been a very successful year from that
13 standpoint.

14 Also, it's been a really challenging
15 year from the standpoint of bad weather
16 events, straight-line wind events,
17 tornado events. It seemed like every
18 other week we were under the threat of a
19 new hurricane down on the Coast.

20 And we weathered all those occasions
21 very successfully. I think it's been
22 the epitome of adaptive management in
23 the way we've been able to pivot and

1 deal with all that. And I want to thank
2 the Commissioner and his leadership for
3 seeing our needs and helping us and
4 supporting us to make all of that work.
5 And, also, Deputy Commissioner Ed
6 Poolos. We would not have been able to
7 do all this as successfully as we have
8 been without their assistance.

9 That's all I have.

10 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Greg.

11 Any questions for the Parks
12 Director?

13 (No response.)

14 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much. And
15 thanks always to Deputy Poolos who works
16 in a back corner office, very small,
17 dimly lit, but he does a whole lot of
18 good things for the Department. So
19 thank you.

20 Ms. Patti McCurdy with State Lands.

21 DIRECTOR McCURDY: Mr. Chairman, I told
22 Commissioner I know you have a lot to do
23 today. I would defer to the next

1 meeting unless there's a specific
2 question from any Board member.

3 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Anybody have anything that
4 relates to Ms. McCurdy?

5 (No response.)

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. Thank you.

7 DIRECTOR McCURDY: I'll let y'all get back to
8 business. Thank you-all.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Thank you very
10 much.

11 Mr. Chuck Sykes, Wildlife and
12 Freshwater Fisheries.

13 DIRECTOR SYKES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm
14 going to start probably from this angle,
15 and then I'm going to move around here
16 in a minute.

17 Last year, if y'all remember, I made
18 a pretty big deal out of the number of
19 hunting accidents that we had had from
20 our last season, and I wanted to make a
21 note that this year we are on pace to
22 have the lowest recorded amount of
23 hunting accidents and fatalities that

1 we've had since we started keeping
2 records in 1973. So that's a very big
3 deal.

4 Hunters are listening. We're doing
5 our best to educate. And I certainly
6 hope that we can keep that number down
7 from 15 to 1. That's a huge, huge jump
8 over last year.

9 Everybody has mentioned the COVID-19
10 bump for outdoor recreation. As a
11 nation, state wildlife agencies have
12 been dealing with a relevancy issue for
13 the past couple of decades. Nothing we
14 could have done could have brought us
15 back to the forefront like COVID-19 did.

16 Most of our recreational licenses
17 increased from 2019 to 2020. Freshwater
18 fishing licenses increased by almost
19 15 percent. Hunting licenses were up by
20 8 percent. Even this year, we've got a
21 5.3 increase of hunting licenses so far.
22 And although it's really early in the
23 freshwater fishing season, we're up

1 8.8 percent on those over the same time
2 last year, which had an almost
3 15-percent increase last year. So
4 people are definitely getting outside.
5 They are definitely enjoying what
6 Alabama has to offer.

7 Same goes for our archery parks and
8 shooting ranges. They experienced a
9 record number of visitors this year.
10 And it goes to prove that those first
11 two bullets -- you may wonder why I'm
12 putting them in there. But from January
13 of '20 to December of '20, there were
14 more than 39 million background checks
15 performed by licensed firearm dealers.
16 Approximately 8 million of those were
17 new buyers.

18 So we've got a lot of first-time gun
19 owners out there and bowhunters, and
20 they need someplace to go. So we
21 operate 12 public shooting ranges and 18
22 community archery parks. Anyone can
23 utilize those ranges and parks as long

1 as they have a license issued by DCNR.

2 We have a couple of shooting ranges
3 that are staffed. And just one of them,
4 to give y'all a little perspective, the
5 Swan Creek Range up in Limestone County
6 averaged selling 150 new licenses a week
7 last year. So there was a lot of
8 first-time people coming and taking
9 advantage of what this Department has to
10 offer.

11 Same goes for our public fishing
12 lakes. Our Fisheries section manages 23
13 public fishing lakes, a little over 1900
14 surface acres in 20 counties. They had
15 a 44-percent increase FY19 to '20. That
16 equated to more than 50,000 more fishing
17 trips than normal and the most fishing
18 trips in the past 17 years. So
19 everything that we had, from WMA usage
20 to public fishing lakes to shooting
21 ranges to parks, Forever Wild
22 properties -- everything experienced
23 tremendous usage last year.

1 To give just a little CWD update, as
2 of me standing here talking to you
3 today, we still do not have CWD in the
4 state of Alabama. We're currently
5 testing.

6 The big thing I want y'all to look
7 at is those maps. We've tried to
8 educate people from day one that CWD
9 progression is about like feral hog
10 progression. It doesn't move real fast
11 naturally. It only moves real fast when
12 it's in the back of a truck. And
13 thankfully hunters have listened.
14 They've learned. And in Mississippi and
15 Tennessee it has only moved 10 miles in
16 the past two years through natural
17 progression.

18 Y'all, I'll take that. That means
19 we've still got time. Who knows, in the
20 next several years, there may be some
21 other alternatives. But right now I
22 just want to thank the hunters for doing
23 their job and not artificially expanding

1 the CWD zones.

2 Many of y'all talked about the
3 transfer of possession regulation. And
4 I want to thank the Board for listening
5 to our recommendation and doing a hard
6 thing last year. Change is not easy.
7 Y'all saw it last year. Phones rang off
8 the hook. Every one of y'all has said
9 once it settled down after a few weeks,
10 a little tweaking, it was not a problem.

11 Y'all can see our compliance. We
12 had 95,000 deer reported last year. We
13 had 195,000 reported this year. It
14 worked, no ifs, ands, or buts. Our
15 compliance rate --

16 We are estimating right now. We
17 have not finished going through all of
18 the numbers.

19 -- will go from less than 50 percent
20 to approximately 90 percent this year.
21 That's a big deal. That's a huge deal
22 for us to be able to utilize this data
23 to make positive changes.

1 And this is just one example. Up in
2 your area, Mr. Jones, we were able to
3 take our Game Check data and we were
4 able to refine some of our deer zones
5 and pull Jackson County completely out
6 of Zone C. It was not justified due to
7 hunter numbers, harvest numbers. So we
8 use this county by county to make better
9 decisions, to give hunters more access,
10 and to do what's best for the resource.

11 All right. As far as turkey
12 research, which is what most of y'all
13 are here for, I spent a whole day this
14 week going back through old Board
15 minutes. And if y'all ever get bored, I
16 recommend it. There's been a lot of
17 things happen over the past six or seven
18 years.

19 And, Don and Susan, I want to thank
20 y'all. You have been there through
21 every bit of it. Y'all were there for
22 every one of them, good, bad, and
23 otherwise. A lot of y'all have.

1 But the first -- the first date that
2 I can see where members of the CAB
3 started asking me questions -- and,
4 granted, I started in December of 2012,
5 so this wasn't long after I started --
6 was May 4th of 2013 that members of the
7 Board were asking about turkey
8 populations due to concerns expressed to
9 them by hunters in their district.

10 With a little more research, later
11 that same year the brood survey showed
12 recruitment rates were the lowest that
13 it had been in the past 24 years. Well,
14 we needed to know what was causing it,
15 if it was real, so we -- as you heard
16 from Dr. Grand, we initiated the
17 research project in 2015.

18 And, Mr. Chairman, if you add up all
19 the dollars, it's about \$3.4 million
20 we've spent over that five-year period.

21 This was some of the numbers going
22 into it. This graph is a little bit
23 easier to understand than Dr. Grand's.

1 Over the decade -- not every decade,
2 but that decade -- there was a
3 10-percent decline in the number of
4 hunters. There was a 30-percent decline
5 in harvest. So there's 20 percent in
6 there that's not directly attributed to
7 the loss of hunters. You would expect
8 in a healthy population when hunter
9 numbers decline that harvest would
10 decline at that same rate, and it
11 didn't.

12 During that same decade you had a
13 30-percent decline in brood size and you
14 had a 30-percent decline in poults per
15 hen from the statewide brood surveys.
16 So everything was trending at -- the
17 harvest, the brood size, and the poults
18 per hen were all declining at basically
19 the same rate.

20 So some historical management.
21 Turkey populations in Alabama have
22 previously been at places where they
23 couldn't sustain hunting. The 1950s

1 populations were so low, most counties
2 were closed. Extensive restocking
3 efforts took place. And following the
4 restocking efforts, the areas where the
5 stocking took place were closed for
6 hunting for five years.

7 If y'all don't pay any attention to
8 anything else I say today, I want y'all
9 to look at these two graphs. In north
10 Alabama you've got Colbert, Franklin,
11 Lauderdale, Lawrence -- a bunch of
12 counties up there. I'm just basically
13 going to pick on Colbert.

14 When the season opened in 1955 after
15 restocking, the opening date was April
16 10th. Pressure regarding the opening
17 date -- if we went back and asked
18 Fred -- and even he wasn't here to tell
19 us why the date was moved, so we're just
20 going to speculate. But it was moved
21 back in 1961 to March 24th. It was
22 changed again in '62 to March 20th.

23 All right. So after approximately

1 ten years, the season had to be closed
2 again. When it was reopened in 1977,
3 the start date was pushed back to April.

4 This is not WMA data. This is not
5 southeastern data. This is data from
6 Colbert County, Alabama.

7 So statewide season timing and
8 harvest: These are some Game Check
9 numbers that we've got. Just like we
10 use it for deer, we use it for turkey.
11 26 percent of the total harvest occurs
12 in week 1 and approximately 50 percent
13 of the total harvest takes place by the
14 end of the second week of the season,
15 which coincides with peak breeding
16 window. According to the statewide Avid
17 Turkey Hunter Survey, gobbling peaks at
18 week 3, which is the first week of
19 April, and with the -- as with Game
20 Check data, harvest peak is week 1
21 and 2.

22 So our turkey recommendations:
23 Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries is

1 recommending an April 1st start, one
2 gobbler for the first ten days, one
3 gobbler per day, and a five-bird bag
4 limit with no net loss of hunting days,
5 just a season shift.

6 So, again, going back to that slide,
7 we feel like we're headed in a bad
8 direction. We don't want to see what
9 happened in Colbert County happen
10 statewide. Thank you.

11 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Director.

12 Any questions for Director Sykes
13 from the Board? Any questions?

14 (No response.)

15 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Director Sykes,
16 very much for being here.

17 And know that all these fellows and
18 their adjuncts, all these Directors,
19 they do a super job looking out for you;
20 Greg, Patti, Chuck, Scott. I mean,
21 there's a lot going on in the state of
22 Alabama as the Commissioner mentioned.
23 Somewhere down the line if you're

1 outside, the Department of Conservation
2 and Natural Resources, they touch your
3 life. It's very important.

4 So now we come to the public
5 commentary, which is a very important
6 part of this for the Board. We've got
7 14 speakers, I believe. And I'm going
8 to ask the speakers to come to the
9 podium. We don't have a "ready" chair.
10 I think this is going to go quick
11 enough.

12 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Mr. Chairman?

13 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes.

14 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Can we take a bathroom
15 break?

16 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. Let's take -- the
17 Board is going to stand at ease. Let's
18 do it for five minutes.

19 (A brief recess was taken from
20 approximately 10:42 a.m. to
21 10:50 a.m., after which the
22 meeting was resumed.)

23 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: We're not going to have a

1 "ready" chair. I think we'll do fine
2 without it. But as the speakers come to
3 the podium, I'm going to ask you in the
4 audience to please be respectful of the
5 folks that are here. Reserve your
6 comments for outside of the hall. No
7 cheers or applause. No outbursts at
8 all.

9 I'm going to ask Board members as
10 well as the speakers to please refer to
11 the Chair. No dialogue straight with
12 the Board members. Ask me for the
13 floor. Don't talk to -- two reasons for
14 that. It's not because of me. There's
15 a young lady down there that records
16 everything that is said. Her fuse is
17 already short because she couldn't hear
18 when we had some issues before, and you
19 push her over the edge and I have to
20 pay, as I've told you in the past. So
21 ask me.

22 Ms. Jones is going to hold time.
23 She's over here. You're welcome to

1 check her iPad from time to time. You
2 have three minutes to speak. And I will
3 reserve the right to allow someone to
4 complete a point. Because we have so
5 many speakers, in the interest of time,
6 I'm going to ask you to keep it to the
7 three minutes. So be succinct and make
8 your point, please. Let's be courteous
9 and give each speaker the respect that
10 you expect from them.

11 Our first speaker today, his name is
12 Greg Williams from Walker County.

13 Greg, if you'll come up.

14 And then our next speaker is going
15 to be Brandon Jackson. If you'll just
16 be prepared.

17 MR. WILLIAMS: All right. Thank you very
18 much. My name is Greg Williams,
19 District Court Judge from Walker County.
20 And I'm not here about turkey. What I'm
21 here about is a problem that's come to
22 the surface.

23 A great thing last year. I enjoy

1 seeing people fish. I have policies and
2 procedures in my court to encourage
3 people to fish. Our Walmart ran out of
4 fishing equipment. So I know it's a lot
5 of fishing going on.

6 But here's a picture here. I fish a
7 lot on the Sipsey Fork, the only
8 year-round trout place we have in
9 Alabama. Up here in the left, that's
10 only part of our parking lot. It's
11 gotten really crowded on the river, and
12 I'm excited to see that. But we only
13 have about a mile of area where the
14 common person can go down there and
15 fish.

16 That bottom right picture, imagine
17 that's your family. You've taken all
18 day and you get down there to fish and
19 there are about three guys sitting there
20 and they're taking up about 50, 60 feet
21 and there are three of them and they
22 have multiple rods out and there's
23 nowhere for your family to fish.

1 They're not fishing anymore. They're
2 harvesting.

3 So what I'm asking you to consider
4 is a regulation, some way to limit up on
5 the Sipsey Fork the number of rods that
6 you use. Is there precedent for this?

7 Yes, there is. Something very
8 similar is on the Alabama State Gulf
9 Pier. On the pier, you can take six
10 rods out, but you can only use one.
11 Only use one. Because imagine down on
12 the State Pier, if the guy can take out
13 six rods and then just put those six
14 rods out all throughout the pier, how
15 much problem you're going to have.

