

STATE OF ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF  
CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Lakepoint State Park

104 Lakepoint Drive

Eufaula, Alabama

May 21, 2022

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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Proceedings taken before Stacey L.  
Johnson, Certified Court Reporter and  
Commissioner for the State of Alabama at  
Large, at Lakepoint State Park,  
104 Lakepoint Drive, Eufaula, Alabama,  
Saturday, May 21, 2022, commencing at  
9:00 a.m.

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BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Joseph Dobbs, Jr., Chairman

Commissioner Christopher M. Blankenship,  
Ex-Officio Secretary

Mr. Kevin Savoy

Mr. Grady Hartzog

Mr. Greg Barksdale

Mr. Tim Wood

Mr. Raymond Jones, Jr.

Mr. Ben Stimpson

Mr. Gary Wolfe

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1 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Everyone please take  
2 a seat. Please find a seat.

3 Glad to see everybody this morning  
4 at our Advisory Board meeting for May the  
5 21st of 2022. Let's have a productive  
6 meeting with good dialogue.

7 This morning I'm going to ask  
8 Mr. Raymond Jones, our Board member, to  
9 give the invocation.

10 (Invocation given by

11 Mr. Raymond Jones, Jr.)

12 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Jones.

13 I will lead us in the Pledge of  
14 Allegiance today. The flag is to my  
15 right. If you'll stand, please.

16 (Pledge of Allegiance led

17 by Chairman Joseph Dobbs,

18 Jr.)

19 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you-all. Thank  
20 you.

21 We have a special guest today.  
22 I'm going to ask Commissioner Blankenship  
23 to come forward and introduce our special

1 guest.

2 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Thank you,  
3 Joey.

4 Good morning. I'm Commissioner  
5 Chris Blankenship of the Department of  
6 Conservation and Natural Resources, and I  
7 welcome y'all here to Lakepoint State  
8 Park. I'm glad to have all of you here  
9 this morning. I'd like to thank Odell  
10 Banks and Essie and the whole staff here  
11 that have made the night and the stay very  
12 enjoyable. And the facility looks great.  
13 And thank y'all for the work you do.

14 We're so glad to have Governor Kay  
15 Ivey here with us today. Recently, the  
16 Governor and I visited Franklin, Randolph,  
17 Pickens, Greene, Baldwin, and now Barbour  
18 Counties where she's talked about the  
19 importance of outdoor recreation to the  
20 economy and the quality of life in  
21 Alabama. Alabama is truly a great place  
22 to hunt, fish, camp, hike, and spend time  
23 in the great outdoors.

1           Speaking of turkeys, we recently  
2           completed the Governor's One-Shot Turkey  
3           Hunt. This event brings in prospective  
4           industry representatives, current large  
5           manufacturers, and other valued guests to  
6           stay in lodges around the state and to  
7           compete for the title of the Grand  
8           Champion Turkey Hunter. It's also a  
9           primary fundraiser for our Conservation  
10          Foundation that provides scholarships to  
11          students at Alabama and Auburn. Thanks to  
12          Governor Ivey's support, I'm proud to  
13          relay that the Governor's One-Shot Turkey  
14          Hunt was the most successful we've ever  
15          had in the state and raised more money for  
16          scholarships than any other One-Shot. So  
17          thank you, Governor, for your support of  
18          that.

19                 Of importance to this group, I  
20                 think, is that in the time that Governor  
21                 Ivey has been in office, we have acquired  
22                 more than 63,000 acres of property that  
23                 has gone into public ownership for the

1 conservation and enjoyment of our citizens  
2 forever. Wow. Thank you, Governor, for  
3 your leadership in allowing DCNR to do  
4 good work for the people and the natural  
5 resources that God has so richly blessed  
6 us with here in Alabama.

7 In my 28 years in the Department  
8 of Conservation and Natural Resources, I  
9 do not ever remember having a governor  
10 join us at the CAB meeting. It means  
11 a lot that you're here today.

12 Please help me to welcome the best  
13 Governor we've ever had to support outdoor  
14 recreation in Alabama, Governor Kay Ivey.

15 GOVERNOR IVEY: Well, good morning,  
16 everyone. Thank you, Chris, for letting  
17 me swing in for a few minutes to be with  
18 this outstanding group while we're in  
19 town.

20 Y'all, hunting and fishing,  
21 camping, and outdoor recreation that's  
22 managed by the Department of Conservation  
23 and Natural Resources is a 14 billion --

1 with a B -- dollar economic driver for our  
2 state. That's especially good for folks  
3 in rural areas.

4 I thank the men and women of the  
5 DCNR for their hard work and their passion  
6 that they display every day to ensure we  
7 have fish, wildlife, and access to public  
8 lands and waters both today and tomorrow  
9 for future generations. Conservation also  
10 manages our beautiful Alabama State Parks,  
11 many of which I've had the pleasure and  
12 enjoyment of visiting.

13 This Tuesday, let me remind you,  
14 the State Parks bond amendment is on the  
15 ballot. If approved by the voters, it  
16 will provide 85 million dollars for  
17 improvements and upgrades to our state  
18 parks, and I will certainly be voting yes.

19 I'd like to thank the members of  
20 the Alabama Conservation Advisory Board  
21 for your dedication and your service to  
22 our state. One thing is for sure, in a  
23 state like Alabama, folks are passionate

1       about hunting, fishing, and wildlife, and  
2       they have plenty of opinions on how they  
3       should be managed. Commissioner  
4       Blankenship and his team do a wonderful  
5       job of balancing long seasons with  
6       appropriate bag limits to ensure that we  
7       do not overharvest the bounty that God has  
8       blessed us with. Alabama is truly a great  
9       place to hunt, fish, camp, hike, and spend  
10      times in the great outdoors. So let's all  
11      keep up the good work to ensure that we  
12      remain Alabama the Beautiful.

13                 Thank you again for having me here  
14      today and may God continue to bless each  
15      of you and the great state of Alabama.

16                 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: On the agenda too  
17      today we have the Sportsman's Pledge. I'm  
18      going to reread that for you very quickly,  
19      I think. Well, I don't guess I will. I  
20      have not memorized it, and I apologize. I  
21      had it here, and I don't have it now.

22                 Well, let me ask our Secretary, do  
23      we have a quorum today.

1           COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: We do.

2           CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, I think we have  
3 a quorum.

4                     Thank you very much.

5                     And are there any other  
6 individuals or groups that we need to  
7 recognize, Mr. Commissioner, that I'm not  
8 familiar with?

9           COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: No, sir. I  
10 think we can do the introduction of Board  
11 members and...

12           CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. Very  
13 good.

14                     So let's start down at the far end  
15 with Mr. Wolfe.

16           MR. WOLFE: Gary Wolfe, District 1,  
17 Baldwin County in South Alabama.

18           MR. BARKSDALE: Greg Barksdale,  
19 District 4.

20           MR. WOOD: I'm Tim Wood. I'm from  
21 Selma. I represent the west portion of  
22 the Black Belt.

23           MR. STIMPSON: Ben Stimpson,

1 District 1 in Mobile County.

2 MR. HARTZOG: Grady Hartzog,  
3 District 2, Barbour County.

4 MR. JONES: Raymond Jones,  
5 Congressional District 5, North Alabama,  
6 Madison County.

7 MR. SAVOY: Kevin Savoy, District 2  
8 representing the Wiregrass.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: And Joey Dobbs,  
10 District 6, central part of the state.

11 Thank you. These are the  
12 gentlemen -- if you have questions or  
13 issues, these are the gentlemen in your  
14 congressional districts that I would  
15 recommend that you contact. And thank  
16 each of you for being here very much.

17 I want to go back for a moment and  
18 ask about the minutes of the meeting and  
19 approval for those minutes. The Board's  
20 read those minutes. Are there any  
21 additions or corrections to the minutes?

22 And as they're not, without a  
23 vote, the Chair will approve the minutes?

1 Is that okay?

2 Very good. So those minutes are  
3 so approved.

4 Today we have with us the  
5 directors of -- Ms. McCurdy from State  
6 Lands and Mr. Greg Lein from State Parks.  
7 Thank you very much. The parks are --  
8 this is very nice. It was very nice to  
9 have been here last night and to be here  
10 today, and thank you so much for hosting  
11 us, as the Commissioner said.

12 Scott Bannon with Marine  
13 Resources, Mr. Chuck Sykes with Wildlife  
14 and Freshwater Fisheries, thank you-all  
15 for being here as well today. And I know  
16 that some of you have some PowerPoints or  
17 programs for us. They're great folks and  
18 work hard for everything.

19 So I guess that we will move now  
20 to Commissioner Blankenship and your  
21 report.

22 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP. Thank you,  
23 Mr. Chairman.

1 I'll be fairly brief. We covered  
2 so many things at the March meeting that's  
3 going on with the Department ,but I do  
4 want to catch the Board up on a few items  
5 that have taken place since our last  
6 meeting.

7 The Governor did mention the  
8 85 million dollar bond that will be on the  
9 ballot May 24th, and I appreciate the  
10 Board and the support for that. That will  
11 make -- give us the funds to make some  
12 much needed improvements at our  
13 campgrounds around the state to bring  
14 those up to the 21st century. A lot of  
15 our campgrounds were built when camping  
16 was a pop-up camper and a tent, and we are  
17 way past that now in technology with the  
18 three air conditioner motor homes and the  
19 50-amp service and we want to make sure  
20 that we provide for our citizens and our  
21 guests moving forward.

22 So campground renovations, our  
23 day-use areas, we need some new bathroom

1 facilities to try and expand the day use  
2 in our parks, to build some accessible  
3 playgrounds so that our citizens of all  
4 different ability types will have the  
5 opportunity to play at our playgrounds and  
6 enjoy our parks. We have different parks  
7 that -- this park has several cabins. We  
8 have a lot of parks that don't have cabins  
9 or places for people to stay. If they  
10 don't have an RV or a motor home, they're  
11 not able to enjoy the parks as much as we  
12 would like, so we're going to build some  
13 cabins. We've got a lot of work planned  
14 with those funds, and we appreciate  
15 everybody's support on that.

16 We're not just waiting on the  
17 bond, though. The parks have been very  
18 successful under Greg Lein and Matthew  
19 Capps, our new assistant director. I saw  
20 Matthew -- many of you may not know  
21 Matthew. Will you raise -- that's our new  
22 Parks Assistant Director Matthew Capps. I  
23 guess new. It's been about a year now.

1 Still fairly new. But Matthew's doing a  
2 good job. And so every dime we make in  
3 the parks, we're putting back into the  
4 parks to do good work now.

5 We've had ribbon cuttings here  
6 recently at Cathedral Cabins where we  
7 opened a new campground. We worked with  
8 Alabama Department of Environmental  
9 Management on using rubberized asphalt to  
10 pave all the roads at Guntersville State  
11 Park. I was up there a couple of weeks  
12 ago, and it's a smooth ride around there  
13 now. It's very nice. And that's a good  
14 partnership with another State agency to  
15 be able to do that project.

16 We've opened the Joe Wheeler  
17 campground areas B and C that were  
18 destroyed with the tornadoes in December  
19 of 2019. That's reopened and is doing  
20 well.

21 We just completed a project at  
22 DeSoto Falls, dredged out the river there,  
23 built a new beach for the day-use area at

1 the falls, and we are -- we'll be paving  
2 up there later this month with some  
3 rubberized asphalt around that day-use  
4 area at the falls.

5 We recently celebrated the  
6 acquisition of 1650 acres adjacent to  
7 Oak Mountain State Park. We had that  
8 celebration in April. That's a great  
9 addition to the largest park in our system  
10 right there in fast-growing Shelby County.  
11 To be able to add 1600 acres was  
12 monumental. That was purchased by the  
13 Forever Wild Land Trust Board that's  
14 managed by State Lands Director Patti  
15 McCurdy and then added to the parks. So  
16 that's a great addition. You don't get  
17 those opportunities very often, and I'm  
18 very thankful for the Forever Wild Board  
19 moving on that.

20 And then I hope you enjoyed, the  
21 ones who stayed here last night, the new  
22 mattresses in all of our rooms in the  
23 state park. I'm so glad to have those new

1 mattresses in all 1300 overnight  
2 facilities throughout the parks. And I  
3 slept like a rock last night on mine. I  
4 hope you did too. That's very satisfying  
5 to have that done.

6 And then here while you're at  
7 Lakepoint, we've just opened a new  
8 off-highway vehicle trail, OHV trail, in  
9 what used to be the golf course over here.  
10 So if you have some time today, go over  
11 there and ride you a side-by-side through  
12 the course. We have a novice course, and  
13 then we have one that's a little bit more  
14 exciting for folks that have some  
15 experience on that. So that's a new  
16 recreational opportunity that we've done  
17 here and at Buck's Pocket State Park.

18 The World Games is going to be  
19 coming up in July in Birmingham, and we're  
20 very pleased to host four events at  
21 Oak Mountain State Park. So we'll have  
22 the marathon canoeing, orienteering,  
23 wakeboarding, and then a skiing

1 competition there at Oak Mountain State  
2 Park. So that's going to be a big thing  
3 for the state. It probably hasn't gotten  
4 the press that it should, but that is --  
5 all of these sports are either sports that  
6 are being looked at for future Olympic  
7 sports or have most recently been an  
8 Olympic sport but the host country for the  
9 last Olympics did not choose that as one  
10 of the sports that they wanted to have in  
11 the Olympics so they're having it at the  
12 World Games. So these are truly  
13 Olympic-class athletes that will be here  
14 in Alabama for about 12 days in July, so I  
15 hope that you will spend some time taking  
16 a look at that and avail yourself of the  
17 opportunity to go see some of the world's  
18 best athletes here that will be in Alabama  
19 at Oak Mountain State Park.

