MR. BATES: Thank y'all. I guess this thing is on.

Anyway, it's good to be here today. It's good to pray for our state and industry and stuff. I say our industry. Our animals and stuff. But let's pray the Lord will bless us.

One scripture before we go into it. Solomon was a very wise man in his day. A lot of his wisdom extends to today. He wrote in the Book of Proverbs 27:23:

Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks and look well to thy herds. That can go for fish. That can go for deer, ducks.

Look well. Know what you got. Know how to treat your animals, your stocks of oysters, shrimp, fish. We are to be wise in our decisions and know what's out there and what can be done to help it. Let's bow.

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for your many blessings. We thank you, Lord, that you give us the bounty of the sea and the land. Lord, we pray that we'll be mindful to protect it and protect those that catch it and hunt it and fish it. And, Lord, we just pray that you will give us food for our labor that we might continue to feed these people and the people around our country. Let us make sure, Lord, that we have no diseases, pestilence, Lord, that might affect us. Bless us, Lord, give us knowledge and wisdom and this group make the right decisions that we might be better because of things that comes through this house here today and use us to your honor and glory. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Welcome, everybody, to the first Conservation Advisory Board Meeting of 2020. Glad you're all here today and everybody made it in safe. Let's have a really productive meeting today with some really good dialogue. And to get it started, I'm going to ask Mr. Avery Bates to please give our invocation today.
(Pledge of Allegiance recited.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.
On the agenda we have the Sportsmen’s Pledge. It’s something we’ve talked about before. It rings through to what we all believe is the purpose of forward-minded resource management. And we’re going to recite the pledge, and you have a copy of it. Please recite it along with us. I’m going to ask Mr. Greg Barksdale to lead us in the Sportsmen’s Pledge.

(Sportsmen’s Pledge recited as follows: Since the state in its sovereign capacity occupies the attitude of guardian and custodian of the people’s welfare, it is therefore the duty of the state by enactment of appropriate legislation to endeavor to extend adequate protection to those resources in which the people have collectively a natural right. Wise and discreet individuals who feel no inclination to make assaults on nature’s storehouse should have their rights protected by the enactment of strong laws to restrain the hands of the wanton and the reckless whose vandalism would annihilate every visible thing of fin, fur, or feather to gratify their savage instincts.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: That was written, as you know, at the turn of the 20th Century, so -- but it holds true through today.

Mr. Secretary, do we have a quorum?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Yes, sir, we do.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I have one brief announcement or congratulatory. There was a special award presented to Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. That award was the 2019 State Agency of the Year. It’s presented by the National Assembly of Sportsmen’s Caucuses. We are the one agency in the country that got that. It’s a very prestigious and noteworthy award, and we’re very proud to be selected.

Congratulations to the Department, to the staff, everybody that’s a part of it. Congratulations. That’s pretty cool.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: So if anybody has any questions about that, I’m happy to talk about it some more.

All of the Board members, I think, have gotten and read the minutes from our May 4, 2019, board meeting. Are there any notes or changes?

(No response.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: If there are no notes or changes, the Board minutes that are provided by Ms. Tracey and approved by Ms. Betsy stand approved.

And, if we can, let’s ask each board member -- we’ll start down at the far end with Mr. Barksdale -- to please stand or sit and give us their name, their district, and a district report.

MR. BARKSDALE: All right. My name is Greg Barksdale. I’m in District 4.

The main topic of discussion in District 4 was concerning chronic wasting disease. There was a lot of discussion about this just before deer season. There were CWD meetings held across the state.

We did have a meeting in October at Wallace State College which was within the district. I think this was a very informative meeting for the hunters and breeders that did come to the meeting. I would have liked to have seen more folks show up to that. The information would have been a really good idea for those folks where they understood CWD more than what they were reading on the Internet.

I was also contacted about deer dog hunting in Franklin and Marion Counties. The other contact I had was about deer populations in Winston County and the
need to take it out of Zone C.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Greg, Mr. Barksdale, would you please lean closer to the mic. Some of the folks can't hear you. And I think you have to turn it on.

MR. BARKSDALE: Okay. Thank you.

Like I said, I was contacted about deer dog hunting in Franklin and Marion Counties. I was also contacted about the deer population in Winston County and the need to take it out of Zone C.

Other than that, it was relatively quiet in District 4 since our last meeting.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

MR. MARTIN: Jeff Martin, District 3.

You know, all in all it's been a pretty calm year. The changes that we had made in the past seemed to be working on both sides from the dog -- from the Talladega National Forest end. They've been doing a good job. I've been talking with Chuck and some other -- and Lonnie. It's just been a pretty quiet, peaceful year. I appreciate that on both sides, especially you guys.

With all the rain and all, fishing has been good. I know on the Coosa chain it has been. So hopefully we will -- some of that may subside a little bit, but all in all it's been a great year.

MR. BROCK JONES: Brock Jones, District 7. I share that representation with Tim Wood who could not be here today.

Tim and I have met with a couple of groups around the district in trying to get a feel for what people are thinking and talking to several processors. And the general feeling is over the District 7, which is pretty much the Black Belt, that it was a good season -- not a great season -- for deer. The quantity and quality were up.

Feral hogs continue to be a great frustration, and everyone is looking forward to hopefully us coming up with a solution poison-wise for that.

There were no dog hunting issues. There's a feeling that allowing baiting has caused more negative than positive and that bucks become and doe become more nocturnal. The three-buck limit seems to be having a very positive effect on the quality of deer that we now see.

And the CW meetings were very informative and very well done. Had a couple of locations, Tuscaloosa and Selma, where we had those meetings. That's all I have.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

MR. CAGLE: I'm Patrick Cagle, and I represent District 2.

Like Mr. Barksdale, the Department of Conservation hosted a CWD meeting at Bass Pro Shops in Prattville which was a convenient spot for a lot of folks in District 2. I would have loved to have seen every hunter there. I really commend the Department for going out of their way to share good information. It's hard to -- you know, it's hard to reach everyone that they need to with their efforts. And at least the folks that attended that now have good information, and hopefully they'll be leaders and share that with others.

You know, getting information on a disease so complex directly from the source is really the only way to do it. You can't read a few lines, a few sentences on the Internet and understand much about it. So I commend the Department for their efforts in reaching out. I know they plan to continue.

I received less calls this year than ever. You know, I can't take that as a reflection necessarily of the issues in District 2. Folks may have just gotten tired of calling me. But I will let you know I'm always available. My cell
phone number is published. So if you
have an issue or if you don't have an
issue and have something that you've
seen that's positive, feel free to call
me.

A little outside of my district, but
I really want to commend the Department
for all they've done on the coast. This
year I got to spend more time off the
Alabama coast than in typical years.
And spearfishing is my passion. And I
just really saw how great of a resource
we have both on the public reefs and the
private and had a couple of great trips,
including October.

Since the state is doing so well
with Snapper Check, they're able to make
sure we fully capture the available
resource because reporting ensures we
don't go over, which prevents us from
being subject to very strict fallback
for next year. So the state was able --
you know, we had a couple of extra days,
a few weekends added in October. I was
quite impressed that the boat I was
on -- we had an average of a 19-pound
snapper in October after the resource
had been enjoyed by everyone who had the
opportunity, and that really says a lot
about the quality of it and the quality
of the artificial reef system that our
state has created.

MR. STIMPSON: I'm Ben Stimpson. I represent
District 1.

Like everybody that's gone before
me, this year overall seemed to be a
very quiet and good year. I as well had
fewer calls on dog deer hunting than
I've ever had. I actually only had one
call from Mobile County and two calls
from Washington County and none from
Baldwin, which is -- I think that's
impossible, but it happened.

Obviously everybody is working to do
a good job. I think the permit system
must have had something to do with it.

But it was the least amount of calls
that I've had since I've been on the
Board.

There was some excitement over -- we
had an oyster harvest for the first time
in -- I don't know when the last time we
had it, Chris, but it's been a while.
Of course, the rivers jumped up and shut
that down. But that had a lot of
positive talk going on there.

And most of the conversation that I
did have with people in general was
around CWD and feeding and baiting. And
most of it was just questions trying to
gather information. But a good year in
District 1.

MR. RAYMOND JONES: I'm Raymond Jones. I
represent Congressional District
Number 5, which is in north Alabama.

We had a -- overall it's been a good
year. The deer season in our neck of
the woods was average at best, marginal.
I think a lot of that was due to the
unseasonably warm weather.

Duck season was better than it has
been in the last few years, but again it
was not as -- it was well below
historical averages simply because of
the unseasonably warm weather and
literally water-water everywhere. The
ducks were very scattered.

Last spring's turkey hatch marked
five years in a row that we've had well
above average hatches. We have turkeys
in our area of the state where they
haven't been in over a century where
we're now seeing turkeys. So that's
very positive in that regard. And I saw
a hen and several poult's, again, on some
land we've owned since the 1950s where
we've never seen turkeys, and we've got
hens and poult's there now, which is a
positive.

I did receive a complaint on dog
deer hunting in Colbert County. I've
checked into that, and I'm monitoring
that situation. But I did receive a
complaint there.
That's my report.

MR. HARTZOG: Good morning, everybody. Grady
Hartzog, District 2.

There again, following what
everybody else has said, probably had
the quietest year that I've ever had.
We had a lot of good things happening in
District 2.

We just got through with the youth
hunt, and next year the Barbour County
Youth Hunt will have its 25th
anniversary. There were several hundred
kids there. I want to thank the
Department. They had about ten wardens
there assisting with the youth hunt.

It's a big deal.

Greg ought to be smiling because
we've had several big tournaments there
at the state park. The parking lot was
full every day. I want to thank Greg.

We had a problem with one of the ramps,
and the mayor had called me. And, in
fact, the day I called Greg, Greg, I
think, had just signed a contract to
spend a couple of hundred thousand
dollars on repairing that ramp -- they'd
had a lot of problems with it -- and
also doing the paving.