16 Now, we've only had just a few
17 confrontations because of the number of
18 people, but I fully expect to see more
19 this year. We don't need that. As a
20 judge, I don't want to have to be
21 handling problems where people are
22 yelling and hitting each other with
23 whatever they have in hand on the Sipsey

1 Fork.

2 So, again, I'm not asking today for
3 you to make a decision. I'm just asking
4 you to consider one rod per person, one
5 rod to use. And I'm going to call y'all
6 about it and talk to you and answer any
7 questions you may have. If you want to
8 talk to me even before then, I just told
9 Ed -- and I don't do this. Judges don't
10 ever hardly do this. But if you have a
11 question, get Ed to give you my cell
12 phone number and you leave me a message
13 and I'll call you right back.

14 So are there any questions?

15 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any questions for Judge
16 Williams?

17 Commissioner.

18 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: No questions.

19 I wanted to thank you, Judge, for taking
20 the time to come down here and speak.
21 Appreciate the partnerships that we have
22 there in Walker County and enjoyed
23 seeing you again. Thank you.

1 MR. WILLIAMS: Well, thank you, Chris. I
2 enjoy the fact that you men are serving
3 us in the state of Alabama and what
4 you're doing. I deal with angry hunters
5 and fishermen all the time. They have
6 an opinion, but I'm -- fortunately, I'm
7 the one person who can say, yeah, but my
8 opinion is a little bit higher than
9 yours. I appreciate y'all. Thank you
10 very much.

11 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Judge. Thank you.
12 Brandon Jackson.

13 MR. JACKSON: Appreciate your work and your
14 time and the Department's commitment to
15 fishing. We have seen great numbers of
16 fishermen utilizing the outdoor
17 resources, especially on the Sipsey
18 Fork.

19 And I just -- I agree with Judge
20 Williams that we are seeing more and
21 more. And it's not just COVID-related.
22 It's a trend that's been going on for a
23 number of years. We've been seeing

1 great -- and that's a great thing.
2 That's something I think that the
3 Department is excited about and we're
4 excited about and the fishermen are
5 excited about.

6 And we want to work with the
7 Department in making sure everyone has
8 access to the fishing, the quality of
9 fishing, the opportunities of fishing
10 that they can. So I look forward to
11 working with the Board and the
12 Department in coming up with ways to
13 make that happen.

14 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Brandon.

15 Any questions from the Board for
16 Brandon?

17 Mr. Hartzog.

18 MR. HARTZOG: Brandon, your topic said the
19 Trout Unlimited project on stream
20 improvements. Exactly what is the
21 improvements they're doing?

22 And it also talks about stocking of
23 brook trout. Is Trout Unlimited going

1 to pay for the stocking of brook trout,
2 or are y'all approaching the power
3 company to pay for that stocking?

4 MR. JACKSON: We have a private fund that has
5 agreed to support the cost of at least
6 two stockings each year. That would be
7 through a grant program. And that grant
8 has been submitted and that has been
9 approved. So we have the funding in
10 place.

11 Talked to members of the Department
12 about not doing that this year just
13 because of the number of anglers that
14 were present, that we would hold off on
15 that to a time when those numbers had
16 kind of plateaued a little bit, and that
17 might give more incentive for more
18 anglers to come visit and take part in
19 that diversity of angling opportunities.

20 Trout Unlimited is -- has raised
21 funds. They actually paid the same
22 contractor who developed and implemented
23 the improvements to the stream that have

1 already taken place back in 2012, '13.
2 Same guy. He came and did an assessment
3 on the lower section from the pumping
4 station down to the bridge and is
5 providing us with cost estimates and the
6 work that would need to be done to
7 improve those to make them match the
8 upper sections. And we're raising funds
9 for that at this time.

10 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Excellent. Any other
11 questions?

12 Mr. Cagle.

13 MR. CAGLE: Mr. Chairman, my question, I
14 guess, is really for the Department and
15 going back to the one-rod limit.

16 Has the Department considered that
17 at all? I know we've discussed it in
18 the past and I've brought it up in the
19 past. But is there anything that y'all
20 would like to add to that?

21 CHIEF GREENE: That is something that's a
22 topic that's been brought up in the
23 past -- Chris Greene, the Chief of

1 Fisheries.

2 That's a topic that's been brought
3 up in the past, Patrick, and at that
4 time we did not see justification. If
5 there's been an increase in usage from
6 COVID, that may be something we need to
7 take another look at.

8 MR. CAGLE: Thank you.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any other questions from the
10 Board?

11 (No response.)

12 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Brandon, thank you. You come
13 here often, and we appreciate your
14 diligence and the work that you're doing
15 on the stream. That's wonderful. Thank
16 you. Thank you very much.

17 Jason Kellar.

18 MR. KELLAR: My name is Jason Kellar. I'm a
19 commercial fisherman on Gunterville
20 Lake. And I'd like to ask y'all to
21 please consider raising the size limit
22 on the catfish or doing away with it.

23 The state of Arkansas was the first

1 state to have the catfish size limit,
2 and they've done away with it because
3 they said it was doing no good. South
4 Carolina has the catfish size limit, but
5 they want you to remove all the
6 flatheads because flatheads is
7 destroying their game fishery.

8 So I was just asking if y'all could
9 consider either doing away with the size
10 limit or raising it to maybe 38 inches.

11 And then my other question was, when
12 the first -- when y'all had first put
13 the size limit in effect, the biologist
14 said that there was no -- there was no
15 problem with the catfish population. So
16 my question was, if there was no problem
17 with the fish population, why was the
18 law enforced or why was it passed?

19 And that's about all I was
20 wondering.

21 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. Thank you. Hold on.

22 Any questions from the Board? Any
23 thoughts?

1 MR. BARKSDALE: What is the limit that you're
2 referring to? Because I'm not
3 familiar --

4 MR. KELLAR: The catfish has a size limit of
5 one per day over 34 inches.

6 MR. BARKSDALE: Over 34 inches?

7 MR. KELLAR: Yes, sir.

8 MR. BARKSDALE: Does the species matter; blue,
9 yellow?

10 MR. KELLAR: In the state of Alabama it's for
11 all species of catfish.

12 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Jones.

13 MR. RAYMOND JONES: One reason that -- I was
14 here when that was put in place, and the
15 main reason -- I'm going to talk loud.

16 The main reason that was put in
17 place is we had a lot of catfish --
18 commercial catfish people coming in and
19 taking these much larger catfish out of
20 the lake. They were then taking them to
21 Ohio, Kentucky, other places, and
22 putting this very, very large catfish
23 into fish-out ponds. People were paying

1 big money. So commercial fishermen were
2 making a lot of money off of the
3 resource that we had here in Alabama,
4 and that's the reason that limit was put
5 in place.

6 MR. KELLAR: Could y'all reconsider it and
7 pass the law to where no fish is allowed
8 to be transferred over state lines
9 alive?

10 MR. RAYMOND JONES: It's already there.

11 MR. KELLAR: No. It just for 34 inches. You
12 can transfer catfish under 34 inches.

13 MR. RAYMOND JONES: So why would you want more
14 than one over 34 inches?

15 MR. KELLAR: It's affecting my paycheck. I've
16 threwed back -- it costs me money. And,
17 I mean, I work in the state and I pay my
18 taxes. So I'm throwing money away every
19 day that I fish because of this law.

20 And it's not -- it's not affecting
21 the fisheries, I mean, because there's
22 more catfish now than there ever has
23 been. So if it's not affecting the

1 fisheries, I mean, why do we have it?
2 And other than that, just keep -- just
3 don't let them haul them over state
4 lines alive.

5 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Just so I'm clear for you,
6 that you want there to be no size limit
7 for commercial fishermen to catch
8 catfish because you're having to --
9 you're only allowed to catch one per day
10 and you're having to put the others that
11 you catch back?

12 MR. KELLAR: Yes, sir. I'm releasing too many
13 fish.

14 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I understand.

15 MR. KELLAR: Yes, sir. Because the 34-inch
16 fish is only like a 15-pound fish. And
17 we're throwing back way too many fish.

18 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I might make a recommendation
19 that once the meeting is over that you
20 talk with Chief Greene, Fisheries Chief,
21 ask him, and that's something maybe that
22 he would have an answer for you better
23 than the Board would today.

1 So we'll take that up at the next
2 meeting. We'll ask that of Chief Greene
3 and let him give us some more
4 information about it at the next
5 meeting. Is that okay?

6 MR. KELLAR: Yes, sir.

7 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. Thank you very much.

8 Next is Mr. Troy Cornelius.

9 MR. CORNELIUS: Since 2013, myself and these
10 other fishermen have been part of a
11 five-year study for paddlefish. And all
12 of the numbers we accumulated, it showed
13 that that fishery was sustainable -- not
14 only sustainable, but it was vibrant.
15 I mean, it was really good. In 2018 it
16 was taken away from us.

17 The first five years if you was
18 picked -- it was a lottery system. If
19 you was picked, it was mandatory that
20 you had to go through a training class
21 with enforcement officers and
22 biologists. In that first five years,
23 out of 15 fishermen, I think a total of

1 maybe ten violations was written.

2 In 2018 if you was picked, there was
3 no mandatory meeting. Some of the rules
4 and regulations was revised and added
5 to. Nobody was on the same page. No
6 mandatory meeting. The first week 135
7 violations was written and they shut the
8 fishery down. And we're here to ask you
9 to open it back. It was a
10 miscommunication. Nobody was on the
11 same page. The language was changed in
12 some of these regulations, and it
13 just -- it was something that was taken
14 from us that shouldn't have been.

15 And I wrote a letter for y'all to
16 read. If y'all have any kind of
17 questions, I'll use the remainder of my
18 time to answer them.

19 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any questions?

20 MR. WOOD: I've got one.

21 Are you talking about all navigable
22 waters, or are you strictly talking
23 Alabama River?

1 MR. CORNELIUS: Alabama River, 120 miles in --
2 from Autauga, Dallas, Wilcox, Monroe to
3 Baldwin County.

4 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any other questions?

5 MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman?

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Hartzog.

7 MR. HARTZOG: What is the Fisheries'
8 assessment? If he's saying the
9 population is sustainable, does our
10 Department agree with the assessment
11 that it is sustainable?

12 CHIEF GREENE: Chris Greene, Chief of
13 Fisheries.

14 At the time we opened the season up
15 in 2013 we did feel like the population
16 could support a limited commercial
17 fishery, but as time went on and with
18 the violations that we saw and knowing
19 how vulnerable that fishery can be just
20 because of the life history of
21 paddlefish -- they're a long-lived
22 species. The reproductive rates have
23 already taken a hit from all the dams

1 that went in on the river. So they're
2 very vulnerable to overharvest.

3 As a matter of fact, there's another
4 species of paddlefish in China that has
5 already been considered extinct from
6 overharvest. There's a lot of pressure
7 put on these fisheries from the caviar
8 industry. So we know the vulnerability
9 is there.

10 Is it sustainable with the amount of
11 violations we saw? No, we don't believe
12 so.

13 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: So there is an answer. But
14 the best thing I could do -- that the
15 Board can do is to ask Fisheries to
16 possibly review some areas for some
17 limited opening for it. But I can't
18 speak for them. I'm not a biologist.
19 But that's something that we would ask
20 and we would --

21 MR. CORNELIUS: Just so everyone is aware, no
22 other state on the Gulf of Mexico,
23 including Alabama, writes violations to

1 the captain and the deckhands, and
2 that's what happened. And that's what
3 compounded all those violations that
4 should -- it was 135. It shouldn't have
5 been but about 65. And on top of that,
6 most of them was bogus. If you want
7 some --

8 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Well, I appreciate that.

9 That's something --

10 MR. CORNELIUS: I mean, I know this ain't a
11 court of law, but this was a lot of
12 bogus things that happened here, like
13 fishing hours. People got tickets
14 because they said they left the boat
15 ramp too early, before sunrise, when it
16 says you cannot start fishing.

17 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I hear you.

18 MR. CORNELIUS: I mean, that was tickets that
19 should have never been wrote, but it was
20 added to it. And that's what compounded
21 a lot of the things and that's what got
22 us shut down.

23 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. Again, all I can do is

1 offer that -- if Fisheries will take
2 that up and give us a report next
3 meeting about whether there's any way to
4 viably open it back up. Thank you very
5 much for your time. I appreciate it.

6 MR. CORNELIUS: All right.

7 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Our next speaker is Mr. Paul
8 McCaleb.

9 MR. McCALEB: My name is Paul McCaleb. I live
10 at 2523 Hillcrest Way, Adamsville,
11 Alabama. Thank y'all for allowing us to
12 come to speak. I guess I'm the first
13 one to speak about the turkey issue that
14 has caused great concern for us that
15 turkey hunt.

16 And I apologize. I should have been
17 more involved with this process until it
18 gets to what some people refer to as a
19 severe stage. However, I did read the
20 minutes of your August 22nd meeting. I
21 tried to prepare myself as best I could
22 based on the facts of the research by --
23 I think his name was Dr. Chamberlain,

1 the biologist from Georgia. And I'm not
2 here to dispute any research, but
3 research is only as good as the
4 parameters that are used to gather the
5 data.

6 I do take exception to a couple of
7 the findings of that research. In
8 particular, he made comments about the
9 pecking order. That is true. There are
10 dominant gobblers. There are dominant
11 bucks. There are subordinates. There
12 are dominant hens. But to say out of
13 that research area that Hen 5 goes to
14 that dominant gobbler before Hen 1 does
15 and he says, no, I got to have Hen 1
16 first is a little bit out of the realm
17 of speculation.

18 And I kept hearing the word
19 "science." Well, science has been
20 trying to disprove our Lord above for
21 years and years and years. God made the
22 mating process perfect in every way, and
23 to try to improve on that is out of

1 man's realm.

2 There are other solutions besides
3 limiting bag limits and reducing days;
4 nesting habitation, prescribed burning
5 at the right time of the year. These
6 are -- these are ways that you can get
7 those brood --

8 MS. JONES: Time.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: We understand, Mr. McCaleb.

10 And thank you very much for coming here.

11 Are there any questions for
12 Mr. McCaleb?

13 (No response.)

14 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. Our next speaker
15 is Mr. Guy Moore.

