STATE OF ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Department of Agriculture and Industries

Richard Beard Auditorium

1445 Federal Drive

Montgomery, Alabama

March 5, 2022

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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Proceedings taken before Stacey L.

Johnson, Certified Court Reporter and

Commissioner for the State of Alabama at Large,
at the Department of Agriculture and Industries,
Richard Beard Auditorium, 1445 Federal Drive,
Montgomery, Alabama, Saturday, March 5, 2022,
commencing at 9:00 a.m.

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BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Joseph Dobbs, Jr., Chairman

Commissioner Christopher M. Blankenship, Ex-Officio Secretary

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

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

Mr. Kevin Savoy

Mr. Grady Hartzog

Mr. Greg Barksdale

Mr. Jeff Martin

Mr. Brock Jones

Mr. Tim Wood

Mr. Raymond Jones, Jr.

Mr. Ben Stimpson

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CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Let's let this meeting of the first Conservation Advisory Board of 2022 here on March the 5th — a beautiful Saturday outside — come to order. Glad you're all here. Hello to the usual participants, and those of you that are new here, glad to see you. Let's have a productive meeting today with some good dialogue.

To begin, I'm going to ask our Board member, Mr. Brock Jones, if he will please give our invocation today.

MR. B. JONES: Let us pray.

(Invocation led by Mr. Brock Jones.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Brock.

And I'll ask -- we're going to have the color guard today, and as part of that, I'm going to put my hand over my heart as they begin.
(Presentation by the color guard.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'll ask Kevin Savoy to please lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

(Recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance led by Mr. Savoy.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much, and thank you to the color guard. That was great.

On our agenda, we have the Sportsmen's Pledge. I do not have a copy of it here to read along with you, but you-all remember the Sportsmen's Pledge. We shall -- we won't say that. We won't speak the Sportsmen's Pledge today.

So I want to introduce if I can Representative Tommy Hanes in the northeastern part of the state of Alabama. There's Tommy. Thank you for being here with us. It's always good to see you and always good for the Legislature to be represented.
Thank you.

Is there anyone else here that that -- all right. Very good.

Mr. Secretary, do we have a quorum today?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Yes, sir, we do.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Very good.

Let me ask about the minutes of the meeting. Are there any questions or anything to be noted with regard to the minutes of the meeting of May the 8th of 2021, by the Board?

As there are no changes, the Chair approves the minutes, but I'm glad to ask for a motion and a second to approve the minutes.

MR. R. JONES: So moved.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: So moved.

All right. The minutes are approved. Thank you, Ms. Johnson.

Thank you so much. Tracye is not
with us today. Thank you for being here.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: For the Record, Mr. Chairman, that's the approval of the minutes from the 3-6-21 meeting and the 5-8-21 meeting.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Both meetings.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Let me ask each Board member if they will to introduce themselves, note their congressional districts, and please provide us with a district report, goings on in their district. Let's start to my right with Mr. Barksdale.

MR. BARKSDALE: Good morning. I am Greg Barksdale. I represent District 4. There's not really any major issues that I'm aware of that happened in the district since our last meeting. I have had several
conversations with some of the
hunters, one to do with hog hunting
on the WMAs, the other one about
Forever Wild property. I've had
several conversations with the turkey
guidelines, and then one with coyote
hunting during nighttime during deer
season as well as dog deer hunting in
northwest Alabama. But most of that
is just conversation, and probably
some of them will be here today to
talk about that. Other than that,
we're good. Thank you.

MR. MARTIN: Jeff Martin,
District 3. I think we had a really
good season this year. Only one or
two complaints on the dog hunting.
Lonnie Miller took care of those.
Fishing is kicking off like crazy.
Logan Martin Lake has just been
crazy. So all in all a good year.

MR. WOOD: I'm Tim Wood, and I
represent District 7, congressional
district. I live in Selma. Basically I cover the Black Belt.

    The deer season was outstanding in the central part of the Black Belt in Dallas County, Wilcox. The numbers were up. But for some strange reason, the rest of my district actually was down flat. For me to say what that was would be speculation, so I'm just going to be quiet. I don't know what it was.

As far as turkey season, people are busy right now doing a lot of burning. And if you are burning, be careful. I'm going to be out this afternoon if you want to come help, feel free to come on.

As far as fishing, the Alabama River and the Ala-Tom has been extremely busy. Camden is -- they do as good a job as anybody in the state promoting the Miller's Ferry Lake down there, and they do a
great job with what they do. It's a
great economy for Wilcox County. And
also let me say -- and I don't know
if everyone knows, but what this
Department does in the background for
our local communities is outstanding.
I want to say thank you to Chris
Blankenship and also Ed Poolos and
Todd Mize because they are actually
getting Selma and Marengo back in
shape. And if -- I'm telling you
what these folks do in the
background, they don't get a lot of
publicity about it, but I'm going to
tell you I appreciate what they do
and what they mean to the community.
That's pretty much my report. Thank
you.

MR. HARTZOG: Good morning,
everybody. Grady Hartzog, District
2. Just not a whole lot of reports.
No dog hunting claims at all. This
morning you could not put another car
trailer on Lake Point State Park boat landing. The fishing has been phenomenal. The numbers of fishermen are phenomenal. On the way up, I saw turkeys on the way up. So everything is looking good.

I talked to the deer processors in our area. All the processors feel like their numbers are up. One thing that -- in fact, one of the processors this morning called me because I generally -- he knows I'm headed to the meeting, just following up, that, you know, Barbour County is the only county in the state that has a point restriction limit on it. And he says, Grady, every year we're getting bigger and bigger and better bucks coming into the processors. He said, we're seeing 170-class deer pretty regular, and he says, I just wish the Department might consider adding
additional counties. And the only other thing he said is, I wish the Department would up the fine for the people that are not abiding by the point limit and maybe make some believers out of them and they'd let some of these deer grow. But he did say he wished that several of the adjoining counties would also follow the lead from Barbour County and go to the point restriction. So other than that --

And the only other thing is we had some complaints concerning the turkey season and taking the -- some days -- the decoys away from the kids, and I propose to make a motion to try to fix that for next season. So that's all my report. Thank you.

MR. SAVOY: Good morning. Kevin Savoy, District 2, Dothan, Alabama. We had a good dove season. I was contacted by a group of dove hunters
about looking at our Wiregrass counties a little bit differently due to the peanut harvest.

I was also contacted by a gentleman — and I believe he's on the agenda today — with Alabama Hawking Association. He's outside my district, but he also happens to be a customer of ours so he reached out to me and he is on the agenda today.

I also was contacted, like Greg, by a farmer about hunting feral hogs and coyotes through the season, year-round actually. And I got an interesting call or a message from a gentleman who suggested amending the baiting program and registering feeders. So I thought that was an interesting concept, but I thought I would share that with y'all.

And I had — we had no deer hunting issues that I was aware of this year. I was contacted by a
local dog deer hunting association.
I had a great conversation with them.
We don't have any issues in
Henry County where we primarily are,
but I know -- I think we have one
person on the agenda today that might
bring some issues up with that. But
overall, we had a good year. Thank
you.

MR. PATE: I am Rick Pate. I'm
the Commissioner of Ag and
Industries. And, of course, we
welcome you here. This is our
building, and we're proud to host the
Conservation. I am the Commissioner
of Ag and that's why I'm on this
Board. But if you look at these
posters on the side, these are really
the six divisions that we visit.
Hardly anybody knows what we do, the
responsibilities we have with food
safety and peanuts and pesticides and
weights and measures. And so I will
sort of wrap around.

The Sweet Grown Alabama is a new initiative we started three years ago. We realized that people in Alabama couldn't identify what was local and what wasn't. And there's a lot of things being sold that maybe originated in Mexico or California that looks like some farmer grew them. But we're proud of that. That's probably the third year of that program. And appreciate Representative Hanes and the Legislature who supported it.

We did last year for the first time ask for some money for the farm and school program. It was very disappointing with COVID and all that was going, the supply side issues. We realized how little the school system was buying from local farmers. And if one thing you want to solve is a supply side issue, you buy from ten
miles down the road where the kids
that are going to your schools family
is growing. And so we're real proud
that the Legislature give us several
hundred thousand dollars -- $120,000
last year and 200- this year, and
that has been a huge hit. We're
selling so much more local food in
our school system now than we were.

We had a half-million dollar
grant from USDA really to begin the
discussion about mental health in
rural Alabama. We have seen some
statistics that show, you know,
farming, rural life, by nature is a
little more isolated than urban life,
and then with closing the churches
and schools, it became even more.
Statistics were showing there were
higher rates of mental health issues.
And so we begun that. And Department
of Conservation and Natural Resources
attended our sort of kickoff for
that. But we met with 12 different
stakeholder groups, the Cattlemen and
Farmers Federation and the Poultry
and Egg. But anyway, we're proud of
that.

And then in sort of
closing -- and that's what we call
The Healthy You Healthy Farm. We
actually partnered with RC&D in what
they call Veterans at Ease, and we've
got a little bit of money we can give
to a veteran farmer. That veteran
agrees to allow other veterans to
come onto his farm and then allows us
to bring other veterans out on his
farm once a year. And we kicked that
off up in Arab maybe around November,
I think, and it was very gratifying.

We probably had 20, 25 Vietnam War
veterans show up on a veteran's farm.
But anyway, we've got a lot of balls
in the air, but we appreciate having
y'all here and you're always welcome.
CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much, Commissioner Pate. You and your staff -- it's a great need that works very well for us every time and we appreciate it so much. Thank you.

Next?

DR. PHILLIPS: Good morning, everybody. My name is Mike Phillips. I'm the Director of the Alabama Cooperative Extension System. I've probably got the best job of anybody in this room. I say that because we get to work with all of these organizations. We do educational outreach statewide. We provide a lot of educational resources, work with a lot of these agencies in extending our outreach. So it's truly an honor for me to sit on this Board. And I hope we have a great day today.

MR. STIMPSON: Ben Stimpson, District 1, Mobile. This year was -- well, I wouldn't say -- it was pretty
quiet. There weren't really many complaints. I talked to a lot of people. I talked to several people -- and I wouldn't call them complaints -- that were requesting permits for the dog deer hunting in Mobile and Washington County. And I think someone will be on the agenda today to speak to that.

I had several conversations with different duck hunters from the Delta. They had a good season mainly early. The biggest concern that I'd say with two or three people was they're starting to talk about that there appears to be some over hunting, but, you know, they've been talking about that for years.

Had a lot of people, of course, that talked about the new turkey season and limit and had a lot of questions, but they were mainly people wanting to understand, you
know, why we did it and how it was going to work. But it took up a lot of time. Everybody wants to talk about it. But other than that, it was relatively quiet.