But there for several weeks the
parking lot and boat landing was slap
full. And they were catching nice bass,
good bass. And so the lake is probably
in a good cycle right now.

The only -- I only had one dog
hunting complaint.

And the only other thing -- and I've
talked to Chuck and Chris -- is that
I've had several requests -- well, a
good many requests for Barbour County to
be placed in the north zone for dove
season. If you look at the map of the
south zone and north zone, Barbour
County is the northernmost county in
that south dove hunting zone.

Because of federal regulations, you
can't change but once every five years.
We can't make it effective for the next
season, but Chuck and Keith and Chris
and all have said that we would shoot
for making that available for the dove
hunters for the '21 season.

So other than that, overall a quiet
year. I did call several of the
processors, and they processed the same
number of deer. But they keep saying
the deer seem to be getting healthier
and bigger. The weight size is going
up. So they're happy with it. And
Barbour County, as you all remember, is
the only county that has the antler
restriction rule, and it seems like
everybody is still happy with that rule,
trying to grow good quality bucks.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Grady.

DR. LEMME: Good morning. I'm Gary Lemme
representing -- ad hoc member
representing Alabama Cooperative
Extension System.

The Extension will be cooperating
with State Soil and Water Conservation
Committee and APHIS and the Department
on feral hog reductions in three
watersheds in lower Alabama. We'll be
providing the educational programming.

And the 4-H shooting sports programs
are up and running. And we'll be having
state tournaments here in the next two
months, and we have over 1200 kids
involved.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Dr. Lemme.

COMMISSIONER PATE: Hi. I'm Rick Pate. I'm
actually Commissioner of Agriculture. I
live in Lowndes County. But I want to
extend a welcome to you to being here at
the Beard Building. Hopefully you found
the restrooms just right outside the
doors. But anything -- there's three or
four of my staff people here. If any of
us can help you in any way while
you're here, just holler at us. Thank
y'all.

I would say while you're here in Montgomery if you're planning on staying or maybe -- I wouldn't leave any vehicles inside the fence after the meeting is over. When everybody has cleared out, we'll lock that gate. And so I'd just ask you if you're going to leave a vehicle here this afternoon, pull it into one of these parking spaces in the front, and then you'll be able to come back later in the day and get it.

I will take a little privilege since you are in your building that my offices are in. But look at the boards that are on the wall. Nobody really understands what we do here. We probably have as much regulatory responsibility as any state agency, and the responsibilities we have are huge. Just take food safety and ag compliance and animal health -- I mean, the Governor and them have done such a great job of tracking industries, but if we get AIDS and influenza or something in our poultry industry, it would be an economic impact that the car industry doesn't even understand.

But from pesticides management to weights and measures. Everybody pretty much knows we regulate the gas pumps to make sure you get a gallon, but most people don't realize we regulate everything weighed and measured in the state of Alabama. So when you're buying bananas at Winn-Dixie, we certify that scale to make sure you're treated fairly.

And, of course, we've got a huge initiative. They put that screen in front of it. But hopefully you will see it this year. We've realized that people want local Alabama products. And so we've initiated a new program called "Sweet Grown Alabama." And we're hoping this year you will be able to go to a farmer's market or go in your grocery store and find that "Sweet Grown Alabama" logo and you'll be assured that the things you're buying are from Slocomb or Sand Mountain and are not from Mexico and they're not from central California, which is probably where they typically come from.

So, anyway, we're excited to have you here. If we can be of help to you in any way, me or my staff, just reach out to us. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Commissioner Pate. And thank you for the loan of the building very, very much. It's a wonderful venue, and we enjoy being here.

Thank you all, gentlemen. Those were great reports. I appreciate it.

Next would be our Commissioner's report. Would you like to come to the podium?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: I'll just do it from here if that's okay with you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, sir.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: I do want to thank Mr. Pate for letting us meet here. This is very convenient for everybody, a lot better parking and getting in and out here than downtown. Thank you, sir, for letting us meet here.

And I want to welcome you on behalf of Governor Kay Ivey to the Conservation Advisory Board Meeting as I'm blessed to be the Commissioner of the Department of Conservation and thankful almost every day to get to work with a great staff to try and do the right thing by the resources and the sportsmen and citizens of Alabama.

I'd like to think after hearing the reports of the quietness of everybody's district -- I think that's a testament to the good work of our staff both on the enforcement side and the biological side and the State Parks and Lands Division, the good work that they do
throughout the year.

I would be remiss if I didn't take
an opportunity while I've got everybody
here to remind them that the census
forms will be coming out. I think you
will get those the week of March 12th
and that you'll start to see a push for
that.

It's imperative that we all
participate in the census for our state.
Some of the rural areas of our state
have traditionally been undercounted,
which if that happens this year, that
may cost us one of our representatives
in Congress as well as several million
dollars that comes to the state through
a lot of the federal programs. So
please take that census seriously.

And make sure you count your kids.
If they're off at college, you count
them. Make sure you count your
children. Even if they don't live with
you, make sure that one of you is
counting all those children. That's
where I think that we leave a lot of
people off of our census in the past.
So that's been a big initiative of the
Governor this year to make sure that
happens.

I will report to the Conservation
Advisory Board that we had our legal
compliance audit this year for the
Conservation Advisory Board and it was
extremely uneventful. There were no
findings, and they got us all in a room
to tell us that there were no findings.
It lasted about two minutes, which was
very good, the way you like to have an
audit. So I thank the staff for that.

This year having the bait license
privilege has made a little bit of the
change throughout the state. I have
received very little negative feedback
on that throughout the season. I think
it's been received well by most of the
people throughout the state. People had
the opportunity if they didn't want to
use -- hunt with the aid of bait, they
didn't have to, and after a little bit
of work within some of the hunting
clubs, I think that that over the next
couple of years will work itself out.

But I think one thing that happened
this year that to me really shows the
value to the economy of Alabama of the
hunting season is I was in Sumter County
on Martin Luther King weekend and shot a
deer on that Sunday afternoon. And I
went to take it to the processor in the
middle of nowhere in Sumter County, and
they had people out there directing
traffic on the road so that people could
get into the processor, you know, in
rural Sumter County. Then you pulled in
and they had one-way signs in the yard
and then around the back of the building
they had several people in there
cleaning deer. Must have been -- must
have been 20 people in line either
dropping off a deer or picking up deer
and people steady coming in the whole
time I was there. I said that -- I took
a couple of pictures just so I could
show people that don't understand what a
value hunting and fishing is to the
economy of our state. So I hope that
you do the same in telling people how
important hunting and fishing is not
only for the quality of life in Alabama
but for the economy of our state.

Our Forever Wild program has
partnered with the Division of Wildlife
and Freshwater Fisheries on several
opportunities over the past year -- the
past several years to provide more
hunting opportunities for people in
Dallas County and then, also, on the Red
Hills Salamander habitat in Monroe
County. Appreciate the work of the
Department and the Forever Wild Board
partnering together to do some good
things for our state.
In our state parks that are managed by the Director of State Parks, Greg Lein, we're implementing a new reservation system that is coming online April 1st for some of the campgrounds and will be fully implemented by October 1st of this year for all of our facilities. I think that that will make it a lot easier for people to camp or stay in the cabins or cottages that are at your state parks.

And I know, Commissioner Pate, you hear a lot about rural broadband and the importance of that in the state. That's important for us as well in our state parks because most of them are located in rural areas in the state. I'm happy to report that over the next couple of months we will have broadband access to all of our state parks in Alabama. I wanted to have that done by the end of 2019, but it was more challenging than we were able to accomplish.

But we will have that done here -- hopefully by the end of next month we'll have all of our state parks with high-speed Internet access, which will be a benefit, too, to some of the other citizens around those parks so that they can tap into that high-speed Internet.

The Lodge at Gulf State Park that opened last year where we had our last Conservation Advisory Board Meeting of 2019 in May has had a productive year and continues to do extremely well, allowing us to put some profits from that back into the other parks and take care of some much needed long-term maintenance and capital improvements there along with other operational income that we're seeing from the people that are staying in our parks, one, because, I think, all of the work that's been done by the staff to make them nicer and to take care of some of the old maintenance backlog, but also with the economy that we have people are having a little bit of opportunity to have some more money to spend on leisure and they're spending that in our state parks.

And if you have not been to a state park in a while, I hope that you'll go either camp or stay in one of the cabins or cottages or chalets and spend some time in your state parks.

As was mentioned earlier with the oyster season, the oyster season this year was longer than it has been in several, several years, and we've harvested more oysters this year than we did if you combined the last five years. The industry and the resource is not back to where we want it to be, but it's headed in the right direction. And I appreciate the work of the Marine Resources Division and the Good Lord for making the conditions right to see those oysters start to come back and grow in our waters.

This year was the last year of the exempted fishing permit for red snapper which allowed us to have a season last year that was over 40 days. That exempted fishing permit and the state management of red snapper was made permanent beginning this year. So we'll be managing that fishery from now on for the recreational side and thanks to the good work of a lot of people in Congress and Senator Shelby, Congressman Byrne particularly, and then a lot of work that's been done on the research side by our staff, the University of South Alabama, and Auburn University, that's allowed the state to be able to manage that fishery. And I think that is going to be long-term one of the biggest successes that you'll see in conservation in our state in a long time is the opportunity for people to access and get out and catch those red snapper.
on our artificial reefs.

And we're still seeing diminished catch on flounder. I was in Washington this past week talking with senators and representatives up there with people from all of the five Gulf states. They're all seeing the same low recruitment and low amount of flounder. And so we are working to try and find the cause of that and what we can do to combat that to try and get the flounder fishery back to where we want it to be.

And part of that is we're now raising flounder in our Claude Peteet Mariculture Center in Gulf Shores, and we'll be restocking flounder beginning this year.

And if you follow the Marine Resources Division Facebook page, you can see the progress of how that's going. I think every week they're posting pictures or -- start out under a microscope and now they're big enough you can see them in the tanks -- about how that project is going.