16 MR. MOORE: Board members, Commissioner, I
17 appreciate y'all listening to us today.
18 I'll piggyback on a little bit that Paul
19 just said. I wish I would have been
20 more involved in it earlier, but at the
21 same time, I do stand opposed to any
22 changes in bag limits or some of the
23 things that I've heard today.

1 But the bottom line is, I don't see
2 that that's going to help when you got
3 so many predators, the problem we've got
4 with raccoons. I mean -- I mean, I
5 appreciate what y'all are trying to do
6 with the feral hogs and with the
7 coyotes. That's good. I think we need
8 to let them shoot them at night, shoot
9 them anywhere you can, do anything you
10 can. I appreciate that. I've spoken
11 before at this same Board communicating
12 that same thing. That's our biggest
13 problem in my opinion.

14 And then cutting timber during the
15 nesting times, that can't be good for
16 it. I know there's too big a lobby for
17 you to go there. I can understand that;
18 okay?

19 Only 25 percent of us kill more than
20 three a season. Only 25 percent of us
21 do that. So you're only affecting a
22 very few people. Saving a few birds is
23 all you're doing anyway.

1 And, by the way, you better start
2 affecting -- you're going to have to
3 change the rules how many I can call in
4 because that's only stopping people from
5 pulling the trigger twice per year. I
6 call in a lot more than any five birds
7 every year because I've got it -- now I
8 pastor a church. I'm retired from the
9 government. And so I get to hunt a
10 whole lot. So my point being is,
11 though, that, you know, you're not going
12 to stop us from killing more than that
13 because I'm always going to have
14 somebody with me anyway.

15 I wanted to retire for many, many
16 years. Finally got retired and y'all
17 have changed the season one time with
18 the opening date and now you're going to
19 go change it again. If you want to save
20 some turkeys, you need to outlaw jake
21 shooting, bearded hens. Outlaw decoys.
22 Do away with TSS. People shooting
23 turkeys 70 and 80 yards. That makes

1 more sense than what y'all are trying to
2 do here today. I appreciate your
3 situation. I appreciate what you're
4 trying to do.

5 Greenfield hunting in the afternoon,
6 do away with that. That would help more
7 than -- and Commissioner Pate's
8 recommendation -- I appreciate the
9 Commissioner of Agriculture. He said
10 why don't you think about putting this
11 off for a while, look at it a little
12 more. I appreciate that. I think we
13 need to do that.

14 But the predator control and
15 landowners getting involved and trying
16 to enhance the habitat to do something
17 to help control predators and -- but the
18 hunting -- my hunting club in Winston
19 County that -- I'm in several. I hunt
20 in five counties. But my hunting club
21 in Winston County, we started trapping
22 coyotes a few years ago. And they
23 said -- they restricted -- right now you

1 restrict your deer there, the doe days,
2 and you restrict your turkey hunting
3 days.

4 Our -- our population has exploded
5 through that one thing. That's going to
6 do more than anything else you can do.
7 You can do all this other stuff, come up
8 with all these ideas and all that stuff.
9 And I don't know what the politics is
10 even behind this. But the bottom line
11 is, I think there's better ideas and
12 especially that you need to give
13 yourself a little more time, I think, to
14 look at what you're trying to do.

15 Thank you for your time.

16 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Moore.

17 Questions for Mr. Moore?

18 (No response.)

19 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

20 Our next speaker is Mr. Chris
21 Wester.

22 MR. WESTER: Good afternoon, y'all.

23 Appreciate your time. I wish Paul had

1 had more time to speak because he knows
2 more about turkeys than everybody in
3 this room, I bet.

4 I think we've got a flawed tagging
5 system. I would recommend a better
6 tagging system. A couple of ways we
7 could do that is charge an additional --
8 if you want to drop it down to three
9 birds, charge an additional \$25 for the
10 fourth and fifth bird. I believe that
11 those are fractional numbers of hunters
12 that actually kill a fourth and fifth
13 bird.

14 The tagging system is flawed as it
15 sits, whatever the tags are. I would
16 support an actual tag -- and I hunt
17 other states, and this is the worst one
18 that I know of. And I form focus groups
19 and I talk to people all over the
20 country about tagging systems. And what
21 we're doing here, I don't think we have
22 any idea how many turkeys are being
23 killed. I don't think we have any idea

1 how many turkey hunters are in the
2 woods. So I think that those are
3 problems.

4 The tagging system I would propose
5 would be a physical tag that you put on
6 the neck or leg or whatever. Get caught
7 without that bird being tagged, then
8 there is a substantial deterrent for
9 that, a fine or whatever. At the end of
10 the year, any tags that you have not
11 used, then you mail them back in a
12 self-addressed stamped envelope to the
13 State so that's there a correlation
14 between what you reported for Game Check
15 and the tagging system. So there's sort
16 of a failsafe in there as well.

17 Pass the cost of that -- pass it on
18 to the consumer, the hunter, because
19 we'll pay. I'll pay it if we can get
20 some accurate numbers. I believe in the
21 science. I believe in sustainability.
22 I just -- if the science lines up with
23 what the numbers are. I just don't

1 think we know what the numbers are.

2 Having said that, I think you could
3 also pay for a fourth and fifth tag with
4 a certain number of coyote tails or ears
5 or who knows what. The discussion needs
6 to be on predators.

7 Predators are the cancer of wild
8 turkeys. It is not hunters. That is
9 not the problem. Bearded hens, get rid
10 of them. If you can't tell the
11 difference between a bearded hen and a
12 long beard, you shouldn't be in the
13 woods. So get rid of bearded hens.

14 Fall turkeys. I believe the
15 majority of fall turkeys are shot off of
16 a deer stand. Most of the hunters that
17 I know -- and I know a bunch of them --
18 don't even hunt in the fall. So I think
19 that's an issue as well.

20 I've got all these notes. I'm
21 trying to move quickly. I'd just get
22 rid of fall season to be sure.

23 Season dates. If you push the

1 season dates back, then you lose all of
2 the revenue from the out-of-state guys
3 who are coming here to hunt Alabama
4 because the dates here are so early. So
5 we lose all that revenue. And I think
6 that -- and I don't know what that
7 revenue is, but -- I can see I'm out of
8 time. I wish I had more.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any questions for Mr. Wester?

10 (No response.)

11 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much for being
12 here, and we hear what you're saying.
13 We're listening.

14 Next is David Harley. The next
15 speaker is David Harley.

16 MR. HAWLEY: It's actually Hawley.

17 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Hawley.

18 MR. HAWLEY: Thank you, Chairman.

19 My name is David Hawley from Sumter
20 County. I've been turkey hunting for 25
21 years. The past ten or so I probably
22 averaged 35 mornings a year. So you can
23 say I'm pretty obsessed with turkeys.

1 I've been thinking about this very
2 subject about declines and how we can
3 reverse it pretty much every day for the
4 past six years. If you don't believe
5 me, just ask my wife. She's tired of
6 hearing it.

7 I'm making these statements on my
8 own accord.

9 You know, no one wants to be having
10 this conversation, and obviously the
11 passion that we have for turkeys is
12 evident here today. And I agree with
13 many of the points that everyone made
14 here. I think the resource is what has
15 got us to this point. We wouldn't be
16 having these conversations if no one in
17 the state of Alabama was seeing some of
18 these things and some of these trends.

19 I do believe we have issues in the
20 state of Alabama. I know that some
21 places are more pronounced than others.
22 I've seen some places that have
23 maintained strong populations through

1 habitat and predator control and also
2 seen places where the population is a
3 shell of what it was even five years
4 ago, ten years ago.

5 And I think what -- where we're at
6 right now is that we've got to address a
7 lot of different problems. And harvest
8 has to be a thing that we look at,
9 whether it's the season framework, the
10 bag limit, all that above. But to send
11 the signal without changing those things
12 and saying that harvest in trouble, I
13 think, sends a bad public relations
14 message to hunters and landowners out
15 there that there is no issue. I don't
16 think that kicking the can down the road
17 without making any changes -- and I
18 think the study showed that -- are going
19 to do anything to protect this resource.
20 And it really will ultimately hurt the
21 hunters in the long run, because if the
22 resource collapses, the hunter
23 opportunity is not there.

1 I would implore this committee and
2 members of the public just to think
3 about our kids and grandkids in this
4 discussion. I know everyone brings up
5 the quail example a lot. I don't know
6 if they're on the same trend, but -- I
7 don't think anyone has a crystal ball or
8 a line to St. Peter to be able to ask
9 that. But I don't think we need to take
10 any chances and try to address as many
11 things as we can, as possible, problems
12 with poult production, because that's
13 where it all starts.

14 But in light of those things and
15 that poult production level, we have to
16 consider harvest reduction in some way,
17 shape, or form or even the timing of it
18 as a possible solution.

19 So I thank you for your time and
20 welcome any questions.

21 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Any questions?

22 Any questions from the Board?

23 (No response.)

1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. Thank you for coming
2 very much and your comments.

3 Mr. Stover Perryman.

4 MR. PERRYMAN: Good morning. I'm Stover
5 Perryman from Camden, Alabama. I know a
6 few of y'all. And I hunt primarily in
7 Wilcox and south Dallas County.

8 I am 100 percent in favor of the
9 season coming in later. I know it's not
10 proposed here, but I would probably be
11 even in favor of a lower bag limit. In
12 some places I feel as though hunting
13 clubs could regulate their members more
14 if this State law said that.

15 My reason for this is that I hunt on
16 family land and we do a lot of trapping.
17 We do some habitat improvement on
18 certain areas, and we certainly have
19 more turkeys on those areas than we do
20 on the place as a whole. But even some
21 of the places where we do all of our
22 efforts to increase the number of
23 turkeys (inaudible) myself and my dad

1 and my brother do most of the hunting
2 there. And we pretty much start in the
3 same place every year, and we kill our
4 turkeys, as the study showed, the first
5 couple of weeks.

6 And we should be ashamed of what
7 happened on one of our places where we
8 would go when it was coming in on the
9 15th. The turkeys -- we would hunt that
10 place hard to start with, and we really
11 lowered the numbers of turkeys to the
12 point we have not killed a turkey on
13 that property in four years. I did see
14 one on it last year walk across the
15 pasture one day. I have seen some this
16 winter, a few. And we didn't kill over
17 the limit, but we did kill them early.
18 And I think it needs to be backed up
19 because of that.

20 Another one in particular, this past
21 season we had several trail cameras out
22 in the area -- and this is an area that
23 we had trapped extensively. In February

1 of last year we had gotten it to where
2 you couldn't hardly see a coon or a
3 possum track.

4 There was a gobbler. And it was
5 clearly the dominant gobbler with about
6 seven hens. We saw him regularly in
7 pastures. We have a cattle farm. There
8 was four gobblers that stayed together.
9 They were at least two years old or
10 better. My dad killed that turkey
11 probably the fifth day of the season.
12 And we continued to watch that area the
13 rest of the year. Those four gobblers
14 never took up with those hens.

15 And we kept trail cameras on the
16 roads there until July and never got a
17 picture of a poult. I know that could
18 be from a lot of things. You know, I
19 attribute it possibly to the selection,
20 that those hens for some reason didn't
21 take up with those other gobblers or
22 vice versa.

23 I appreciate y'all's time. I

1 appreciate what y'all are doing for the
2 wildlife in the state of Alabama.

3 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much for your
4 insight.

5 Any questions?

6 Mr. Wolfe.

7 MR. WOLFE: How much land are y'all hunting?

8 MR. PERRYMAN: About 7500 acres.

9 MR. WOLFE: Thank you.

10 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any other questions?

11 Mr. Jones.

12 MR. RAYMOND JONES: Tell your dad "hello."

13 MR. PERRYMAN: I will. He's got the COVID.
14 He couldn't make it. He was coming.

15 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much. Good
16 luck to your father, and thanks for your
17 insight.

18 The next is Mr. Al Mattox.

19 MR. MATTOX: My name is Al Mattox, and this is
20 the fourth time that I have addressed
21 this Board in the last 15 years. This
22 is the third time I've addressed this
23 Board in the last six. I will speak

1 very frank but not out of disrespect to
2 you but because my time is limited and
3 my comments will be public record.

4 Dr. Michael Chamberlain, the
5 National Wild Turkey Federation
6 Communicator of the Year and the premier
7 expert on wild turkeys, addressed you in
8 August. He told you Alabama had
9 problems and we needed to change, yet
10 there is no record of you asking him one
11 single question. If you will not listen
12 to the premier expert on the topic, I
13 don't know why you will listen to me.

14 You were appointed to this position
15 to assist the Department. I honestly
16 don't even know how to talk to you to
17 get you to view my views or the
18 scientific data because the actions
19 appear predetermined.

20 Population numbers indicating --
21 well, I have been hunting turkeys in
22 Alabama for 45 years, most of that as a
23 professional guide, and I've hunted in

1 52 of Alabama's 67 counties. Population
2 numbers indicating Alabama has nearly a
3 half-million birds is 20-year-old data,
4 and urbanization alone proves that that
5 is wrong.

6 You actually started discussing
7 season and bag limits in 2013. Alabama
8 has seen declines in habitat, increases
9 in predators, increases in -- or
10 decreases in trapper efforts, and
11 increases in hunter efforts. Alabama's
12 turkey population needs your help, and
13 your legacy as a Board member will be
14 defined by what you do or what you
15 decide to ignore.

16 You requested a survey on the data
17 of turkeys. After five years and
18 millions of dollars, that survey is now
19 over. You had been saying you would not
20 make any decisions on the turkey until
21 that project was over, and here we are
22 today.

23 The only thing that has changed

1 since 2013 is the date. You get to hunt
2 some of the best places in the state of
3 Alabama and the average guy can't. You
4 have continually put off making
5 decisions that would benefit the turkey
6 and instead have allowed the Alabama
7 Wildlife Federation to control your
8 decisions.

9 I am not going to (inaudible) the
10 merits of landowner practices. I will
11 say that this Board should listen to the
12 experts conducting the research and not
13 special interest groups or landowners.

14 As a result of changes in habitat,
15 minimal changes in the season, and no
16 changes in the bag limit, our turkeys
17 are not able to outproduce the --

18 MS. JONES: Time.

19 MR. MATTOX: -- (inaudible) stacked against
20 them, and that should be pretty obvious
21 to see. I recommend opening the season
22 on April the 1st with a three-bag limit.
23 Subject to your questions, that's all I

1 have.

2 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

3 Are there any questions from the
4 Board?

5 (No response.)