MR. R. JONES: Raymond Jones, Congressional District Number 5, which is in North Alabama. Fairly quiet in my district as well. The deer season was good. I don't know that I would say great, but it was good. Duck season was poor. Unfortunately, it just never got cold enough to push many ducks in our direction.

Biggest news I guess that happened is obviously we had our first case of CWD in my district, which is unfortunate. I attended the CWD meeting in Florence, Alabama, to represent the Department -- the Board there. We also had an Avian flu in an American wigeon that was just
announced. So that's another thing.
So from a disease standpoint not a
good year in our district.

MR. B. JONES: I'm Brock Jones.
I'm District 6. I live in
Tuscaloosa. District 6 is all of
Shelby County, part of Tuscaloosa
County, part of Jefferson County, and
a sliver of Bibb County. The season,
from what I understand in talking to
people in the district, was a good
quantity but not necessarily quality.
As far as complaints go, really just
got several calls about people hoping
that we could continue the coyote
night hunting and hog night hunting
through the season. I understand the
Department's position on that and
told them that, why that hasn't
changed. A lot of burning going on
right now as Tim said in our
district, which is good. And anxious
to hear what Chuck has to say about
the hog effort regarding the sodium nitrites. So a lot of people anxious to hear about that. That's pretty much all I have.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. Thank you, gentlemen. Thank you, gentlemen. Good reports, up to date. The next item on our agenda, I'm not going to introduce or bring to the table any of the directors of the divisions. I'm going to turn it over to the Commissioner who has a wonderful report for us and ask him to come up here. Thank you.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Before I give my report, I would like to recognize the service of one of our Board members that rolled off last year and was not able to make it to our last meeting in May after he rolled off. Can we get Patrick Cagle to come up.

Patrick was on the
Conservation Advisory Board for several years and served with distinction, always had great insight. He spent a lot of time talking to people in his district and really around the state, not just in his district, on issues and brought a lot to the Board. He was not able to be reappointed because of his position with Alabama Mining Association, but I certainly can't say enough about your friendship, about your service to the Board, and you are missed on the Board. But I do appreciate your continued involvement with the issues of the Department, and I know that you will always be a supporter and provide input and wise counsel on issues that impact the Department, whether you're on the Advisory Board or not. So with that, Mr. Chairman, let's walk around, see if we can get a good
picture with Mr. Cagle.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: And to Molly who has helped lots of mornings bringing snacks and treats and keeping us in line, thank you.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: I appreciate Patrick being here and Molly. I appreciate all the wives of the men that are on the Conservation Advisory Board. Those late night calls and weekend calls and people stopping you at the store and everything else. I know that they go a long way to support y'all and appreciate the work that y'all all do on the Board.

I do have a fairly lengthy Commissioner's report. I will say before I get into this that I culled a bunch of stuff off yesterday afternoon to make this a little bit shorter, but we have had quite a successful year I think with the
Department of Conservation. A lot of
that goes to the efforts of Ed
Poolos, our Deputy Commissioner;
Chuck Sykes, the Wildlife and
Freshwater Fisheries Division
Director; Patti McCurdy, our State
Lands Director; Scott Bannon, Marine
Resources Director; and then Greg
Lein, our State Parks Director; and
their staffs. They have had a very
active year, and I'll hit some of the
high points and be glad to take
questions after that. But I will say
I looked back at my report from last
year's March meeting that was pretty
lengthy and I think impressive about
the work of the Department and the
work they've all done to make sure I
didn't duplicate anything that I hit
the high points on last year, so all
this is new stuff. I mean, this is
stuff that happened really since the
May meeting last year.
I'm going to focus a little bit more on Parks. This year we've got a lot of stuff. It's been a great year for our Alabama State Parks. You don't hear a lot about that from your constituents. I know you're mostly dealing with hunting and fishing, but Parks is a big part of our Department.

This past year, we had the highest grossing revenue in State Parks' history, and we also had the highest gross profit in State Parks' history, and it was a very good year. Legislature passed a bill to have a constitutional amendment for an 85 million dollar bond issue that will be on the ballot on May 24th. So I hope that you'll all be supportive of that for us to take that money and continue to make improvements to our Parks. And you'll hear more about it over the
next couple of months as we work

towards that constitutional amendment

on the ballot May 24th. It will be

the only amendment on the ballot, so

when you go vote, just vote yes for

the only amendment on there.

We implemented beach parking

at the Gulf. That was an asset that

we have down there. Implemented that

last April, and that's going to

produce about a million dollars a

year at $5 a car parking. That

money's going right back into the

Parks. We're taking the money that

was generated this past year and

adding bathrooms at the Romar Beach

access and other improvements within

the Parks, so we're putting that

revenue and the gross profit this

year -- we're putting it right back

into the park.

We built a new campground at

Cathedral Caverns. We didn't have a
campground there. Joe Wheeler State Park was devastated by a tornado in December of 2020, I guess, and we rebuilt two-thirds of the campground. We opened those up last week. We'll have a ribbon cutting up there in a few weeks, but they've already got plenty of people camping there.

We're renovating the day use area in Desoto Falls, electrical upgrades at Monte Sano so we can have the 50 amp service and really grow that park, grow the revenue there.

And we built a new OHV trail at Lakepoint State Park. There was some untapped grant funds that you-all pay into when you purchase fuel or -- and we were able to use that to do some -- a trail at Buck's Pocket State Park a couple of years ago, and we've done one now at Lakepoint.

And that's a pretty fun
trail. I went up and rode it a couple of weeks ago to see how it was going to be, and I think it's gotten pretty good use since we opened it. But I will say the reason that we're doing that is to kind of expand the recreational opportunities to provide business from some groups that may not have stayed there before.

A great example is that January I was up at Buck's Pocket State Park and rode through the parking lot, and on a cold January day, there were about five campers and all of them had four-wheelers or off-highway vehicles parked next to them. So the only reason they were there camping in January was so they could ride those trails. So we were doing business that we would not have done in January on a cold and rainy weekend because people are using those trails. So it's having the
desired effect.

If you noticed during the Super Bowl all of the car commercials during the Super Bowl were all for electric vehicles. In Alabama State Parks, we're trying to be ahead of the curve on electric vehicle sales. We have a partnership we're bringing to install charging stations at all of our Alabama State Parks so that we'll have that as an opportunity for our guests.

The World Games will be in Birmingham in July. That's a big deal for Alabama. Four of those events are going to be at Oak Mountain State Park. We've worked with AT&T to upgrade our fiber network. It's really a multimillion dollar investment that AT&T is making at Oak Mountain State Park to be able to operate the cameras and all the infrastructure that they need for the
World Games, and that will remain after the World Games.

Another big and exciting thing that happened this past year is we purchased about 1650 acres -- or the Forever Wild Board purchased about 1650 acres adjacent to Oak Mountain State Park. That's a great addition to the fastest growing county in the state to our park. I appreciate the Forever Wild Board's support of our State Parks.

And then we purchased some property at Rickwood Caverns State Park. That's the property above the cave, so that keeps us from having any issues in the future. So I'm glad that came available and we were able to work on that.

And one of the things I'm most excited about with Parks is we're in the process now of changing out all of our mattresses -- all 1300
of them -- to -- we're leveraging our partnership with Hilton and putting Waldorf Astoria 2 plush mattresses in all of our state sparks. Those are being swapped out now. And we also have an agreement with a company in Alabama to provide some high quality sheets, and we'll be doing that from an Alabama supplier. So if you go to our State Parks in a couple of months, you ought to get you a good night's sleep. The mattresses and sheets sure will be nice.

And on the negative side, we -- looking at all our financials and running Parks like a business, we have -- do lose money on our restaurants. We've contracted with a food and beverage consultant to come in and analyze our operations and make some recommendations so that we can at least break even on the restaurants and still provide good
service to our customers.

People have asked me about
the pier, the portion of the pier
that was damaged in Hurricane Sally.
We're opening those bids later this
month. We're still waiting on our
final permit, but we're going to have
the -- we're going to go ahead and
bid it out and get it ready for
construction to start. As soon as we
get those permits from the Board of
Engineers and others, we'll be able
to start that construction.

The 18 cabins at Gulf State
Park that were destroyed during
Hurricane Sally, we have the design
done on those. We're ready to bid
those, and those should be all
constructed by the end of '22 or the
first part of 2023. No doubt be open
by spring of '23.

And the last thing on Parks,
I want to talk a little bit about our
partnership with ADEM for the rubber modified asphalt. We have a project at Guntersville State Park and Desoto State Park that used this rubber modified asphalt. So any time you get your tires changed, they charge you a $2 a tire fee that goes into this recycled tire fund. But Ed Poolos, our Deputy Commissioner, working with ADEM, we were able to tap into that and came up with some good projects, places that we needed paving to use the recycled tire mix, but then also some money out of that fund to pay for the installation of that. Just so you know as a Board, that had never been done in Alabama. That mix had not been certified, so we had to work with Auburn University and their transportation group there to certify this mix. So now not are we only using it on our Parks, but this mix is available now to be used
anywhere in the state. So it makes
good use of those tires instead of
them going to a landfill or being
chipped up for something else. The
Department is pretty cutting edge on
getting that done.

For our Marine Resources
Division our red snapper season was
the longest in over a decade. It
started on the weekend of Memorial
Day and went all the way through
December. It was a very good season
this year. A lot of that had to do
with some bad weather days in June
where people couldn't fish because it
was either a tropical system where it
was too rough and so they didn't
catch the quota during some of those
weekends. We were able to stretch
that out and use that all through the
rest of the year. So that's the
beauty of the regional management
system that we're under now. If we
have bad weather or we have something
like that, you don't lose those fish.
The people get to go, and it's been a
good year. We plan to do the same
thing this year. We're sending a
news release out this next week,
opening red snapper season that
Friday before Memorial Day, and it
will be open Friday through Monday
weekends beginning that Memorial Day
weekend, and we'll fish until the
quota's met or until we get to the
end of the year, whichever happens
first. I won't go into a lot of
detail here. I may have a little bit
more detail at the May meeting, but
we're still working through some
issues with NOAA Fisheries that has
the potential to decrease the red
snapper quota for Alabama. Scott
Bannon and I were in DC last week
working with NOAA and our
congressional delegation to try and
mitigate those potential impacts. So I'll expand on that a little bit more when we have some time at the May meeting.