So again on the oyster season, oysters are very important to the state of Alabama. It's a source of income for our folks and it's a way of life for the people of south Alabama. Our staff worked very hard to develop some harvest goals for this year based on our surveys, and we had a target of 7,000 sacks to be harvested. And then based on the efforts of the oyster catchers, they discovered some areas that we had not surveyed. And we were able to go back and resurvey those and reopen some areas, and we actually harvested about 40 percent more. So we closed the season at about 11,000 sacks. That's about a million pounds of raw product.

Again, that's fair in the big scheme of things. We feel like we're turning a corner. I think next year is going to be a better year. I'm very optimistic. Unfortunately, our states to the west -- Mississippi, they lost all their product together -- if I miss somebody --

Tracye, Wanda, Kristen, Chief Weathers and your officers for being here, of course, the Honor Guard. Good-looking young men in great new uniforms. Very proud of that. So thank you.

Don't forget our Special Opportunity Areas. The Department is working to create those every day in concert with, as the Commissioner said, Forever Wild and with the foundation. So those are great opportunities -- and as well the mentored hunting program -- to bring somebody into hunting.

With that, let's step into the Directors' reports. I think we have two today. You want to go first?

Scott Bannon. Colonel Bannon.

DIRECTOR BANNON: All right. Good morning, everyone. It will be a fairly quick report. The Commissioner handled most of it for me, so that worked out good, the good news.
due to the high water events of last year, and Louisiana lost a large portion of theirs. So there was very high demand for Alabama oysters. There's always high demand for Alabama oysters, and the price was at record highs this year. So our catchers were able to make a little bit of money, and we hope that's better for next year.

We had 110 boats, I think, was the most number of boats we had out on the reef, and we haven't had that in ten years.

The flounder and trout changes that were passed last year through the Advisory Board, we've received some very favorable comments. We've been through a season where people utilized the new slot limit and the reduced bag limit. And generally whenever you make a reduction or a change you get a lot of negative feedback. Overwhelmingly we've received some positive comments. So thank you guys for doing that.

To back up real quick about the oysters and some other fisheries, because of the freshwater events of last year, as you guys have seen this year, a lot of high water. The Mississippi system was very high. And they opened the Bonnet Carre spillway, and that caused the damage in the other two states. And then our watershed is slightly differently, but, again, we had some freshwater intrusion that caused some damage to the saltwater areas. So it impacted our shrimp and our crabs. And our oysters came out fair through that. We didn't get enough to destroy them like it did in the other states. But we're a large processor state. So most of our processors in the Bayou La Batre and Bon Secour areas bring product from those states that didn't have product. So we had a large economic impact. It totaled about $129 million in the time period that we calculated. And, of course, the damage continues to go on. So we've submitted to NOAA Fisheries a claim for $129 million, and there was $165 million available for the entire country. The Gulf Coast had about half-a-billion dollars in damage.

So we have not received any monetary announcements yet. We were in DC this week and having some conversations with them. We hope that comes in the future, but it will be pennies on the dollar.

Quick mention of the hatchery. We have three species there. Florida pompano we've been doing since 2017, and we released about 8,000 juveniles into the system this year.

Flounder is in its first full year of production. We had our first spawn. It takes them about a year or so to acclimate to the tanks. We were able to use some federal funds along with some donations from the Coastal Conservation Association of Alabama to get the correct equipment and to establish this. And we had our charter fishermen and our recreational anglers who helped catch the stock to put into those tanks. It was a great combination of a public-private partnership, so to speak, where the public provided the flounder to put in the tanks. We issued permits so they could catch some undersize ones, which the males are generally small.

And so we look forward in a couple of weeks to having the release of those, and we'll get David to do an article. And, like I said, follow our Facebook page. The pictures have been great to watch those baby flounder and their eyes move from both sides of their head to one side of their head. They're an interesting creature.

Spotted seatrout is the third species that we've just started. Again, the public has provided the stock for
that. It’s more cost-efficient for us
to let the public go catch the fish
instead of my staff going and catching
the fish and probably a little better
optics too. So we’ve been very
appreciative of that.

That Claude Peteet Mariculture
Center has been there since about the
’70s, and we had a drain line that has
been there since the ’70s. So this year
we were able to replace it so that we
could -- hopefully we’ll get another 40
or 50 years out of that drain line so
that we can continue operations.

License sales this year have been
pretty steady for us. I know in some
parts of the conservation world it’s
been in a little bit of a decline. In
the saltwater fishing it’s been pretty
good.

Last year we passed the Gulf Reef
Fish Endorsement which helps us to
identify the people participating in
reef-fish fishing. And that went on
sale in August of this year, and that
applies to private anglers, commercial
party boats or charter boats, and
commercial anglers as well. And the
sales in that have been pretty fair. So
we’re hoping to utilize that along with
Snapper Check this year to have a little
bit of a -- a better definition of the
number of people that are truly
participating in the reef-fish fishery
off the state of Alabama.

And we’re working on doing some
surveying offshore to expand our
artificial reef zone by about 110 square
miles, and by then -- I don’t remember
what the total number of square miles
will be, but it’ll be a bunch. That’s
my official term. So we’re very excited
about that. The surveying should start
here in the next few weeks.

Snapper Check, last year we had the
best reporting rate we had had in -- in
the history. It was about 51 percent
for the private angler, and in the
reporting world that’s a pretty good
number. Scott’s goal is 100, so I’m
going to stick with that.

But it did help us to manage that
season. As Mr. Cagle said, we made two
additional seasons based on the weather.
Last year the weather got us pretty good
on a few weekends, so it reduced the
effort. And so we opened two different
occasions, and that shows that the State
of Alabama can be very responsible in
managing that fishery.

So for this year we got a little bit
of boost in the number of pounds that we
can catch, and it’s about a day or two’s
worth in the grand scheme of things.
Alabama has 3 percent of the coastline,
and we get 26.2 percent of the fish out
of the Gulf of Mexico. So it’s a pretty
good deal across the -- when you look at
it from a Gulf perspective.

So we’re going to open a season this
year -- the announcement will go out
Monday, the official press release, but
I want to tell you guys today that we
are going to open to the private angler
red snapper season on Friday, May 22nd,
which is the Friday of Memorial Day
weekend, and we’re going to run through
Sunday, July the 19th. So that’s a
35-day season.

And we’re going to run it a little
bit different this year. We’re going to
do four-day weekends. We’ve done
three-day weekends, Friday, Saturday,
Sunday. We’re going to add Mondays.
And that’s at the request of the public.
Especially local people in the south
part of the state would like to avoid
the chaos of the weekend fishery and let
the visitors participate in that, and if
their schedule allows and the weather is
going to cooperate, they’ll go on Monday
and let other people have an opportunity
and not have to deal with quite as much
activity. And that helps spread the
pressure.

So Mondays are kind of a new thing
for us. So we’re shooting for that
35-day season. There’s always a chance
that we could close a little early if
the weather is perfect and the effort is
extremely high, but we feel pretty
confident we’ll get through that
weekend. And then if there’s any
additional days, we will consider
something such as the amberjack season
in August or Labor Day weekend. And
last year we got all the way to the one
weekend in October, which was fairly
successful, but that really only applies
to local anglers to get to take
advantage of that.

So, again, Friday, May 22nd, through
Sunday, July 19th. 35 days. Friday,
Saturday, Sunday, Monday. So it opens
12:01 a.m. on Friday, so if you’re an
early riser or you like to stay up late,
and it’ll close at midnight on Mondays.
With the Gulf Reef Fish Endorsement
it allows our enforcement guys to have a
little more role in ensuring the
compliance that will also lead to the
compliance in the Snapper Check.

And one last item on the Snapper
Check is we did not allow for anglers to
catch red snapper from the shoreline,
which historically has not happened, and
we did not allow for anglers to catch
red snapper via kayak or unpowered
vessels. Now with Alabama’s expansion
of the reef zone right up to the
shoreline -- we have some reefs that are
within 800 feet of the shore -- you can
and will and they do catch red snapper
on the beach.

So we’re using the Conservation ID.
This year our staff along with Alabama
Interactive is putting that into place
hopefully for the start of the season so
that a kayaker or someone fishing from
the beach can report through Snapper
Check using their Conservation ID. We
just did not give them the opportunity
to do that before. And when you see the
Facebook pictures of somebody with the
condos in the background, you’re like
good job catching those fish, but we did
not give you the opportunity to report
and we want to do that.

So that concludes my report. If I
can answer any questions --

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any questions from the Board?
Mr. Hartzog.

MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman.

One species you didn’t -- Mr. Avery
at the last meeting expressed concern
over the flounder and over the oysters
but also over the crabs, and you didn’t
have any comments as to the crabs as to
what’s the status of their --

DIRECTOR BANNON: Sure. So I don’t have the
numbers on the -- we were actually just
looking at flounder on the way up here,
the harvest efforts of flounder.
Flounder are an up-and-down species
throughout the last few years, so it’s a
little hard. I did not look at the

So crabs have the ability to push
away from that freshwater intrusion. So
what we saw in some areas was an
increase in harvest and in other areas a
decrease. Mississippi crabs kind of
push towards the Alabama line, and then
the Bay crabs push down towards the
lower end of Mobile Bay.

So it’s a little bit of a quirky
year with the incredible high water that
we had this year, the freshwater

consistent number of crab catchers, and
so I will -- for the next meeting I’ll
make sure we pull the harvest reports
and give you some totals compared to the
last couple of years.

MR. HARTZOG: Okay. You know, Mr. Avery
brought up those three species and in
your report you didn't mention them,
so ...

DIRECTOR BANNON: And, like I said, we did
look at the flounder numbers. I was
remiss and did not look at the crab
numbers.

MR. HARTZOG: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any other questions for
Colonel Bannon?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Would you like to
talk about your oyster season
regulation --

DIRECTOR BANNON: Yeah, the changes. I
probably should do that.