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Mattox, very
7 much. Noted.

8 The next speaker is Mr. Chip
9 Dillard.

10 MR. DILLARD: Mr. Chairman, I'm Chip Dillard
11 from Vestavia, Alabama, and I'm a coyote
12 hunter. Right now -- currently under
13 the current system or the State laws we
14 can hunt -- night-hunt coyotes exclusive
15 of deer season.

16 And what I'm proposing is that
17 the -- working with the Wildlife
18 Division and like vetting, say, five --
19 I just picked a random number, a low
20 number -- five guys that would be
21 authorized to hunt coyotes at night
22 during deer season but with a focus
23 on -- coyotes around cattle is the

1 focus. Because I've got people that
2 call me all the time and ask me, hey,
3 can you come, I've got -- I'm calving.
4 There's a lot of guys that calve in
5 December and January, which is during
6 deer season.

7 So I'm just proposing that some
8 special -- a handful of special permits
9 be issued to certain people as vetted by
10 the Wildlife office. And we could work
11 with the -- each of the counties' CEOs
12 and say -- you know, be as transparent
13 as possible about where we're going to
14 be on what night if that's -- if they so
15 choose to ask us that. So that's --
16 that's basically why I'm here.

17 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I understand. Our job is not
18 to make the rules here today at this
19 Board, but I will refer you, then, to
20 Keith Gauldin who could possibly help
21 you with that or Chief Weathers in the
22 Law Enforcement section. There may be
23 some opportunity for that. I don't

1 know.

2 And currently I don't believe it's
3 there. But if you don't know -- the
4 Commissioner spoke about it -- there is
5 a piece of legislation that has made it
6 through two committees and, I think, is
7 up for a vote that will allow hunting at
8 night for feral hogs and coyotes outside
9 of deer season. You want something
10 different, and that will have to be
11 something that they approve.

12 MR. DILLARD: Correct. Yeah. I'm already
13 hunting coyotes at night outside of deer
14 season with the permits that the State
15 has issued me. I'm just looking at
16 trying to help some cattlemen out during
17 deer season.

18 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Again, I would refer you to
19 Chief Gauldin, if you haven't already,
20 and/or Chief Weathers about the veracity
21 of that and whether it's something that
22 they could accommodate. That's the best
23 I can do.

1 And if you want us -- if you want
2 them to report back at the next Board
3 meeting, I don't think that they would
4 mind that if there's an opportunity for
5 that.

6 MR. DILLARD: Okay. Yeah. That's all I ask.

7 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Thank you very
8 much.

9 I'm sorry. Mr. Hartzog.

10 MR. HARTZOG: A lot of my constituents that
11 are cattle farming -- raise cattle and
12 all have brought up the lack of being
13 able to shoot the coyotes during deer
14 season, you know, and they -- like what
15 he brought up about calving and all. So
16 I really wish the Department would look
17 at -- especially if they're cattle
18 producers, to consider giving them a
19 nuisance permit during deer season.

20 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Noted. Thank you very much.

21 MR. DILLARD: Thank you.

22 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Our next speaker is Mr. Don
23 Knight.

1 MR. KNIGHT: I'm Don Knight. I'm a Director
2 of the Alabama Hunting Dog Alliance.
3 I'm from Anniston, Alabama. I got a
4 couple of things I want to try to get
5 through to you today.

6 We'll start with number one because
7 most of the dog hunters in the state of
8 Alabama are not represented by the
9 Alabama Dog Hunters Association anymore.
10 Our association is the same way. We
11 don't represent as many dog hunters as
12 we would like to.

13 But in my Facebook, we -- we
14 probably get 2,000, 3,000 people looking
15 at our Facebook, and we have found from
16 many, many people that this bill that
17 the Alabama Dog Hunters Association is
18 trying to put in, the dog hunters do not
19 want it.

20 Okay. I just want you to understand
21 that right up front. They don't want
22 it. They don't think it's good for dog
23 hunting at all. And so we'll be doing

1 what we can to help you fight it.

2 Now, the second thing I wanted to
3 get into is that Colbert County. We've
4 got an understanding that they're going
5 to put it on the -- or part of the
6 county on the permit system. We'd ask
7 you to look at that very, very closely.
8 I'm talking to you, the people of the
9 Board. Take a look at it very closely.

10 I sent you a couple of letters. I
11 would like for you to read those and be
12 very careful about putting people on a
13 permit system in an area in Colbert
14 County. They don't deserve it.

15 You got two major complainers up
16 there. One of them bought land and has
17 come along with -- he's got plenty of
18 money. And he comes in and he wants to
19 have a super eight-horn-or-better club
20 on his land. And that's okay. Nobody
21 is complaining about that. Matter of
22 fact, it would be good. But he's come
23 in, bought the land, and wants to do

1 away with the dog hunting on clubs
2 that's been up there for 50 years.

3 And this year it was very bad on
4 dogs being shot, dogs being picked up.
5 I've never seen a dog that knew how to
6 hitch a ride. So somebody had to pick
7 those dogs up. And they take them as
8 far as 80 miles from where they're
9 found. They leave the collars on them
10 where we can get them, find them.

11 But these people deserve better than
12 that. They've been paying into the
13 hunting license and everything for many,
14 many years, and they don't deserve it.

15 Now, the game warden up there came
16 and looked -- tried to find one dog that
17 was shot. And he did a great job trying
18 to find it, but he couldn't find it.

19 Okay. These people know how to do away
20 with them. But we've been finding them
21 30, 40, 50 miles away from where they're
22 at.

23 MS. JONES: Time.

1 MR. KNIGHT: And that needs to be looked into
2 very strongly before you put these
3 people on a permit system up there.

4 I appreciate your time. Any
5 questions?

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Don.

7 Are there any questions from the
8 Board?

9 (No response.)

10 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: No questions. Thank you,
11 Don, for being here.

12 The next speaker is Mr. Norman
13 Parks.

14 MR. PARKS: Hey, I'm Norman Parks. I'm from
15 Cecil, Alabama, in Montgomery County.
16 And I'm speaking on behalf of the Nose
17 to the Ground-Alabama Network. Nose to
18 the Ground along with the Alabama Blood
19 Trailing Network provides a free service
20 on Facebook that tries to connect
21 hunters that need tracking teams to
22 assist them in finding wounded deer.

23 The reason for being here and our

1 concern is the bill that Mr. Blankenship
2 brought up earlier and the gentleman
3 just before me was talking about -- is
4 that we don't have a concern with that
5 bill one way or another except for the
6 fact that they've included dog hunting
7 and tracking dogs in the same thing as
8 if they were the same activity. We feel
9 like they're almost as unrelated as
10 hunting and fishing and don't really
11 think that either group ought to be
12 affected by decisions that only affect
13 the other one.

14 So we just -- we understand that
15 this is just a proposal that's
16 circulating and hasn't been maybe a
17 legislative effort. But as a group, we
18 want to go on record that we do not
19 believe that blood tracking should be
20 covered under the same regulations as
21 anything that's regulating deer hunting
22 with dogs.

23 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Understood. Understood.

1 Any questions? Any questions?

2 Commissioner.

3 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Not a question. I
4 just wanted to say we talked on the
5 telephone. It's very nice to see you
6 face to face, Mr. Parks.

7 MR. PARKS: Good to see you, Chris.

8 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you for coming. Thank
9 you for coming.

10 Our next speaker is Lane Stephens.

11 MR. STEPHENS: Mr. Chairman, Commissioner,
12 other members of the committee, thank
13 you for having me here today. I'm Lane
14 Stephens, and I do represent the Alabama
15 Dog Hunters Association.

16 I am here to give you a 60,000-foot
17 overview of the legislation that has
18 been discussed. But first I will tell
19 you that we came to create that
20 legislation at the request of several
21 legislators after we had a meeting with
22 those legislators and several of your
23 staff members and they asked us if we

1 could come back with a proposal that
2 would provide for a level playing field
3 and fairness across the state so that
4 all hunters would be treated equally and
5 fairly. I'm just going to go over this
6 real quickly due to time.

7 So things that are included in the
8 legislation -- or the proposed
9 legislation is it would create a no-cost
10 registration system for hunt masters.
11 Those are people who are controlling and
12 own the deer dogs.

13 It would also require all deer dog
14 hunters to use electronic tracking and
15 correction collars. Those collars --
16 you know those as GPS, but it would
17 still allow for telemetry for those who
18 still use those. But at the same time
19 it would protect those hunters and those
20 collars by making it illegal for anyone
21 to tamper with, remove, or disable those
22 collars. They're very expensive. And
23 those collars are what make it

1 successful to be able to train their
2 dogs and keep them on properties where
3 they have permission to be.

4 That gets me to the next point,
5 dealing with permission. This bill
6 would make it illegal to knowingly or
7 negligently cast your dogs on private
8 property where you do not have
9 permission to be or to allow those dogs
10 to trail on private property where you
11 do not have permission to be.

12 But we all know mistakes can happen,
13 even for good hunters. And so the
14 penalty process is a graduated penalty
15 process where you would start with a
16 warning, but it would quickly ramp up to
17 those who want to continue to break the
18 law.

19 It would also require DCNR officers
20 to investigate any intentional killing
21 or injury of a deer dog -- a dog while
22 it's hunting. Right now there's --
23 sometimes that's left up to the local

1 law enforcement. Because this is a
2 hunting activity, we would like to see
3 the DCNR officers do that.

4 Finally, it would rescind the
5 permitting system that is currently in
6 place. That was the thrust of what the
7 legislators had asked us to do. It
8 would rescind that permitting system
9 because it gives the agency tools
10 necessary to go after those unethical
11 hunters who continue to allow their dogs
12 to trespass where they have no right to
13 be. It does nothing to open any county
14 that has been closed by a referendum or
15 legislative order. We know we can't do
16 that with this legislation. What it
17 would do, though, is require the
18 counties that have been closed by
19 recommendation from you to be open by
20 2024.

21 MS. JONES: Time.

22 MR. STEPHENS: That's the end of the bill.

23 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Stephens.

1 Any questions from the Board?

2 MR. WOOD: I've got one.

3 Lane, do you have a sponsor to the
4 legislation right now, someone that's
5 presenting it or --

6 MR. STEPHENS: We are -- Senator Stutts has
7 turned this into bill drafting, and
8 we're working very closely with him.
9 And we still have a few revisions we
10 have to make.

11 I've had some conversations with
12 some members of the Blood Tracking
13 Network, and we realize there's a
14 difference between their recovery
15 efforts. And some of them still use
16 leads. So if a dog is on a lead, this
17 would not apply to them at all.

18 But we have some amendments that I
19 had shared with the Senator that didn't
20 get quite get into bill drafting yet --
21 but I'll be getting those over next
22 week -- that would address some of the
23 concerns. They would still let

1 trackers -- because their dogs are
2 pursuing deer, even though it's a shot
3 deer --

4 And there's a difference. They are
5 trying to recover.

6 -- it would still require them to
7 register, but it would distinguish
8 between them and regular hunters.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any other questions?

10 MR. RAYMOND JONES: Mr. Chairman?

11 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Jones.

12 MR. RAYMOND JONES: My concern with this bill
13 is that it would open -- re-open a lot
14 of areas that either, A, have never had
15 a dog season in the history of the state
16 of Alabama or, B, it's been closed and
17 those areas have been closed for a
18 reason, because we've had issues there.

19 So that's something that I think we
20 all need to consider. And I think
21 you-all -- it would be nice if you could
22 reconsider that in your -- in the
23 writing of your bill.

1 MR. STEPHENS: May I respond?

2 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Please.

3 MR. STEPHENS: I appreciate that. That's why
4 what we've tried to do is have this
5 scenario where the agency has the tools
6 that it needs to be able to make sure
7 that -- I see this as much as a private
8 property rights bill as I do as an
9 ethical hunters act because I see this:
10 If you're a private landowner in this
11 state, you ought to have the knowledge
12 that -- if you don't want someone
13 hunting on your property or having their
14 dogs on your property, this agency
15 should have the tools necessary to
16 punish those who do, and today you
17 don't.

18 On the same hand, we have people in
19 this state who are private landowners
20 who can no longer hunt deer with dogs on
21 their property because of actions of
22 others, and their rights are being
23 violated just as much as the private

1 property person who doesn't want a deer
2 dog hunting on their property. And we
3 support both of those private property
4 owners.

5 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any other questions?

6 MR. CAGLE: Mr. Chairman?

7 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: You do?

8 MR. CAGLE: Yes, sir.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Please, go ahead.

10 MR. CAGLE: Just a quick statement. I want to
11 commend the Dog Hunters Association for,
12 you know, really shifting the focus onto
13 what we all know is a problem, which is,
14 yes, dogs continuously ending up on
15 someone else's property, and really
16 being proactive in looking at solutions.
17 So I commend the folks you represent,
18 you know, for that.

19 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: One comment from me in five
20 words or less. I hear a division of --
21 or an undercurrent of some division in
22 the dog deer community. Who do you
23 represent?

1 MR. STEPHENS: Alabama Dog Hunters
2 Association.

3 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. How many people
4 are in that organization?

5 MR. STEPHENS: I don't know how many
6 individuals. It's made up of a number
7 of regional organizations from around
8 the state, county-wide clubs.

9 Mr. Miller may be able to give you more
10 of what those individual numbers are.

11 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. That's what
12 I needed. Thank you.

13 MR. STEPHENS: Yes, sir.

14 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

15 Our next speaker is Mr. Avery Bates.

16 DIRECTOR SYKES: Mr. Chairman, one point of
17 personal privilege. I want to apologize
18 to Mr. Bates because while I was doing
19 my research -- I pointed out Don and
20 Susan had been at every one. Mr. Bates
21 has been at every one as well. Thank
22 you.

23 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, he has.

1 MR. BATES: My name is Avery Bates. I'm Vice
2 President of Organized Seafood
3 Association. And the reason I'm at
4 every one, I love seafood. I love to
5 work in it. My family has done it for
6 generations. And I want y'all to keep
7 eating seafoods. Don't quit eating it.
8 But please don't put seafoods as a
9 gamefish.

10 All seafoods -- all saltwater fish
11 is seafoods. Don't let somebody talk
12 you into taking property. Seafoods is
13 property. Y'all know the good Lord
14 said -- look, he told David this: He
15 that ruleth over men must be just,
16 ruling in the fear of God.