And oyster season this year was phenomenal. I think I see Mr. Avery Bates is here. Hopefully they'll say something good about the oyster season when he comes up. We're trending in the right direction. We had 10,000 sacks in 2019. We harvested about 23,000 sacks in 2020, so we doubled from the previous year. And this year, we harvested about 50,000 sacks so we doubled again in '21. So appreciate Scott Bannon and Kevin and the work that they're doing to help bring back our oyster resources.

Our State Lands Division, the Governor approved 41 million dollars' worth of GOMESA projects on the coast. There are 17 projects.
Those are managed by our State Lands Division. With those GOMESA projects, the Governor is extremely interested in providing public access to our waterways and to our lands, and so that has been a priority for her with the GOMESA projects. So we have a lot of boat ramp building, waterfront land acquisition, fishing gear repair and development, and other public access work in coastal Alabama that's being done by our Lands Division and our Marine Resources Division. And that's just so important for our citizens and our visitors to have access to our waters and our public land.

Through Forever Wild, we purchased property in Butler County, the Greenville area, and opened up a new special opportunity area. I'll talk a little bit about some land acquisition, but since Governor
Ivey's been in office the last four years -- or almost five years, DCNR and its partners have acquired more than 61,000 acres in Alabama for public access. Over a short amount of time, that's quite an accomplishment, and I want to make sure the Board's aware of the work that's been done to get more property for Alabama to hunt and hike and fish and have access to. That will have a long-term legacy impact, and we're not done yet. We've got a lot more to go. There's a lot more stuff in the hopper.

For Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, as you know, the hog and coyote nighttime license passed last year. We've sold about 16,000 of those this year. I won't go into all the work we're doing with Ducks Unlimited. That progress report is at each of your seats. If you look
over that, any questions you could
have for Chuck or Keith on that,
either during the meeting or after
the meeting, but we've got a lot of
work going on with them.

The reservoir management
legislation that was sponsored by
Senator Scofield passed last year and
that adds $5 to each boat
registration, and that goes into a
fund that DCNR manages and will
provide some grants from that for
invasive species and aquatic
vegetation work, marine debris
removal, and regulatory and signage
projects around the state. That just
started in January, so that needs to
build up a couple of years before it
will allow money there to do a lot of
these projects.

And we're talking about
boating access. Governor Ivey
dedicated 2.7 million of the state's
3.7 million from the CARES EDA money. That came to DCNR for fishing ramp and access improvements, and so we're using that money to do that. I appreciate her giving the lion's share of that money to the Department to use for public access because we know what those fishing tournaments mean for the local communities to be able to have those events.

We also have a really big boat ramp project in Demopolis. We're partnering with the City of Demopolis and the county to put a first-class ramp in downtown Demopolis that can host big tournaments in West Alabama. That's something that's been missing for a while. And as Tim mentioned, we're working with Selma and coordinating with ADEM to improve boating access at the Selma marina. Two big projects there in West Alabama in the
Black Belt.

DCNR received a little over a million dollars in the Tyson settlement, Tyson spill settlement that happened in the Cullman County, Blountsville area. We're using that to increase public access on the Mulberry or Bankhead Lake and some other projects in that area. Just of note for the Board, that's the largest fish kill settlement in DCNR history. I want to thank our Fisheries section, Ed Poolos, and our General Counsel Charlanna Skaggs, as well as Attorney General Steve Marshall for the work they did on that to hold people accountable that damage our natural resources and I'm very, very pleased that that was worked out. Hopefully, we won't have those type things, but when we do have them, it's nice to know that we have a team that can make sure that
people that cause problems for our
natural resources are held
accountable for that.

I talked a little bit about
our CWD. Chuck's going to have a
presentation about that shortly. As
you know, in January, we became the
latest state to have CWD positive.
Our response, I feel like, has gone
very well. We were prepared in the
event that this ever happened. We'd
already developed a plan, had
practiced the plan, working with the
Department of Ag and Industries and
others. We've had tabletop exercises
so that if this came here, we
wouldn't be caught flatfooted. When
it happened, we implemented the plan.
Chuck, Amy, Keith, and their staff
have been on this from the very
beginning.

I want to thank Commissioner
Rick Pate and Dr. Frazier with the
Department of Ag and Industries.

They provided a great turnaround on almost a thousand samples that have been taken from deer in the chronic wasting disease zone since January.

And I also appreciate the cooperation of the legislators, the hunters, the landowners in the area. Chuck will talk a little bit more about it in his presentation, but I just wanted to say I appreciate Raymond Jones coming to the public meeting and personally thank our staff for the good work that they've done in responding to this. Out of the 966 additional samples since we had the first positive, there was one deer that came back positive as well, so we have two positive deer out of almost a thousand samples. So the prevalence is very low, and we'll continue to monitor that. And Chuck will talk a little bit more about it
with some regulatory changes that we are making to try and keep that spread down.

The Deepwater Horizon, I'll give a full report at the May meeting on all the work from the Deepwater Horizon section, but I want you to look at your calendars. If you're available, especially the ones from the southern district, May 19th, the Governor is having a Deepwater Horizon Restoration Summit in Spanish Fort. It will be that evening about five o'clock, five to seven, five to eight. If you could put that on your calendars. I think it might be of interest to you. Again, another thing we handle in the Department that you probably don't hear that much about as Board members. But to date since the Deepwater Horizon, we have over a billion dollars' worth of projects that we're managing in
Mobile and Baldwin Counties to our Deepwater Horizon section and our Lands Division and our Marine Resources Division working on those. So between Deepwater Horizon and GOMESA, it's over a billion dollars worth of work that's underway down there right now and being managed by DCNR.

In legislation, this is a light year for us. We didn't have any -- no Department bills. As a recap, we passed 12 pieces of legislation in this quadrennium. Really that was in two years, because in 2020, they didn't have a real session because of COVID. But this year I think we've accomplished all of the goals that we had in this quadrennium, so we're kind of sitting this year out.

There has been a piece of legislation that would establish a
paddlefish season. I think that you have that at your spots here. That was introduced, but it has not had any movement since it's been introduced. And there was some legislation introduced last week that would create a special deer season for deer breeders that would be earlier than the current season. Just in short, the Legislature had a lot of structural issues in forming and it's just not a very -- it's not an effective piece of legislation, and we need a lot of changes, not to mention some management issues. But that was just introduced this past week, and Charlanna and our team are reviewing it and are meeting with the sponsor and the committee chair and can provide some more feedback on that through the process. I'll just do that through an email since we won't meet until after the
legislative session.

And then again as another topic for our May meeting, we are working with the Governor and the finance director and the Legislature on a broad outdoor recreation plan to be accomplished, the ARC funds that the state's receiving. We're getting about 1.1 million dollars in June or July that will be deposited, and we are working with them to do a lot of things to improve outdoor recreation and things that I think that y'all will be impressed with. And I'll give a full report on that in May when we have a little bit more time. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I think that's enough. I talked long enough.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Commissioner. That was a very comprehensive report, very capable. I'm proud to be associated with in any way all of what this Department
is doing. So it's a new day, a build
better and build more for Alabama.
We're way ahead of the curve for the
federal government, their build back
progress.

    It is my understanding now
that Director Sykes is going to give
us a slide presentation on CWD and
any other items; is that correct?

    MR. SYKES: Yes, sir, if you
want me to.

    CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Oh, there you
are. I couldn't see you. Yes,
please. You want to come up here or
-- you're going to do it right there.
Very good.

    And let me say one thing at
the beginning, be respectful. And
any questions or comments for Chuck
ask me so I can get it to you,
because Ms. Johnson is new and she
has promised to key my car if she
doesn't get all of this down proper.
So work through me if you don't mind.
Work through the Chair. Thank you.

MR. SYKES: Thank you, Chairman Dobbs.

As the Commissioner said, unfortunately, we knew it was going to happen. We prolonged as long as possible by implementing proper regulations and educational programs to, in our opinion, prevent artificial introduction of CWD, but we knew as close as it was in Mississippi and Tennessee, it was coming eventually. When we got the call in late December -- the Commissioner thanked a few people, but I want to take just a second of personal privilege to allow people to understand just a little bit about the staff that I have that is working on this.

When I first took this job -- and I think there's still
a lot of people out there that think it's a State employee, they don't care, they can't get a job anywhere else so they're just working for the State and making a paycheck. In addition to Keith and Amy and Marianne and Billy, Chief Weathers, and Captain Michael East, we were all locked up in my conference room for two weeks preparing for the release of the information. And I'm going to put Michael East on the spot. He was scheduled to retire the following month after a long, very decorated service with our Department. He chose not to because he did not want to leave the person that would be backfilling his position with us just having CWD. That's the kind of people that work for this agency. He postponed his plans, his family's plans, where he could do his job and represent our Department and the
citizens of this state and the
natural resources of the state. So,
Michael, thank you.

Y'all can see the two dots
up there, the two green dots. As the
Commissioner said, unfortunately, we
did find one more. I'll go over that
here in just a second.

On January the 7th when we
announced that we had CWD, the first
thing we did was establish a chronic
wasting disease management zone that
was comprised of a high-risk zone, a
buffer zone. The high-risk zone is
there in red. The buffer zone in
yellow. All season and daily bag
limits were removed for that CMZ. We
had 30 days left in deer season
basically to acquire samples. We
needed hunters out there hunting and
giving them all the opportunity they
could to provide us samples. So
that's why we removed the season and
daily bag limits for that area. It was mandatory for all deer harvested within the HRZ, or the high-risk zone, to be tested for CWD, and hunters were strongly encouraged to submit CWD samples for all deer harvested within the buffer zone.

And then, of course, we had carcass transport restrictions on the CMZ. We were extremely pleased with the participation we got from the majority of the hunters. Of course, there's going to be a couple in every crowd, but for the most part, everything went exceptionally well.

We had 966 total samples from that CMZ. You can see the breakdown right there. 497 were from Lauderdale County, 469 were from Colbert County. Out of those 966 samples, only one additional deer tested positive for CWD. So we have a .005 percent prevalence rate.
When Mississippi became positive in 2018, they found one deer. It took four years for them to find another deer in that county.

When Tennessee became positive in December of 2018, they found one one week, ten the next week, 50 the next week, and it has exploded.

Thankfully with all of our preventative measures, I think we're more like the Tennessee -- I mean the Mississippi model where we have been looking in the right area for the past five years, we knew where it was going to come in, so our prevalence rates are extremely low. I'm happy with that. This is something that we're never going to eradicate. We just need to understand it, we need to know the distribution and the prevalence of it, and we manage around it.