So the two regulations that we
presented before the Board today, the
first one has to do with oystering.

We've been able -- last year we didn't
open at all. The year before it was 138
sacks. Before that it was only a few
thousand sacks.

When we were going to open this
year, I made the comment -- I said the
average age of an oyster catcher is
going to be 55. Probably wasn't that
far off. One of the discussions in the
seafood business is trying to get young
people interested in becoming commercial
fishermen. And, again, it's been a way
of life here in Alabama, and there are
some changes that have made that
difficult.

For the oystering, the way the rules
are set up it's a Monday through Friday
harvest. And I was there on a holiday,
and there were three kids that went
oystering with their parents. Two of
them said I kind of like this and
wouldn't mind doing it, and one of them
said I hate this, I'd rather be in
school. Both of those are good answers.

One learned this is not for me, and the
other two said, you know what, I would
like to do this. And we realized that
we did not give them the opportunity
because we are only open Monday through
Friday.

And actually someone from industry
brought it up as well. They said,
Scott, you're going to be mad at me
because I want to do something. I said,
well, I'm not going to be mad. I may
not agree. And he said I think we
should open on Saturdays to allow young
people to go oystering. And I said,
well, you're in luck. I'm not mad. I'm
excited because I think that we should
do that.

So that's the purpose of opening on
select Saturdays is to allow young
people who are in school the opportunity
to commercially harvest oysters. They
could buy a commercial harvester
license. They could make their own
money. It's hard work. And some of
them want to do it, and so we want to
provide that opportunity.

We will do select Saturdays because
there is a little bit of a concern with
the -- we'll have to coordinate with the
dealers. So we couldn't do it every
weekend because it's not cost-effective
for the dealers to be open for that all
the time. So we will work with the
industry to decide how many Saturdays
and what that would look like. But the
regulation did not allow for it. So
that's the purpose for that regulation.

The other regulation that we've
presented to you was to our Snapper
Check regulation, so to speak. We
wanted to make the change to make the
Conservation ID a requirement for an
angler who's fishing from the shore or
from an unpowered vessel where we didn't
give them the opportunity.

In addition, we would like to add
amberjack and triggerfish as two
mandatory species under Snapper Check.
And, again, that seems like more
regulation, things to that effect, but
we want to do this for the fishermen’s
benefit. Snapper Check we feel has
proven that real-time data and data by
our folks off our coast is important to
make change. That was part of the
process that allowed us to get to this
state management where the states now
manage red snapper.
Amberjack and triggerfish are two
species that are very valuable to the
private anglers of the state of Alabama.
And we disagree a little bit with some
of the data that is collected from the
federal government, and the best way to
dispute it is to get your own good data.
And we have through the Sea Lab. We
have some other survey type things. And
then we would like to do the reporting
to show what Alabama anglers are really
bringing in.

The survey system that the federal
government uses showed that we fished a
million pounds of red snapper last year,
which was what we were allocated. We
finished the season with 16,000 pounds
left, which is about half of a Sunday
fishing in Alabama. So we felt like we
did a pretty good job with that. The
federal government says we fished 5
million pounds. We can’t physically
fish that many pounds. We don’t have
that number -- the number of trips they
said we made, we don’t have the ability
to fish that many trips.
So that’s why we want to add
triggerfish and amberjack, two crucial
species for us in Alabama, to the
mandatory reporting. That would begin
in January of ’21. We wouldn’t
implement it this season. You know, it
has to go through the Board here. But
then we would start in January of ’21.

And we would advertise and explain to
people, look, the reason why we would
want to do that. And for people that
are engaged in that fishery, they
realize that this data is very valuable
to what they do.
And I think now -- we also want to
remove the paper tickets. If you’re
reporting through Snapper Check, there
are some select boat ramps where you can
fill out a paper ticket to report your
catch. It’s about 7 percent of the
landings. And it’s a little bit clunky
for us. It doesn’t contribute to the
real-time data. We have to go collect
that. It’s a cost that we feel like we
could do away with. With the access of
smart phones there are very, very, very
few people that go on a fishing trip
where there is not a smartphone on the
boat to be able to report. Reporting
takes less than 30 seconds.

There are -- I can name a fisherman
who has a flip phone, but his family has
a smartphone. So he can call his family
member and say please report my fish.
So there is access to it.
Reducing the administrative and
financial burden of paper tickets for
next year we think would be a benefit.
And most people who reported by paper
could have reported by smartphone, and
that’s a much better -- a lot of them
have handwriting like I do, and we run
into a lot of administrative errors
trying to enter that data.

Sorry for the addendum there. Thank
you, Commissioner.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any questions from the Board
of Colonel Bannon?
(No response.)
CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

Next we will hear from Director
Sykes. As he is cueing up, I want to
take just two seconds more to thank the
folks who work with our legislature
here, not just the Commissioner or the Directors, but, of course, Deputy Commissioner Poolos and legal staff with Jennifer, Charlanna, and those that aren't here today. So thank y'all very much for what you do.

DIRECTOR SYKES: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I am really glad that you let Colonel Bannon speak ahead of me. It kind of sets up one of the points I want to make.

Commissioner said it. You said it. Mr. Cagle said it. And Colonel Bannon said it: That Snapper Check has been the reason why things have been so successful. I think the success of that by participants has been because the federal government has been involved and they think our staff can do better than the feds.

Well, since I don't think we have a fear of the feds coming in and taking charge of our deer and turkey numbers, I don't think that hunters are going to respond to Game Check like they did Snapper Check. And since we have advertised in magazines, TV, radio, our Digest, begged and pleaded for people to actually report, we're kind of at the end of our rope. We don't really know what is the next step to try to increase participation.

So in meeting with my staff and the Commissioner's office, we figured that this was the next best thing is for 2021 we're just going to close turkey season in the hopes that people will understand how important Game Check is. We only had less than 11,000 turkeys reported last year. I don't think anybody on this board -- Raymond and Ben probably know enough people that got 10 percent of that.

We need people to understand how important those numbers are. If our turkey numbers are actually that low, we're in a mess. Now, we don't think they're that low, but this is the information that we have to go on.

And before the Commissioner has a stroke, we're just picking with this slide. But I wanted to get everybody's attention, and Scott set it up beautifully. We need people to report. You can breathe now, Dr. Lemme. We're not going to make the phones ring off the hook.

All right. On a serious note, the Chairman wanted me to bring up something that -- every hunting accident in the state comes across my desk. I didn't realize how bad it was until I got there. My crew that I hunted with growing up and through my career had always been pretty safe. We grew up doing it. We respected the issues. But unfortunately there's a lot that don't.

Hunting accidents in 2018 and 2019, we had 20 total, 14 non-fatal and six fatal, with the vast majority of those being tree stand accidents, 12 non-fatal and three fatal. And we did a little bit better this year. Hunting accidents for this season were down two with 15 non-fatal and three fatal. Firearms, we had no fatalities. We had only had five non-fatal. Tree stand numbers were down a little bit.

But some of the common denominators were -- it's not what you would think. It's not typically younger hunters or inexperienced hunters that are having these problems. The majority of the hunters who fall out of tree stands and are killed or injured are anywhere from their late 30s to their 60s. They've been hunting forever. The majority of them have not taken a hunter education course because they were grandfathered in and they get complacent. The majority of the firearms incidents are the same, and most of them were...
self-inflicted. Just taking things for
granted and being complacent.

The really bad thing about the tree
stand accidents is 95 percent of them
are completely preventable. If people
will wear a safety harness and wear a
Lifeline and be connected from the time
they leave the ground till the time they
get back on the ground, 95 percent or
better of our tree stand accidents would
be eliminated.

We did have something pop up this
year that was a little unusual is we
actually had three people die in tree
stand accidents this year from permanent
shooting blinds. So every year -- yeah.
It's kind of perplexing, which is why I
put that picture there.

This was a portable homemade blind
that was made out of scaffolding and tin
put on a trailer and was ratcheted
together with ratchet straps. Every
year we've been telling people check
your portable stands, check your
lock-ons, check your ladder stands, but
apparently now we need to start telling
people check your shooting houses, check
your permanent box stands.

We had one gentleman fall through
leaning out of the front window to trim
a branch that had grown in front. The
whole side collapsed. So a lot of these
are prevented -- we can prevent them
from happening if people will just take
a little bit of time to do some small
things before the season comes in.

The biggest change that we have got
for this year is we added two new deer
zones. We've been looking at this for
over a decade with our fetal
collections. When we started out, we
just had a Zone A and B with B going
into February. We adjusted that. So
now we have Zone D, which is mainly
around Winston County, which has an
earlier rut based on all of our
information than the surrounding areas,
and we have a Zone E, or affectionately
known as Zone J, in Cleburne County and
then down around Russell County.

The data is there. The science is there. We've been telling hunters that,
yes, we know you're right. Your deer
rut earlier. It just takes a while to
get lines drawn and get the maps done
and make sure that not only can the
hunters enjoy it, but we can enforce it,
that everybody understands what's going
on.

I'm not going to go through all of
the dates because it is -- you can see
from that it's fairly elaborate, the new
maps. David Rainer has stuck a mic in
front of me here, so I am betting that
probably next Wednesday afternoon there
will be an article out on the
proceedings from the Advisory Board
where David will have all of these maps
with their dates.

The main thing people need to
understand is that in Zone D and E gun
season will come in a couple of weeks
early and will go out a couple of weeks
early. You're not getting additional
time. You have asked to be moved to the
earlier spot because of the rut. You
get a little in the front. You lose a
little bit in the rear. So David will
have all of that next week. It will be
out. It will be online and in the
newspapers.

Several of the Board members
mentioned our CWD stakeholder meetings
that we had throughout the state. I
want to thank our staff, especially Amy
and Michael East, for organizing all of
these. I want to thank Commissioner
Pate for his staff participating with
Dr. Frazier and some of the other vets
that were there at all of them.