20 On the negative side for the pier  
21 at Gulf State Park that was damaged during  
22 Hurricane Sally, we've worked with the  
23 Corps of Engineers to get the permit for

1 that and then to bid that out. We thought  
2 the bids would come in somewhere between  
3 4- and 6 million, 6 million being the high  
4 bid was the estimate from the engineering  
5 firm. When we bid that, the lowest bid  
6 ended up being 12 and a half million  
7 dollars, so it was more than twice what we  
8 thought would be the high bid. So we're  
9 still working with FEMA to get approval  
10 for the new amount, and so we've -- we're  
11 not going to be shutting the pier down  
12 this summer to do the construction as we  
13 had planned. We're going to work to try  
14 and get the new funding amount approved  
15 through FEMA and then move forward. We're  
16 going to have to bid that again probably  
17 later this summer, early fall. So I get  
18 a lot of questions about the pier. So  
19 that's the parks update.

20 From Marine Resources, Scott  
21 Bannon's got a presentation for us today,  
22 so I won't steal a lot of his thunder  
23 other than to say that our red snapper

1 season opens Friday. Just as information  
2 for the Board, I didn't send this to y'all  
3 yesterday. They announced the South  
4 Atlantic season for red snapper yesterday.  
5 It will be July 8th and 9th. That is  
6 their season, two days, two days.

7 The work that Scott and Kevin and  
8 our team have done in Alabama with the  
9 Gulf states has made a huge difference.  
10 Had that work not taken place, our season  
11 in the Gulf would probably be two days.  
12 Last year, our season in Alabama was  
13 124 days. So that's -- when we got down  
14 to a three-day season back in 2017, that's  
15 when a lot of things changed here. We got  
16 some agreements with the other states and  
17 the federal government and were able to  
18 move forward on some things. So just  
19 putting in context what I feel like is the  
20 positives of our red snapper season --  
21 without the work of Scott, Kevin, and  
22 their team with the other states, we'd be  
23 at two or three days. So that just shows

1 tangibly the work that takes place and  
2 what that means for the economy and for  
3 the outdoor recreation folks here in  
4 Alabama.

5 We've got new boat ramps taking  
6 place -- construction taking place all  
7 over South Alabama, mostly with some  
8 GOMESA funds that are managed through  
9 State Lands but also with Sport Fish  
10 dollars. We're making great improvements  
11 for boating access. And I'll leave the  
12 artificial reef and other stuff to  
13 Director Bannon for his presentation.

14 State Lands Division, working with  
15 Mobile County using GOMESA funds,  
16 Mobile County recently purchased the Cedar  
17 Point Fishing Pier, which is kind of an  
18 iconic place in South Mobile County, and  
19 that takes that out of private ownership  
20 that wanted to close that down and put  
21 that in public ownership now and it's open  
22 to the public. And they've been catching  
23 a lot of fish down there. But that's a

1 great opportunity to get people that don't  
2 have boats or don't have the ability to  
3 get out on the water to be able to catch  
4 fish and have that in public ownership  
5 now.

6 Very pleased with our partnerships  
7 with Mobile County and all the things that  
8 they're trying to do to get people  
9 outside. They've got a Blueway Project  
10 that they're working on all over the  
11 county. And Commissioner Randall Dueitt,  
12 a new county commissioner, that is his  
13 passion is to get people outside, and so  
14 he's doing a great job in the county and I  
15 want to commend him publicly here.

16 And as I said as I introduced the  
17 Governor, since she's been in office,  
18 we've acquired over 63,000 acres of  
19 property around the state to put in public  
20 ownership, and that is, I think, quite an  
21 accomplishment over a five-year period to  
22 be able to do that. We just closed  
23 yesterday on 2600 acres along the Perdido

1 River, and that will have a long-lasting  
2 legacy impact in all this land acquisition  
3 for the public to be able to use these  
4 lands forever. So we've done a lot, and  
5 we've got a lot more in the hopper using  
6 the Forever Wild program, some funds from  
7 the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, some  
8 species recovery grants from Fish and  
9 Wildlife Service. Chuck and his team have  
10 done a great job working with the Fish and  
11 Wildlife Service out of the Atlanta region  
12 to identify some areas and funds that we  
13 can use in the Red Hills salamander  
14 habitat in Monroe County. So we've got  
15 a lot of good things going on in land  
16 acquisition.

17 Forever Wild and Freshwater  
18 Fisheries, we covered most of those things  
19 at the March meeting, but since the last  
20 meeting, the Legislature passed a piece of  
21 legislation that created an enclosure gun  
22 deer season, and you'll see that in your  
23 season and bag limit packets. That is in

1 addition to what we had in March. And so  
2 it sets the season for the enclosures that  
3 opt into that season. Their gun season  
4 would be October 15th through January 6th.  
5 And so we'll see this year how many people  
6 want to take advantage of that. And  
7 that's an option. It's not a requirement  
8 for them.

9 I don't know if you've been  
10 following some congressional legislation  
11 that could have a huge impact on the  
12 Department of Conservation is Recovering  
13 America's Wildlife Act. That's working  
14 its way through Congress. If passed, that  
15 would be the first real money for non-game  
16 and threatened and endangered species that  
17 DCNR and many of the other states have  
18 ever received. This would be a huge thing  
19 for the Department. It would really  
20 transform the way that we do work for  
21 threatened and endangered species and  
22 non-game, which, as you know, most of the  
23 funding for that comes from hunting and

1 fishing licenses. There's not any  
2 dedicated funding to speak of for that,  
3 and so this would be a real game changer  
4 for us and many other states. And it's  
5 gotten a lot of traction. It's passed out  
6 of the committees in both the House and  
7 the Senate, and hopefully will get a floor  
8 vote. They were pushing for that sometime  
9 before Memorial Day, but since Memorial  
10 Day is next week, I don't know that that's  
11 going to happen. But it is gaining some  
12 traction there.

13 And as promised at the last  
14 meeting, I've looked into the rehabber  
15 permitting process. I talked with  
16 Mr. Morse for a long -- Mr. and Ms. Morse  
17 for a long time. I feel like our  
18 standards are not too restrictive and our  
19 process is not overly burdensome or  
20 cumbersome. We use the national  
21 standards. We have not created our own  
22 standards for caging. We use those  
23 national standards. And we've not denied

1 a permit to anyone who's applied and would  
2 meet those national caging standards.  
3 Those are not standards we've made up.  
4 Like I said, they're standards that are  
5 endorsed by the National Wildlife  
6 Rehabilitation group. Enjoyed our  
7 conversation with the Morses, but I do  
8 think there is opportunity for improved  
9 communication between our agency and the  
10 Alabama Wildlife Rehabbers and  
11 Conservation Society.

12 For instance, on the AWRC's  
13 website, there was an outdated permit  
14 application from 2017 on the website that  
15 had incorrect information on where to send  
16 the applications, so I don't know if that  
17 has caused some issue with us not  
18 receiving some of the applications. I  
19 talked to Mr. Morse about that yesterday.  
20 They're going to fix that on the website.  
21 And I'll say this to -- I know there's a  
22 group here -- with our staff -- talked  
23 with Director Sykes this morning, and I'm

1 going to set up a meeting with our staff  
2 and some of the AWRCs directors and some  
3 of their folks when things settle down  
4 just a little bit after the election and  
5 probably later in June or July to be able  
6 to talk and make sure that we all  
7 understand each other and that any  
8 miscommunication from the past or if  
9 there's something that we can do to  
10 provide better information that we will do  
11 that. So I'm just letting the Board know  
12 that I'm going to make that offer to them  
13 to meet in June or early July, late June  
14 or early July.

15 I don't have any notion that we  
16 will all be on the same page on the  
17 priority or application of wildlife  
18 rehabilitation or release, but I think we  
19 can all have good, cordial conversation  
20 and see if there's some common ground  
21 places that we can work towards; and if  
22 not, maybe at least then we can, like with  
23 a lot of the other groups that we work

1 with, have an understanding of all of the  
2 sides.

3 On the American Recovery Plan Act  
4 for future plans for the Department,  
5 worked with the Governor, Finance Director  
6 Bill Poole, and the Legislature. We're  
7 working with them on a broad outdoor  
8 recreation plan that will hopefully be  
9 accomplished with some ARPA funds. That's  
10 about 1.1 billion dollars that will be  
11 deposited into the state in June. The  
12 Legislature will go into a special session  
13 sometime this summer and talk about how to  
14 utilize those funds.

15 We've had great conversations  
16 pushing forward to use some of those funds  
17 for -- it would be different than the  
18 Parks money. This would all be money that  
19 would be used for bigger shooting ranges,  
20 build new shooting ranges, maybe to build  
21 like a shooting sports trail through the  
22 state, additional boating access sites,  
23 improvements at WMAs, trail head and trail

1 amenity work that we really need to do on  
2 some of our properties to make those more  
3 accessible to the public, build some  
4 bathrooms, bigger parking lots, better way  
5 finding signs so that people are  
6 comfortable using our trails. And then  
7 part of that would set up a one-stop-shop  
8 website for outdoor recreation. That is a  
9 goal of mine. So if you want to -- we can  
10 take not only the work for the Department  
11 of Conservation, Forever Wild, what some  
12 of the counties are doing, cities around  
13 the state, some different land trusts, you  
14 know, all of that recreational  
15 opportunities that are, you know, on this  
16 website here or on this place or this  
17 place and there's no aggregation of that  
18 into one site, so this would be a great  
19 way for us to do that, not only for our  
20 citizens. So if you like hiking, you can  
21 just click on hiking and it can tell you  
22 geographically where to go. If you like  
23 horseback riding, if you want to canoe or

1 kayak, you know, all of that will be on  
2 this one website. And then we can also  
3 use this as an industry recruitment tool  
4 for people from other states that are  
5 looking to come to Alabama either -- to do  
6 business. Or now in this gig economy  
7 where people can work from home and work  
8 from anywhere, we're trying to attract  
9 a lot of those workers to Alabama, and one  
10 of the things that is very important to  
11 them is access to outdoor recreation. And  
12 so instead of something where they have to  
13 go to four or five different websites, we  
14 can send them to one place and use that as  
15 an industry and employee recruitment tool.  
16 So that's -- I could go into much more  
17 detail about that. I'm very passionate  
18 about it. I could be up here for  
19 30 minutes talking about that, but that's  
20 what we're working with the Legislature on  
21 to fund those with ARPA dollars.

22 And it was good to have Governor  
23 Ivey here. We've been doing visits all

1 over Alabama promoting outdoor recreation  
2 and camping and hunting and fishing as it  
3 relates to the economy and the quality of  
4 life. And she's such a big supporter of  
5 our department and the work that all of  
6 our staff do, and I appreciated her coming  
7 today.

8 On Thursday night, we were down in  
9 Spanish Fort for the Governor's Deepwater  
10 Horizon Restoration Summit. We talked  
11 about it a little bit at these meetings,  
12 but we, through the department, are  
13 managing all of the Deepwater Horizon oil  
14 spill buckets of funding that come into  
15 Alabama.

16 To date, there's 158 projects that  
17 have been approved, valued at 926 million  
18 dollars' worth of work. When you add the  
19 GOMESA funding that's being managed  
20 through our State Lands Division, that's  
21 over a billion dollars of work that we're  
22 managing, just oil spill and coastal  
23 related, through the Department of

1 Conservation. So that is making quite a  
2 landscape change down there.

3 We're going to show a video here  
4 in just a minute that we showed at the  
5 summit the other night that kind of just  
6 hit some of the high points. But for your  
7 reading pleasure, I can send you one of  
8 these Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill  
9 Restoration progress reports that have all  
10 158 projects, where they are in the  
11 process, whether they're completed,  
12 underway, have been funded or planned.  
13 But this is a part of the Department that  
14 a lot of people don't know about or y'all  
15 don't see that a lot. But there is a  
16 tremendous amount of work that is making  
17 generational difference on the coast as we  
18 recover from the oil spill. When I look  
19 at the 2022 progress that we just released  
20 Thursday night and compare that to the  
21 2018 progress report -- that was the last  
22 time we did a summit -- the amount of work  
23 that's taken place in those four years is

1 really just astounding. And I appreciate  
2 Amy Hunter who's our Deepwater Horizon  
3 Restoration coordinator and her staff and  
4 then all of our partners throughout  
5 coastal Alabama that are implementing  
6 a lot of these projects. It is really  
7 legacy projects that will transform our  
8 coast, and so I'm very proud to be a part  
9 of that.

10 And with that, Mr. Chairman, let's  
11 play the video.

12 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Please do.

13 (Video played.)

14 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: So as you  
15 can see, that's just a snapshot of some of  
16 the work that's going on. I want to give  
17 Billy Pope from our Communication &  
18 Marketing section his due for producing  
19 that video on fairly short notice. He did  
20 a very good job on that. That was very  
21 nice.

22 And also while I've got the  
23 microphone still, I'd like to recognize

1 Carter Hendrix. I think this may be  
2 Carter's last meeting. Carter is the  
3 Assistant Chief of Wildlife, and Carter is  
4 moving on to do some fun stuff, I guess,  
5 and retiring after a great career. So  
6 thank you, Carter, for your service. I  
7 tell people that retire I'm jealous  
8 because we all want to get there some day.  
9 That's always an exciting time to think  
10 about the great career you've had and  
11 appreciate all the work you've done.