As you can imagine -- and
Raymond's well aware of this -- we took quite a bit of criticism when we removed the season and daily bag limit. We were going to kill them all. We're going to destroy deer hunting in the CMZ. They're going to starve the people to death in the future because we were going to kill all of the deer. If you look at that top graph, during the 2021 season, we killed 1481 deer in that CMZ during that time frame January 7th to February the 10th. This year with the removal of the season and daily bag limit, we killed a grand total of 1707. We did not destroy the deer herd in that area. We did not kill them all. There will be plenty there next year. And if you look at the next line down, the next graph down, you'll see that for the season in Lauderdale and Colbert Counties we're below the harvest of what we killed
last year. So even with our new
regulation, everything is still fine.

Overall statewide, we were
down a little bit with deer harvest
this year to last year. What I want
the Board and members of the public
to take away from this, this did not
catch us off guard. Nothing we did
was a kneejerk reaction. This is not
a government conspiracy. We were
prepared, we put a plan in place, and
it's working. We have an incredibly
talented staff that has been working
on this for over a decade. We work
with professionals around the country
looking at the good and the bad and
the ugly of these other states that
have been dealing with CWD for
decades. We're going to be fine.
We're going to manage through this.
Things are just going to be a little
bit different.

So what we've proposed for
new regulations for 2023 in the CMZ, the entire CMZ will fall in the boundaries of Zone A this year. Parts of Zone -- of the CMZ zone were in Zone C last year. So we have moved all of that to Zone A. The seasons and daily bag limits will be Zone A. Baiting and supplemental feeding of wildlife will be suspended within the CMZ. The only exceptions are feed in an active hog trap or bird feeders located within a hundred feet of a building or occupied dwelling. Rather than have mandatory testing of every deer killed within the HRZ, we're going to have certain time periods where we can look at Game Check data and our biologist data from our WMAs where we can make the most of a few weekends to get the desired number of samples that we need. So we will do some mandatory testing dates and locations within
the HRZ and the BZ, and all of that will be published online and in the Digest. And we still -- even though it's not mandatory testing, we still strongly recommend that all deer harvested within that CMZ be submitted for testing.

Commissioner, that's it. And I'll be happy to take any questions.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Director Sykes. We'll entertain questions from the Board.

MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Hartzog?

MR. HARTZOG: On the nonfeeding in the hot zone, would it be possible or wise to maybe consider no feeding within the buffer zone also?

MR. SYKES: It is. It's within the entire CMZ, which is the HRZ and the buffer.

MR. HARTZOG: Okay.
MR. SYKES: It's both counties, Lauderdale and Colbert.

MR. HARTZOG: Good plan. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any other questions? Mr. Commissioner?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Chuck, I don't want to put you on the spot. I know you've not really planned to talk about it, but would you be able to talk about the toxicant, the status of that, or you want to...

MR. SYKES: I can. We have been working with USDA APHIS for the past three or four years working on a toxicant to help with our feral hog problem. I want to make one thing perfectly clear. This is never going to be something that Tim is going to be able to sell at the co-op on the shelf. It's not going to happen. This is going to be much like a
restricted use herbicide or chemical application where professionals that are licensed and bonded, USDA APHIS agencies, are going to be able to use. We do not want a toxicant spread indiscriminately across the landscape. We all want to get rid of hogs, but there's nontargets that have to be considered.

Texas and Alabama have been on the ground floor of this. We've been working with USDA through their registration process. The first year with the trials, we had some nontarget issues. The bait composition wasn't what it needed to be, and the timing of the use of it coincided with migratory flights of neotropical migrant songbirds. So we had more collateral damage than we needed to.

So we went back to the drawing board with the bait
composition timing and now the
delivery mechanism. All of that is
still progressing through the
process. It's not quick. When
you're talking about registering a
toxicant, you have got to cross every
T and dot every I. So this is still
several years down the road, but we
are -- Alabama has been on the
forefront of it.

The product is sodium
nitrite, not nitrate. It is very
effective at humanely dispatching
hogs. Basically they eat the bait,
they walk away, they get sleepy, they
go to sleep, and they don't wake up.
It depletes the oxygen in their
blood. So it's very humane, it's
very quick, and it's very effective.
And it does not keep killing down the
line where a lot of toxicants if you
kill one animal and a buzzard eats
it, it kills the buzzard. If an
opossum eats the buzzard, it kills
the opossum. This doesn't do that.
This breaks down quick in the
bloodstream.

All I can tell y'all is be
patient. Nothing like this goes as
quickly as the private sector wants.
Many of y'all may not know, but I did
come from the private sector so I
understand that side of it. I would
love it to be here tomorrow. It's
not going to happen, period. Right
now, the best tool we have for
removing the number of feral pigs
that we need to remove is whole
sounder removal trapping. No ifs,
ands, or buts. Shooting pigs is fun.
Shooting pigs is a recreational
activity. You cannot eliminate a
problem with a gun or we would have
done it over the past 30 years. The
same goes with coyotes, bobcats,
raccoons, whatever. The best
disposal method at our fingertips is trapping.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. May I ask -- or ask you to add about the USDA's trapping program that is available in, I think, five or seven counties. If anyone doesn't know about it, it's very effective. It's cost-effective.

MR. SYKES: It is. USDA receives grants. Most of it is down in the Wiregrass. They basically overlaid agricultural usage with feral hog populations. They picked Sumter County in West Alabama and picked the Wiregrass to target. People can apply for cost share for traps, or they can have actual USDA come in with a professional trapper and remove pigs. I know that -- I had a call this week. I'm from Choctaw County. We've got just as many hogs as Sumter County does. We
could have been there too, but plain and simple, they looked at ag versus hog populations and that's how it was determined.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. And know that trapping service is free, and it's a 70/30 match to buy the traps. I've just recently learned about this. Thank you, Director Sykes.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Mr. Chairman, I just want to point out to the Board and make sure we are -- even though we are working with USDA and actively involved from the beginning, the certification of the produce and all that is a federal decision through USDA EPA. We're not -- that's not a hold up on our part. We don't really have any say in that. That's going through the federal process.

MR. SYKES: Correct.
CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Very good. Any questions or comments from the Board with regard to that?

Very good. We'll move on to the next -- we'll move on to the next portion of our meeting, which is special orders and/or public comments.

So we've got a list of speakers here. We will work through that. I'm going to give you a set of rules. I think we have 19. We don't have a place for a ready chair, so I believe that today we will just call you. Please be prepared if you're the next speaker, if you know that, if you have a sheet, and I'm going to ask each speaker as they come up to be respectful. Point your comments to me as the Chair. Don't interact with the Board directly. Please come through me. Again, I don't want Ms. Johnson to key my car or Betsy to
turn the clock over on me. So direct your responses to me. Don't engage with the staff directly. Direct it to me. To the folks out here viewing, reserve your comments for outside, no applause, no outbursts during this, and respect these folks and give them a chance to have their say here today just like you would.

Okay. Our first speaker is Christopher Lamb. Mr. Lamb, I'll ask you like I ask everybody, please speak into the microphone. And I'm going to cut mine off.

MR. LAMB: Good morning. My name is Christopher Lamb. I'm from Somerville, Alabama, up in Morgan County, and I came here to raise some concern about rehabilitation. I know this might kind of be against what we just listened to from this gentleman here, but it is a concern that I believe
should be addressed in our state. It seems like we have a lack of resources when it comes to rehabilitation of wildlife, injured animals, sick animals we find on the road.

Before I go any further, I am an avid outdoorsman. I take my kids hunting just about every afternoon during hunting season. We're out on the water just about every nice day in the summer. So we enjoy hunting and fishing all over the state. It's some of the best I've ever seen. I've lived all over the country. One thing that I do have a concern over is when my children ask, you know, what do we do for injured animals besides just shooting them. We have that lack of resources for rehabilitation here. What I try to ingrain in my children is ethics. Leaving an animal to die
when it could be saved, rehabbed, what have you, it's an ethical concern. So it's kind of going against the whole ethical thing we teach our kids just to kill something when it gets injured or sick.

My children are also taught to have compassion towards these animals. When we harvest a deer or any sort of game, you know, we thank that animal, we thank the Creator for providing us with that food, that nourishment. So it's again kind of backwards when we don't have the resources to rehab these injured animals.

The State does a great job when it comes to hunting and fishing. I take, you know, every benefit I can, and I'm showing my kids to do the same. So I'm not really a crazy hippy out here to, you know, disrupt the government or anything, what you
guys have going on, but I would like to bring up a concern for this. And I would like to see Alabama wildlife thrive with the increasing population. Especially that we see in North Alabama, you know, wildlife is suffering. I don't think there's any argument against that. So with that being said, I would like everybody to please consider allowing more opportunities for rehabbing in this state so we can keep Alabama wild. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Lamb.

Any questions from the Board?

Thank you very much for traveling here.

Our next speaker is Mr. Terry Morse -- or Ms. Terry Morse.

MS. MORSE: Good morning. My
name is Terry Morse, and I'm a Board
member of the AWCRS. I am here today
to suggest proposed changes to our
current wildlife rehabilitation
program beginning with an open
dialogue.

Many rehabbers and citizens
feel that the WFF is putting the
Alabama citizens' safety and lives at
risk by discouraging new wildlife
rehabilitators in Alabama.
Compassionate citizens who find wild
animals in need of help cannot turn a
blind eye and let nature take its
course when the reason is most likely
human imposed. Human imposed injury
is not a natural injury. Therefore,
intervention is the responsible
action to be taken.

We are fully aware that WFF
does not want wildlife rehabilitators
in Alabama because Director Sykes has
told us so, but the citizens of
Alabama feel we are needed. We propose that we form an independent committee of established and experienced permanent wildlife rehabilitators, veterinarians, AWCRS members, and other pro wildlife representatives to develop a stable program that benefits our native wildlife and to protect our citizens, give them a place where they can turn for appropriate advice, education, and a safe place to bring a wild animal that is truly in need of help.

Wildlife rehabilitators also deserve better treatment and respect from this State agency. With approximately 5 million citizens in Alabama and only 13 rehabbers, it simply doesn't make any sense. Permitted rehabbers that provide a free service to the public are turning away many of the animals that are called about for lack of space
and resources. As a result, Alabama citizens take the animals home exposing their families, friends, and themselves to various diseases and injuries. The citizens don't know the proper natural diets, can't get vet care, don't have appropriate housing, and they don't know how to prepare the animal for release back to the wild where they ultimately belong. This has created a very powerful underground rehabilitation group with the lack of proper knowledge. Is what they are doing wrong? Yes and no. But what choice do they have.

It is degrading to the Alabama citizens to be threatened for their compassion and willingness to be good stewards to our wildlife. As a result, citizens are being threatened with fines and innocent wildlife are being killed. Game
wardens are no longer allowed to take
the animals to wildlife
rehabilitators according to Marianne
Hudson. WFF does not encourage a
positive wildlife rehabilitation
program, nor issuing new permits.