As of today -- I want to hit that
last bullet point -- we do not have CWD
in the state of Alabama. We've
currently tested this season over 1500
deer, which exceeds our sample goal.
However, we still have a couple of areas
that we're not quite satisfied, that
we're going to test an additional 2- or
300 before next gun season.

We've been trying to work with as
many processors, taxidermists, hunting
clubs. We're even working with DOT.
They're letting us know road kills. But
we also put out 53 self-service check
stations, which are freezers, scattered
throughout the state. Unfortunately,
you could house ice cream in most of
them right now because nobody used them.

We had several hundred that were
dropped off, but that's not enough. We
need participation from the hunters to
help us maintain our status of CWD free.
People can go online to
OutdoorAlabama.com to see all of the
freezer locations. All of our district
offices are equipped to take samples.

And unlike years past, we have a
good relationship with our Department of
Ag and Industries with our sampling and
our testing. Now we can get samples
collected, sent to Auburn, and back
sometimes within a couple of days,
90 percent of the time within a week to
ten days. So if hunters drop a deer
off, we can have their results back to
them quickly. And, again, all they need
to do is go to
OutdoorAlabama.com/CWD-sampling-results
and they can find all of that.

I was on a text thread with Chief
Gauldin and Mr. Cagle yesterday or day
before yesterday on a deer just north of
the line that someone had sent him a
video of that was exhibiting some
strange behaviors. That's one thing
that we need from people. If they see a
deer that is acting strange -- let me go
ahead and say this: You cannot look at

a deer and tell that it has CWD. So if
somebody tells you they saw a deer on
the side of the road with CWD, they're
lying. You cannot do that unless we
take a sample, send it to Auburn, and
have it tested.

However, if you see something, you
can contact us. We have 24 hours
somebody sitting by the phone, or you
can go online and report it.

Mr. Chairman, that's all I have.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

Are there any questions from the
Board for Director Sykes?

MR. RAYMOND JONES: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Jones.

MR. RAYMOND JONES: On your CWD map you had
two different colors, a green and kind
of a beige color. What was the
difference?

DIRECTOR SYKES: It's basically an assessment
of risk of where we think it may -- so
northwest Alabama, with Tennessee being
positive, Mississippi being positive,
some of those counties down through
there we're trying to take a higher
number of samples just because common
sense tells you that may be where it's
going to come from.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any other questions?

MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Hartzog.

MR. HARTZOG: Chuck, just out of curiosity,
what was the dollar amount raised by the
new permit for corn?

DIRECTOR SYKES: I think it was $10.75.
I don't know the exact number. It
was around -- it was a couple of million
dollars.

MR. HARTZOG: Is that available for PR match?

DIRECTOR SYKES: Absolutely.

MR. HARTZOG: Good.

DIRECTOR SYKES: The part of it that does not
go to law enforcement. It's a
complicated, convoluted formula, but,
yes, the part that does not go to law
enforcement is available for match, absolutely.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any more questions for --

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: I do want to clarify one thing Chuck said. We have had a good relationship with the Department of Ag and Industries. They just didn't have the equipment for us to be able to do the sampling and get those results back to us as quickly.

DIRECTOR SYKES: That's right.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: And so now that we've worked together and they have the sampling equipment, we're able to get that turned around very -- quicker now than having to send it off to other states.

DIRECTOR SYKES: Absolutely.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Stimpson.

MR. STIMPSON: Chuck, I wanted to let you know that I posted a picture of that slide that you had on closing turkey season to Instagram through a cell phone. You've already had 5,000 hits.

DIRECTOR SYKES: I sort of figured it would.

That's why we did it.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any other questions?

MR. CAGLE: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Cagle.

MR. CAGLE: Can you give us an update on where license sales stand and kind of how we compare to other years?

DIRECTOR SYKES: Yeah, I can. And I might as well while I'm here. I'll go ahead and do this. Scott took the liberty of going a little extra, so I will too.

Grady, I do know exactly how many we sold, and I guess it needs to be in the record.

Last year we sold 146,828 all game hunting licenses. This year we sold 151,286. So that was an increase of 4,458.

MR. HARTZOG: Good.

DIRECTOR SYKES: So our license sales went up this year. Small game went up.

Resident baiting privileges, do you think we sold more or less than annual hunting licenses?

MR. STIMPSON: More.

DIRECTOR SYKES: 7,011 more. Sold 158,297. This was as of Monday.

Our non-resident licenses are still up. Non-resident bait privileges were around 17,000.

But one thing I do want to get in the minutes, this isn't the full story. People don't ask all of the right questions. Yes, we sold more licenses and that baiting privilege did bring us in another couple of million dollars, and unfortunately that's where a lot of people let it go. If they would bother to ask another question or listen a little better, this was the first year in the past four that Fred and I have not had to cut the budget from our Law Enforcement, Wildlife and Fisheries Division, for budget downfalls.

So we weren't flush and all of a sudden we're in high cotton with the baiting license. All that did was allow Chief Weathers to buy a couple of trucks this year rather than not, where officers that are in a 200,000 mile truck can now have a decent truck to go check for compliance.

So I don't want people to think that just because that baiting license passed that we're great because we're not. It just allowed us not to have to cut budgets this year.

MR. STIMPSON: Do you think the baiting changed your harvest numbers any?

DIRECTOR SYKES: And it may have been you that said in your report that deer seem to be more nocturnal. That's been proven in state after state after state. We're getting reports from some people it was the greatest season they ever had. Others think it's the worst thing that ever happened. It's all in
how you use it and is a personal preference.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Cagle.

MR. CAGLE: Mr. Chairman, I want to ask one more follow-up question.

So we sold 151,000 all game hunting licenses. Do you think we have more than 151,000 hunters?

DIRECTOR SYKES: Oh, absolutely. That's another thing that we ran this year. With that baiting privilege it had no exemptions. So we had 27,000 people that bought a baiting license that did not have a hunting license. So that is private landowners on their own property, under 16, over 65. So for the first time in the history of Alabama we can count them now as hunters. That gives us a bigger portion of the PR dollars that's set aside for Alabama.

Whether it's good, bad, whether you agree with it or not, it did have some positive impacts to our budget, and,

more importantly, the legislature gave us the authority to manage baiting and feeding of wildlife in the event of a disease. So philosophy aside, ethics aside, whether you like it or not, in my opinion the Department is better off today than it was before it passed.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any other questions from the Board?

(No response.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Director Sykes, thank you very much. Appreciate it. Appreciate it very, very much.

MR. HARTZOG: Thank you, Chuck.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: The next portion of our meeting today will be public comments, which is very important to what we do. We appreciate everybody being here.

You have three minutes at the podium. We call your name. Your three minutes start when you get there. I ask you -- we only have eight speakers unless somebody else has signed up. So I'm going to ask the participants and our folks here visiting with us today to be respectful, reserve your comments, please, inside this hall. No applause and no outbursts.

And so let's move on with the first one. Ms. Jones is going to hold time with the three minutes, and we'll reserve the right to give you a few extra moments to finalize your statement.

So with that, our first speaker today -- is there anything else that I've left out that you want to know?

You're going to have to speak into -- if you talk softly -- I don't. But if you talk softly, speak into the microphone and get close to it or we can't hear you.

So our first speaker today is Mr. Randy Campbell.

MR. CAMPBELL: Good morning, gentlemen. Appreciate the time. My name is Randy Campbell, and I live in Alpine, Tennessee. And for the past -- and I have for the past 22 years. Before that I lived in the state of Florida. I have been in the rattlesnake business for 33 years, and I've been picking up dead rattlesnakes in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia since I began. I am here because about a year ago required permits to deal with rattlesnakes in Alabama was enacted. I applied for these requests for the permit, and I was denied three times.

Gentlemen, let me explain my business. I pick up dead rattlesnakes from the mom-and-pop stores in rural areas like you were talking about earlier. They pay a couple of dollars a foot for a rattlesnake to the public, and I double that money to the mom-and-pop stores.

I spend tens of thousands of dollars on rattlesnakes in the state of Alabama,
Florida, and Georgia every year. The money people get for turning in a dead snake instead of letting it rot buys them milk -- a couple gallons of milk, a little bit of gas. The country store receives 200 to $500 a month, and on a little country store that's a lot of money.

The snakes that I collect are from natural kills, run over by a car, tractor, farm equipment, encountered by farmers, somebody in their yard, somewhere on the farm that would actually throw that snake away, and I turn it into a natural resource. I tan rattlesnake hides, canebrakes, western diamondbacks, and I furnish them to the boot companies.

If you ever see a rattlesnake boot in a western store, it came from us, a family business, my son and myself. I pick up just a tiny fraction of the naturally killed snakes in Alabama. I also pick up snakes in Florida which no longer requires a permit. And Georgia requires a permit, and I give them a report every month -- every year.

According to my rattlesnakes -- the rattlesnake is thriving in Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. The report that I have given you took months to compile and will show you the number of rattlesnakes actually in the hundreds of thousands are healthy and abundant.

If you'll turn to page 13, you'll see ten pickup sites, and at the bottom you'll see how many snakes that I buy per year. And those numbers fluctuate very little.

Gentlemen, I want to comply with the law, have done due diligence just to do that, and I have been denied a permit. I stand before you today --

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Hold your position.

Any questions for Mr. Campbell?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Mr. Campbell, I would like to ask you to speak with Amy Silvano while you're here today.

Before you leave today, Amy, will you please talk with him. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Campbell.

Gentlemen, I want to comply with the law, have done due diligence just to do that, and I have been denied a permit. I stand before you today --

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Campbell.

Any questions for Mr. Campbell?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Mr. Campbell, I would like to ask you to speak with Amy Silvano while you're here today.

Before you leave today, Amy, will you please talk with him. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Campbell.

Mr. Jackson?

MR. JACKSON: I'm Brandon Jackson. I own Riverside Fly Shop and have since 2005.