12 And with that, Mr. Chairman, I'll  
13 turn it back over to you.

14 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you,  
15 Mr. Commissioner. That was a wonderful  
16 report and great, new and exciting things  
17 happening on the coast. And my  
18 congratulations to you as well, very much,  
19 very much.

20 Take just one moment away from the  
21 agenda. I was directed at our last  
22 meeting to put together a letter of  
23 gratitude to one of our CEOs who was the

1 National Wild Turkey Federation's Officer  
2 of the Year this past year, Mr. Drake  
3 Hayes. And I will -- for the Board,  
4 you're going to get a copy of this if you  
5 don't already have it, but Betsy's asked  
6 me to read it to you.

7 Dear Officer Hayes, on behalf of  
8 the Conservation Advisory Board, we  
9 congratulate you on being named NWTF's  
10 Wildlife Officer of the Year. Your  
11 exceptional performance and achievements  
12 this past year are to be applauded. Your  
13 perseverance and willingness to go the  
14 extra mile made the difference. Your  
15 willingness to share your skills and  
16 caring attitude with others set you apart  
17 as well. Congratulations with great  
18 respect. So thank you to him.

19 Our next --

20 MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman?

21 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes. I'm sorry.

22 MR. HARTZOG: Since you've deviated,  
23 could I ask for a deviation?

1           CHAIRMAN DOBBS:   What is your  
2   deviation?

3           MR. HARTZOG:   I was just going to ask  
4   Chris about since we -- Forever Wild or --  
5   draw its money from the trust fund, the  
6   trust fund gets its money from the oil  
7   leases, with all the divides and cutbacks  
8   on oil leases and all, is that going to  
9   impact our future ability to add to the  
10   trust fund and the future for Forever Wild  
11   acquisitions?

12          COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP:   So to  
13   answer your question, I may get  
14   Ms. McCurdy to chime in, but on the  
15   offshore leases, that really does not  
16   affect the trust fund, Alabama Trust Fund,  
17   as much as it does our GOMESA  
18   distribution.

19                 So the GOMESA distribution is --  
20   that comes to the four producing states in  
21   the Gulf -- is derived from production  
22   numbers based on an inverse proportion to  
23   where that rig is located in proximity to

1 Alabama, so we get money from all the oil  
2 and gas work that's taking place in the  
3 Gulf. The further that rig is from  
4 Alabama, the less we get from that  
5 particular rig, if that makes sense, and  
6 so that's how that -- it's a very  
7 complicated and super long formula with  
8 all those rigs out there. That's one part  
9 of it. And then the second part is the  
10 percentage of the leases that -- when the  
11 leases are sold, the same way, an inverse  
12 proportion of where those leases are  
13 comparing that to Alabama. That money is  
14 how that's divided among the four states.

15 So that's where it hurts us is on  
16 the GOMESA side. When they're not leasing  
17 those properties, that's not an addition  
18 to our GOMESA funds. So this past month,  
19 we received our deposit. This year it was  
20 about 28 million dollars for Alabama.  
21 Under the Trump Administration when we had  
22 the last lease sales, our portion was  
23 about 49 million, I think, yeah, 49

1 million. So you see it makes that much  
2 of --

3 MR. HARTZOG: Roughly half.

4 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: -- a swing  
5 in our distribution for GOMESA.

6 Anything else you want to add?

7 MS. MCCURDY: That's correct. The  
8 majority of the funding that goes into the  
9 ATF offshore is from production in state  
10 waters, natural gas production in state  
11 waters. So that's not impacted other  
12 than, you know, industry -- a little more  
13 indirect industry impact possibly but not  
14 direct. There's a small amount of revenue  
15 sharing with the feds that goes into the  
16 ATF, but it's not -- so you might see some  
17 indirect impact but not as direct as  
18 Commissioner said with GOMESA.

19 MR. HARTZOG: Forever Wild is just too  
20 good a program to lose funding for.

21 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Agreed.

22 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

23 So I'm going to step back one

1 moment, something that was my fault that I  
2 didn't have, but I'm going to read the  
3 Conservation statement, our pledge, to you  
4 just to have it so you'll remember.

5 (Sportsman's Pledge read.)

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: That was written by,  
7 I think, our first or second Commissioner  
8 in 1908 for Alabama.

9 The next order of business is  
10 going to be our directors' reports. I  
11 think I'm safe in assuming, Director  
12 Sykes, you have nothing.

13 Director McCurdy?

14 Director Lein?

15 Director Bannon?

16 MR. BANNON: Yes.

17 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Director Scott Bannon  
18 from Marine Resources Division.

19 MR. BANNON: Good morning, everyone.

20 And, Greg, thanks for the new  
21 mattresses. The snoring report I got from  
22 my wife this morning must mean that they  
23 were successful and worked.

1           And also this is the second time  
2           this week I've gotten to attend one of our  
3           state park facilities for a meeting, and  
4           it is a blessing in Alabama to have such  
5           great facilities. I was at the lodge  
6           earlier this week, and, Greg, the staff --  
7           and for those of you if you have not  
8           visited our state parks, we have amazing  
9           staff at each of these locations, and I  
10          usually try and commend them for what they  
11          do because, one, they're coming to work  
12          and I appreciate that, and the work they  
13          do is absolutely amazing. And it's tough  
14          to compete with the private industry, so  
15          I'm appreciative of that.

16                 A couple of quick notes. I just  
17          want to say thank you to the Commissioner.  
18          A side note, the Commissioner and I --  
19          about 25 years ago, he picked me up for my  
20          first day at work as officers in the  
21          field. So two dreamer officers running  
22          around getting the boat stuck and chasing  
23          bad guys, and so it's pretty amazing as he

1       went through this report at what we've  
2       been able to be a part of over the last --  
3       his 28 years, my 25 years. And who'd have  
4       think it. So for all the staff here in  
5       the front and in the back, you never know  
6       where you may end up. So it's pretty  
7       amazing that we're here today talking  
8       about some very positive things that have  
9       occurred within our Department.

10               So specifically in the Marine  
11       Resources Division, for those of you that  
12       don't know, we're very small. We're only  
13       in Mobile and Baldwin Counties because  
14       we're saltwater specific. It's about  
15       1200 square miles of water and land, but  
16       then we also work up to 200 miles offshore  
17       for our Fisheries enforcement. We have a  
18       lot going on out there, and you're going  
19       to see a few things. I'll probably take  
20       us right into supper talking about it, so  
21       it shouldn't take too long.

22               A quick note, the recreational  
23       fishing license sales in Alabama have been

1 on an increase. If you look at the graph  
2 right there, that's a positive thing, but  
3 it also means that there are a lot of  
4 people coming to the Gulf. A lot of  
5 people are moving there, and then a lot of  
6 people are coming and visiting there. So  
7 our license sales reflect that, and it's  
8 been in a positive direction and that's to  
9 the benefit of us. As managers, it gives  
10 us some funding, because, again, we don't  
11 use General Fund money. We use our  
12 license money.

13 There's a little note at the  
14 bottom that says the Gulf Reef Fish  
15 Endorsement was created two years ago to  
16 help with the research and the reef fish  
17 fishery. This will be our third year. So  
18 for the first two years, we sold 23,000 of  
19 those and then it doubled to 56,000 in the  
20 second year, and that helps identify the  
21 world of anglers that are participating in  
22 offshore fishing. They're participating  
23 in reef fishing. So that's a great way to

1 identify that group if we're working  
2 through some of our federal challenges  
3 across the Gulf and we're partnering with  
4 other states. It's only a \$10 permit, but  
5 it identifies the world of anglers and  
6 that money goes back into the fishery.

7 So the commercial sales gets a  
8 little bit busy, but I wanted to kind of  
9 highlight some of the different type  
10 licenses that we have because we do have a  
11 commercial aspect of what we do. So I  
12 didn't put it in a graph because I wanted  
13 to show you the other things. But if I  
14 were to graph it, it goes the other way.  
15 Our commercial licenses are going down,  
16 and there are different reasons for that.

17 The commercial fishing industry is  
18 a very challenging industry. 2008 when  
19 the housing market took a plunge, that  
20 impacted a lot of our commercial  
21 fisheries, such as shrimping in  
22 particular. It was pretty sad to go see  
23 all the boats in areas like Bayou La Batre

1 and Bon Secour with U.S. Marshals stickers  
2 on them where they were -- they had  
3 defaulted on their loans. It's a little  
4 struggle to rebound. Costs are a little  
5 bit challenging in that world. And then  
6 we had, you know, Deepwater Horizon in  
7 2010. Previous to that, we had some  
8 hurricanes. Hurricanes are always a  
9 persistent challenge, and that really  
10 impacts our fisheries.

11 So just to highlight a couple  
12 things, you'll see in there on the -- in  
13 2010, you'll see a lot -- and 2011, you'll  
14 see a lot of license increases. That was  
15 the Deepwater Horizon impact, people  
16 trying to make some claims and things as  
17 commercial fishing, but that's why you see  
18 a little bit of an increase there and then  
19 it kind of steadies back out. But in  
20 general, the trend has gone down except  
21 for in charter boat.

22 If you see charter boat down  
23 there, it goes up. We've increased -- we

1        have our federal for-hire fisheries, your  
2        charter boats that go offshore and you go  
3        fishing. That number has stayed fairly  
4        constant. But our in-shore fishing  
5        guides, the folks that take you on  
6        speckled trout trips and red fish trips,  
7        those have increased and it's become a way  
8        to provide access to folks. So that  
9        number has increased slightly.

10                And there's a new line in there,  
11        oyster aquaculture. And I didn't catch  
12        this, but apparently when you average  
13        three years across ten years and there's  
14        lots of zeros, the average looks really  
15        bad, but there's -- we've only had that  
16        permit in place for the last couple of  
17        years. And you see 19, 18, 17, those are  
18        oyster farms. Those are the folks that  
19        are farming oysters that if you're going  
20        to restaurants and you're getting these  
21        really pretty half-shell oysters and  
22        they're costing a lot of money, that's a  
23        high-value product that's produced in

1 South Alabama. They're in high demand all  
2 across the country, especially on the  
3 east coast. If you go to New York City,  
4 you're very likely to get an Alabama  
5 oyster that's going to cost about  
6 six bucks apiece to consume that.

7 But our oyster farmers are great,  
8 hard-working folks that are trying to keep  
9 this product in the market. It's very,  
10 very difficult work. A lot of  
11 environmental conditions, but they get  
12 that oyster aquaculture permit. So that's  
13 why you only see that for three years.  
14 That's fairly new. And so, again, just to  
15 show the trend is generally down on  
16 commercial licenses but it's starting to  
17 steady out.

18 So this one's really busy, but  
19 this -- we just wanted to throw a lot of  
20 numbers at you. These are some of the  
21 things over the last few years that we've  
22 been spending money on and kind of the  
23 total dollars that -- the top -- the reef

1 projects there that you see, those are the  
2 things that are going on offshore and  
3 inshore. If you fish down in the coastal  
4 areas, we have some inshore reefs that are  
5 located in Mobile Bay, Mississippi Sound,  
6 the Perdido system. Those are areas where  
7 we create habitat, we increase habitat in  
8 those areas, and recreational anglers can  
9 go there, your charter guys, your inshore  
10 guys can go there. And so we have those  
11 type. Then we have the offshore zone, and  
12 I'll show you some pictures of that in  
13 just a minute. But it takes a lot to get  
14 all that in to work. You have to do some  
15 surveys, the cultural resources surveys.  
16 You have to identify the bottom types.  
17 The permitting process is pretty  
18 difficult. I have a great staff. Craig  
19 Newton is one of our staffers who takes  
20 care of most of that, and he works for  
21 Kevin Anson, our chief science officer.  
22 And it takes a lot of pushing up hill to  
23 get this stuff done. And then I don't

1 know if any of you have ever worked with  
2 the State's bid system. To get these  
3 going, it's a little bit challenging. But  
4 these are the dollars that come to the  
5 state of Alabama that are coming back to  
6 you as citizens of the state of Alabama  
7 and actually to the citizens of the  
8 United States, because people from all  
9 over the country come to fish offshore.

10 Then at the bottom, you see our  
11 oyster projects right there. So cultch  
12 restoration, that is increasing the  
13 habitat and making that better for  
14 wild-caught oysters. And oysters are not  
15 only important to catch and eat, but I  
16 call it the foundational critter.

17 In the Gulf in the estuary  
18 systems, we need those oysters. They  
19 clean the water. They're a sign of a  
20 healthy water system. They feed a lot of  
21 the other critters that are out there. So  
22 without oysters, the whole system is out  
23 of whack. So it's not only an effort to

1 build up the opportunity to go catch  
2 oysters and eat, it's an opportunity to  
3 increase our fishing habitat and water  
4 quality.

5 And water quality is a big issue  
6 in the Gulf coast. We're at the bottom  
7 end of the state, so for those of you that  
8 live anywhere between Mobile and  
9 Baldwin Counties and the Tennessee line,  
10 your water probably ends up in our  
11 backyard at some point, so whatever you do  
12 to it up here, I have to deal with it when  
13 it gets down there. So that's the honest  
14 truth if you'll think about that. All  
15 your waterways up here generally drain to  
16 the Mobile Bay system.