Marianne Hudson says she is
not getting any new applications, and
this simply is not true. The AWCRS
has confirmed several citizens that
have applied over the last five
years --

MS. JONES: Time.

MS. MORSE: -- and they never
get a response. Their applications
were sent via certified mail, email,
and they have tried to call
Ms. Hudson. Citizens of Alabama
deserve responses and reasons their
applications are being ignored or
denied. We truly want to be a part
of this solution in this matter.
Thank you for the Board letting us
CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Ms. Morse.

Any questions from the Board?

MR. WOOD: You did say there are 13 rehabbers in the state; is that correct?

MS. MORSE: Yes.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Do you want to speak to that, please?

MR. SYKES: Mr. Chairman, can we go through all of these and then get --

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Choice idea.

Thank you. I see that we have three or four more.

The next speaker is Ms. Kimberly Sheham.

MS. SHEHAM: Good morning. My name is Kimberly Sheham from Priceville, Alabama, in Morgan County.
On three separate occasions,
I was in need of a wildlife 
rehabilitator. The first time I
found an injured squirrel, the second
time a baby opossum, and the third
time I found several bats that were
no more than a few days old. I
immediately sought help for these
animals.

I researched online to begin
to call licensed rehabbers. I was in
shock that Alabama only has 13. And
that is absolutely ridiculous because
not all 13 can take all species of
animals. I thought you could take a
deer to any of these people, a bat to
any of these people, and that's not
the case. There's only three for
rabies vectors, such as your fox,
your skunks, your bats, so forth. So
in that situation, the few
rehabilitators we had, I had to seek
alternate methods for help.
There are a lot of people that are underground, and that's where my animals went. I'm not ashamed of that. I'm not going to teach my children that I'm just going to let this animal suffer, possibly be eaten alive by ants, freeze, starve to death. That's not moral. You guys just said a prayer for our wildlife and you sit here and let this happen. So I'm asking you to actually do something about it this time. Thirteen in 67 counties. I had to drive two hours either way I wanted to go just to get help. That's ridiculous. That needs to change. Children are being raised to believe it's okay to kill all these animals, but they can't help them. They can't help -- I'm not raising my children that way. Sorry I'm passionate about this. That's all I have to say.
CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

The next speaker is Mr. John Morse.

MR. MORSE: Mr. Pate, I've seen your name so many times when I gas up, but I do not hold you accountable for the prices.

MR. PATE: Thank you.

MR. MORSE: Your luck.

Good morning. I'm John Morse. I'm speaking for the citizens of Alabama.

Starting in 2012, citizens have been working with WFF trying to get the wildlife rehabilitation program more formalized, organized, and workable. 2012 is the last time WFF worked with the rehabbers.

In 2013, WFF started their adversarial relationship when Director Sykes sent out letters that stated rehabbers were required to
euthanize seven species of animals. Six were rabies vectored species. Rehabbers and citizens fought that action because it was not based on science. Director Sykes was the first and only wildlife director in the United States to classify the opossum as a rabies vectored species. During that meeting, Director Sykes stated wildlife rehabilitators were not needed in Alabama and the wildlife rehabilitation is unnecessary evil. During that meeting, he also stated that if there was an animal that doesn't belong on this Earth, it was a raccoon and they need to be eradicated. We asked him when do you know you have enough to meet your desired -- he stated that too many -- if too many animals were killed, the federal government would take over and make it a special program.
That's not right. Working with WFF has been a take or leave it attitude. No transparency and no cooperation. You don't protect citizens. You don't protect citizens' rights. If you would read the rehabilitation permit, you would find that you probably would not sign it. It's a take it or leave it. You don't want to rehab, you don't sign it. That's wrong.

In 2012, there were over 100 wildlife rehabilitators in the state of Alabama. Due to the guidance coming from Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, it is -- it's almost impossible for a citizen to get a wildlife permit. We want it. It's a free service. We do what we need to do. Why do we do it? We take the animals away from good intended citizens and we don't want them to have it. They have good intentions,
but if they can't find somebody they
will not listen to a phone call.
Leave it alone, put it back in
nature, let nature take its course.
I'm going a little bit long. I hope
you give me that time.

We started today with a
prayer. We're in the Bible Belt of
the whole country. People read the
Bible.

MS. JONES: Time.

MR. MORSE: I hope --

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Please make
your point. I understand that, but
please make your point.

MR. MORSE: We started off with
a prayer, we read the Bible. We are
stewards of this land. You can't
blame a person to say I want to do
something for this animal. We're
only talking about -- there was a
small little portion that Director
Sykes said, .005. We do
.001 percent. We do it just because we want to do it and get that animal back into nature. We're only talking about a very few people -- or a very few animals, but we do need to have that so that people can give it to somebody that can do it.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. We understand. There are others that we're infringing on their time. Thank you.

Any questions from the Board? Any comments?

The next speaker -- and this has to do with raptor conservation. Shall we hear from this speaker before -- Chief Gauldin, should we hear from the speaker before we ask --

MR. SYKES: No, we need to go on and address this, if that's okay.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Ms. Marianne Hudson. Or are you going to do it?
MR. SYKES: First of all -- I'm sorry, Legal Counsel. Get ready.
Unfortunately, we can't manage wildlife off of emotions. We have to manage wildlife off of science. We also manage off of population, not individual animals, populations.
That's what we do. That's our job. We do that for the citizens of Alabama. We have to make hard decisions that make people mad. That's part of it. It doesn't mean that we're wrong. A lot of us have differences of opinions. It's what makes America America, but just because you don't agree with my opinion, does not make us wrong. The quotes that Mr. Morse was making up, y'all can look in the minutes of the Board meeting because I pulled it up where he thanked me and the Department for working with him. A bunch of y'all were sitting here when
that happened. We have to base our
recommendations on facts, not
emotions.

Now I will turn it over to
Ms. Hudson because she has way more
facts than I do.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

Remind you again, please respect
Ms. Hudson's time at the podium.

MS. HUDSON: I'm Marianne
Hudson. I'm the Conservation
Outreach Coordinator and also serve
as our Wildlife Rehabilitation Permit
Coordinator.

Wildlife rehabilitation is a
volunteer activity, so every Alabama
resident who's interested in
conducting wildlife rehabilitation
volunteers and applies for this
permit.

Alabama's wildlife
rehabilitation policies are among the
most lax in the nation. I work
closely with other permit coordinators in other states to see what they're requiring and perhaps consider upgrading the strictness of ours due to what other surrounding states require of their permit holders.

With that being said, our wildlife rehabilitation permits now require a completed application agreeing to the policies related to the release and care of the animal and also an inspection of enclosures. Those enclosures are based on recommendations by a nationally known wildlife rehabilitation organization called the NWRA, National Wildlife Rehabilitation Association. So we follow their recommendations completely for enclosures. These are not random requirements that we created.

When we implemented that
standard of enclosures for the
animal, the number of rehabbers
dropped and that helped eliminate
some of the deplorable conditions
that myself and our officers
encountered when we inspected these
facilities and found animals kept in
dog crates for six months, beavers in
basement bathtubs for six to
eight months. So those minimum
standards of enclosures were very
important for the care and quality of
the animal and brought us up to speed
with national standards.

Since 2013, I have received
five completed applications and
requests for enclosure inspection.
All five of those applicants were
granted permits. I've received quite
a number of incomplete applications.
I've even gone to do facility
inspections and there have been no
enclosures there. But everyone who
met all the requirements of enclosures and applied for a permit, which has been five since 2013, have received a permit.

When it comes to rabies vector species, as they mentioned, we only have three permit holders for that. When you introduce rabies into the conversation, you introduce public health, so our conversations about that include cooperation with the USDA and the Alabama Department of Public Health.

Alabama is really on the front lines. It's really a battleground state to help prevent the spread of rabies to other states. As you know, the USDA spends millions of dollars in our state alone to help prevent spread of rabies.

Rehabilitators congregating animals in cages and releasing them away from their county of origin is
in direct conflict with public safety issues and the efforts of us to control wildlife diseases and also public safety concerns of the USDA and the Alabama Department of Public Health. All our recommendations for the animals are for the safety of the animals, the well-being of the animals, and despite that, although we only have a small number of permitted rehabbers now, I do get a fair amount of complaints from the public about these animals once they are released. For example, squirrels that are overly tame, deer that are overly tame and cause nuisance issues in the areas where they have been released by rehabbers.

When it comes to rabies, we have other concerns. We have documentation for permitted rehabbers releasing rabies vector species away from their county of origin, and even
in the counties that are currently
naive to rabies, which, as you know,
is not just an issue for public
safety, but also the long-term health
of the wildlife population, which is
what we are concerned about the most,
preserving these wildlife populations
mixing these animals and releasing
them contributes to the spread of
disease.

In 2019, Big Bend Wildlife
Sanctuary, despite not having a
permit to possess raccoons, accepted
a rabid raccoon into their facility.
We did not get that information from
them but did hear later from the
Alabama Department of Public Health
about their call to try to find the
finders who were potentially exposed
to rabies through this endeavor.
Those people were never found.
However, it did lead to continued
conversations between our agency, the
Alabama Department of Public Health, and the USDA about how we handle permits to members of the public to handle animals that could potentially increase the risk of human health dangers.

So rabies vector species, which do not include possums in our state or any other state, are restricted more than the other species due to concerns for human health and wildlife population. Allowing these animals to mix in cages and then be spread out to counties where they're not currently found, as far as the disease is not currently found, is not something we can sanction for both the wildlife health and human safety issues.

Those folks that we've heard from today that are concerned about the lack of resources, we invite them to apply. As I mentioned, this is a
volunteer activity which takes a lot of time, money, and resources, and it's an extremely expensive hobby and not a lot of people once they call and find out the enclosure requirements and the type of money that they will be spending out of their own pocket are, frankly, not willing to do it. It's not a facility we can drop on every street corner. It's a volunteer activity. And when people volunteer, they are volunteering again their time, their money, and resources. Of the five people that have volunteered since 2013, each have received and currently hold a permit.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Ms. Hudson.

Any questions from the Board?

Any comments?

Thank you very much.
MR. PATE: Of course, I didn't realize this was an issue. So there actually is a program where you can be an official rehabber. I mean -- and so I don't know what -- you know, we all know now, I think -- or y'all maybe disagree -- you know, you're not supposed to find a deer -- a young deer by itself, you don't go get the deer and go try to find its mama. I think we're not talking about that, right? We're talking about -- and so I don't really understand what y'all's grind is if there's a program there. And what would you have them do?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'll have to ask you to come back to the podium. I'm going to give you just a couple of seconds. Go ahead, Marianne.