17 If you take seafood away from -- God
18 give it to everybody. And he gets it
19 through the commercial fishermen. Don't
20 let any Wildlife Federation or any group
21 take it away from you and us who supply
22 you with good healthy seafood.

23 I want to tell you, it has been done

1 even in the catfish. Catfish is a
2 commercial fish. We got just a handful
3 of miles of river. There's thousands of
4 miles of rivers and bayous that the
5 bottoms of them -- guess who? They
6 belong to the people of the state to be
7 held in trust for. You know that?

8 And all them fish that you take, God
9 give them to us, for us, for y'all.
10 Enjoy them.

11 These things that's going on with
12 this spoonbill catfish -- let me tell
13 you, Timothy was warned about being --
14 science so falsely called. I've been to
15 court twice with the State of Alabama,
16 with scientists from Mississippi and all
17 over, and guess what won out? The
18 people of the state that was working
19 them and giving the seafood or selling
20 the seafood to the people of the state
21 over the science that was falsely used.

22 We knew Fowl River was, what, a
23 natural oyster bottoms and reef. What

1 happened? Judge Turner ruled in -- the
2 people of the state, the public. What
3 happened? Judge Phelps. Herron Bay.
4 Almost lost it. But what Judge Phelps
5 ruled for -- and the highest scientists
6 they could get, he ruled in the people's
7 favor and science's favor, true science.
8 What does that mean?

9 Some scientists can be what you call
10 took. It's almost like some reporters.
11 Go to CNN and listen to that for about
12 ten minutes and then switch over to Fox.
13 Who's got the true facts?

14 You better watch out when you make a
15 ruling that you're going to have to
16 answer for your ruling one day as
17 leaders. If somebody stands up here and
18 says I want your --

19 MS. JONES: Time.

20 MR. BATES: -- (inaudible) to catch a trout or
21 to catch a -- any fish that's saltwater,
22 what's happening? You're robbing the
23 people of Alabama of good healthy food.

1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Avery. Always
2 wonderful to hear from you and thank you
3 for those comments very much.

4 MR. MARTIN: Mr. Chairman?

5 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'm sorry.

6 MR. MARTIN: I would like to ask -- it's a
7 question for Lonnie Miller, how many
8 members they have.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. Mr. Miller, if you
10 don't mind just standing up and giving
11 us that answer.

12 MR. MILLER: We have 2500 members.

13 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: 2,500 members in the Alabama
14 Dog Deer Hunters Association. Okay.

15 MR. MARTIN: Thank you.

16 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Does that answer your
17 question?

18 MR. MARTIN: Yes.

19 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. Our next speaker
20 is Mr. Blakeley Ellis.

21 MR. ELLIS: My name is Blakeley Ellis. I'm
22 the Executive Director of the Coastal
23 Conservation Association of Alabama.

1 And I'm not here to complain. I'm here
2 to tell you thanks to the Department, to
3 Commissioner Blankenship, everybody that
4 we work with on a lot of the projects.

5 Y'all have done a great job on the
6 hatchery down in Gulf Shores. Really
7 appreciate y'all's efforts to continue
8 to work and drive the train for State
9 management of our resources and moving
10 some of that management away from the
11 federal government and to the states
12 where we believe as an organization is
13 the right place. And appreciate y'all
14 being on the same page with us for that.

15 That's pretty much it. I don't have
16 much other to say. If there are any
17 other organizations or needs for kids'
18 fishing equipment, please come track me
19 down after the meeting. Happy to help
20 as long as we can -- we can get the
21 equipment, because as everybody knows,
22 the outdoor equipment is in short supply
23 these days. But we will do our best to

1 go out and make sure we can accommodate
2 any requests and needs.

3 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Blakeley, for
4 being here.

5 Any quick questions?

6 (No response.)

7 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thanks so much. Always
8 appreciate what you do as well.

9 That concludes our public comments
10 today. We'll move on to our next order
11 of business, and that is the unfinished
12 business that's on our agenda, the
13 business from last meeting.

14 Is there any unfinished business
15 before this Board?

16 MR. CAGLE: Mr. Chairman?

17 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Cagle.

18 MR. CAGLE: At the last meeting there was a
19 motion related to turkey season that I
20 tabled to a date certain, which is the
21 first meeting of this year. So I
22 believe we should probably vote on that
23 motion at this time.

1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: So you want to bring the
2 motion from the table where it is
3 currently -- where it is currently and
4 resurrect the motion and vote on the
5 motion?

6 MR. CAGLE: I will leave that up to your
7 judgment, Mr. Chairman.

8 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: If the Board has no
9 objections, we'll vote on it. If the
10 Board has no objections, the Chair has
11 no problem in indefinitely postponing
12 that motion and leaving it.

13 MR. RAYMOND JONES: Mr. Chairman?

14 MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman?

15 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Go ahead, Mr. Jones.

16 MR. RAYMOND JONES: I would like to go ahead
17 and vote on that motion.

18 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. Then make the
19 motion.

20 I'm sorry. Mr. Hartzog.

21 MR. HARTZOG: Point of order. Actually
22 Raymond had asked me to look at
23 parliamentary procedures. Parliamentary

1 procedures say other business has to be
2 transacted before a tabled motion can be
3 moved.

4 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Other unfinished business?

5 MR. HARTZOG: We need to vote on something
6 else before under Robert's Rules of
7 Order.

8 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: That's right. And we're
9 taking this first as unfinished
10 business. So if there's a motion to
11 bring that from the table and then a
12 second to offer it up for a vote -- I'm
13 sorry.

14 MR. HARTZOG: Point of order is the Robert's
15 Rules of Order says other business has
16 to be transacted before a tabled motion
17 could be -- I mean, Raymond particularly
18 called me and asked me to --

19 MR. RAYMOND JONES: I can do the CPI motion
20 first.

21 MR. HARTZOG: So we need to vote on something
22 else before we can untable it.

23 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Well, we'd have to move to

1 new business.

2 No?

3 MR. RAYMOND JONES: I don't think so.

4 MR. HARTZOG: I mean, I'm fine with what
5 Patrick is saying, but I was asked, you
6 know, to look up Robert's Rules of
7 Order.

8 MR. STIMPSON: I'll make this motion.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Well, we'll be out of order,
10 but so be it. We'll take that -- the
11 Board will take the liberty -- the Chair
12 will take the liberty to move out of
13 order, and we'll take a motion from
14 Mr. Stimpson.

15 MR. STIMPSON: Mr. Chairman?

16 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes.

17 MR. STIMPSON: In accordance with the
18 requirements of the State of -- Alabama
19 State Legislature, I make a motion to
20 approve an increase in all licenses and
21 fees levied by the Department of
22 Conservation and Natural Resources,
23 where applicable, based on the increases

1 in the Consumer Price Index as published
2 and using the formulas for said
3 increases as previously approved.

4 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Did you get that?

5 I'll read it again for clarity.

6 This is the Consumer Price Index -- its
7 a market basket of goods, and that's
8 what we use to increase licenses and
9 fees in the State of Alabama.

10 In accordance with the requirements
11 of the Alabama State Legislature, I make
12 a motion to approve an increase in all
13 licenses and fees levied by the
14 Department of Conservation and Natural
15 Resources, where applicable, based on
16 the increases in the Consumer Price
17 Index as published and using the
18 formulas for said increases as
19 previously approved.

20 Is there a second?

21 MR. RAYMOND JONES: Second.

22 MR. HARTZOG: Second.

23 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: We have a second. Is there

1 any discussion?

2 (No response.)

3 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: There being no discussion,
4 I'll call the question. And let's have
5 a -- let's do this -- let's have a
6 roll-call vote. Is that okay with you?

7 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: That's fine.

8 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Let's have a roll-call vote.
9 We'll start at this end.

10 MR. BROCK JONES: Yes.

11 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Jones, yes.

12 Mr. Wolfe?

13 MR. WOLFE: Yes.

14 MR. MARTIN: Yes.

15 MR. HARTZOG: Yes.

16 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Hartzog.

17 Mr. Cagle?

18 MR. CAGLE: Yes.

19 MR. STIMPSON: Yes.

20 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Stimpson.

21 We'll start at the far end down
22 here.

23 MR. WOOD: Yes.

1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Phillips?

2 DR. PHILLIPS: Yes.

3 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Wood?

4 MR. RAYMOND JONES: He already said "yes."

5 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay.

6 MR. BARKSDALE: Yes.

7 MR. RAYMOND JONES: Yes.

8 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: And Mr. Jones, yes.

9 Okay. So the vote passes.

10 Now, is there any other business in
11 new business or any other motions in new
12 business?

13 MR. CAGLE: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

14 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay.

15 MR. CAGLE: First I want to pass out a motion
16 I would like to introduce. And while we
17 do that, may I have a point of personal
18 privilege?

19 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, you may.

20 MR. CAGLE: This will be my last -- the last
21 motion I make during my service on this
22 Board. I've made a lot of motions.
23 This is also the toughest one I think

1 I've ever been asked to make, and I
2 think the other members of the Board
3 would agree.

4 You know, it's a lot easier to be an
5 arbitor of fact and decide who's right
6 and who's wrong. Unfortunately, in this
7 case, I think all could be true. You
8 know, there's a lot of passionate turkey
9 hunters in our state, which I think is
10 an asset, and there's a lot of truth
11 that predators and habitat play a role.
12 And, also, the research that has been
13 presented to us in the Department has,
14 you know, made recommendations based on
15 that the timing of harvest and the
16 number of gobblers killed during the
17 first harvest season affects it.

18 So I think this is, you know, again,
19 the most difficult motion or issue that
20 we've been asked to decide during my
21 service on this Board.

22 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Would you like to
23 read the motion.

1 MR. CAGLE: Yes, sir. At this time I'd like
2 to introduce the following motion:

3 I move that the Conservation
4 Advisory Board recommend the following
5 turkey season and bag limit changes
6 beginning with the 2022 turkey season
7 and continuing thereafter:

8 Move the start date for a 45-day
9 turkey season to March 25th;

10 Prohibit the use or possession of a
11 turkey decoy or fan during the first 10
12 days of season;

13 Lower the annual harvest limit from
14 5 gobblers to 4;

15 Furthermore, once these season and
16 bag limit changes go into effect, the
17 Conservation Advisory Board urges the
18 Commissioner to establish a "Turkey
19 Study Committee" to support the Wildlife
20 and Freshwater Fisheries Division's
21 efforts to increase the wild turkey
22 population in our state, review existing
23 turkey research, recommend areas of

1 study for future research, and present
2 their findings and recommendations to
3 the Conservation Advisory Board.

4 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. I'm going to repeat
5 that. This is not a motion that was
6 provided to the Chair, but this is what
7 we have:

8 I move the Conservation Advisory
9 Board recommend the following turkey
10 season and bag limit changes beginning
11 with the 2022 turkey season and
12 continuing thereafter:

13 One, move the start date for a
14 45-day turkey season to March 25th;

15 Two, prohibit the use or possession
16 of a turkey decoy or fan during the
17 first 10 days of the season;

18 Three, lower the annual harvest
19 limit from 5 gobblers to 4;

20 Furthermore, once these season and
21 bag limit changes go into effect, the
22 Conservation Advisory Board urges the
23 Alabama Department of Conservation and

1 Natural Resources Commissioner to
2 establish a "Turkey Study Committee" to
3 support the Wildlife and Freshwater
4 Fisheries Division's efforts to increase
5 the wild turkey population in our state,
6 review existing turkey research,
7 recommend areas of study for future
8 research, and present their findings and
9 recommendations to the Conservation
10 Advisory Board.

11 Is that it?

12 MR. CAGLE: Yes, sir.

13 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: And, Tracye, I'll have this
14 for you.

15 Is there a second?

16 MR. HARTZOG: Second.

17 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: We have a second,
18 Mr. Hartzog.

19 Is there any discussion?

20 Mr. Hartzog.

21 MR. HARTZOG: I would possibly like to add an
22 amendment to that because the way
23 Patrick has actually worded that is the

1 Department wouldn't set up its study
2 committee until the season actually went
3 into effect. I think the Department
4 ought to consider putting that study
5 group together immediately instead of
6 waiting. As the bill is worded, it
7 doesn't go into effect until the season
8 goes into effect.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Are you making an amendment
10 to this? Are you adding on to it? How
11 are you going to word that?

12 MR. HARTZOG: I can either word it as an
13 amendment or Patrick can either redefine
14 his effective date.

15 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. Going outside --
16 and this is discussion. This is from
17 the Chair. Why don't you ask the
18 Commissioner after the meeting, see if
19 that works with his timetable.

20 MR. HARTZOG: Okay.

21 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Is that okay with you,
22 Patrick?

23 MR. CAGLE: Yes.

1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. So we have a
2 second. It's been read. Let's call the
3 question. Let's take a vote on this.
4 Let's do it again just as we did before.
5 We're going to have a roll-call vote. I
6 will start down to the podium's left.

7 Mr. Jones?

8 MR. BROCK JONES: Yes.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Wolfe?

10 MR. WOLFE: I abstain.

11 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Jeff Martin?

12 MR. MARTIN: Yes.

13 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Hartzog?

14 MR. HARTZOG: Yes.

15 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Cagle?

16 MR. CAGLE: Yes.

17 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Stimpson?

18 MR. STIMPSON: Yes.

19 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'll go all the way to the
20 end.

21 Mr. Phillips?

22 DR. PHILLIPS: Abstain.

23 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Tim?

1 MR. WOOD: Nay.

2 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: He says no.

3 MR. BARKSDALE: No.

4 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Jones?

5 MR. RAYMOND JONES: Yes.

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: So the motion carries.

7 Is there any other new business
8 before this Board today?

9 MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman?

10 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, sir.

11 MR. HARTZOG: If -- I don't know whether it
12 would be Chuck or enforcement or
13 whatever. I would like to ask a couple
14 of questions on the changes that are
15 proposed here.

16 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes. Go ahead.

17 MR. HARTZOG: All right. On page 11, there's
18 no closed season on bobcat, coyote, fox,
19 or feral swine. However, on the next
20 page, under trapping, bobcat and fox --
21 you know, if one of our major concerns
22 is controlling predators, why not have
23 bobcat and fox -- having trapping year

1 around instead of just a set season.