17 You'll see the planting numbers  
18 right there toward the bottom. 2014 and  
19 2016 cultch planting, that's putting  
20 oyster shell and rocks and things out  
21 there. So we did it three years in a row  
22 with some funding. And, again, it's a  
23 substantial amount of money. And we're

1 working on what we call a spat-on-shell  
2 project. We're going to create a hatchery  
3 at our facility in Gulf Shores where we'll  
4 breed the oysters; and then we'll take  
5 them to our Dauphin Island facility and  
6 we'll put them -- the larvae on shells and  
7 let them grow out a little bit, and then  
8 we'll put those out in the wild. We'll  
9 use that to help kick-start some reefs  
10 that have struggled and also to enhance  
11 our current system or current reefs.

12 So this is what we call our Mounds  
13 and Furrows project. So historically,  
14 some reefs across the Mobile Bay system  
15 are no longer producing. We've produced  
16 lots of oysters over the years, but  
17 there's been lots of changes to the  
18 environment -- some not always positive --  
19 and so we have to figure out how do we  
20 work through that.

21 So this Mounds and Furrows system  
22 is a way to look at an oyster reef that is  
23 no longer productive. And we found out

1       that the low oxygen levels on the  
2       bottom -- there's oxygen in the water and  
3       the critters need that. Well, on the  
4       bottom, it's hypoxic, it's dead. So we're  
5       elevating some sections, and you can see  
6       like the red is the top of the mound so  
7       those are mounds that you see at the top,  
8       and then on -- and there's furrows.  
9       There's a length of shell that is  
10      deployed, so that brings that shell higher  
11      in the water column into the exposed  
12      oxygenated water. And so we're hoping to  
13      start seeing wild oysters grow in those  
14      areas and that it will regenerate on its  
15      own or we'll use that spat-on-shell  
16      project to help enhance those and to kick-  
17      start is the term I like to use for that.  
18      But that's what you see where you -- it's  
19      almost like a furrow in a farm field on  
20      the left and then some mounds you see on  
21      the right. And this is one of those sonar  
22      pictures that we get when we do our  
23      surveys.

1           So our oyster harvest for our wild  
2 harvest in Alabama, it occurs in a very  
3 small area. Just to kind of put a frame  
4 of reference, when you see that little  
5 spit of land that looks like an arrowhead  
6 pointing south, that is the last tip  
7 before you get on the causeway going to  
8 Dauphin Island. That would be the Dauphin  
9 Island Bridge that goes through there, and  
10 it's Dauphin Island at the very bottom.  
11 It's kind of a busy slide.

12           We had some challenges with the  
13 way that we were managing oysters. We had  
14 these large areas, and the catchers would  
15 work in a very small area and harvest a  
16 small area too much. They would work too  
17 hard in some small areas. And the only  
18 ability we had was to close a whole area,  
19 but there were still oysters there that  
20 they needed to go work. And they need to  
21 work the oysters, one, to harvest the  
22 product, but, two, to turn that bottom to  
23 allow new oysters to attach.

1           So we developed this grid system.  
2       There are 500 square meters and that -- we  
3       actually expanded this to the entire  
4       waterway. But we use this grid system,  
5       and they can go to outdooralabama.com and  
6       they can find out where they are. And  
7       we'll highlight the open grids, so we'll  
8       say these areas are open to harvest. And  
9       then we can move them 500 meters at a  
10      time. That was a huge benefit to the  
11      catcher and to the resource to be able to  
12      just move them a little bit to get them  
13      off the hot spots -- and I'm going to show  
14      you the hot spots in just a minute -- and  
15      then they report to us which grid they are  
16      in. Those are lettered and numbered. I  
17      know it's really busy there. But they  
18      have to come in at the end of the day and  
19      buy their tags for their harvest, and they  
20      buy them from us and they tell us which  
21      grid they were working in. So they can do  
22      it from a smartphone or they can just look  
23      on the land. And they're really good at

1 line of sight, lining up a couple of  
2 things. I was in U45, and that's a great  
3 management tool.

4 So you can see the hot spots -- go  
5 back one real quick. I'm sorry. So the  
6 green and the white that you see, the  
7 white is the historic oyster reef. That's  
8 where we traditionally have wild oysters.  
9 The green, that would be areas that we  
10 have planted. So those numbers -- it's  
11 2014, '15, '16 plants, so they would be in  
12 those areas. We enhanced those reefs.

13 So then you see those are the hot  
14 spots where people work. So the blue  
15 circles that are bigger, that means there  
16 was more harvest that was conducted in  
17 that area. So the one blue that's  
18 furthest to the top right there, that's  
19 where they go day one. When we open a  
20 season, they head there and they start  
21 working. You can literally hop boat to  
22 boat and -- so that shows you that they  
23 were working a very small area, but I had

1 to close the entire area north of there to  
2 get them out of there previously. Now  
3 with the grid system, we literally  
4 close -- we can close one grid at a time.  
5 We can close 500 square meters and just  
6 get them out of that.

7 And so at first, they were a  
8 little like -- it was dead silence in the  
9 meeting when we announced it. They were  
10 like we don't know what's going on, but  
11 then they saw the benefit that we're just  
12 moving them a few feet at a time and kept  
13 them working. Our harvest estimate for  
14 2022 was about 22,000 sacks, and we closed  
15 the season at about 50,000 sacks. It was  
16 all because we could keep them moving and  
17 not having to close big areas. And they  
18 started figuring out that, hey, this is a  
19 benefit to us. And so those -- the bigger  
20 the circle, the more harvesting that went  
21 on there. And that's how we closed the  
22 area. I told the staff, I said, let's  
23 literally play Tetris with this, and they

1 will begin to learn to work around it and  
2 they did. And on the east side of the --  
3 to the right-hand side there, those dots,  
4 our harvest estimate over there was zero.  
5 We ended up harvesting almost 11,000 sacks  
6 over there because we were able to open  
7 those areas and move those folks around to  
8 harvest that. So it was a great benefit  
9 to the state to turn more bottom and a  
10 great benefit to oyster catchers.

11 So this is a little bit of the  
12 history. Oystering struggled for a little  
13 bit, a lot of environmental conditions  
14 that were counterproductive. So you can  
15 see back as far as 2011 and 2012 the  
16 season days and the number of sacks that  
17 we were harvesting, and they were  
18 dwindling. We had come off the years of  
19 drought and some other challenging  
20 environmental conditions, and so we were  
21 working very hard to figure out how we  
22 move forward. The staff came up with some  
23 great plans.

1           But we were at a zero day season  
2           there in 2018 and 2019. That's counter to  
3           what we do in the Department of  
4           Conservation. Our job is to keep things  
5           moving and to open things up for folks.  
6           So to have a zero season is -- I kind of  
7           have hurt feelings about that. So like  
8           how do we start making things better, and  
9           the staff worked very hard to continue.  
10          And part of that grid system was a big  
11          factor in that. So you see we're on an  
12          increase. We started doubling our harvest  
13          each year. That 50,000 sacks right there  
14          equates to about 4 million dollars to the  
15          catchers.

16                 So on our highest participation  
17          day, we had about 209 catcher boats out  
18          there. We haven't had that in my 20,  
19          25 years. So 209 was an amazing number.  
20          So about 4 million dollars of cash went to  
21          about 209 catcher boats.

22                 So our license sales -- on the  
23          slide earlier, there was a year we only

1 sold like 94 licenses. This year, we sold  
2 409, so that was all due to the fact they  
3 could go make money. We were open 79  
4 days. There were a few bad weather days.  
5 I did some quick estimates. If a person  
6 worked 70 days, at the average -- the sack  
7 limit is six sacks. At the average weight  
8 of 85 pounds a sack and a price of 85  
9 cents on average per sack, if they worked  
10 only 70 days and they got six sacks a day,  
11 that person made \$28,000 in 70 days. And  
12 for some of those guys who are really  
13 good, they literally worked about one to  
14 two hours a day to get those six sacks.  
15 So we see that as a great benefit to a  
16 community who has suffered, as, again, you  
17 look at those licenses over the history.

18 And another thing that we added in  
19 there -- there's an asterisk on 21 and  
20 22 -- is that we never accounted for  
21 recreational oyster harvest. So this  
22 year, we started requiring people who were  
23 getting their recreational limit of a

1 hundred oysters to come in and report, and  
2 so that helps us in management to know  
3 that -- so there were 1,177 trips out on  
4 the oyster reef. You can only go when  
5 it's open, and that -- it's a little bit  
6 different equivalence, so it worked itself  
7 out to be about 706 commercial sacks so --  
8 but this is the first year we ever  
9 accounted -- we never had no idea how many  
10 recreationally caught oysters were being  
11 harvested, so that's a good management  
12 tool.

13 And this is -- kind of shows the  
14 hard work that they do. It is not an easy  
15 living. Do not arm wrestle the oyster  
16 catcher. But they would get out there in  
17 the fog and the rain and the wind. Days  
18 that I thought nobody would be out there,  
19 they were out there, so kudos to those  
20 folks about how hardworking they are.

21 So the pride of Alabama is  
22 probably the world's largest and best  
23 managed -- whether it's the largest or

1 not, there may be a little argument, but I  
2 promise you it is the best managed  
3 artificial reef zone in the world, the  
4 amount of research that we've put in  
5 there, the effort that we've put into  
6 this. It's about 1200 square miles off  
7 the coast of Alabama that is designated as  
8 artificial reef zone. It's permitted by  
9 us to deploy material out there. Private  
10 individuals can deploy material out there.  
11 They just get a permit from us. Our  
12 private -- they've been going up, right,  
13 Kevin? There for a while after the  
14 housing market took a plunge, we saw very  
15 little activity from the private world to  
16 put reefs out there, but now we're seeing  
17 a lot -- several hundred, I think, last  
18 year that's -- so you can go buy an  
19 artificial reef and pay a company to  
20 deploy it or you can deploy it yourself.  
21 You have to meet certain standards -- it's  
22 on our website -- and get a permit from us  
23 and you can go put it wherever you want.

1        You just have to tell us kind of the  
2        generic area, what zone it's in, but you  
3        get to put it where you want and it  
4        becomes your reef until it hits the  
5        bottom. Then it's technically public. We  
6        don't publish it, but somebody else can  
7        fish on it whether you like it or not.

8                So we increased about 115 square  
9        miles recently, so the top row that has  
10       lots of blue in it, those are some of the  
11       expanded newer areas. And the blue one  
12       that kind of looks like an L to the left  
13       right there, that is actually the  
14       Christopher M. Blankenship Zone. The  
15       Commissioner was a vital part of getting  
16       the funding to allow us to expand this  
17       reef zone and to do the work that we're  
18       doing in there. So we felt it was an  
19       honor to name it after him and that people  
20       should know how much effort he put into  
21       creating the world's greatest artificial  
22       reef zone.

23                The little triangle up to the left

1 is what we call the Alabama Wildlife  
2 Federation Zone for the money that they've  
3 done and the participation they've done.  
4 And I'm going to show you in just a minute  
5 some work that they did there. So they've  
6 helped to put material in there, and our  
7 private-public partnerships are crucial in  
8 this.

9 We had an opportunity where a  
10 contractor called me and he said, I have  
11 72 pieces of six-foot culvert. So I am  
12 six foot four, so I could just about walk  
13 through it, so it's big culvert. He said,  
14 it's in great shape. Can we deploy it; is  
15 there something we can do to deploy it?  
16 Well, we are the government and we don't  
17 do anything fast. So I was like -- he  
18 needed it out of there. It was for the  
19 Pensacola Airport expansion.

20 So I made some calls -- that's the  
21 advantage of having a Rolodex -- and  
22 talked to some folks. The Alabama  
23 Wildlife Federation was helpful in this.

1       And within a couple of days, they  
2       partnered with people to get  
3       transportation, the permitting done, and  
4       those 72 pieces of pipe became artificial  
5       reefs very quickly. So that was material  
6       that did not go to a landfill, that was  
7       material that was able to be repurposed.  
8       We don't dump trash out there. Some  
9       people say that. No, it's all inspected.  
10      There's a very high standard for things  
11      that go out there. But we've done that  
12      with other projects, and that private-  
13      public partnership is a benefit.

14                So all the blue dots are the  
15      recent work that we've done. You can see  
16      456 of the 25-foot tetrahedron modules --  
17      that's a pyramid. That's a big word to  
18      say pyramid. You're going to see a  
19      picture of that -- 1200 of the juvenile  
20      reef modules, 327 circalittoral modules --  
21      another big word. That means they're just  
22      close to shore. Then the inshore reefs,  
23      we just set the bids for that, and they're

1       about to do about a million dollars' worth  
2       of work on the four little blue dots way  
3       up in Mobile Bay up there, but those are  
4       going to be enhanced or create new  
5       artificial reefs on the inshore side.