MS. HUDSON: Since possession of protected wildlife is not legal otherwise, we do issue permits for
wildlife rehabilitation, and so
basically these permits are in place
so when a member of the public finds
an animal that is in need of care and
rehabilitation action to remedy
whatever its injuries or ailments
are, they are legally able to hold
that animal temporarily in captivity,
euthanize it if it needs to be
euthanized, or perhaps keep for a
period of time until its injuries are
healed and then release it back out
into the wild. And in order to
receive that permit, permit holders
have to have required enclosures and
agree to release the animal within
certain guidelines.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.
Does that answer your question?

MR. PATE: Not really. So what
would be the animal -- I need
something more concrete. If a bird
falls out of a nest and has broken
its wing, is that what we're talking about?

MS. HUDSON: Yes. Let me give you an example. I receive animal reports from wildlife rehabilitators, and the majority of the animals that come into the facilities are those that should have been left where they are. So these are animals like baby deer that are waiting on the doe that are removed from the wild although they should have been left. These are fledglings or brancher developing birds that should have been left. So most often these animals are removed by well-meaning members of the public when they should have been left where they are. However, there are times where there may be a bird with a broken wing or an opossum that's been hit by a car, something that can recover from those injuries within a short period of time under the care
of a permitted individual.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Is that substantial?

MR. PATE: I want to hear their side. They don't agree with that.

MS. SHEHAM: The problem is that there was over a hundred rehabbers at one time and it dropped down to 13 and the people are still rehabbing underground. So they're still putting them in these tiny cages. They're still putting themselves at risk. That's the issue. Without getting them education and the ability to actually rehab, you're just keeping people underground. And they're afraid, so they don't network with each other.

MR. PATE: What would you have us to do? I mean --

MS. SHEHAM: There are several --

THE REPORTER: Hold on. Hold
MR. PATE: I mean, I guess the question is there's a program in place and so -- and it sounds like --

MS. SHEHAM: I tried to --

MR. PATE: -- it's a nationally recognized sort of program. I don't know why people went underground. People do that in lots of industries, whether it's not getting hunting licenses or different reasons people do that. But what would you have us do?

MS. SHEHAM: The problem is I wanted to apply after finding these animals and there was nothing online that I could fill into. There was no application. It said not accepting applications at this time. And that was over probably a year period. So you're not giving us the option. There's only one point of contact if you'd like to be a rehabber. You
have to call that person. And the 
people I've talked to because I'm a 
part of another organization, they've 
all been talked to like they're 
idiots, and they're talked to rudely 
when they call the Department because 
they don't want rehabbers because 
it's not bringing them money like 
fishing licenses and hunting 
licenses. They don't spend money on 
things they don't want to spend money 
on.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. It 
seems that there is a solution to the 
problem, that is, applying for an 
approved rehabber permit, be 
inspected, and be part of it. That 
seems obvious, and that's what I 
would recommend that you do. You 
have your understanding of what the 
rehabbers do and that there is a 
program available for additional 
rehabbers. That is correct. I'm
sor

questions --

MS. MORSE: That's not fair, sir.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: -- from the --

MS. MORSE: The problem is we don't have a two-way conversation with the Department. It is their way or the highway.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Ms. Morse, that is a matter -- something to be dealt with with the person that manages that.

MS. MORSE: They won't. We have tried.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I find that hard to believe, and I'm not going to accept any dialogue with you here unless you're at the podium.

We'd like to move on to the next --

MS. MORSE: I'll move back to the podium and explain this further.
CHAIRMAN DOBBS: There are other people here. And we understand exactly --

MS. MORSE: It's not fair.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: -- what you're saying.

MS. MORSE: I want to go on Record this is not fair. This is the --

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Then it's on the Record that it's not fair.

MS. SHEHAM: We have 11,000 signatures that says it needs to change in Alabama.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Very good. Let's work to be part of the solution.

MS. SHEHAM: I'm trying very hard.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Next? Yes, Mr. Hartzog?

MR. HARTZOG: Could I ask that maybe the Department -- we have a
nongame section, correct?

MR. SYKES:  (Nods head.)

MR. HARTZOG:  Why not appoint several members of the nongame section to work with Marianne and to work with these people. The people that are underground -- I mean, the way I'm hearing this is the people that are underground probably couldn't pass inspection. Well, they -- if they're going to rehab, they need to pass the inspection.

MS. SHEHAM:  And any education. There's no education.

MR. HARTZOG:  Okay. But maybe if the Commissioner would set up a committee with Marianne and a couple members of the -- go ahead, Chuck.

MR. SYKES:  I'm sorry. We already have a committee. Marianne doesn't do anything unilaterally. She works with law enforcement, she works with nongame, she works -- it's
already there.

MR. HARTZOG: Okay. But it may be to try to -- take one step to try to is acceptable to me, say, within the next -- before the next meeting to have them report back to --

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Hartzog, it seems that the procedures are in place within the Department. It's not something that I think we as a Board have to reinvent. That is something that's in place. It's available. I do believe that there are educational opportunities for these rehabbers. Somewhere I have read that there are educational opportunities. I won't debate. But thank you, but I think that that's in place. Am I right, Ms. Hudson? Not the education, but there's a process in place?

MS. HUDSON: That's right. So we have our website, we have a
contact information list on the
website, folks can contact us and
inquire about permits. I get
inquiries, a few a week, and when
people find out that they need to
have minimum enclosures, quite often
they just do not want to proceed
because, as you mentioned, a lot of
people would rather just do it in
deplorable conditions at times and
they do. And we cannot stop people
from doing it illegally. All we can
do is sanction and recommend people
do it well, and we do have a system
in place for that.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP:
Mr. Chairman, I would just suggest
that I will review the procedures and
process with our staff and make sure
that we feel that it's adequate what
we're doing and bring the report back
to the Board at the May meeting.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: That sounds
like a perfect example of a solution.

Thank you very much.

Let's move on. Our next speaker is Mr. Matt Whitfield.

MR. WHITFIELD: Chairman,
gentlemen of the Board, thank you for your time. I'm a little bit nervous. I've never had this many game wardens watching me.

MR. BANNON: That you know of.

MR. WHITFIELD: I am the president of the Alabama Hawking Association and also the representative of the Alabama Falconry Raptor Council. So I am a permitted general falconer and small game hunter in the state of Alabama. And let me give you just a brief description of falconry.

Falconry is the taking of wild quarry in its natural state with a trained raptor. Falconry does not include keeping the birds of prey for
any other reason other than hunting. Because our birds are a natural resource, we have obligations to ensure that the continued availability of that resource is plentiful.

Falconry offers the highest form of protection of an animal by a human. We feed them, nurse them when they're sick, protect them from predators, and we also give them a step up while they're juveniles to help learn to survive by the next winter.

Now, there is a high mortality rate in birds of prey just by nature. Humans also play a harmful role in that mortality rate due to lack of education. And we're proposing a poster be generated and sent out to help with this. I've included that poster I think with the packet that you gentlemen have
received.

Indiana has a similar program like what we're proposing, and I think there's a potential donor paper that I've handed you that might have some of the donors we've used to handle the money for that. And those posters we'd like to put in State Parks or, you know, maybe schools or other places of education.

Falconry and rehabilitation programs, even though they're different, different-type programs, have been dramatically successful throughout the years in helping conservation of birds of prey, and we hope that us as falconers can partner with you, the Conservation Board, to help with that. I've got 45 seconds. I can say whatever I want.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: You certainly may, but let me take some of that time and ask the Board if they have
any questions for you.

    All right. Thank you very much.

    MR. PATE: There again, what is -- is he asking us to do something?

    CHAIRMAN DOBBS: It's my understanding he had a point and we appreciate the knowledge that you brought to us.

    COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Mr. Pate, we have received the information from him earlier in the week, and we've passed that in our Department and there was some -- we want to work with him on the poster material provided to make sure that it meets -- it has some grammatical problems and a few other things that we're not opposed to trying to get worked out with their group and what they do and educational things around the State Parks and others. It fits
well within our mission.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Our next
speaker is Randy Blelew.

MR. BLELEW: Thank y'all for
being -- taking the time out of your
Saturdays. I'm here to talk about
the limits on fishing.

It's been called to my
attention you can catch a limit
today, say -- let's skip everything
on this list except crappie. You go
fishing today and catch a limit.
Tomorrow -- it's been called to my
attention I can't go fishing tomorrow
for crappie because I got a limit
that I caught legal today. Chapter 2
right here it says it's unlawful to
possess more than one limit. Where
does that limit, the possession, come
in? And I'll put this limit in the
freezer. Where does that limit --
that possession stop and start. And
that is my question. I can't get an
answer from nobody to -- does it carry on until I eat that limit or what?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: I think the best thing to do would just have you talk with one of our game wardens at a break or afterwards. But you're asking if you can have more than one limit on the boat at a time?

MR. BLELEW: No. In my home in my freezer, where does that possession stop and start? I've been told for me to go fishing tomorrow because I got a limit, I need to take ten, give it away. I can go catch ten instead of my daily limit.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: I think the best thing to do would be to talk to one of our game wardens about that. This is not a statewide issue that there's -- people are having problems with that
understanding of the possession
limit, I don't believe.

MR. BLELEW: It's right here in
the book.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Again, as the
Commissioner said, my recommendation
is you pick one of these gentlemen.
They all know the rules and
regulations, what then is redeemed to
your possession or becomes in your
possession that would then allow you
to go catch more fish. They can
explain that to you succinctly.

Thank you very much. Our
next speaker is Mr. Tim Mullek.

MR. MULLEK: Good morning,
Chairman and gentlemen of the Board.
I am asking this Board to consider
recommending a regulation change from
one unantlered deer per day to two
unantlered on private and leased
lands.

I am a cotton and a peanut
farmer in Robertsdale, which is Baldwin County. You guys may ask why do we need a regulation change. This summer and for several years, I have applied for and received depredation permits from the DCNR. Working with them is easy. No complaints there. I counted when I was sitting in the back, this summer we shot 228 deer. This problem is not unique to Baldwin County. It is in Dallas, Barbour, Russell, Mobile, and Escambia.

Why would a regulation change be better for everybody? First of all, when we shoot them in the summer, we have to let them lay and that's a waste. If hunters could shoot them in the winter, they can clean them and eat them.

Secondly, during the hunting season, a hunter can very easily distinguish between a doe and a
yearling easy. Does have got the long nose. Yearlings are smaller. When we shoot them in the summer with a thermal, you see the deer. Can I see horns? Yeah. I don't -- that's not my problem. But when you shoot an unantlered deer in the summer, a certain percentage of them are males, and so I think the hunter can do a better job than a farmer can in the summer. And that's all I have.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. So to sum that up for us, you're recommending a two-doe limit in what part of Baldwin County?