2 I mean, I'm just asking a question.

3 Why wouldn't we want to trap the fox
4 and the bobcat year around when we can
5 hunt them year around but we can't trap
6 them year around? And if we're trying
7 to control the predators for the turkey
8 population, you would think you would
9 want to eliminate the predators year
10 around.

11 Keith?

12 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Mr. Chairman, I
13 talked with Grady about this briefly
14 yesterday. And so I've asked Chuck or
15 Keith, whichever one, to talk about
16 that. Thanks.

17 CHIEF GAULDIN: Yeah. There are several
18 species that are not allowed to be
19 trapped during the entire year. They're
20 just trapped during the regulated
21 trapping season. I think that would
22 include otters, mink, muskrats as well,
23 because historically those had high

1 health values.

2 But if somebody wants to catch
3 those, either foxes or bobcats, on their
4 property or have somebody do it for
5 hire, they can call the district office
6 and get a Nuisance Wildlife Control
7 Permit to do that.

8 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Does that answer your
9 question?

10 MR. HARTZOG: Yeah.

11 Second thing, on that same page,
12 it's feral swine and it says private --
13 and it's the special nighttime season.
14 Wouldn't that totally be eliminated with
15 the legislature?

16 DIRECTOR SYKES: No, sir. That season is
17 specifically for running dogs with no
18 guns.

19 MR. HARTZOG: Okay. Thank you.

20 MR. STIMPSON: Mr. Chairman?

21 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Are you squared away?

22 MR. HARTZOG: Yes, sir.

23 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, sir, Mr. Stimpson.

1 MR. STIMPSON: Would it be appropriate to make
2 a motion to approve the -- other than
3 the turkey motion that just passed, the
4 rest of the recommendations by the
5 Department?

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I think we'll wait until next
7 meeting to do that.

8 MR. STIMPSON: Okay. Just checking.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: That's generally what we do.
10 Thank you for asking. But let's -- that
11 way, if there's any housekeeping or
12 other issues that need to be had, we'll
13 have that and they will be ready for the
14 *Digest*.

15 MR. STIMPSON: Sure.

16 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Is there any other new
17 business before this Board today?

18 Mr. Jones.

19 MR. RAYMOND JONES: Yes, Mr. Chairman. To
20 limit the problems with dog deer hunting
21 in Colbert County, I would like to place
22 the area west of Highway 43 under the
23 permit system in order to allow those

1 dog hunters in those areas to continue
2 to dog hunt in an ethical way.

3 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. You're making a
4 motion?

5 MR. RAYMOND JONES: This would be coming up
6 for the next meeting.

7 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. So as a talking point?

8 MR. RAYMOND JONES: As a talking point.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: That's not a motion.

10 All right. Is there any other new
11 business before the Board at this point?
12 Anybody have anything new that they want
13 to bring up?

14 (No response.)

15 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'm not going back to
16 unfinished business. We'll just let it
17 roll.

18 And so that is done and our motions
19 are made. Good with the legislature,
20 the CPI. I don't have any additional
21 announcements from anybody.

22 Welcome, Mr. Phillips. Thank you so
23 much for being here.

1 To the Board, thank you guys for
2 coming and for your hard work getting a
3 lot of this stuff done.

4 To the Department, to all the staff
5 people, to our speakers, safe travels
6 home.

7 The next meeting will be in May, the
8 date to be determined. We don't have a
9 date at this point.

10 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: The date and
11 location will be determined. Everything
12 is -- seems to be in our state moving in
13 the right direction with COVID, and we
14 are looking at those first couple of
15 weekends in May as the next date and
16 looking for a location similar to this
17 where we can still safely distance and
18 have our meeting where the court
19 reporter can hear, which is extremely
20 important. As Chuck had mentioned
21 looking back through the minutes in
22 2013, I'm glad to know that somebody
23 read your work product.

1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes. Very important for her.

2 And thank you, Betsy, again, for
3 getting the venue. And I suspect you'll
4 be part of getting it next time.

5 Thank you, everyone. Safe travels
6 home. We're adjourned.

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8 (Meeting adjourned at
9 approximately 12:04 p.m.)

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* * * * *

REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

* * * * *

STATE OF ALABAMA:

MONTGOMERY COUNTY:

I, Tracye Sadler Blackwell, Certified Court Reporter and Commissioner for the State of Alabama at Large, do hereby certify that I reported the foregoing proceedings of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Advisory Board Meeting on March 6, 2021.

The foregoing 162 computer-printed pages contain a true and correct transcript of the proceedings held.

I further certify that I am neither of kin nor of counsel to the parties to said cause nor in any manner interested in the results thereof.

This 6th day of May 2021.

Tracye S. Blackwell, CCR, RPR
ACCR No. 294
Expiration date: 9-30-2021
Certified Court Reporter
and Commissioner for the State
of Alabama at Large

Demography and Harvest Decisions for Eastern Wild Turkeys in Alabama

James (Barry) Grand
U.S. Geological Survey
March 3, 2021

Alabama Conservation Advisory Board



original graphic art by: Griffin
Shreves III

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Research problem

Eastern Wild Turkey populations across the region appear to be declining...

Turkey biologists in Alabama and other southeastern states believe that reducing spring harvest and postponing spring seasons will increase productivity leading to larger turkey populations



Research results

- Most results in 5 graduate student theses at Auburn University
 - M.B. Gonnerman ([Abundance, productivity, monitoring methods](#))
 - Use of camera surveys to estimate distribution & abundance
 - S.J. Zenas ([Survival rates](#))
 - Estimate effects of trapping & marking
 - Estimate age-specific seasonal survival rates
 - L.A. Margadant ([Movements](#))
 - Examine habitat selection
 - Determine effects of baiting on movements
 - B.D. Stewart ([Effects of opening dates, image analysis](#))
 - Estimate effects of experimental seasons on populations
 - Develop automated image analysis techniques
 - S.R. Keller ([Design of surveys](#))
 - Compare surveys on wildlife openings & random sites
 - Estimate effects of bait on camera surveys

Decision support tool



original graphic art by: Griffin
Shreves III

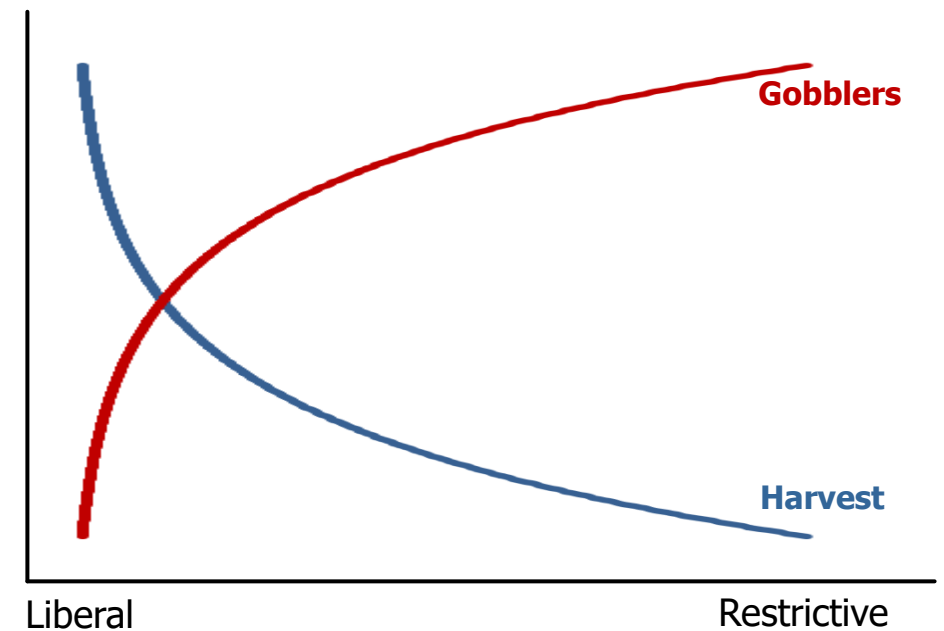
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Management objectives

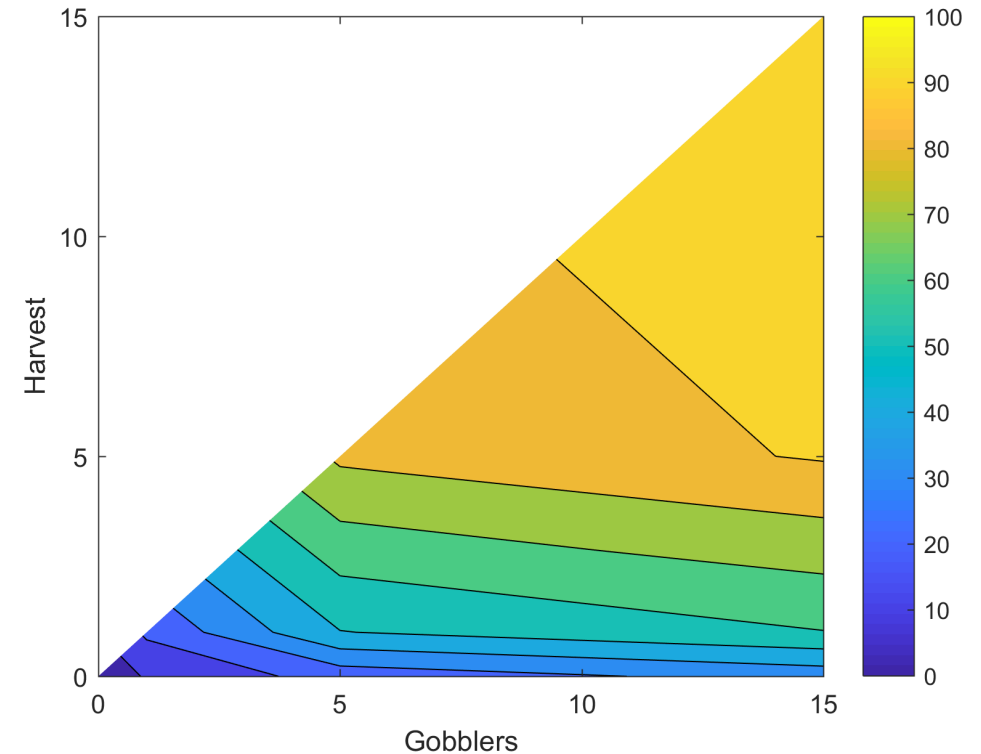
- Reverse the decline in turkey populations
- Stakeholder objectives
 - Maximize the availability of gobblers
 - Maximize harvest
- Tradeoff





Determining tradeoffs – value function

- Workshops across the state
- Alabama Avid Turkey Hunters, WFF Biologists, AWF and NWTF partners
- Scoring: On a scale of 0-100, how would you value having __ gobblers/sq. mi. in the spring and harvesting __ gobblers/sq. mi.?
- Values used to compare the predicted outcomes of harvest regulations.





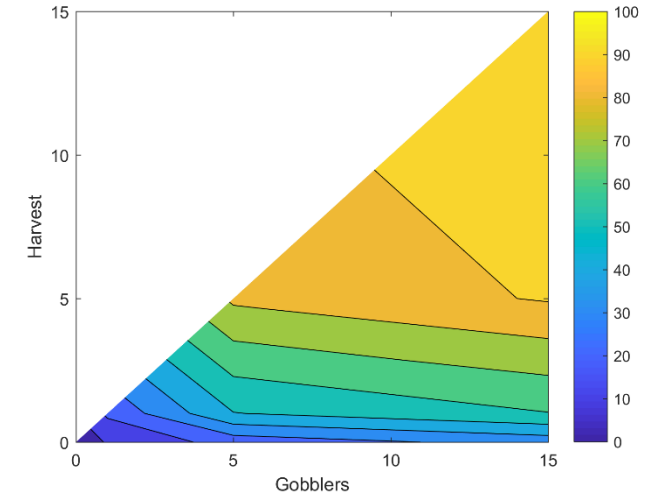
Harvest Management – alternatives evaluated

1. Status quo – 5 males, 45-day season, 15MAR-31MAY
2. Reduce bag (**RB**) – 3 males
3. Open later (**OL**) – ≥ 10 -days (enough to increase productivity)
4. Shorten season (**SS**) – 35-day season in combination with later start
5. Reduce bag & open later (**RB OL**)
6. Reduce bag , open later, & shorten season (**RB OL SS**)
7. Restricted – 3 males/yr, open later, 10-day season,
8. Closed – no season



Predicting consequences of each alternative

- Effects of alternatives on desired outcomes (objectives)
 - Spring gobbler density
 - Gobbler harvest (≥ 2 y)
- Population model
 - Vital rates from research & scientific literature
 - Experimental regulations on WMAs
 - Expert judgement
 - Not wild guesses – logic & inference
 - Results of harvest survey (turkeys/hunter)
 - Results of avid hunter survey (harvest dates, productivity)





Determining vital rates

- Started with published literature on southeastern wild turkeys
- Estimates from the ADCNR-funded research
- Used established techniques to elicit relative effects on rates
 - Mail survey data – e.g., How many hunters report shooting more than 3 turkeys?
 - Avid hunter survey
 - Timing of gobbling & harvest
 - Productivity – poults-per-hen (*pph*)