I appreciate the Board for all that you do and the Department for all that they do. Congratulations on that award. That's pretty awesome. Appreciate our enforcement officers.

Officer Jonathan does a lot of work on the river where we're at. We own the shop on the river below Smith Lake on the Sipsey Fork, and he does a great job. It's not often you find a guy who can write somebody a ticket and they walk away smiling afterwards, but that seems to be the case with him often on our river.

I have two things that I'd like to express. I'm part of Trout Unlimited, and that's a group that has a national organization but also has a chapter in Alabama. And recently that chapter, the state chapter, raised over 10,000 -- around $10,000 for a feasibility study.

We are contracting with Chris Metcalfe. He was the person responsible for the work that Alabama Power did on the Sipsey Fork in improving it and making it more accessible and a better fishery. And he's going to do a feasibility study to see how much it would cost, whether it is feasible or not feasible, to implement the same patterns for a lower section of the river.
Only a very small section was done originally through the work that Alabama Power did, and we're using those funds to help look at the possibility of improving larger sections of the stream. That would make it match more closely to other states that have improved areas of their streams bringing in more revenue, more anglers, and more opportunities, and that's what we would like to see. How we see that being used is to provide greater opportunities to more people.

In order to raise that money, this local chapter, the Sipsey chapter of Trout Unlimited, was one of the first tailraces ever to be granted money through the national organization of Trout Unlimited. So the national organization sees the potential of this stream. But it was also one of the largest number of unique donors to any of their fundraisers. So within that section we had more people interested in our stream in Alabama than in any of the other streams that were in that drive nationally.

The second thing is I've been able to secure funding for two stockings of brook trout per year. In previous meetings with the Board we've talked about the possibility of brook trout, and that was -- that was a favorable opinion. We've talked about brown trout, not so favorable --

MR. JACKSON: Brown trout would be my choice, but we've been denied that on several occasions. But the brook trout was more favorable. It seems from my understanding -- I'm not a fisheries biologist, but my understanding is that they typically stay closer to the dam and therefore would be less likely -- because they like colder waters -- less likely to go into areas that might adversely impact other fish or other areas of the fishery.

MR. HARTZOG: Okay.

MR. JACKSON: But the area that we're looking to improve is from the bridge up. So we're still only looking at about 3 miles downstream from the dam. If there is much of a temperature change, it would be minute at that point.

MR. HARTZOG: Okay.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any other questions?

MR. CAGLE: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Cagle.

MR. CAGLE: And I think my comments are mostly directed at the Department.

I appreciate all the effort and resources the Department has invested in this great fishery. The research that Auburn did was great. It's a very significant investment to do that. The Department has worked well to make this great fishery what it is working alongside private companies that have an interest in it and have been supportive.

MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Brandon, one question.

MR. JACKSON: Yes, sir.

MR. HARTZOG: Since the brown trout has a higher temperature tolerance than the brook trout, why are you looking -- because the further you go downstream trying to enhance that habitat the warmer the water gets, and if the brown trout is more tolerable to higher temperature, why is the brook trout the species of choice instead of the brown trout?
And it's a very unique resource. We're very blessed to have it. Appreciate y'all's efforts and just continuing to look at ways to make it better recognizing that, you know, the improvements to get us this far were easy. It gets a lot harder to make something that's good a little bit better because you've already picked the low-hanging fruit. But appreciate y'all's efforts in continuing to work with the resource users of that to see what's possible and look at each step with U.S. Fish and Wildlife. So just appreciate what y'all have done. It's a great resource that we all -- that everyone in the state gets to enjoy. And, you know, I think it's great that we have an opportunity to look for ways to make it even a little bit better if it works within the biology and all the other constraints. So thank y'all for your efforts.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any additional questions? (No response.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Brandon. Well done.

Our next speaker today is Mr. David Miller.

MR. MILLER: Good morning, gentlemen. Thank you for the opportunity to address the Board today.

My issue has to do with landowner safety. I own land in Bullock County, and I have for the past 27 years. My issue today is the placement of these deer stands from adjoining landowners for their leases with the deer stands only a few feet away from our property line. And they will face our property. Now, my place is not big. You see the diagram there on the packet that you have there. And on that diagram it shows the position of each of these deer stands. And over the years it has evolved to a commercial-type hunting operation, either pay to hunt by the day or pay a lease. Either way this situation is very dangerous.

My family and I and my guests have been out on our horses running our bird dogs, jumping deer or a wounded deer, and before that thing gets off the property these deer hunters are shooting at the deer on our place. They're not waiting for it to cross the line.

So what I'm asking you to do is to provide me some protection and my guests and my family, have these deer stands limited to the distance from the property line, also the direction that they face, that they do not face the adjoining property.

I'm not the only one that has this problem. I have fellow landowners in Bullock County that are in the cattle business. Same problem.

I'm a hunter. I'm not against hunting. I mean, I actually have one of the first lifetime hunting licenses ever issued by the State of Alabama. So I've hunted all my life and so have my children.

Now, this has far-reaching consequences. In 2019 the Youth Division of the Alabama Field Trial Association contacted me about having a Youth Field Trial on our property. When the directors came out to inspect the property and set up the course, they saw these deer stands along the perimeter facing our land, and they said no way, the safety concern is way too high.

So I'm asking y'all for protection. I don't know of any rule in the fish and game laws -- now, some of the larger land companies -- the timber companies require their deer hunters to maintain 50 yards from the property lines.

Thank you so much for your attention.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Hold your place.
Any questions from the Board?

Mr. Jones.

MR. RAYMOND JONES: This is more directed at some of the staff.
How do other states handle this, or do they?

CHIEF WEATHERS: It's a patchwork quilt, like everything. There are states that do have a distance from a property line regulation. Alabama does not unless there's a dwelling on the other side of the line.

MR. RAYMOND JONES: Is that legislative or regulatory here?

CHIEF WEATHERS: Here it would be regulatory. Most likely it would be regulation from the Commissioner.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Just from the Chair, we've dealt with this before. We've had some -- we've had end resource users come to us before about this, and it is a sticky wicket.

Director Sykes, any comments about this?

DIRECTOR SYKES: I'll defer to Chief Weathers.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Do we get more complaints, Chief?

CHIEF WEATHERS: I'll talk over here where we can hear.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Please. Do you mind sharing with him, Mr. Miller?

MR. WEATHERS: We have, you know, pretty common complaints about the practice about putting a tree stand on a property line facing a property line. The only regulation we have that covers that is our 100 yard rule, and that's when there is a dwelling on the other side of the property line. And that does not -- it doesn't take effect if the person who places that stand is the landowner. So it would be someone who leases the land.

Now, we have a regulation they cannot -- you know, they, of course, can't fire and strike a dwelling. They can't fire across the property line. If

Mr. Miller has a neighboring hunter who fires at a deer on his property, whether you strike the deer or not, if he witnesses that, our officers can assist. We can get warrants so we can prosecute that person. They can't fire onto his property without a permit written by him to do so.

So we have some regulation. We have some law in place that would assist that but nothing that addresses the distance that a stand has to be from a line unless there's a dwelling.

MR. MILLER: What about the direction the stand faces?

CHIEF WEATHERS: It's not mentioned.

MR. MILLER: I mean, even in the packet there we have a picture of one of these shooting houses that is perpendicular to our property line not 20 yards off the line. And they have mowed lanes toward our land, and the only reason they do that is to shoot in our direction. Our horses are there. Our dogs are there.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Miller. It's indicated in the picture, and we've heard and we understand. We do understand. And we will speak as a group. This is something that we will take under advisement and give some consideration to. And I have your cell phone number here, and we'll talk.

MR. MILLER: Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

Any other questions?

MR. HARTZOG: Well, Mr. Chairman, I was just going to ask if Chief Weathers could actually possibly have his wardens in Bullock County to work -- you know, when Mr. Miller sees somebody in those stands and he knows somebody might be shooting across the line, have the warden sitting there to catch the guy. You know, even if you had a 100 yard rule, with today's rifles -- I mean, the guys next door to me are shooting deer at 900 yards, you
MR. MILLER: Well, let me address that a minute. Our Conservation officer has been promoted to a sergeant and does recruitment now. He was our Conservation officer, Bill Freeman. He did catch one of these groups baiting and shooting right there on the -- before it was legal. He wrote them a ticket. They were from out of state, no hunting licenses, illegal hunting. They shot an illegal deer. The next day the sheriff called him wanting him to drop the charges.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. This is -- thank you very much for your comments, and it's something, again, I think the Board wants to --

MR. MILLER: Thank you for hearing my complaint.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Our next speaker is Mr. Jimmy Jimmerson.

MR. JIMMERSON: I can assure y'all that my comments are going to be a lot shorter than they've been in the past few years. I just want to say thank you to Chuck, your staff, and to the Commissioners and to everyone that's worked on this project as you've shown a lot of diligence and persistence. I think it's going to be a whole lot better for the folks hunting in Cleburne County. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Jimmerson. Our next speaker is Mr. Donald Nelson.

MR. NELSON: Good morning. Thank you, Commissioner and Board Members, for allowing me to speak.

I've been blessed about the last 50 years to be able to hunt in District 2 in Mr. Grady and Mr. Patrick's area and particularly in Butler County. And what I'd like to do is just say thank you to them for the great report they got from District 2, in particular for Butler County. And I attribute that to several factors, and one is the fact that we educate our hunters 100 percent to be in compliance with your rules and regulations. We stress that every time we gather to hunt.

The second thing is we work very closely with Mr. Don Knight, Mr. Lonnie Miller, and Ms. Susan Morrow to alleviate any problems.

The third thing is that I communicate -- and Mr. Cagle can attest. About three years ago we had an issue in our area. I come up with an action plan. We implemented it. And I believe that plan has gone away forever. And that's through the communication with Mr. Cagle.