MR. MULLEK: I think it should be statewide. If an area does not have a deer problem, people will self-regulate. They'll only shoot one or none. And I think in the old days the regulation read two deer a day, you can only have one buck and one doe. So you can't -- we're
not -- you can't have a buck and two does. We're not asking for three. But to be able to kill two unantlered deer per day every day of the season not on management area.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I understand. I understand what you're asking for. Are there any questions from the Board?

Thank you, Mr. Mullek. We understand.

Our next speaker is Mr. Glenn Cox.

MR. COX: Thank you, Mr. Dobbs and the Board. My request today is pretty simple. I'm from Gadsden, Alabama. This is about Zone E up in Cleburne County, Cherokee County, Calhoun County. And I know it's been going on a couple of years, and I don't know if there's any data that you have gotten back from that area with the change to move the season up
two weeks as well as bring the end of
the season up two weeks. I know
going back and looking at the
minutes, it was recommended even when
this was being looked at is to maybe
leave the end of the season alone,
and that's really all that myself and
the other hunters and landowners in
that area that I've talked to --
that's all they're recommending or
would like to see is for the end of
our season to stay the same as
February the 10th, I believe it is.
Because right now what we've got is
the season has moved up -- and,
again, I understand that the data
showed that the rut was coming in
earlier up there, which we all knew
that, but for us, even with the
regular dates, we found the rut was a
week or two after the season opened
was really when things got started.

Now, we bow hunt, so for us,
you know, it doesn't matter that it's moved up. And I guess as Mr. Hartzog I think had mentioned back then is because we have limits of three bucks anyway and we have limits on does, then why all the changes in different zones and carving out places for -- and, again, I know you guys don't want to end up with 20 zones in Alabama, but if everybody simply moved up two weeks, is it going to matter? Then you can start eliminating Zone E and just say we're moving up two weeks. People aren't going to rush out in those two weeks and say, well, I think we're just going to kill a bunch more deer, because if their rut's not until January, they don't care that it's moved up two weeks.

So for us really all we're wanting to do -- and I've talked to a lot of other landowners and people
around us in that area -- is do you
have any data you can provide that
shows that this is some great benefit
to not have the two weeks at the end
of the season; and the reason I say
that is at the end of our season, we
have a second rut which actually
starts -- it literally starts right
around the time now that our season
closes, and it runs from the end of
January around the 24th, 25th, all
the way through December 10th. And
we have trail cams, we have data, we
have all that to prove that.

MS. JONES: Time.

MR. COX: If I can go on just a
second.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Get to your
point.

MR. COX: My point is we'd like
to get our February 10th date back.
We've been hunting it, and then all
of a sudden for the last two years,
we're sitting here looking at trail
cams and we're watching deer start a
whole second rut that we've always
been able to hunt and now it's just
like, sorry, you can't do that
anymore. So, again, my simple
request is we'd like to go back to
our finishing day of February the
10th in Cleburne County.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Okay. You
spoke of Cleburne, Calhoun, and
Cherokee?

MR. COX: Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very
much.

Any questions from my right
or the left about this? Any redress?
Thank you very much.

Our next speaker is
Ms. Martha Strange.

MS. STRANGE: I'm Martha Strange
from Talladega County.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Good morning.
MS. STRANGE: My concern is with the deer dog hunting. I've been a property owner next to the Talladega National Forest for 20-plus years.

MR. B. JONES: Speak up, please.

MS. STRANGE: And I don't want to appear adversarial. I've actually spent some good time talking with some of the deer dog hunters here today. But my point is I'm not against hunting; I'm not against a person hunting with his dog. I don't hunt. My husband hunts and I've got friends that squirrel hunt with their dog, but they control their dogs. What we're against is the person or persons releasing a group of dogs to run loose across our property, and we see that -- our perception of that is trespassing.

For example, the deer dog hunters will drive up to two gates, one next to the property and one
close to the property line, release
their dogs, and our perception is
that dog deer hunters know where
their dogs are. Their dogs are
wearing GPS collars, so the hunters
are allowing their dogs to trespass
on private property. Dog deer
hunters increase this risk when they
release their dogs with close
proximity to private property. And I
came today -- my intent was to ask
why we cannot ban dog deer hunting in
Talladega National Forest as is true
for the rest of the national forest
in Alabama.

And I have filed complaints
with Jerry Fincher. We've talked to
Jeff Martin. I talked with Lonnie
Miller, who is the dog hunter
association.

Now, Lonnie Miller gave me a
lot of good information. He said the
dogs can be trained to not go on
private property by -- I may not be
using the right word -- but shock
collar training. And if the dog deer
hunters can control their dogs, then
I have no issue. My issue is coming
on my property. But if they can't
control their dogs, then we don't
think they should be allowed to
trespass on our property.

I spoke with -- the premise
is why are dogs allowed with GPS
collars on and hunters know where the
dogs are to be able to run free on
other people's property. I spoke
with Lonnie this week -- and, again,
he's the dog hunting association --
and he did say he is willing to work
with us. He said he's willing to
work within next season, but I wanted
to -- I was told if you don't
complain -- like you said, there's
only one complaint -- if you don't
make a complaint, then guys don't
know that this is still an issue in
the Talladega National Forest. So
working -- I'd like to go forward
with Jeff and Lonnie and Kyle and
let's work next year and see can't we
do a better job with the dog hunting
in Talladega National Forest.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very
much for your attitude. That's
wonderful. Please do stay in touch
with your representative, with Jeff
Martin. Please stay in touch with
him. I'm going to make a note here
for that too for me.

Our next speaker -- I'm
sorry. Are there any questions from
my right or the left?

Our next speaker is Mr. Max
Freeman.

MR. FREEMAN: Thank you-all for
your time. I'm a deer hunter. I
hunt the same woods that Ms. Strange
owns and the national forestry for
the last 44 years. I have not had
problems with the dogs until the last
three years where they've been banned
in other counties and stuff like
this. There's many other folks that
hunts the national forestry too that
don't want dogs.

We spend a lot of time and
money on our land beside the national
forestry to increase and develop good
deer and stuff like that, and now
we're having people to come from
other counties where it's been banned
from their county to come in our
county and destroy our population and
take all of our deer back home with
them.

They're not doing it right.
They're trashing our woods. They're
making our roads dangerous by flying
up and down the roads trying to cut
their dogs off with the GPS. They're
no longer standing the roads they
used to. They're riding the roads and following their GPS tracking. They're no longer turning their dogs out in certain spots where needs to be. They're going along the road where they know the deer is behind the population of houses and stuff like that, turning them out from the main road and then running them back up in the national forestry and waiting on them to come up through there and then shoot them.

As a person with interest in the hunting, I spend a lot of time in the woods fixing my property and other property to be able to hunt without them interfering with us. There's enough of them.

How come they don't have to go and lease them some land to run their dogs on? They've run other people that's paying the forestry taxes or whatever and buying the land
and leasing and stuff to -- they have no concern over it. They're running their dogs through it, and we can't do nothing about it. I can't stop a man running down the road. He stops when you're not there, throw his dogs out, and then runs up on the map and waits for his dogs and he's tracking a GPS. It's like shooting a deer in the butt with a dart, you're going to find it sooner or later. It's not fair. It's not fair to the people that's took time to prepare their land and everything else for these people to come from other counties that they're already busted up and done away with their welcome to come to our part that borders the national forestry and all and destroy what we've worked so hard for and done just because they have some dogs and they want to get out there and ride the roads and chase their deer with a
GPS. That's not hunting. That's not

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Understood.

Thank you for being here. Are you

saying that these dog deer hunters
cross your property, trespass on your

property?

MR. FREEMAN: Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Not just on the

road?

MR. FREEMAN: Yes, sir. They're
going across everybody's property.

If I'm not mistaken, I talked to some

of the game wardens. They say as

long as they aren't within 50 yards

of a dwelling and on national

forestry, they can turn them loose.

Well, if they got a little bitty

50-yard spot of national forestry and

then the rest of it's privately owned

land, they go to that one little spot

right there, throw their dogs in, and

then run over to the big part of
national forestry and come through our land, which we have put feed plots and taken care of to keep the deer around there, and run into them by going through our land.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. The Board, I believe, has a sense of your issue. And, again, thank you for being here.

Any questions?

Thank you.

I'm sorry. Mr. Martin?

MR. MARTIN: Yeah, I would suggest to get with Lonnie.

MR. FREEMAN: We have talked. I'm with Ms. Strange, and we have talked and we've had this problem and it's coming from St. Clair County, Pell City. And it's three major groups that's doing this, and we can't -- every time they tell us we can't do nothing with the dogs. You can't catch them. You catch them,
and you try to give them back to them. They get smart if you mess with their dogs. They claim you do something to them. Nobody's doing nothing to their dogs. We just want them to stay off of our land that we have prepared for us. It would be like you fixing your crop for your food and you took all summer fixing it and preparing, and then somebody from the neighboring county come over and walked through your property and picked what they wanted and you've worked all this time for it.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Freeman. We appreciate it very much.

Again, any other questions?

Our next speaker is Mr. Charles Stewart.

MR. STEWART: Mr. Dobbs, Board members, my name is Charles Stewart.

I'm from Opp in Covington County, and
I appreciate the opportunity here to speak today. I'm a property owner in Covington County, and I'm here today to get some issues resolved concerning dog hunters, specifically encroachment.

The activity that goes along with dog hunting right around -- I'm basically surrounded. I own a hundred acres. I lease another 130 that we use for hunting and recreation, and everybody knows you can't compete with the dog hunters. And like the gentleman just said, I'm having the exact same issues.

And this is the third time that I've brought this in front of the Board. The previous two meetings I sent an email to my district reps. I was unfortunately unable to come to the meeting. And after reading the minutes, I believe it said that there were no dog issues. However, I
submitted issues both those times.
The guy that had the lease that I have now submitted a letter to the Board having the same issues. Which he had the lease for two years and gave it up after that because of the issues with dog hunters.

And like the gentleman said before me, it's just the same. They come up to the property line, let their dogs out, and they run across the property line and you have no recourse of action.

On the west side and south side of my leased property is all dog hunting areas. They lease 12,000 acres around us, and as soon as hunting starts, I get pictures of dogs running all over my property. I get pictures of GPS collared dogs running through my property chasing deer. For over an hour I get these pictures of these dogs. That's not
an accident.