6                So this is an example of some of  
7       the material that goes out there. So  
8       those 25-foot pyramids up there on the  
9       left with a pole sticking out of the  
10      top -- for those of you that are familiar  
11      with offshore fishing, we call that an  
12      Amberjack pole. They like to circle  
13      around that pole. So we had some  
14      discussions. The federal government calls  
15      them attractants, and we call them  
16      habitat. When you first deploy these,  
17      they are attractants. They just come  
18      there because fish are nosey. They're  
19      kind of like people, they want to go check  
20      out the new kid in the neighborhood. But  
21      eventually, the growth starts to develop  
22      on there. These pyramids are designed  
23      very specifically to promote growth. And

1       then it creates its own little ecosystem  
2       from the bottom to the top, and that's why  
3       the pole is up there. You'll see the --  
4       like I said, the Amberjack swim around.  
5       Grouper and snapper and other reef fish  
6       like to get on the insides and hide in  
7       there. And the apex predators, the  
8       sharks, they're part of the system. They  
9       will come hover around there, and it keeps  
10      everything in balance. And then you'll  
11      see the smaller reefs there to the right  
12      that were deployed from a -- that's our  
13      contractor there on the Gulf coast who  
14      does a lot of that work for us. And so,  
15      you know, that allows -- that's a  
16      different type of habitat there with the  
17      circle disks, and we use those in a lot of  
18      areas where the water depth is shallow.  
19      And then the barge right there by Alabama  
20      Power Company, they filled it full of --  
21      it's a boiler and some other material  
22      that's inside of there, and I think it was  
23      a 110-foot barge. So they filled it full

1 of water until it literally sank to the  
2 bottom, so now that becomes -- at first,  
3 it's just this really cool thing  
4 underwater. Within about three years or  
5 so -- three to four years, Kevin -- it  
6 starts to kind of get this growth on it  
7 and some different things.

8 But very quickly, we sunk a ship,  
9 the New Venture, a few years ago. I  
10 think, Jason, did you dive that with us?  
11 So it hit the bottom, and while the sand  
12 is still swirling, fish from neighboring  
13 reefs come to check it out. So that's how  
14 quickly fish will get attracted to these  
15 things and then eventually it becomes  
16 habitat.

17 Just a few highlights of what we  
18 do down there. The top picture is the  
19 Claude Peteet Mariculture Center. We have  
20 35 ponds out there that we do research in.  
21 We partner with other universities and  
22 other agencies to do some research. Right  
23 now, we have a big partnership with Auburn

1 University doing some shrimp studies. We  
2 raise fish there inside the building.  
3 There's a big, long, white building right  
4 there where we have the ability to --  
5 right now, we're doing Florida Pompano,  
6 spotted seatrout, and southern flounder.  
7 We've done red drum. We've done striped  
8 bass. Have we done anything else in  
9 there?

10 MR. ANSON: Red snapper with Auburn.

11 MR. BANNON: Yeah, we did some red  
12 snapper with Auburn. And then we're going  
13 to do our shellfish, our oysters there.  
14 It's a high-tech facility. If you ever  
15 come down to the Gulf, give us a call.  
16 We'll set you up for a tour. And it's  
17 a lot of real science. It's neat with the  
18 tanks and things. And that's some of the  
19 fish swimming there.

20 This is a little bit about what it  
21 looks like. Those are flounder laying in  
22 the bottom of the tank. And flounder like  
23 to try and match the color of their

1 environment, so they're trying to turn  
2 blue. They can't quite make it, but they  
3 turn that lighter color. Then that's a  
4 flounder over a light. I guess they're  
5 trying to -- those are determining the sex  
6 of those?

7 MR. ANSON: In the female, the  
8 ovaries.

9 MR. BANNON: Yes. And so it's, again,  
10 amazing. And then that's the baby fish  
11 right before they go out. We put those  
12 back out into different areas on the Gulf  
13 coast. That just shows you a little bit  
14 of the fish that we've deployed over the  
15 last few years. You know, flounder is  
16 fairly new, speckled trout is fairly new  
17 for us. We stopped our red drum program a  
18 few years ago. We feel like they're in  
19 pretty good shape. But these are stock  
20 enhancements that we do.

21 So just about to close out here  
22 our 2022 private recreational fishing  
23 seasons. For the three big species in

1 Alabama, these three are all required to  
2 be reported through our Snapper Check  
3 Program. It's a way for us to account for  
4 the harvest off the state of Alabama.

5 Red snapper is managed by the  
6 State of Alabama, even in federal waters.  
7 We're provided a quota. And this year,  
8 we're using 1.12 million pounds, and our  
9 Snapper Check Program, just like the deer  
10 check -- the game check for deer and  
11 turkeys, it's an identical system. So  
12 they report that. We get a little bit of  
13 information.

14 So we're going to open May 27th,  
15 that's this Friday, Memorial Day weekend,  
16 and it will be open four-day weekends  
17 until the quota is met. Last year, a  
18 little bit choppy weather early in the  
19 season, and so that affects the effort.  
20 And once school starts, usually in August  
21 you see that we will have a drop in  
22 effort. But we went all the way to  
23 Christmas. It was the last weekend of the

1 year when we closed. That's the benefit  
2 of the State of Alabama managing our fish.  
3 We determine that. We learn to provide  
4 the seasons based on what the anglers in  
5 Alabama want. Right now, the season is  
6 designed to provide the most access to the  
7 most people. There are some different  
8 things that we could try, but we're trying  
9 to get through a few things.

10 This particular weekend -- we call  
11 it the trifecta for reef -- you can catch  
12 triggerfish, Amberjack, red snapper all on  
13 Memorial Day weekend. If you're going to  
14 come to the Gulf coast, be prepared for  
15 the crazy. The boat ramps are going to be  
16 a little bit congested. That's about the  
17 nicest word I can use. Bring your  
18 patience with you. And it will be a  
19 little bit of a challenge, but it's going  
20 to be good.

21 This year, there's a new  
22 requirement called the venting tool or  
23 the -- a descending device is required.

1 Discards of fish are important to us.  
2 That actually counts against us in the  
3 quota. There's a method to work through  
4 that in our -- Kevin has a really big math  
5 program like they talked about earlier  
6 that we use, but to return fish and give  
7 them the best opportunity to survive.  
8 They suffer sometimes from barotrauma,  
9 which is they come up from depth too fast  
10 and it bloats the fish. You can vent them  
11 or you can descend them back to depth, and  
12 it releases the air out of their bladder.  
13 There's a program called Return 'Em Right.  
14 You can go to [returnemright.org](http://returnemright.org) and watch  
15 a training video. They were giving away  
16 free descending devices, but they've given  
17 away a lot of those. They're just about  
18 gone. But the training video is about  
19 15 minutes. It's amazing and it shows how  
20 that device takes that fish back to the  
21 bottom and it releases it and it swims  
22 away, so it's healthy and its chances of  
23 survival are much greater. So we hope you

1 get the opportunity to come down and fish.  
2 Saltwater fishing license, angler  
3 registry, which is free, and your \$10 Gulf  
4 reef fish endorsement.

5 So this is kind of showing you the  
6 season dates before that the Commissioner  
7 mentioned when the federal government was  
8 managing it. 2014, you see the federal  
9 season was nine days; 2015, ten days; and  
10 then nine days. We opened some state days  
11 in state waters. We could only claim out  
12 to nine miles. And then in 2017, it was a  
13 three-day federal season, and so the state  
14 of Alabama, our congressmen and senators,  
15 they worked very hard with the federal  
16 government for the Department of Commerce  
17 to open up an extra 39 days that year from  
18 the federal government, so we got to fish  
19 42 days that year. And you can see our  
20 harvest rates right there.

21 And then we went into state  
22 management. We passed a program to where  
23 the states get to manage their quota, the

1 five Gulf states. Alabama has the  
2 smallest amount of coastline, and we have  
3 26.2 percent of the fish. And that's  
4 because we have the world's finest  
5 artificial reef system. Of the  
6 neighboring states, Mississippi, most of  
7 their fish are really caught in our reef  
8 zone, and in Florida in the panhandle,  
9 a lot of their fish are caught off the  
10 coast of Alabama. And the fish have  
11 expanded because of the habitat we've  
12 created in Alabama, so we felt that it was  
13 very important to Alabama. Again, about  
14 6 percent of the coastline; we get  
15 26.2 percent of the fish. And so we've  
16 managed that with our Snapper Check  
17 Program. Our goal is not to go over. If  
18 we go over, then we reduce it the next  
19 year. So we've actually been a little bit  
20 under these last couple of years, which is  
21 fine. That means there's fish left in the  
22 water, and we've provided lots of access  
23 to our anglers. But our goal is to

1 provide as much access to the fish as we  
2 can. But that just shows you the benefit  
3 of the state of Alabama managing those.  
4 Instead of being single-digit seasons, we  
5 are out to -- again, we fished -- we  
6 should fish around 245 days if the weather  
7 is good, but the weather was challenging,  
8 so we ended up going 124 days.

9 So I'm going to end with a little  
10 bit of a crazy one. Those of you that  
11 come down to the Gulf and you fish and you  
12 say, oh, I'm not catching those big red  
13 snapper anymore, you are correct. Because  
14 you had those really small seasons for  
15 those several years, the fish got to grow  
16 really big. They were not getting  
17 harvested at the level at which they  
18 should. Believe it or not, we're  
19 harvesting at exactly the rate that we  
20 think we should between commercial, for  
21 hire, and private anglers. So you will  
22 see that you will catch a smaller fish.

23 So the average size has dropped.

1        That dotted line you see goes from  
2        23 inches down to about 21 inches. So the  
3        average size will drop. The amount of  
4        people that are out there fishing is  
5        incredible. A lot of pressure on there.  
6        The abundance of fish is fine off the  
7        coast of Alabama. We invest very heavily  
8        with the University of South Alabama and  
9        the Dauphin Island Sea Lab to do a  
10        preseason and postseason monitoring. They  
11        tell us we're in good shape. As long as  
12        you want to just catch legal fish and  
13        provide access, we're doing good.

14                So if you look at the last  
15        three years, four years, it's kind of  
16        leveling out a little bit. As long as it  
17        looks fairly level like that, we're in  
18        excellent shape. You're going to get lots  
19        of opportunity. It's just harder to catch  
20        the big trophy fish. They're further  
21        offshore, they're a little harder, little  
22        smarter. It's kind of like that big buck,  
23        it's kind of tough to get to. But we have

1       lots of fish off the coast of Alabama.  
2       The state of Alabama was the -- there was  
3       a Great Red Snapper Count done across the  
4       Gulf of Mexico, and that was the work done  
5       by Dr. Sean Powers at the University of  
6       South Alabama that designed this program  
7       across the Gulf of Mexico to count how  
8       many fish are in the Gulf. It was a great  
9       program. You will start to see fisheries,  
10      I think, around the country start to try  
11      and do programs like this. And we're  
12      actually moving to -- Amberjack is the  
13      next species. But just wanted to show you  
14      why, if you go to the Gulf, you're not  
15      catching those big fish. The fish are  
16      still there. There's plenty of fish.  
17      They're just going to be smaller closer to  
18      shore. The reef zone goes 70 miles  
19      offshore, and there's 1200 square miles of  
20      it. You haven't fished all of it, so go  
21      give it a shot.

22                That's a triggerfish coming up to  
23      the camera. We do some ROV work. They go

1 down there. And so they like to come --  
2 they're kind of nosey. They're kind of  
3 like kids at Mardi Gras, they see the  
4 camera and they go out there.

5 And I just wanted to say the  
6 federal for-hire fishing, if you like to  
7 go charter fishing, begins June 1st. It  
8 will run 79 days this year, so it will go  
9 to August 19th. And that's seven days a  
10 week. So if you like to go on those  
11 charter trips, go down to the Gulf, book a  
12 trip, and you have 79 days.

13 And just as an ending note, I  
14 think today is Armed Services Day, so if  
15 any of you served or are serving in the  
16 military, thank you. I'm a 30-year  
17 veteran myself, and I know some of these  
18 guys out here are. So, again, thank you  
19 for serving our armed services.

20 And sorry, sir, but that concludes  
21 my report.

22 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Very  
23 instructive. Most instructive and

1 interesting. Thank you, Director Bannon.

2 Our next -- are there any  
3 questions for Scott? Anybody?

4 You did really well. I don't have  
5 any. I think it was great, very  
6 informative, and we appreciate it.

7 Our next order of business is  
8 public comments. We have a number of  
9 speakers today, and the rules simply  
10 are -- as rules have to be -- you have  
11 three minutes to speak. I reserve the  
12 right to give some an opportunity to  
13 finish a point, a salient point. And I  
14 would ask the participants to not refer to  
15 others or that the -- our attendees please  
16 hold your applause until after everyone is  
17 finished and do that outside.

18 So with that, our first speaker  
19 today is Mr. --

20 MR. MORSE: Sir, I'm sorry. Can I  
21 interrupt for just a second? The reason  
22 being is Commissioner Blankenship  
23 referenced me and him having a

1 conversation. Can I have a few minutes  
2 just to say our point, that when we talked  
3 about it there was a two-way conversation  
4 and not all conversations are relayed.

5 I just wanted to address that we  
6 did have a conversation. But it wasn't as  
7 pleasant as you have put it, and I'd like  
8 to tell the Board that there are two sides  
9 to the story.

10 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP:

11 Mr. Chairman, I would say that there are  
12 two sides to that and that's what the  
13 public comment period is for.

14 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: That's exactly right,  
15 and you have three minutes to do that in.  
16 So if you are on the list, Mr. Morse --  
17 and I see that you are -- when your time  
18 comes, we'll enjoy that.

19 Please, when you come to the  
20 podium, speak up for the court reporter's  
21 benefit so that she gets everybody's name  
22 and can hear every word. We've done a  
23 good job so far, haven't we?



1 I've learned that there is only one point  
2 of contact in the entire state, and the  
3 wildlife application is set up in such a  
4 way to discourage and turn down those  
5 willing to volunteer their services, yet  
6 doing what is asked of them to become  
7 permitted wildlife rehabilitators.