Another thing that's helped us in our area is the Garmin -- the Alpha Garmin. That's been the greatest thing since sliced bread for hunters. We are transitioning to that. Basically if my dog is running a mile from here on our property and I want him to stop, he will stop and come back. That has been fantastic. So we're going to be in 100-percent compliance with that, and we're working toward that goal to alleviate to have zero issues.

Our relationship -- the game warden, I believe, is Mr. Forrester. He's very professional. He had interaction with a couple of our hunters this year, and they're very complimentary about his professional demeanor. And we appreciate that.

One thing I would ask is if you have a problem -- I've been in Butler County hunting for over 50 years. My family has land there. Please communicate if you have a concern or problem, and I can sit there and help alleviate the problem so you don't get the calls and I don't worry about the privilege of allowing my
grandsons to hunt with me to be taken away. I do not want to lose that privilege right there.

One thing I would ask: Due to the fact of all the great reports I heard this morning, I would appreciate it if you would allow us to continue to hunt in Butler County in District 2 the way we have for the last several years and not impose any regulation. I know you're trying to make it better. We're trying to make it better. And my commitment is I will work with you any way I can. I've been here a number of years to this board and am extremely appreciative of what you do.

And the Color Guard, appreciate those gentlemen. The NCO I saw was a Marine. I'm a retired Marine. So I saw that in that. I'm very proud of what they did this morning.

Thank you very much, gentlemen.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

Any questions?

(No response.)

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

Our next speaker is Mr. Lane Stephens.

MR. STEPHENS: Thank you, Chairman and Commissioners. My name is Lane Stephens. I am with the firm SCG Governmental Affairs out of Tallahassee, Florida, and I'm here representing the Alabama Dog Hunters Association.

You may ask yourself what in the world is a guy from Tallahassee doing in Montgomery representing dog hunters. Well, as a contract lobbyist, I've been lobbying in Florida since 1993. And I represent insurance companies and banks and health-care companies, manufacturing companies, but my passion is representing sportsmen organizations. In 1998 I was retained by the Florida Dog Hunters and Sportsman's Association, and I still represent them today. I also today represent the Southeastern Dog Hunting Association, the Suwannee River Dog Hunting Association, and the Florida Airboat Association. I don't just do hunting. I also have represented IGFA, the Florida Tarpon Anglers, Safari Club International to name just a few.

In July of last year -- or June rather, the deer hunting association here in Alabama asked me to come over and speak with them to address and see if I could help them with the deer dog trespass rule that the Commissioner was developing. I came over and met with them, and I told them -- I said, folks, I'll be happy to help you if you want to be helped. I don't use an excuse that deer dogs can read a trespass -- can't read a trespass sign. Those days are long gone. I represent ethical and responsible hunters. And I said if that's what they were and they wanted to hire me, I would go to work for them, and they did.

We met with the Commissioner, and I think the first thing out of my mouth to him was that, Commissioner, half of my job is educating them on what your issues are and then educating you on what their issues are. It's a two-way street, and only through that two-way street can I help my clients to come to a mutual understanding.

The Alabama Dog Hunters Association supported the deer dog trespass rule that the agency put forward, and we're ready to continue working with the agency on that issue moving forward and on other issues. And to that end, the association has created a stakeholder's group representing dog hunters from around the state, and I'll be working with them to look at potential model legislation and rules that will continue
to provide for ethical and responsible hunting in this state and by those that use dogs for that.

I look forward to coming back and visiting with all of you further and would be happy to take any questions if you have any.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any questions?

Mr. Cagle.

MR. CAGLE: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With this I think I've fulfilled my quota on comments. So this will be my last one.

Mr. Stephens, I know you've shared a little about maybe some of your experience in Florida and some of the rules there. I know Florida has put in place a pretty comprehensive regulatory regime related to deer dog hunting. Can you share some of that and any thoughts you have if any of that could be adapted for Alabama?

MR. STEPHENS: I thank you for the question. In Florida -- you're right. Florida has for 25 years been working on preserving the sport of hunting deer with dogs. We now have 21-and-a-half million people living in the state of Florida, and the pressures continue to mount.

The first six years that I represented dog hunting organizations starting in '98 it was reactive. You know, it was the ole whack-a-mole. An issue would come up and we would take care of that issue and then another issue would come up and we'd take care of that issue.

In 2004 the agency in Florida and the deer dog hunters basically had a gun pointed to their head. The incoming speaker of the house called me up. We were good friends. And he said, are you representing them dog hunters? I said, yes, sir. He said, well, I'm going to give you an opportunity to work with the agency to fix deer dog trespassing and you won't like my fix if you don't come up with a fix.

And what we instituted in 2004 was a statewide permit system on private lands. The agency would take care of all the WMAs and government lands through rules. They can just set the rules however they want to do that. But on private land we pushed for -- and it was adopted -- a mandatory requirement that if you're going to run deer with dogs on private land, no matter the size -- you can run on 5 acres or 20,000 acres -- it's a free registration permit that that land had to be registered with the state and a registration number issued. That number then had to appear on the collar of the dog and every member of that club or whoever was on that land had to have the registration number.

That move in itself saved dog hunting for deer in the state of Florida. We've now got well over 200 properties in the state registered. And, again, some of those are 20,000, 30,000 acres. Some of them may be 10. The individuals are held responsible, not the club. The individuals are held responsible by a deer hunters responsibility rule. That's the dog trespass rule that y'all were trying to pass here last fall. That rule holds -- says that if a dog is pursuing game on someone else's property without them having permission of that landowner, the game warden can write that citation to the owner of that dog.

We've seen the number of citations and complaints drop dramatically since all of that was put in place.

In 2015, based upon some pressures that were going on in Blackwater State Forest, the dog hunters in Blackwater State Forest worked with the agency and asked the agency to implement mandatory
GPS and training collars if you're going

to run dogs in Blackwater Forest. And
they did that, and it's been extremely
successful. That saved dog hunting in
Blackwater State Forest. It would have
gone away because of the inholdings if
the hunters didn't do that.

But I mentioned being proactive. A
number of years ago as we saw how the
collars were working in Blackwater, the
hunting organizations went to the agency
and said we think we ought to look at
mandatory GPS and training collars for
deer dogs. And the agency staff said,
you know, we think that may be a good
idea, but we don't think the time is
right to try to place that in rule at
this time.

It took several years of them seeing
what was going on in Blackwater, hearing
from other hunters around the state
positive comments about the collars. So
candidly we were a bit surprised in
October of this year when the agency
released its proposed rules for
mandatory tracking and training collars.
It doesn't say GPS collars. It says
tracking collars because there are still
people that use the beep-beep telemetry
collars. And so we wanted them to be
able to use that.

But that issue went before the FWC
in December for its first hearing.
Their response from online comments was
close to 80 percent support. At the
meeting in Panama City, I think there
were 25 or 30 hunters that got up in
support of that. There were one or two
detractors. The rule moved forward on
February 20th, two weeks ago -- or last
week. The Commission took it up for its
second rule -- second hearing, and it
passed unanimously.

But the interesting thing about
it -- and I'll tell you -- is this: In
2004 the Chairman of the Commission at
that time was a gentleman by the name of
Rodney Barreto. And Rodney and I
worked closely to get support for that
permit system. We spent a year doing
that and having stakeholder meetings.
He's back on the Commission now, and he
made the comment during discussion of
this issue the other day -- he said --
you know, he said it's amazing. He said
in 2004, dog hunters, we had to drag
them to the table to pass the permit
system. He said here in 2020 or '19
when it was started -- he said the dog
hunters are proactive. They're being
proactive and asking us to do things to
help them protect their sport.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Thank you,
Mr. Stephens.

Any further questions?
(No response.)

MR. STEPHENS: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: I would like to
tell Lane thank you for -- I do
appreciate working with you over the
last year and appreciate your
conversations and the work that you've
done. Look forward to continuing to do
the same. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Next is Mr. Avery Bates.

MR. BATES: Thank y'all for all you do and all
you're going to do to help our industry.

I am vice president of Organized
Seafood Association. My name is Avery
Bates. I see y'all quite often. But I
want to say a few things and some
requests that I had made to the Board
and the reason behind it.

The additional Saturdays that we
asked for for oystering was for bad
weather days and not only bad weather
days -- but the amount of bad weather
days -- we also have that was
mentioned -- the young people need to
qualify, learn how to oyster. Everybody
just can't oyster. But we want them to
be trained by their grandparents and their parents, and the only way to do that is to open Saturdays.

The reason we want every Saturday -- and it was mentioned to me we don't have the money to hire the personnel. And that was another problem we had was checking in and checking out. Sometimes it was real long to check in or check out, standing in the rain or whatever, with a limited number of days. If we have Saturdays -- if you wanted to go up on the license $10. Then y'all went to a bait license for $10 and what happened? What did you say, Chuck? 7,000 people got involved with buying bait license.

Now, we fell down in oyster license because there wasn't no oysters. In fact, everybody was hollering, Avery, I need a boat this year. Their boats rotted under the oak trees. Why? No use. No seasons. This year the Good Lord blessed and it looks like we're going to have a great year pending no hurricanes and no major disasters. That means more license. If you have more license and can get the Saturdays and charge $10 more --

What is a license? $36 for an oyster license -- commercial oyster license? -- you will add money to the coffers to pay the extra time that they work on Saturdays. The shops will love the extra oysters.

We've got as much as 80 to 85 cent for Alabama oysters. When I oystered regularly, the best we got was 35. It fell down even though we had other entities pouring oysters into Alabama to only 60 cent. But I want to tell you, you can make a good day's work at 80 cent a day with six sacks of oysters. But if you have three bad days that week of weather, that will put you out of work, and the Saturdays would help. Even the Good Lord give them on Saturdays or day before the Sabbath.

What did they get when they went to pick up manna? You get what? Two extra quarts. We're just asking for one day.

MS. JONES: Time.

MR. BATES: And we've got many more things to say about shrimping, crabbing, floundering. But y'all ask the questions. If not, do y'all want to elaborate on the things that I wrote for y'all?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Avery. Are there any questions for Avery?