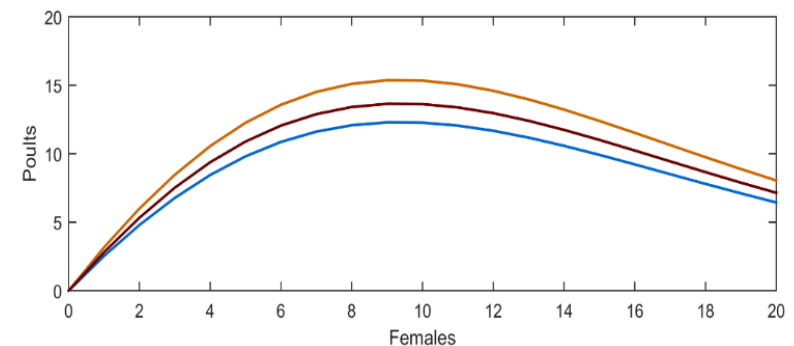
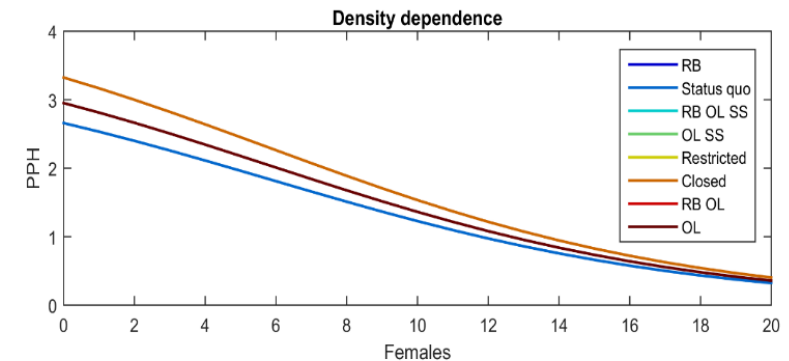
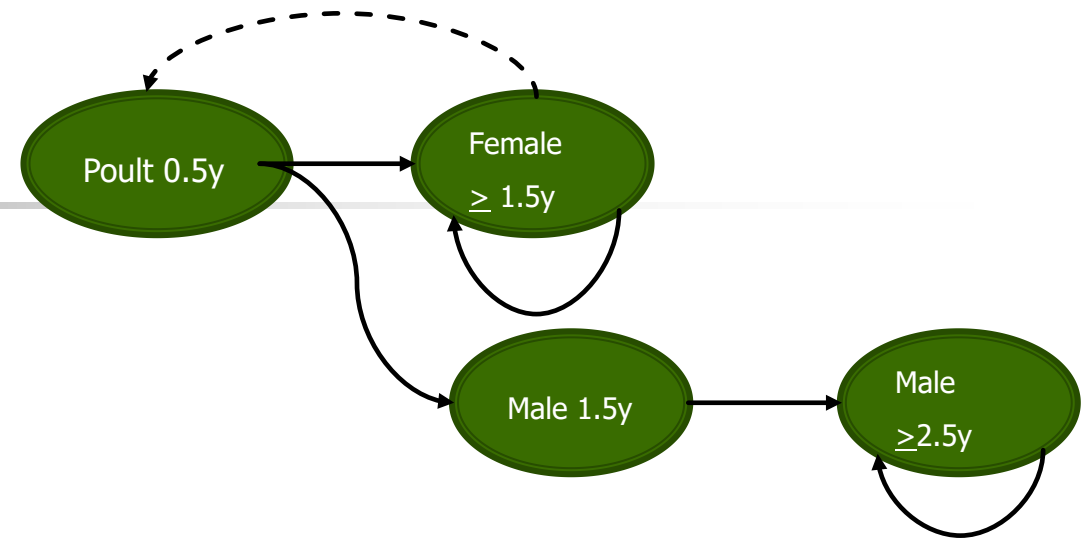
Vital rates

		Female		Male			
		Juvenile	Adult	Juvenile		Adult	
Alternative	Recruitment (max)	Survival	Survival	Survival	Harvest	Survival	Harvest
RB	3.68	0.57	0.48	0.54	0.10	0.46	0.30
Status quo	3.68	0.57	0.48	0.54	0.10	0.44	0.33
RB OL SS	4.08	0.57	0.48	0.55	0.08	0.48	0.30
OL	4.08	0.57	0.48	0.54	0.10	0.44	0.33
OL SS	4.08	0.57	0.48	0.55	0.09	0.46	0.30
RB OL	4.08	0.57	0.48	0.54	0.10	0.46	0.30
Restrict	4.59	0.57	0.48	0.57	0.04	0.54	0.14
Closed	4.59	0.57	0.48	0.59	0.00	0.61	0.00



Population model

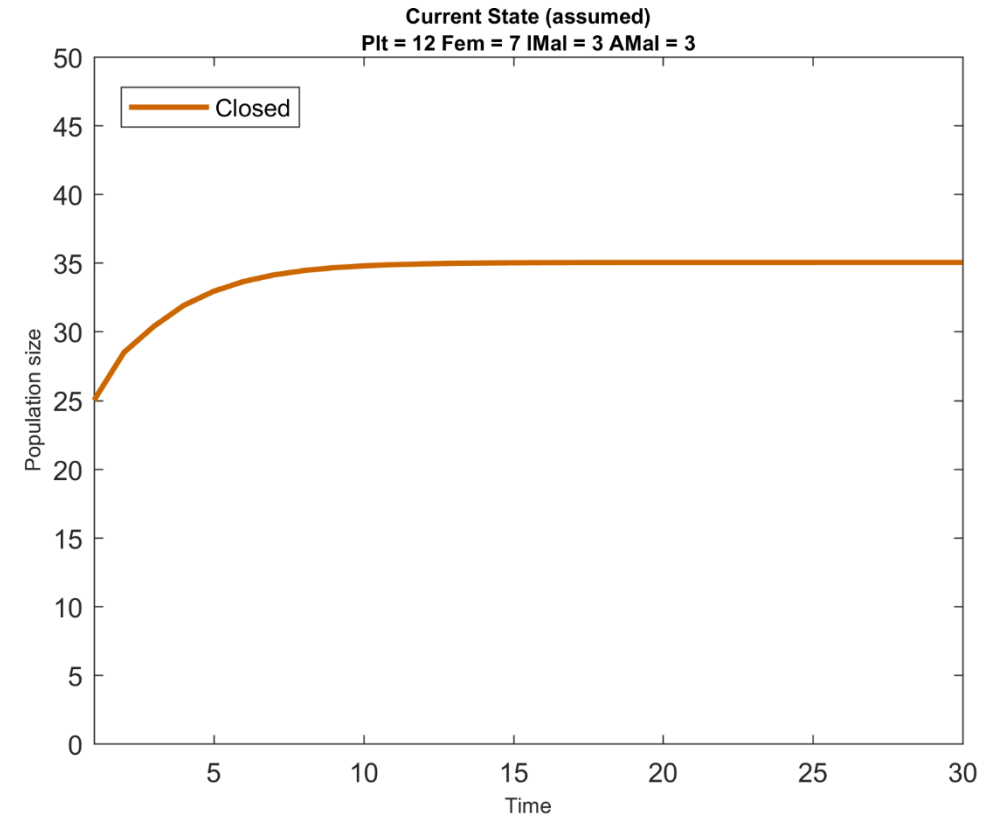
- Predicts fall & spring population
 - Poults
 - Females
 - Juvenile males (jakes)
 - Adult males (≥ 2 yrs)
- Density dependent
 - Productivity (p_{ph}) is function of density of females
- Projections - predictions
 - 30 years
 - Each alternative (8)
 - Many population sizes (states) & vital rates





Effects of alternatives on projections

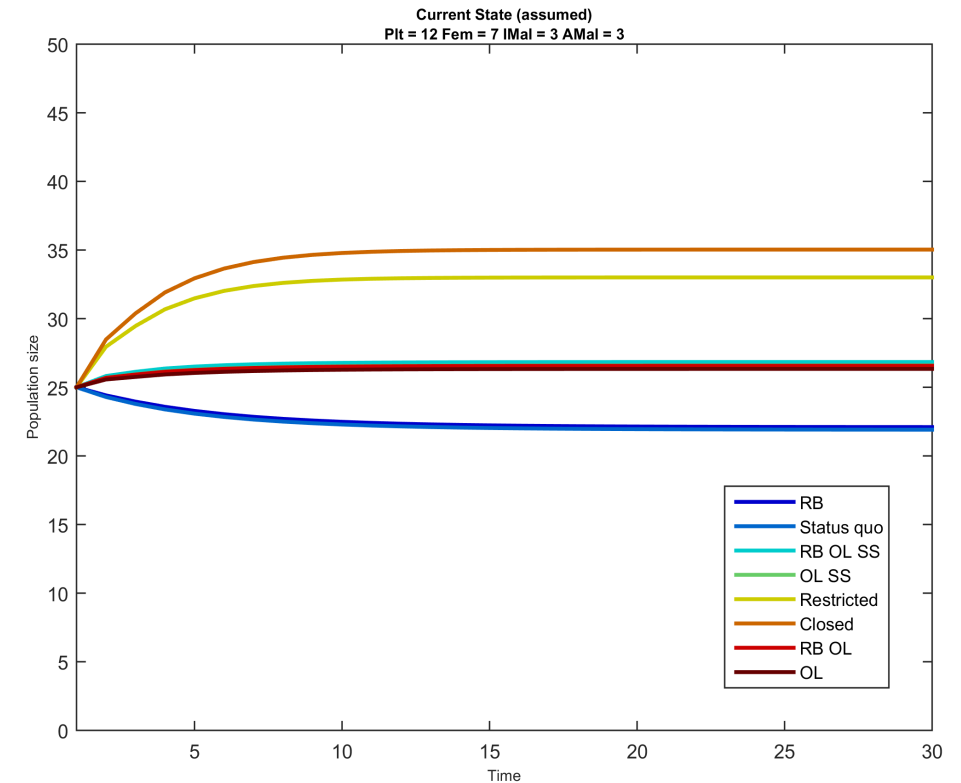
- Projection from current size
 - Population decreasing with status quo and RB
 - Population increases with other alternatives
- Greatest populations
 - Restricted season
 - Closed season





Effects of alternatives on projections

- Projection from current size
 - Population decreasing with status quo and RB
 - Population increases with other alternatives
- Greatest populations
 - Restricted season
 - Closed season
- Productivity (pph) affects growth rate
- Harvest rate & productivity affect ultimate size of population





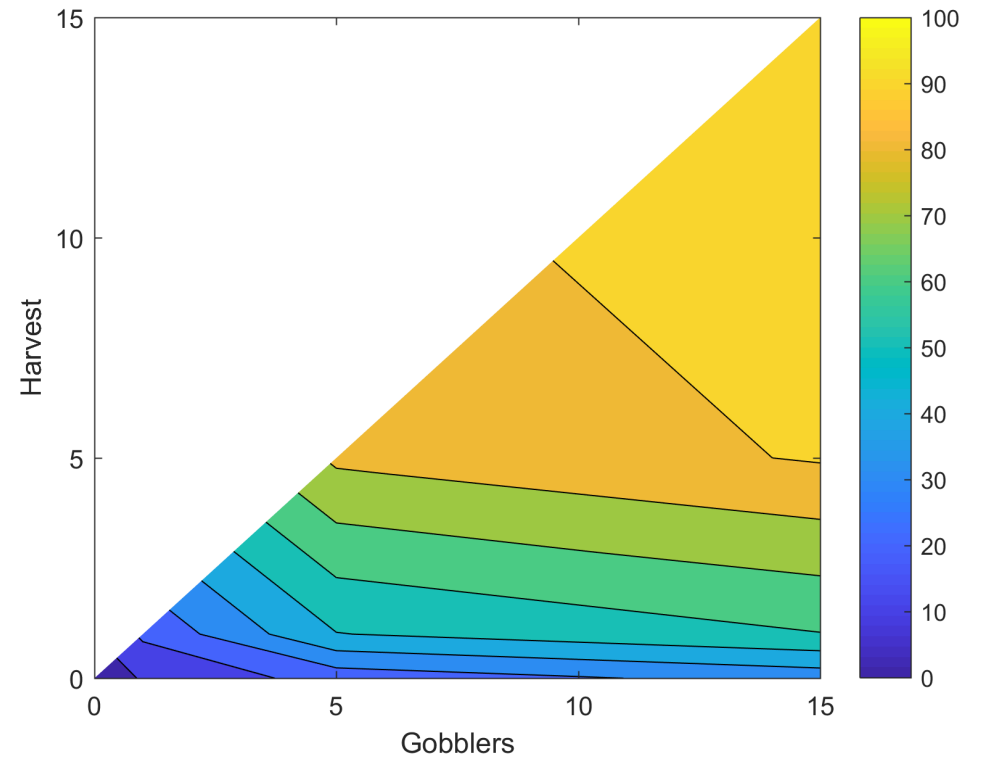
Equilibrium populations (n/mi²)

	Alternative							
Fall population	RB	Status Quo	RB OL SS	OL SS	Restricted	Closed	RB OL	OL
Poults (p)	10.8	10.8	13.0	13.0	15.2	15.2	13.0	13.0
Females (f)	5.9	5.9	7.1	7.1	8.3	8.3	7.1	7.1
Juvenile (m _j) males	2.9	2.9	3.6	3.5	4.3	4.5	3.5	3.5
Adult males (m _a)	2.5	2.3	3.2	3.0	5.1	7.0	3.0	2.8
Total	22.1	21.9	26.8	26.6	33.0	35.0	26.6	26.3



Evaluating trade offs (value function)

- Compare values of alternatives
- Incorporate gobbler numbers & harvest
 - Value of harvest based on males ≥ 2.0 yr
- Average over 30 yr