8 Critically since the application permit  
9 allows inspection after business hours, it  
10 arguably requires that applicants sign the  
11 application under duress and coercion.

12 The application process is certainly  
13 overreaching to say the very least.

14 So what's the solution? It's  
15 simple. Bridge the gap by allowing AWCRS  
16 to develop a diversified wildlife  
17 rehabilitation board creating standard  
18 qualifications of interests and  
19 stakeholders to become permitted wildlife  
20 rehabilitators. This invaluable resource  
21 to Alabamians will also allocate more  
22 resources such as time and money to these  
23 agencies. Our immediate neighboring

1 states have successful rehabilitation  
2 programs serving their citizens and  
3 wildlife in need. So should Alabama.

4 True sorry. Last year, I was able  
5 to get my hunting license while in the  
6 drive through at Purple Onion the night  
7 before opening day of deer season. Also  
8 while I was on the lake fishing when I  
9 realized I had not purchased my official  
10 fishing license as I saw a game warden  
11 approaching my boat, being the law-abiding  
12 citizen I am, I pulled up the Outdoor  
13 Alabama app and quickly purchased my  
14 license before the game warden approached  
15 my boat. It took me only five minutes to  
16 go online and get both licenses through  
17 the app just as it does with game checks.  
18 So thank you for making this easy by  
19 streamlining the process.

20 With that said, I am in disbelief  
21 that wildlife rehabilitators are dragged  
22 through so much in the permit application  
23 process when obtaining a hunting and

1 fishing license only takes a matter of  
2 minutes. For Alabamians who have a  
3 passion for helping injured wildlife, the  
4 process --

5 MS. JONES: Time.

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'm going to call you  
7 on time there.

8 MR. ALLEN: -- is almost unachievable.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you for coming.  
10 We appreciate that. And thank you for  
11 buying a hunting and fishing license.  
12 That's important.

13 Our next speaker is Ms. Stacey  
14 Allen.

15 MS. ALLEN: I'm Stacey Allen, an  
16 animal lover from Jefferson County.

17 When I was getting my undergrad  
18 degree, I met a sweet young man who loved  
19 dogs. Years later, he sent a text message  
20 to me with a photo, and in the photo was  
21 something shocking to me. It was a dead  
22 deer. Apparently, he was a hunter, proud  
23 of his latest victim. I showed my best

1 friend that photo and said, I will never  
2 speak to this guy again. Nevertheless,  
3 the man is now my husband.

4 Our neighborhood backs up to a  
5 nature park, and over the years, I've  
6 found a number of injured and orphaned  
7 wildlife. Recently, we had the  
8 opportunity to help reunite a displaced  
9 baby squirrel with its mother. It  
10 certainly was the moment of a lifetime for  
11 me. I'm fortunate and grateful to have  
12 always known an expert that I can call for  
13 help. As an experienced previously  
14 permitted rehabber, she is incredibly  
15 knowledgeable, and I've learned so much  
16 from her. Anytime I wanted to keep the  
17 injured baby as a pet, she educated me on  
18 why that was not a viable option. No  
19 matter how difficult it was to say  
20 goodbye, I trusted my friend and followed  
21 her instructions. With each case, I  
22 learned more about our state's  
23 regulations, and I learned what was best

1 for the animal. Later when friends came  
2 to me with injured or orphaned wild  
3 animals, I passed on that same information  
4 and remembered which resources to  
5 recommend.

6 I'm here today because I'm aware  
7 our state has the lowest numbers of  
8 professional wildlife rehabilitators in  
9 the Southeast. I find this to be a  
10 tragedy. Our state can do much better for  
11 both our citizens and our wildlife.

12 One of the reasons we love Alabama  
13 so much is because of the level of  
14 biodiversity within our state. The  
15 animals, the plants, the trees and land,  
16 it belongs to all of us. As Alabamians,  
17 we are all individuals with our own  
18 traditions passed down to us through  
19 generations. We all express care and  
20 concern and love for our beautiful state  
21 in our unique way.

22 Like thousands of others across  
23 Alabama, my husband has purchased a

1 license to hunt and to harvest animals in  
2 the name of love and care for our natural  
3 resources. If he is allowed a piece of  
4 paper to take away lives, he should just  
5 as easily be able to obtain a piece of  
6 paper that allows him to save lives when  
7 he encounters injured and orphaned  
8 wildlife.

9 Currently, the two processes could  
10 not be more different. I believe this  
11 needs to change. I'm urging each of you  
12 to consider making the process of  
13 obtaining a wildlife rehabilitation permit  
14 just as simplified and streamlined as the  
15 process of obtaining a hunting license.  
16 I'm asking that more Alabamians have  
17 better and faster access to wildlife  
18 rehabbers when needed.

19 Finally, I'm asking that the  
20 public have access to more educational  
21 materials regarding the preservation of  
22 our state's most valuable resources, our  
23 native species that call Alabama home.

1       The creation of a diverse board of  
2       wildlife professionals and advocates AWCRS  
3       proposes is a major step to ensure more  
4       wildlife rehabilitation permits are issued  
5       to those experienced to share their  
6       expertise and education with the general  
7       public on when and how to intervene with  
8       our native wildlife species, but most  
9       importantly, let's not forget passing down  
10      the tradition of caring for our beautiful  
11      state's wildlife species for generations  
12      to come.

13                 Thank you.

14                 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

15                 Our next speaker is Adam Carter,  
16      Doctor of Veterinary Medicine.

17                 DR. CARTER: Good morning. My name is  
18      Adam Carter. I'm here in support of Big  
19      Bend Wildlife Sanctuary owned and operated  
20      by John and Terry Morse.

21                 I'm a veterinarian with 24 years  
22      of experience. I live in Enterprise,  
23      Coffee County, Alabama. I have a small

1 animal practice, Westgate Veterinarian  
2 Hospital, for 20 years and now I am the  
3 veterinary medical officer for Ft. Rucker,  
4 Alabama. I've been working with Big Bend  
5 Wildlife Sanctuary through my veterinary  
6 practice since 2012. Through this time  
7 frame, I've witnessed John and Terry  
8 rehabilitate hundreds of injured animals.  
9 Many of these injured animals have  
10 suffered due to humans, either directly  
11 like being struck by a vehicle, being shot  
12 by bullets and arrows, or being held in  
13 captivity by citizens that think they're  
14 doing a good deed by rescuing a wild  
15 animal, or indirectly, like domestic  
16 animals, poisons, or fences that entangle  
17 wild animals.

18 Few people are knowledgeable and  
19 capable enough to rehabilitate wild  
20 animals. John and Terry have given the  
21 citizens of Alabama a facility to do just  
22 what is stated on the Outdoor Alabama  
23 website by providing, quote, a resource

1 for the public by prescribing an  
2 appropriate and humane course of action  
3 for wildlife in need, end quote. They  
4 have done this with no cost to the state,  
5 no cost to the public. Everything has  
6 been supported by private funds and  
7 donations. I've personally given of my  
8 time, veterinary diagnostics, and practice  
9 resources to support this worthwhile cause  
10 because I believe that Big Bend Wildlife  
11 Sanctuary is a valuable community  
12 resource. Now they are closed.

13 Burdensome governmental regulations have  
14 forced John and Terry to shut the doors of  
15 Big Bend Wildlife Sanctuary to the public.  
16 Now I have to wonder how many of these  
17 animals will suffer and die cruel, painful  
18 deaths because there's nowhere convenient  
19 to help them or what the public will  
20 attempt to do unlicensed and uneducated  
21 home rehabilitation potentially putting  
22 wildlife at risk and exposing the public  
23 to zoonotic diseases like rabies.

1                   I close with sharing the highlight  
2                   of my veterinary career was when John and  
3                   Terry brought in a magnificent bald eagle  
4                   that had been found in Samson, Alabama.  
5                   It was hypothermic and weak. Terry said  
6                   we needed to perform blood work to  
7                   evaluate its health status and determine  
8                   its sex per governmental regulations. How  
9                   many people ever get to touch a bald  
10                  eagle, much less take a blood sample.  
11                  With the expertise and care from Big Bend  
12                  Wildlife Sanctuary, the eagle was returned  
13                  to full health. A few weeks later, I  
14                  witnessed the release of this adult female  
15                  eagle back near its home. I was touched  
16                  forever as I watched it fly away. Without  
17                  Big Bend Wildlife Sanctuary, I honestly  
18                  believe this national treasure, this  
19                  symbol of freedom, would have suffered and  
20                  died on the side of the road. It has come  
21                  to my attention there was once hundreds of  
22                  licensed wildlife rehabilitators in  
23                  Alabama, but now there are only 13 on the

1 Outdoor Alabama website list of rehabbers.  
2 As a tax paying citizen of Alabama, I ask  
3 why is this.

4 MS. JONES: Time.

5 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

6 Our next speaker is Ms. Amy  
7 George.

8 MS. GEORGE: Good morning. I'm Amy  
9 George from Homewood, Jefferson County,  
10 District 3. I'm here to speak on the  
11 untapped resources skilled wildlife  
12 specialists provide Alabamians, including  
13 the Conservation Department.

14 When the public seeks advice for  
15 wildlife they found, outdooralabama.com  
16 states, quote, trust that your  
17 intervention is not required. But since  
18 you can't legislate compassion and the  
19 public is not turning a blind eye to  
20 wildlife in need, doesn't it make more  
21 sense to have skilled wildlife specialists  
22 determining the needs of intervention,  
23 rather than the ill-equipped citizens

1 making poor decisions potentially  
2 affecting public health?

3 We've been labeled emotional by  
4 WFF, but in reality, hunters and anglers  
5 are just as emotional about wildlife. The  
6 difference is theirs is a hobby and sport  
7 and ours is a free public service.  
8 There's no time for emotion in our world  
9 with the never ending calls from the  
10 public seeking wildlife assistance.

11 The advantages of having multiple  
12 permitted rehabilitators in all 67  
13 Counties: We are your best educators to  
14 determine leave it alone, mom comes home;  
15 rebuilding a nest; or just moving babies  
16 out of harm's way is what's most  
17 appropriate. We discern if wildlife is  
18 diseased, protecting the public from  
19 zoonotic diseases, lessening the liability  
20 of their safety. We participate in our  
21 state's wildlife rabies testing program.  
22 We advocate not keeping wildlife as pets  
23 or novices raising wildlife often

1 resulting in sick animals being released  
2 back into inappropriate locations. Some  
3 spare no expense obtaining rabies  
4 pre-exposure vaccines at a thousand  
5 dollars. We teach education classes at  
6 symposiums in and out of state. And  
7 here's a big one. We alleviate cost and  
8 manpower for Alabama's DCNR, naturally  
9 saving untold tax dollars. Just the  
10 501(c)(3) I founded answers 2500 initial  
11 hotline calls annually taking full  
12 advantage of a captive audience.

13 My passion and expertise is  
14 educating the public and reuniting babies  
15 back to nature. For example, a caller  
16 called begging us to take a fawn found  
17 wedged in a cinder block six inches wide.  
18 I convinced them to give us and the fawn's  
19 mother a chance. The photo in your packet  
20 speaks volumes how that baby was saved  
21 from an unintentional kidnapping. This  
22 book represents only one of nine years of  
23 a thousand wildlife admissions. Please

1 keep in mind this is from just one group  
2 in our state.

3           Lastly, WFF's mantra to the public  
4 is put the animal back where you found it  
5 and let nature take its course. So I ask  
6 you today if you found a pregnant bat  
7 stuck to a glue trap or an owl hanging  
8 upside down on a barbed wire fence, would  
9 you follow the same advice given by this  
10 agency knowing that glue traps and fences  
11 are not part of nature. Nine years later,  
12 this system is still broken. We need your  
13 help. Please clear the path so that we  
14 may move forward providing relief for  
15 Alabamians and the wildlife.

16           Thank you sincerely for your time.

17           CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

18           Mr. John Morse is our next  
19 speaker.

20           MR. JONES: Mr. Chairman?

21           CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'm sorry.

22 Mr. Jones?

23           MR. JONES: Could I get the door on

1 the left side closed? This glare is  
2 killing me.

3 Thank you.

4 MR. MORSE: Good morning. John Morse,  
5 Coffee County, Dale County.

6 Since 2012, the citizens have been  
7 asking the agency, DCNR, to improve the  
8 wildlife rehabilitation program.

9 Ten years later, it remains a  
10 dysfunctional system. The director, WFF,  
11 stated that these stakeholder rehabbers,  
12 for which public demand increases each  
13 year mind you, were not needed in Alabama  
14 and the wildlife rehabbers are a necessary  
15 evil. He went on to express a sinister  
16 hatred for some native animals, especially  
17 raccoons as it was, without a clue how  
18 vital they are to our ecosystem. This was  
19 witnessed by three people, not just made  
20 up by me. Is this an attitude that  
21 reflects responsible management, no; a  
22 productive stakeholder partnership, no; or  
23 is it an arbitrary, very negative attitude

1       trying to exclude wherever he can get away  
2       with it.

3                Their plan has worked. There are  
4       only 13 rehabilitators in the state now  
5       where ten years ago we had over a hundred  
6       specialists serving Alabama. Other states  
7       have hundreds. Gentlemen, please do not  
8       ignore the common denominator here because  
9       this is punishing the public more than  
10      anyone else, and the public deserves  
11      better.