MR. HARTZOG: Not really Avery.

What impact would it have -- I think Mr. Avery has an excellent point for these children to learn the trade. Would it impact the species that bad for us to give Mr. Avery what he's asking for?

Or let Chris --

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: I'll take that one.

Director Bannon has proposed that we open -- that we could have the regulation changed to allow us to open on Saturdays. So I think he's already addressed that, that that's something as a Department that we are in favor of. That's in your packet from the Department.

MR. BATES: This is some Saturdays he said. We want during the season. And you already have control. That's 924, part A. If you see a problem with the production, you can either shut the season or stop it. This would always be in your discretion if the biologists see where we're taking much, much longer to get your quota, if the quota says we can go to eight sacks, ten sacks. But you can see if you have a problem and by regulation adjust either the quotas -- but the days here is quite critical when we had -- I seen three fronts come.
through in one week blowing 25, 35 miles
an hour, and the small oyster boats --
this is imperative that you have an
extra day not only for the school kids
and the upcoming generation to learn.
Everybody can't catch oysters.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Let me just --
quickly, just for your information,
Grady -- and the rest of the Board might
be interested in this -- how we manage
oysters in this state is cooperatively
managed with the processors and others.
So if you don't have a processor that's
open on Saturday, then it doesn't do any
good to have the reef open because
there's nobody for them to sell it to.
So we work with the processors.
And our season now is allowed to go
from October through April to have an
oyster season based on the amount -- but
we base the harvest on the amount of
oysters that are available in the
resource to sustainably harvest. So
like this year it opened in November and
we closed sometime in January. So it
was not for the full October through
April season.

Our staff will continue to manage
the resource for the most effective way
for the resource itself and the
economics of how that's done. As you
can see, if you open it on Saturdays,
that extra harvest day during that week
will likely shorten it at the end. So
you won't have as much harvest later
because you'll be condensing that
harvest into a shorter period of time.
And that may be the best to do on some
years because of the economic value of
the oysters, depending on what other
states are open and how much value our
fishermen can get.

But as you can see, it's not just as
easy as saying we're going to open every
Saturday. It's an extremely complicated
process that Scott Bannon and his staff
do an excellent job working with the
industry to make sure that the harvest
in our state is sustainable and that it
provides the best economic benefit for
the people down there.

And I know Mr. Avery wants that and
wants everybody to be able to make as
much money as they can throughout the
whole year and not just condense it into
a couple of weeks if we can make the
season last and provide good income for
people there. So thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Avery, very much.

MR. BATES: That's the reason we wanted the
Saturdays, though, is just to make up
for some lost time. And we know that
y'all manage the resource. We're not
trying to manage the resource. And we
know that every year we have floods,
every year.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Avery. Thank you
very much. We appreciate you always
being here.

The next speaker is Mr. Earl Jordan.

MR. HARTZOG: While he's coming forward, you
did notice Mr. Avery had a smile on his
face today though.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, yes, yes. He's smiling.

MR. JORDAN: Hey. My name is Earl Jordan from
Mobile. I'm here on behalf of a
ten-year-old little boy.

The State of Alabama's laws for
sharks is kind of complicated. They
list size and everything for a few, and
then all of a sudden it says for all
other sharks 54-inch fork length.

There's a couple of species in this
NOAA Shark Identification Chart. I'm
sorry. It's a poor quality copy. I
don't run an office.

One's a finetooth, blacknose, and a
blacktip. There's a -- you can read the
max size of a finetooth is 5 foot. 5
foot is 60 inches. I'm sure NOAA is
measuring those from tip to tail, not
fork length. That's some legal mumbo
jumbo; right?

Well, so I got to catch a trophy in the State of Alabama waters of a finetooth shark to keep it. I got to catch a trophy, 54-inch fork length. The biggest they grow is 5 feet. I'm sorry.

Okay. Blacknose, the biggest they grow is 4 feet. I can't even keep one. Our legal limit, 54 inches. Can't keep it.

All right. Blacktip, 6 foot. Well, we go to Mississippi, the next page. It's got two categories of sharks, large coastal, small coastal. One is a 37. The large coastal was a 37 total length. Nose to the tip of the tail 37 inches, you can keep it. The small one is 25-inch total length. That's Mississippi. And you'd have to maybe Google -- I Googled this, and I'm not a computer guy -- to find out what these small coastals and large coastals -- the categories, and I'm sure you're going to find blacktip in one of those categories.

Well, down here it says retain shark with no minimum size limit. Guess what? I'm telling you -- you Google it. I'm sorry about the poor quality of the copy. Blacktip is one of those. Blacknose is one of those. No size limit in Florida. We share all the same waters. I mean, I can step one foot over there and I'm in Florida and one foot -- it's really all about where you launch the boat, right, where you bring the fish back to, not about where you caught it.

Anyway, it just don't make sense. A blacktip shark is really good to eat if you know how to prepare it right. I'm just saying it needs to be changed.

Thanks a lot.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Hold your place.

Any questions?

(No response.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

MR. MARTIN: Mr. Chairman, I do.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Jeff, I'm sorry.

MR. MARTIN: That's okay.

Is there any reason why it's like that or it's been that way or --

DIRECTOR BANNON: So in Alabama the sharks -- you know, for sharks we only go out to 3 miles. Alabama is generally a nursery area for most shark species. Inside the state waters you can catch some that are of legal size. So we mimic the federal regulations, which they've done stock assessments.

We don't have the ability to do the stock assessments on these sharks, so we've defaulted to the federal shark limits. So that allows the angler to not have the confusion because they're more often caught in federal waters than they are in state, other than the ones that we see -- bonnethead and Atlantic sharpnose are caught in state waters pretty regularly, and they have no size limit. But the others we default to the federal rules.

And we did check with Mississippi. They are not aware that they've actually ever done a stock assessment within state waters. And so we were trying to see if they had done one. It appears to be an arbitrary setting for the size limit, so --

MR. MARTIN: Yeah. To me sharks are like cobras, snakes.

DIRECTOR BANNON: A shark is a shark.

MR. MARTIN: Yeah. They're all great whites.

DIRECTOR BANNON: Sharks are one of the most misidentified species. Our commercial shark fishermen and dealers actually are required by federal law to go to shark
identification class. We send our enforcement staff to shark identification class. They can be very difficult to identify.

MR. JORDAN: Blacktip sharks are out there by the thousands. They're easy to catch. A lot of fishermen consider them nuisance. They don't like to catch them. If you get an overabundance of fish in a pond, what happens to them? They get malnourished.

I would think a lot of benefit would happen if you started keeping some of them to all the other fish species that seem to be going away, your speckled trout, your redfish. If I got to catch one the max size -- there's no other fish out there you got to catch the max size. Redfish can grow 30-plus inches.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Jordan.

MR. JORDAN: You can keep one that's 16.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. We appreciate your comments and appreciate you being here today. Thank you.

That is the end of our -- well, that is the last of our public speakers today. Our next order of business would be unfinished business.

I would ask the Board, is there any unfinished business that is before you, before us?

The only few things that I have on my notes was Mr. Jimmerson, Grady and I, and that's it. Is there anything else?

We're squared away with Mr. Jimmerson.

MR. HARTZOG: I have a question for Chuck, if possible.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay.

MR. HARTZOG: Chuck, where do we stand on the research projects that we started last -- say, two years ago with the gadwalls and the turkeys? Are we any closer to getting those studies completed?

DIRECTOR SYKES: I will refer to Ms. Silvano, Assistant Chief of Wildlife.

MS. SILVANO: Yes. So the turkey research -- the graduate student who was on the turkey --

Sorry. Not turkey. Wrong species. -- waterfowl research project has left, and so we just recently got on a new person so that we can continue our efforts there.

We've shifted gears. The original objectives in the data that was collected for the original research project weren't where they were supposed to be, and with this new graduate student coming on, we're shifting back to those original objectives. So it will be prolonged a little bit longer than we had originally thought. So hopefully within the next two years we'll have some information for you.

MR. HARTZOG: Okay.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. Any other unfinished business for the Board?

(No response.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Well, let's move on, then, to our new business.

New business today, I think that we have a motion, Dr. Lemme.

DR. LEMME: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I move that consistent with Alabama Code Section 9-11-68 and Section 9-11-69 that hunting and fishing license fees be increased based upon the percentage increase in the Consumer Price Index as maintained by the U.S. Department of Labor.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. I won't make you read that again. We've been through it. We all know what that means for us. It's very important.

Is there a second?

MR. RAYMOND JONES: Second.

MR. CAGLE: Second.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: We have a second, Mr. Cagle. Let's have a vote on this, and we can just -- all those in favor ...
(All board members present respond “aye.”)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any opposed?

(No response.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: The “ayes” have it. It’s unanimous.

Is there any other new business before the Board today? Any comments, questions?

(No response.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Being no new business and there are to my knowledge no announcements, Mr. Commissioner, then the last thing that we have to do is set the location and time of the next meeting. And we will do that with -- there will be an announcement in the paper. We have not set that date and time or location yet.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: We’re looking to do it in May again, likely that third weekend in May. But we’ll be trying to set that very quickly.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: And somewhere geographically that we haven’t been in recent years.

So that’s it. Thank you very much.

This meeting is adjourned.

(Meeting adjourned at approximately 10:54 a.m.)

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REPORTER’S CERTIFICATE
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STATE OF ALABAMA:
MONTGOMERY COUNTY:

I, Tracye Sadler Blackwell, Certified Court Reporter and Commissioner for the State of Alabama at Large, do hereby certify that I reported the foregoing proceedings of the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Advisory Board Meeting on February 29, 2020.

The foregoing 126 computer-printed pages contain a true and correct transcript of the proceedings held.

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

This 4th day of May 2020.

___________________________
Tracye S. Blackwell, CCR, RPR
ACCR No. 294
Expiration date: 9-30-2020
Certified Court Reporter
and Commissioner for the State of Alabama at Large