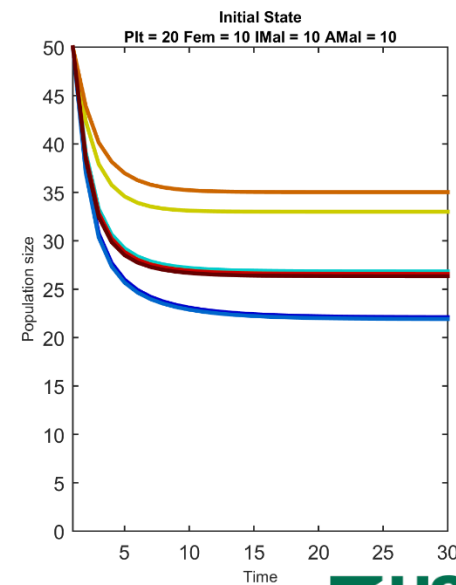
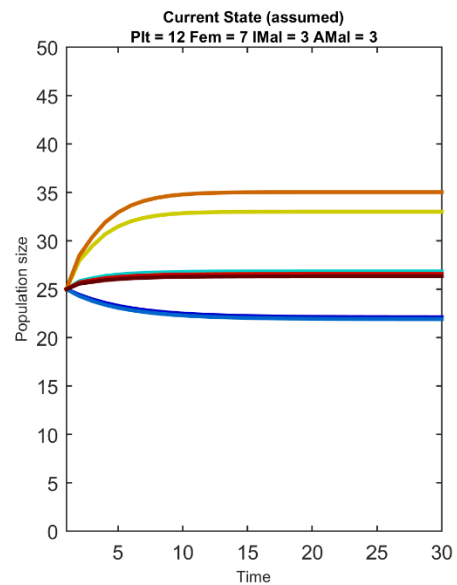
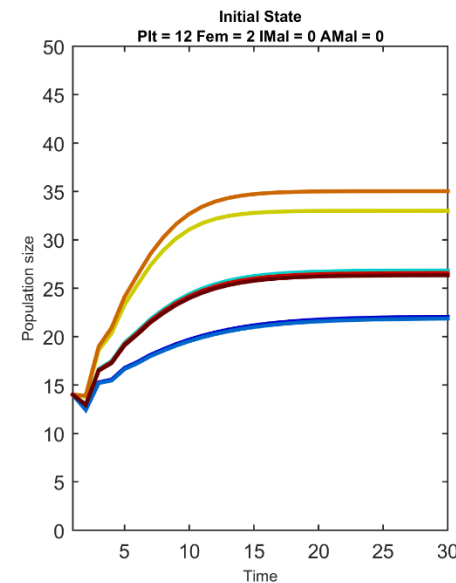
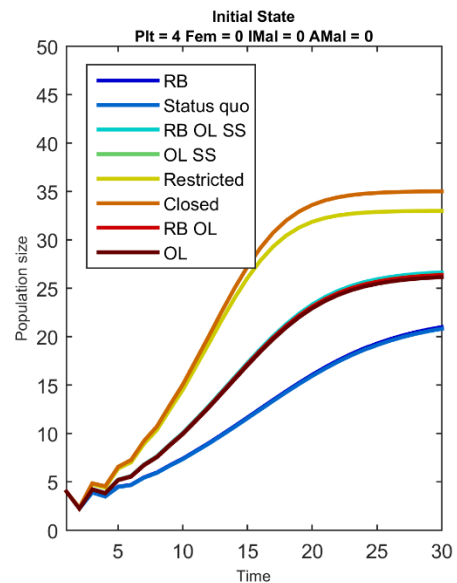
Value of alternatives

	Alternative							
Fall population	RB	Status Quo	RB OL SS	OL SS	Restricted	Closed	RB OL	OL
Poults (p)	10.8	10.8	13.0	13.0	15.2	15.2	13.0	13.0
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Total	22.1	21.9	26.8	26.6	33.0	35.0	26.6	26.3
Spring gobblers	4.0	3.9	5.0	4.8	7.0	8.4	4.8	4.7
Adult harvest	1.2	1.3	1.5	1.4	0.9	0.0	1.4	1.5



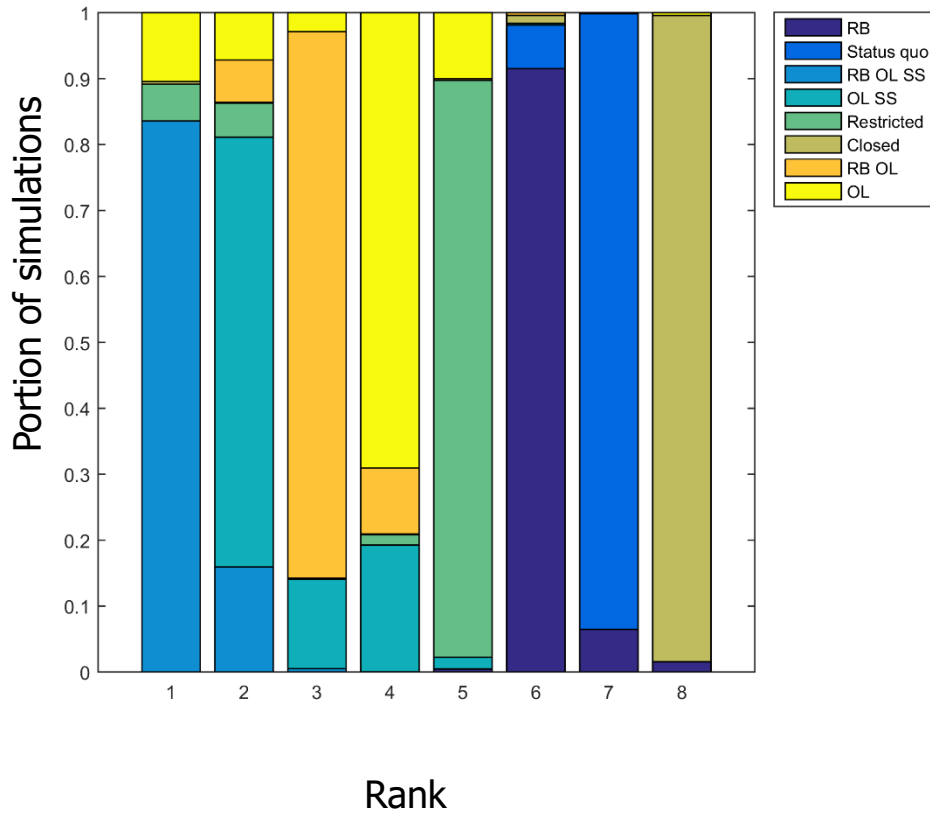
Uncertainty over population size

- Simulated 27,951 initial populations
 - 0-20 poults
 - 0-10 females, juvenile males, adult males
 - 0-50 turkeys/mi²
- Each reaches same, unique equilibrium
- Initial population affects time to equilibrium





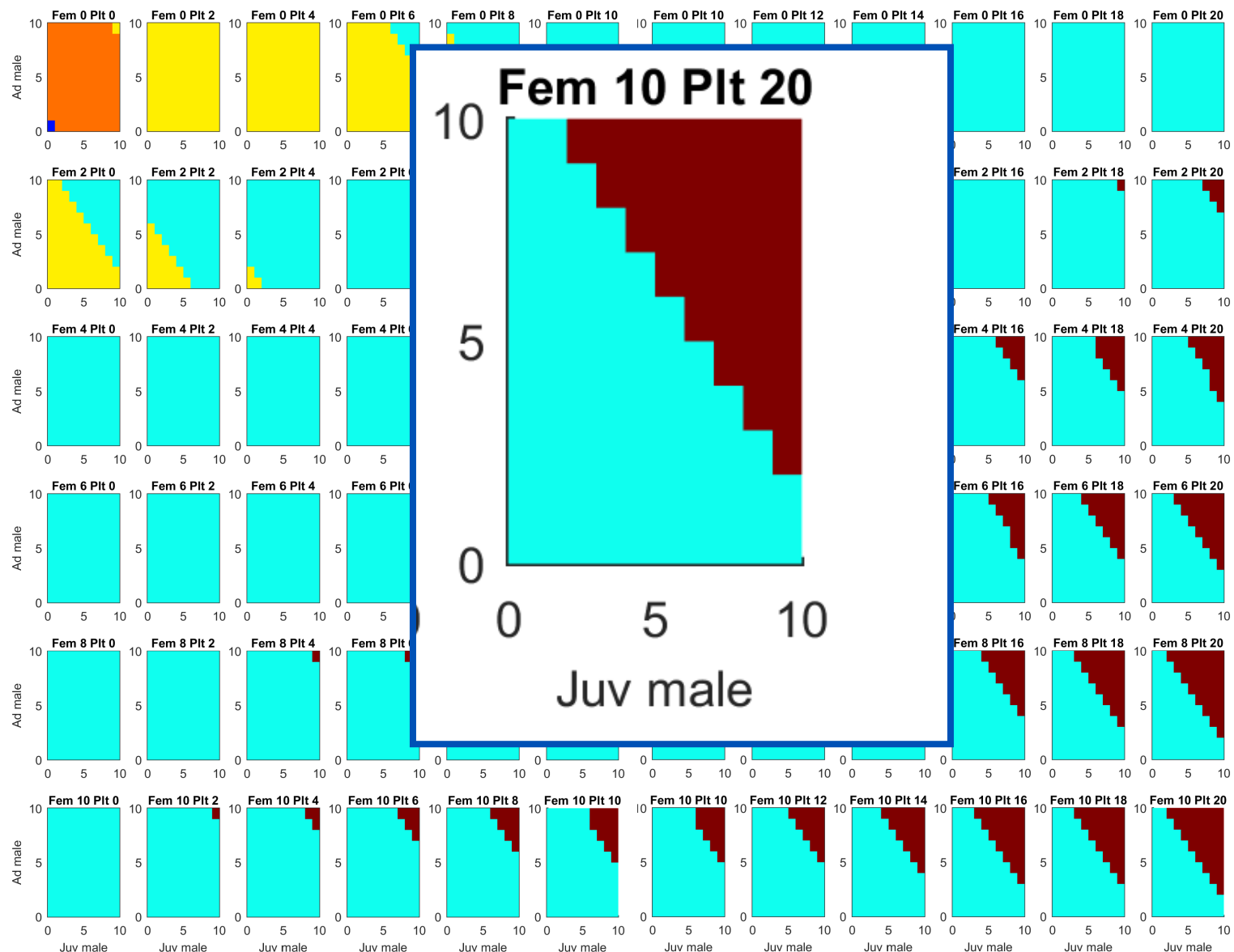
Uncertainty about population size



- Ranks of alternatives (27,951 simulations)
- Best alternative (Ranked #1)
 - RB OL SS - 84%
 - OL – 10%
 - Status quo & RB – 0%
- Worst alternative (Ranked #8)
 - Closed season
- Status quo – 93% 7th best
- RB – 92% 6th best



Decision support tool

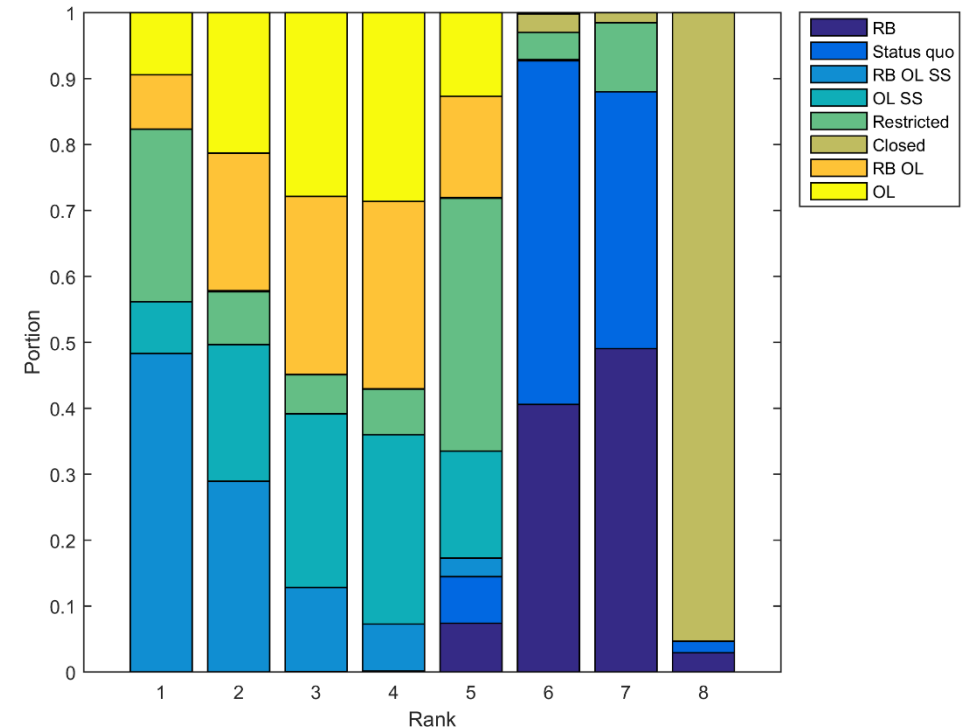


- Plt – poult
- Fem – females
- Juv male – juvenile males
- Ad male – adult males



Uncertainty about vital rates

- What if the vital rates are wrong?
- Varied each vital rate by 20%
- >19,000,000 simulations
- Best alternative
 - Status quo & RB ~0%
 - RB OL SS - 48%
 - Restricted – 26%
- Worst alternative – Closed
- Status quo & RB usually 6th or 7th best
 - Predict fewer spring gobblers & smaller harvest





Summary of results

- Productivity
 - Affects on population size & growth rate
 - Number of males & females
 - Affects value
- Harvest rates of males
 - Affects population size
 - Affects value
- Decision tool suggests
 - Conservative harvest when females & poult are very low (Restricted)
 - Moderate harvest under most conditions (RB OL SS)
 - Liberal harvest when population is large (OL)
 - Never Close
 - Never Status quo or RB



Discussion points

- Reliance on expert judgement (logic & inference) for affects of alternatives
 - Common practice in absence of exhaustive data
 - Reduce uncertainty by monitoring populations or research
- Assumptions
 - Female survival is unaffected
 - All available females breed
 - Alternatives affect productivity
 - Other means of increasing *productivity* on smaller scales



Acknowledgements

- Funding provided by:
 - Alabama Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries Division
 - Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration ← U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
 - Auburn University
 - National Wild Turkey Federation & Alabama Chapter

- Research conducted by:
 - Alabama Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit (85 yr)
 - U.S. Geological Survey
 - Alabama Wildlife & Freshwater Fisheries Division
 - Auburn University
 - U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
 - Wildlife Management Institute



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May 19, 2021

MEMORANDUM

TO: Christopher M. Blankenship
Commissioner

FROM: Charlanna W. Skaggs 
General Counsel

RE: March 6, 2021 CAB Meeting

On March 6, 2021, the Conservation Advisory Board meeting was held at the RSA Activity Center on Dexter Avenue in Montgomery. Due to COVID-19 concerns, the meeting was held in a large space in order to provide adequate spacing between all individuals in attendance. In addition, public speakers, visitors, and all board members wore masks or facial coverings in accordance with the State's public health guidance and Governor Ivey's Safer at Home Order.

As a result of these precautionary measures, the court reporter, Tracye Blackwell, was unable to transcribe the presentation by Dr. Grand. In lieu of transcribing Dr. Grand's presentation, a copy of Dr. Grand's PowerPoint Presentation is attached. It is the Department's practice to transcribe the Conservation Advisory Board meetings. However, a transcript is not required by the applicable statute. Section 9-2-14 provides: "The Commissioner of Conservation and Natural Resources shall be ex officio secretary of the board and shall keep **minutes** of all meetings and a record of all proceedings of the board." Ala Code § 9-2-14 (d) (emphasis added). Therefore, generally referencing this portion of the meeting in the transcript conforms with the statutory requirements

CWS/hb