12               The rehab application and approval  
13      process has been held hostage by the same  
14      negativity. The permit process has  
15      become a steel door. It is the root cause  
16      of the ongoing dysfunction. I'm sorry,  
17      but in their own words by facts and the  
18      numbers, it sure feels like they just  
19      don't want to respect the job. This must  
20      stop. As a result, we have dozens of  
21      people not permitted. But are they out  
22      trying to help the best they can? Are  
23      they doing it right or maybe doing it

1 wrong? That matters to us as  
2 professionals as it should matter to you,  
3 especially in regards to public safety.

4 The inability to work with our  
5 government, specifically including this  
6 manager's area, results in no  
7 transparency, no cooperation, and no  
8 respect for the rights of the  
9 stakeholders, wildlife rehabilitators  
10 pursuing the wildlife's interest. This is  
11 negligence. The citizens have a right to  
12 depend on this agency. So now we must  
13 deploy -- depend on your authority to  
14 ensure that the public can do so. Please  
15 support the pursuit of the wildlife  
16 interests as we know and you know and  
17 respect and accommodate others. You even  
18 have the luxury of being able to embrace  
19 the generous offers that AWCRS have  
20 proposed as a solution to assist you in  
21 doing so. AWCRS are willing for the  
22 benefit of all parties to create a diverse  
23 board of specialists to help adjudicate

1       this process. They will use national  
2       guidelines appropriately, help assure  
3       quality standards, help protect the  
4       public, help protect our wildlife, and  
5       lighten the loads of game wardens and  
6       other agencies. But be clear, this  
7       became -- this is the only solution that  
8       we have come up with, and we want to be  
9       part of the solution. We have a problem;  
10      we have a solution and we're asking your  
11      help for it.

12                 And I'd like to answer any  
13      questions if you have any.

14                 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Morse,  
15      very much.

16                 Our next speaker is Terry Morse.

17                 MS. MORSE: Good morning. My name is  
18      Terry Morse of Coffee County and a member  
19      of the AWCRS, an alliance of professionals  
20      created as a solution that will now bring  
21      to this table an experienced,  
22      knowledgeable alliance to serve as a  
23      formal liaison, one willing to work with

1 both the State and the stakeholders, to  
2 address the current dysfunction of our  
3 state's wildlife rehabilitation program,  
4 improve the quality of this valuable  
5 resource, and develop into public service  
6 that the state and our citizens can depend  
7 on and be proud of. Whatever the problem,  
8 obstacles, excuses, personalities are that  
9 have stifled our state's opportunity to  
10 succeed at that, we need you to recognize  
11 that this dysfunction and half-measured  
12 attempts to pretend everything is okay is  
13 not okay. It has and it continues to  
14 unfairly punish the public as we speak,  
15 and it's past time to stop, to regroup, to  
16 better organize, and to move forward.

17 To that end in addition to forming  
18 an allied stakeholder group, we  
19 constructed the package you have each been  
20 given a copy of. We make all these  
21 efforts and as well as traveling to attend  
22 these meetings to hopefully assure you  
23 that irrefutable challenges exist with our

1 state's management of this program and  
2 that for ten years now it is unfairly  
3 failing the stakeholders and the citizens.  
4 We all need this program, and we need it  
5 to function. I now appeal to you not to  
6 ignore that chronic dysfunction exists and  
7 to intervene as we need you to do today,  
8 to help us all unite to remedy that.

9 As large as that packet is, it is  
10 only a fractional sampling of information  
11 about the value of this resource and just  
12 a snapshot of feedback from some of the  
13 very frustrated citizens and stakeholders  
14 who are highly invested in wanting this  
15 public service to function as it should  
16 and like it is functioning so much better  
17 in other states.

18 The State has had ten years to  
19 listen, to acknowledge, and to get serious  
20 about thoughtfully addressing and  
21 improving these issues. We asked, we  
22 waited, we begged, we hoped, but things  
23 got worse, not better. So as the saying

1 goes, don't come whining to the table  
2 without also bringing a solution.

3 We now have done so by bringing  
4 together a vast collective of years of  
5 stakeholder experience, professionals, and  
6 veterinarians all offering you their  
7 sincere intent to take on the leadership  
8 and workload of creating a stellar program  
9 that you can be proud of having helped to  
10 establish.

11 To this point, this is what is  
12 needed next: We are requesting that a few  
13 of you, as well as staff members, with us  
14 in the next 30 to 45 days and let's get to  
15 work overcoming the obstacles. Let us  
16 create a program that will rightfully  
17 encourage these stakeholders to pursue  
18 their wildlife interests. In fact, in  
19 your package, you will see past media  
20 coverage reporting on a few states who  
21 realize that their overly restrictive  
22 rehabilitation measures are backfiring,  
23 that they are actually putting the

1 public --

2 MS. JONES: Time.

3 MS. MORSE: -- at greater risk. If  
4 you take only one thing from what we've  
5 said, let it be that. There is negligence  
6 and potential liability risk when we do  
7 not have trained stakeholders available to  
8 efficiently and quickly get wildlife out  
9 of the hands of the unqualified public  
10 today.

11 Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, thank you.

13 Our next speaker today is Michael  
14 Shehan.

15 MR. M. SHEHAN: Hello, my name is  
16 Michael Shehan. I'm from Morgan County,  
17 and I'm the CEO of AWCRS.

18 In the last CAB meeting, it was  
19 stated that the State had approved all  
20 completed applications received in the  
21 last -- since 2013. That number was five.  
22 There was five applications in almost a  
23 decade. There's 5 million people in the

1 state of Alabama. That doesn't sound  
2 right. The states around us, Georgia, has  
3 200-plus rehabbers, Florida has over 500.  
4 We have 13. Those numbers don't sound  
5 right.

6 If I want to apply for a  
7 rehabilitation license, I go to the  
8 website. There's no application, there's  
9 one number of someone to contact, and  
10 there's a link to the best practices  
11 manual. The people who have been -- we've  
12 been receiving reports of people who have  
13 contacted the Department. If they are  
14 able to actually get a return call, which  
15 is rare, they're talked down to, they're  
16 treated without respect. Also, we've had  
17 issues with people getting denied permits  
18 with no cause. If I ran a restaurant and  
19 I failed an inspection, they would tell me  
20 what's wrong and how to fix it. That  
21 doesn't seem to happen here.

22 Rehabilitation provides a public  
23 service to Alabama wildlife and the

1 citizens, and not to mention, it reports  
2 back data that is important to  
3 conservation. It's not a hobby and  
4 shouldn't be treated like one.

5 So at the last meeting, Director  
6 Sykes stated that just because our  
7 differences of opinion exist, that his  
8 opinion is not wrong. However, if you  
9 base your policy on that opinion, that  
10 opinion has to be backed by facts, and  
11 there is absolutely no research, no  
12 evidence, that rehabilitation of wildlife  
13 is detrimental to anything or anyone. In  
14 fact, it provides a service to the state  
15 and to the people of the state that  
16 prevents untrained citizens who mean well  
17 but don't know what they're doing putting  
18 themselves and the animal at risk by  
19 trying to help them, because people are  
20 not going to put the animal out and just  
21 leave it to die. And before a predator  
22 ever finds this animal, it's going to get  
23 eaten alive by maggots and it's going to

1 dehydrate and die. People are not going  
2 to do that, and that's the part that the  
3 State doesn't let people know, that when  
4 you leave the animal for a while that's  
5 what's going to happen to it. So please  
6 look at the packets and meet with us to  
7 fix this.

8 Thank you.

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

10 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP:

11 Mr. Chairman, I do have one question. I  
12 just wanted to -- so you're the president  
13 and CEO of the association? I just want  
14 to make sure I heard that correct.

15 MR. M. SHEHAN: I'm the CEO, and John  
16 is the president.

17 COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Gotcha.

18 Thank you.

19 MR. M. SHEHAN: Thank you.

20 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Our next speaker is  
21 Niyon Shehan.

22 MR. N. SHEHAN: Hello, I'm Niyon  
23 Shehan from Morgan County. I'm 13 years

1 old, and I spend a lot of time in the  
2 woods.

3 I've learned throughout my life  
4 that every creature is equally important  
5 for keeping the ecosystem healthy. As  
6 people destroy more and more of the  
7 ecosystem, either way, they even out all  
8 the destruction that we cause to nature.

9 One way of helping restore the  
10 ecosystem is by rehabilitating the injured  
11 or needy animals. It should be up to you  
12 to put policies in place that allows  
13 people to help preserve the great range of  
14 wildlife this state has to offer. This  
15 means that the application process for  
16 future wildlife rehabbers must be  
17 responsive, respectful, and understanding  
18 while still making sure that potential  
19 rehabbers take the precautions to keep the  
20 animals and rehabilitators safe. Plenty  
21 of people want to rehabilitate wildlife in  
22 Alabama, but during the poor application  
23 system they cannot help animals in need.

1 Many of us are asking for a change to the  
2 application system, and I hope you will do  
3 the right thing.

4 Thank you for your time.

5 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

6 The next speaker is Lindsey  
7 Wilmer.

8 MS. WILMER: Everything I wanted to  
9 say has already been said.

10 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Well, thank you very  
11 much. We appreciate that.

12 Our next speaker will be Brandon  
13 Jackson.

14 MR. JACKSON: I'm Brandon Jackson from  
15 Walker and Cullman Counties. Thank you  
16 for all that you do to conserve and  
17 protect Alabama's wildlife. Thank you for  
18 the recent rod use rate on the Sipsey  
19 Fork. It has helped to cut down on some  
20 of the conflict that was seen on the  
21 river, and so we really appreciate that.  
22 I think it's helping to take a step in the  
23 right direction.

1           However, we do still need your  
2           help. We are seeing increased usage. I  
3           know I probably sound like a broken record  
4           saying that over and over, but I've got  
5           some data that I want to share with you  
6           that will back that up. But also due to  
7           Gorgas Fossil Plant closing, the  
8           generation schedule below Smith Lake Dam  
9           has changed.

10           It used to be that during the week  
11           throughout the summer, they would run from  
12           one until six or eight in the evening,  
13           which would eliminate any afternoon  
14           fishing. With the closure of Gorgas, that  
15           schedule has changed somewhat. Now  
16           they're operating traditionally more  
17           typically from about five p.m. until later  
18           in the evening, and so we have a little  
19           longer time and more users. That's  
20           resulting in some difficulty.

21           So Alabama Power's part of their  
22           license 2165, their recreational plant  
23           update placed cameras along the Sipsey

1 Fork for seven months from March the 5th  
2 through November the 1st. They accounted  
3 for 16,204 anglers on the Sipsey Fork  
4 during that time. Here's why that's  
5 important. Not counting natural mortality  
6 or death due to predation, we know exactly  
7 how many fish were in stock in terms of  
8 trout. So when you take that and divide  
9 it up by the numbers of days during that  
10 period, you've got 68 people per day  
11 fishing the Sipsey Fork. You have 1200  
12 fish per month. That's 240 limits per  
13 month available for catch. If you pretend  
14 that none of them die from any other  
15 source, that's three and a half days'  
16 worth of fishing if every angler were to  
17 catch their limit. So even if you take  
18 half of that, that's one week of those  
19 fish for the entirety of the month. We'd  
20 like to see -- we would ask the Board to  
21 look at utilizing some special regulations  
22 that would allow for more anglers to  
23 access those fish for a longer period of

1 time.

2 And we recognize that there is  
3 another issue. The bid process is a  
4 problem in that we're getting stock each  
5 month. During the summer months when we  
6 see the highest usage, we're seeing fewer  
7 fish numerically being stocked. They're a  
8 slightly larger fish, which means that we  
9 get fewer of them, and that's restricting  
10 what the Department would like to do in  
11 terms of alternating between more fish,  
12 larger fish each month. And so I don't  
13 know how to address that. I don't know if  
14 the Commissioner has any ideas about that.  
15 We would like to see -- have some of those  
16 issues resolved.

17 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Brandon.

18 Next speaker is Travis Johnson.

19 MR. JOHNSON: Good morning. I'm  
20 Travis Johnson from Ariton, Alabama.

21 First, I would like to thank the  
22 Advisory Board members for all that y'all  
23 do for our state and for hunting rights.

1 I'm vice president of the Alabama  
2 Dog Hunters Association for Dale County,  
3 Henry County, and Barbour County Chapter.  
4 We're here today on behalf of our youth  
5 hunters in our communities. Our  
6 association believes that the youth of  
7 this state needs more opportunities to  
8 utilize the natural resources provided to  
9 them, such as the Barbour County WMA.  
10 We're proposing for the access to be  
11 granted to hold a one-day youth deer dog  
12 hunt at the Barbour County WMA. If  
13 granted, the youth from this county and  
14 surrounding counties would have the chance  
15 to experience hunting with hounds  
16 firsthand.

17 Our association demands the  
18 practice of ethical hunting, and we want  
19 to instill this into our youth hunters as  
20 well as respecting all landowner rights.  
21 Since the application of GPS tracking and  
22 training collars have been issued in hound  
23 hunting, we now have an excellent training

1        capability to allow us to solely control  
2        the dog at all times. Across the state of  
3        Alabama with the use of these GPS collars  
4        in place, there have been almost no  
5        complaints from private landowners.

6                We feel that the youth in our  
7        community should have the same right to  
8        utilize the Barbour County WMA as youth  
9        from other counties in our state have.  
10       The youth hunters in our community are the  
11       future of this sport. I think we should  
12       all be trying to preserve that. It's a  
13       personal goal of mine to always strive to  
14       provide opportunities such as this one to  
15       our youth and to have a chance to teach  
16       them the ethical way to carry themselves  
17       while being a part of a hunting community.  
18       If provided access, we would like to mimic  
19       the youth hunt that Geneva County puts on.

20                Geneva County, their hunt's  
21       located in the National Forest. Their  
22       hunt's been a huge success since back in  
23       2018. It was a two-day event back then.

1 In 2020, they went to a solely youth hunt.  
2 They've turned loose over a hundred dogs  
3 all day long with no complaints as far as  
4 from private landowners nearby. And I  
5 would like to see us be able to do that at  
6 the WMA in Barbour County.

7 So in closing, thank you for your  
8 time and consideration of the said  
9 proposal and on behalf of our chapter, our  
10 community, and our youth hunters.

11 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Travis.

12 Our next speaker is Shane  
13 Perrilloux.

14 MR. PERRILLOUX: Thank you. I  
15 appreciate the opportunity to address you  
16 here. This will be the second time I've  
17 spoken to you on this topic. I was in  
18 front of y'all in Jasper, Alabama, last  
19 spring.

20 So I'm a landowner in Oakman,  
21 Alabama, Walker County. I've got 50  
22 acres, and I'm surrounded by some timber  
23 company land as well as about 300 acres of

1 private property. And I'm a stalk hunter  
2 and I'm a bow hunter. And before you,  
3 you'll see a spreadsheet that I put  
4 together from game cameras on my property  
5 from this past hunting season. Now, on  
6 the left-hand column, you'll actually see  
7 the different hunting seasons broken out  
8 by week, and the dates listed start on a  
9 Friday and run to the following Friday.  
10 And what you'll see in that data is that  
11 there were three different opportunities  
12 where I was able to capture stray hunting  
13 dogs on my property. I contact Fish and  
14 Game to report those with photo evidence.  
15 The center column are the pictures I've  
16 caught on game cameras for the rest of the  
17 season. The date and the time those  
18 pictures were taken, there were 75  
19 incursions by stray hunting dogs on my  
20 property on game cameras. And on the  
21 right-hand column, you'll actually see  
22 times we're on the stand with deer and  
23 food plots trying to be good

1 conservationists when stray dogs then  
2 drove the deer off our property.

3 When I stood before you in Jasper,  
4 I made the statement that I am not anti-  
5 dog hunting, and I'm not. I don't want to  
6 restrict anyone's hunting rights. I don't  
7 want to restrict anyone's tracking rights,  
8 fox hunting rights, whatever they may  
9 have. I'm a supporter of everyone's  
10 hunting rights. But I also think there  
11 should be respect for the property owner's  
12 rights and the ability to hunt the way we  
13 wish to hunt without being infringed upon  
14 and impaired by someone else.

15 And the challenge here is that  
16 there is no enforcement actions being  
17 taken for these hunters. I have repeat  
18 offenders by name on that spreadsheet in  
19 front of you. I have a hunting club where  
20 they incurred -- every one of those  
21 pictures came from the same hunting club.  
22 But, again, there's no enforcement,  
23 because I have physically laid hands on a

1 strange dog, not aware of that dog's  
2 vaccination status, not aware of that  
3 dog's aggression level, and you're asking  
4 me to be the enforcer of my property.  
5 Something is wrong with this paradigm,  
6 right?

7           And the other thing is when I was  
8 in front of you in Jasper, I also put  
9 together a list of suggestions on ways to  
10 address this. I have cameras. I'll be  
11 upgrading my cameras, I'll be syncing the  
12 times and the dates so that after these  
13 data points that you see in front of you,  
14 next year, I'll be pursuing litigation  
15 against the hunters, the hunting club, and  
16 the timber companies that surround my  
17 property. And I may not win, but I  
18 guarantee you I'm going to get my pound of  
19 flesh, right? Now it's up to you to take  
20 the next step to allow for enforcement of  
21 property rights for the hunters who choose  
22 not to dog hunt even though we do witness  
23 dog hunting on a day-to-day basis on my

1 property.

2 Thank you.

3 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Shane. I  
4 would recommend that you contact your  
5 legislator as well. This is a path that  
6 we've been down.

7 Thank you.

8 Our next speaker is Mr. Charles  
9 Stewart.

10 MR. STEWART: I'm Charles Stewart,  
11 Covington County, Alabama.

12 I'm here today to complain about  
13 the dog encroachments on my property and  
14 the dog hunters' activity around my  
15 property preventing my family and myself  
16 from hunting my property effectively.  
17 This will be the fourth time addressing  
18 the Board on these issues.

19 Landowners need immediate relief  
20 from the constant hunting dog encroachment  
21 on private property. If you research the  
22 past ten years of the Advisory Board  
23 minutes, you will see that there has been

1 complaints of hunting dog encroachments at  
2 almost every meeting. Today is no  
3 different.

4 Back in 2012, Mr. Brown from  
5 Coffee County asked the Board to correct  
6 his dog encroachment problems because  
7 something would happen. Something did. A  
8 man in North Alabama shot a hunting dog  
9 after years of complaining of the  
10 encroachment. He's in prison for that.  
11 That shouldn't have ever happened.

12 The only good news I found out of  
13 ten years of the meeting minutes is when  
14 Mr. Jeffries addressed this Board and  
15 commended it for preserving the ban on  
16 deer dog hunting in Lamar, Marion, and  
17 Franklin Counties. He went on to say and  
18 I quote, deer hunting has improved and  
19 there has been no conflicts between dog  
20 hunters and landowners.

21 So for the dog encroachment issue,  
22 I ask this Board to implement the dog  
23 permit system south of Highway 84 in

1 Covington County, Alabama. That would  
2 bring all of Covington County under the  
3 permit system.

4 I am not the only landowner that  
5 has asked for this permit to be  
6 implemented. If you research the meeting  
7 minutes, individuals have been asking as  
8 far back as 2012, and this has been going  
9 on for over ten years now. We need some  
10 action on this. Adopt an amendment to  
11 allow the law enforcement to access the  
12 track logs of the hunting club's  
13 GPS-collared dogs where a dog encroachment  
14 complaint has been filed. That puts the  
15 dog owners to prove that they weren't on  
16 the property and not the landowner  
17 catching the dog and hopefully it has a  
18 collar and something will be done about  
19 it. If track logs aren't available, a  
20 thousand dollar fine for each dog for each  
21 occurrence. Enforce the three-tier dog  
22 encroachment amendment adopted by this  
23 Board in March of 2017 with fines

1 respectfully.

2 And I'm going to go way over here,  
3 gentlemen. Let me get back to the second  
4 issue if I could, please, or my second  
5 issue. I apologize.

6 The dog hunters' activities around  
7 my property prevent and obstruct the peace  
8 and interfere with my family's ability to  
9 hunt our property. They also create a  
10 visual, oral, and physical stimulant  
11 affecting the natural behavior of the  
12 deer. And to eliminate this, I ask that a  
13 process allowing private property owners  
14 who still hunt on their property to file  
15 with the Department of Conservation and  
16 Natural Resources an application to  
17 establish a buffer zone --

18 MS. JONES: Time.

19 MR. STEWART: -- around their  
20 property.

21 In addition, priority should be  
22 given to those property owners who have  
23 actual dog encroachment on their property.

1 Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you,  
3 Mr. Stewart.

4 MR. WOLFE: Mr. Chairman, question.

5 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, Mr. Wolfe.

6 MR. WOLFE: What was the counties  
7 south of Highway 84?

8 MR. STEWART: Covington County. North  
9 of 84 in Covington County is on the permit  
10 system; south of 84 is not.

11 MR. WOLFE: South of 84.

12 MR. STEWART: Yes, sir.

13 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Next speaker is  
14 Mr. Lane Stephens.

15 MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman?

16 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, Mr. Hartzog.

17 MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Charles and the dog  
18 hunting club that he's having problems  
19 with actually met in my office for over  
20 two hours the first of May.

21 Mr. Charles sent out an email to  
22 the Board that had some inaccuracies in  
23 it. Yes, we did -- when trying to

1 mitigate the problem, I asked would the  
2 club and Mr. Charles possibly agree to  
3 split the cost of a fence along his  
4 borderline. Mr. Charles declined and  
5 said, you know, no way whatever. I want  
6 to commend the dog club for saying that  
7 they would pay for a hundred percent of  
8 the fence, not what was in his email to  
9 y'all that his only option was given to  
10 him was to pay for half the fence, which  
11 was incorrect because the dog club paid --  
12 agreed to pay for a hundred percent of the  
13 fence.

14 The second thing was option -- he  
15 said the only other option he was given  
16 was to call them every time he hunted. I  
17 asked the dog club as a courtesy to him  
18 for when he does have his family and  
19 grandkids and all there if he called on an  
20 occasional basis and asked for them not to  
21 hunt the north end of their lease, they  
22 would honor that. And I thought the club  
23 was gracious in telling Mr. Charles that

1 if a special occasion came, they would try  
2 to honor and accommodate his request of no  
3 hunting. So the two statements he made at  
4 the end of his email were incorrect.

5 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you,  
6 Mr. Hartzog.

7 Our next speaker --

8 MR. STEWART: Can I answer that, sir?

9 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: No, you cannot.  
10 Thank you very much.

11 MR. STEWART: Thank you.

12 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Our next speaker is  
13 Mr. Lane Stephens.

14 MR. STEPHENS: Mr. Chairman, I'm going  
15 to waive mine.

16 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

17 With that -- no questions from the  
18 Board, that concludes this portion of our  
19 meeting, the public comments section.

20 And our next order of business is  
21 unfinished business. Is there any  
22 unfinished business before the Board  
23 today?

1                   There being no unfinished  
2                   business, then we move on to new business,  
3                   the new business before the Board today.

4                   MR. SAVOY:   Mr. Chairman?

5                   CHAIRMAN DOBBS:   Mr. Savoy.

6                   MR. SAVOY:   I do have a motion that I  
7                   want to continue from the March meeting,  
8                   and I'm going to read it so I get it  
9                   correct.  To allow for the use of turkey  
10                  decoys during the youth weekend and  
11                  special disabled hunt day, I make a motion  
12                  that no turkey decoys can be used in Zones  
13                  1 and 3 from March 25th through April 3rd  
14                  and in Zone 2 from April 1st through April  
15                  10th.

16                  To explain this, the youth weekend  
17                  in each zone is the weekend before either  
18                  March 25th or April 1st regular opening  
19                  season date.  That depends on the zone.  
20                  And the disabled hunt day is March 24th or  
21                  March 31st depending on the zone.  The  
22                  motion will allow the decoys to be used  
23                  during those special season dates.

1 Thank you.

2 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

3 There's a motion on the floor. Is  
4 there a second?

5 MR. HARTZOG: Second.

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Is there any  
7 discussion?

8 There being no discussion, then  
9 we'll do this with a show of hands.  
10 Everyone in favor, please indicate by  
11 raising your hand.

12 All those opposed?

13 No opposed. The ayes have it.

14 Is there any other unfinished  
15 business?

16 Mr. Jones?

17 MR. JONES: I'd like to make a motion  
18 to accept all of the amended season and  
19 bag limits as set forth by the Department,  
20 including the latest turkey motion that we  
21 just passed.

22 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: That would be the  
23 turkey motion and as well the registered

1 deer enclosure motion?

2 MR. JONES: Correct.

3 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Is that sufficient  
4 for us? That's sufficient.

5 There's a motion before the Board.  
6 Is there a second?

7 MR. STIMPSON: Second.

8 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any discussion?

9 There being no discussion, we'll  
10 do this again with hands in the air. All  
11 those in favor?

12 Any opposed?

13 The ayes have it.

14 Is there any additional new  
15 business before the Board today?

16 Mr. Hartzog?

17 MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman, when we  
18 started the meeting, we said was anybody  
19 to be recognized, and I didn't see Craig  
20 out in the audience. I'd like to  
21 recognize Craig. Craig was with the  
22 Turkey Federation, National Wild Turkey  
23 Federation. He's been a great help to the

1 Turkey Federation and was a great help  
2 with the Governor's One-Shot, so I'd like  
3 to commend Craig for his work for the  
4 National Wild Turkey Federation, Craig  
5 Harris.

6 CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Craig  
7 Harris, Alabama president of the National  
8 Wild Turkey Federation.

9 Any other business?

10 Any other comments?

11 Nothing?

12 Thank you, Assistant Chief. I've  
13 been with you watching you since I came on  
14 this Board, and I appreciate you. Thank  
15 you very much.

16 Thank you-all for being here.  
17 This was a good meeting.

18 Our next meeting will be sometime  
19 next year. Very good.

20 Thank you. Safe travels on the  
21 way home. This meeting is adjourned.

22 (Proceedings concluded at

23 10:54 a.m.)

## 1 REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

2 STATE OF ALABAMA

3 AUTAUGA COUNTY

4 I, Stacey L. Johnson, Certified Court  
5 Reporter and Commissioner for the State of  
6 Alabama at Large, hereby certify that on  
7 May 21, 2022, I reported the proceedings  
8 in the matter of the foregoing cause, and  
9 that pages 3 through 126 contain a true  
10 and accurate transcription of the  
11 aforementioned proceedings.

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

16 This the 27th day of September, 2022.  
17

18 /s/Stacey L. Johnson  
19 STACEY L. JOHNSON, CCR  
20 Commissioner for the  
21 State of Alabama at Large  
22 CCR 386, Expires 9/30/2022  
23 COMMISSION EXPIRES: 6/22/2023