I've tried talking with the president of the hunting club, and last year when we first bought the property, he said he'd throw it out in front of the Board for a vote and get back with me. He never got back with me. I left two messages, two phone calls, two messages, and I've heard nothing.

So this year, I put out a lot more cameras, and I got -- as soon as hunting season started, I get pictures of dogs running all through my property. They're not the neighbor's dogs. They're collared. They're uncollared. So you've got the rogue dog hunters. They're not permitted. They're not a part of the county. You've got the rogue dog hunters that release their dogs across the road running them through the property.
I filed three reports with
the game wardens this year, and I was
sorry to waste their time. They come
up, they take the report, and say we
can't do anything. We don't know
whose dogs they are. Even though
they're collared and there's a dog
hunting club around me, they won't --
they can't do anything. Their hands
are tied. I've got a picture of a
dog hunter with a radio trespassing
on my property this year. Even the
game warden said, yes, it's probably
a dog hunter.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. We
understand completely. Do you know
the names that are on the dog
collars? Do you know the dog hunting
club?

MR. STEWART: Sir, I don't have
the time to research this to go catch
dogs.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. I'm
just curious.

MR. STEWART: But there is a dog hunting club around. Yes, I know what you're saying.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Are you north or south of Highway 84?

MR. STEWART: South, sir.

They're not permitted in that part of the county. But what I'm specifically asking for if I could, please, is a buffer zone for private property owners. And there are two issues, one is the constant dog encroachment on the property. You're chasing your tail. It's like putting a Band-Aid on a gaping wound. Like I said, when you get dogs running deer an hour on your property and they're whistle trained, it's not an accident. And the other one is the constant activity around the property line. I got a -- what the dog hunters call an 18-acre field and
I've got a shooting house on it. You sit there in the morning. Well, right at daylight here they come, so you might as well just climb down and go back to the house because ain't nothing going to happen while you're sitting there.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

MR. STEWART: A buffer zone for private property owners on the dog hunting.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Our next speaker is Michael Bragg.

MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman, could I address -- because the gentleman is from Kevin and I's section.

We've gotten his letters. The proposal that he made, it sounded like in one of the emails he sent us the club was trying to work and they actually fenced so that the dogs could not encroach, so it sounded
like the dog club was working with him.

The other thing was he was wanting a 500-yard buffer zone. Well, you apply a 500-yard buffer zone, the dog hunters get 500 also, so if you do 500 yards, 500 yards, 500 yards, you've got a 200-acre tract of land that you couldn't hunt if you applied 500 yards.

So we've read his letter. I understand his problem, but it sounded to me in the email that Kevin and I got that the dog club had actually fenced one whole section to try to keep the dogs from trespassing, so, you know, maybe you need to get with that club and see if they will go and fence some of the other.

MR. STEWART: I did that, sir. I asked the club if they could make that a stalk hunting area, and they
never returned my call. I tried working with them, and when they don't return your calls, that's pretty much that we're not going to work with you is what I got out of that. So that's why I'm here today is to try to get this --

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Hartzog, what I would recommend is that you help facilitate that program, that you work through that with them and help solve this.

MR. HARTZOG: Lonnie, if you will get that particular dog club to maybe meet with Kevin and I and we can meet in my office in a conference room. I'm sure Kevin will allow us to use his conference room also.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. No other questions?

Mr. Bragg, I'm sorry.

MR. BRAGG: No problem, sir.

Thank you for your time,
Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the committee for allowing us to be here.

My name is Michael Bragg. I am a member of the Alabama Tracking Alliance. I'm here today to speak about Nose to Ground Alabama: Wounded Game Recovery. I passed out pamphlets for everybody to have. And what Nose to Ground: Wounded Game Recovery is we're a group of trackers that believes in the ethical recovery of wounded game and the use of tracking dogs. We strive to provide quality tracking service for all Alabama hunters statewide. We also encourage the group sport that we love by assisting new handlers and teams in the journey to become successful tracking teams. And one of our goals is that --

There's a lot of myths about what we do, a lot of myths that -- a trained tracking dog doesn't run
every deer in the woods. They are trained to track one specific deer. Our dogs are trained to track only one deer. When we're in the woods with our dogs, they're trained on an individual gland to stay on that -- only one deer. And so by doing that is why we are different than any other dog that is used in the woods.

Our dogs are not deer dogs. And so by that also is that we have a group of guidelines that we suggest to hunters is that don't call everybody in the neighborhood to help you look for your deer. And, you know, we wait and we try to educate the hunters by everything we do.

We also have a training program to where -- we go through United Blood Tracking Organization, which is a worldwide organization that helps train handlers and dogs how to successfully help hunters.
recover wounded game. Our
organization is the only organization
that helps hunters recover wounded
game, and that's what we're striving
to set ourself apart from any other
organization.

We are not against deer dog
hunting. We're not against any other
type of hunting that anybody wants to
do legally in the state of Alabama.
What we are asking is that we are not
included in any other laws that
pertain to deer dogs. We do not want
to be associated with any laws
pertaining to deer dogs.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: We understand.
And I think I speak for the Board.
We understand that there is a
distinction.

Are there any questions?
No questions.
Thank you.

MR. PATE: Is there a problem?
I mean, is there a problem? Have you been included?

Mr. Bragg: Yes, sir. Last year in the SB 381, the Alabama Dog Hunting Association with their bill that they had drafted up included tracking dogs. And they stated that they were no different than deer dogs, and we're completely different. And so last year they moved that. Also, it got to House Bill 381. And then this year my understanding is they're going to try to reintroduce the bill, and I just want to state that we are not the same.

Mr. Pate: That sounds like more of a political issue that you need to talk to your representative.

Mr. Bragg: Yeah, we have done that, but I also want to educate the Board here that if you hear something, we don't have any complaints about our dogs and what we
We don't cross the property line without permission. We tell people before we even come if you don't have permission, we're not coming. So, you know -- and we follow the game laws.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: We understand. Thank you very much.

Next speaker is Mr. Don Knight.

MR. KNIGHT: I'm Don Knight. I live in Anniston, Alabama, and hunt in Fayette County. I moved out of Grady's area where I'd leave him alone.

Just to start right here, I want to brag on these people that just talked. And there is a difference in our dogs. My dogs -- I can speak on my dogs. My dogs run the deer. They'll run the heck out of it, but when I take those same dogs out there to track a wounded
deer, if it's fresh, they'll find it.
If it's not that fresh and the deer
crosses -- another deer crosses,
whoop, there goes my dogs. They
going to the freshest smell.

Okay. I want you to
understand that because I think these
people are doing a tremendous great
job, the recovery people. And when
you see a young kid get that first
deer and these people track it for
him, they're amazing. It will make
your whole heart and your whole life
fess up a little bit. It's a great
thing to have going.

And I'd like to ask the
Board -- you know, last meeting I had
a little say about the permits. And
I'd like for y'all to consider
enforcing the permit system like it
was set up, because you're going to
want people to enforce things you're
doing today later on down the years
that you've made good. And the Board was set up to give people after a couple of years on the permit system the opportunity to get off.

Now, let me tell you, most of the people that I know that are on the permit system right now would be willing to get off the permit system but they'd still hunt by it.

Okay. In most cases the people I talk to, they'd still hunt by the regulations. They've got used to them. But they'd just -- it's kind of like taking a shot. You know, you want to make that decision on your own. If you get a shot, that's your business. If you don't get a shot, that's your business. And that's kind of the way we are under the permit system. We'd like for that -- y'all make them -- your people right here make the decision.

Just talk with them and if you hadn't
had any problems with them, take them off. They'll probably still hunt by
the rules and regulations. Most of them I've talked to will. And so,
you know, we want you to be represented and we want you to be respected for holding up the laws that other Boards have set up. It don't just be if it ain't broke don't fix it.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I agree. Thank you, Don, for being here today.

Any questions?

MR. KNIGHT: My time is not up yet.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: It looked like you had finished.

MR. KNIGHT: Well, I'm working on it. No, my time's up.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Don.

Any questions?

None.

Thank you.
Next speaker is Koty McCarley.

MR. MCCARLEY: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, Board, for allowing us this opportunity.

I want to start by thanking Board Member Raymond Jones. Raymond, you may recall we had a situation in the 2021 season where we had to deal with a situation in Colbert County. You chose to give us a line of communication to work with you on that, and I just want to say thank you.

My primary reason for being here today is a request for the permit system that was just spoke about. The request is that be expanded into Franklin County. I submitted some material. I hope that you have that.

Franklin County was completely closed in 2002, has never
been given the opportunity to be able to hunt on this permit system. There are currently 17 counties in Alabama where the permit system is used to be able to have a season for deer hunting with dogs. Along with certain other regulations, the main requirement for this permit system is 500 continuous acres of property. I am focusing this request primarily on two hunting clubs. Both of these clubs would qualify for these requirements if it was just made available to us. And you can see on the map that I have submitted, you can see that acreage that these clubs have. And I've already submitted some highlighted areas with Franklin County, gave you a couple of different options there you can look at.

All throughout the state, the permit areas are defined by
highways, city limits, waterways, just different ways that these areas are defined. And you can see I have defined a few of those so you have some options to look at.

I want you to notice that this would be a small expansion. You know, there are areas nearby where dog deer hunting already exists. It's not like we're making a real large expansion. That's not what I'm asking for.

And I want to point out right here technology. I know this has already been spoke about, but things have changed a lot in 20 years. You know, 20 years ago when we were closed down in Franklin County, we did not have the ability to look at our handheld Garmin unit and say, hey, my dog's fixing to cross onto this other property, I better go catch it. We didn't have
that then, but we have that now.

    And I want to point to the
Geneva State Forest hunt that we have
each year; that's just proof that
this technology works. We turn loose
a hundred dogs at a time multiple
times a day. We keep them all in
bounds. So if you're willing to use
it, the technology works. And I'm
confident that if you will expand
this with this technology, we can
make this work in Franklin County for
the hunters and for the property
owners as well. I can say this with
confidence because I have volunteered
in this Geneva hunt, and I am a
member of a club in Colbert County in
Mr. Jones' district where we use this
technology. Can I get just about 30
more seconds, please?

    CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, 30
    seconds. Go.

    MR. MCCARLEY: I want you to
consider these questions. Is it right that myself and my kids and the other hunters of this generation are still being punished for the previous actions of the previous generation? Is it right that -- or do we, the new generation, deserve a chance to prove to you that we can do this the right way? So I just want you to consider these as you consider this request.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. McCarley.

Any questions?

MR. WOOD: I do have a question. Is all the property contiguous? Is it all joined together, number one; and number two, is there private landowners kind of intermingled inside of this property?

MR. MCCARLEY: No private landowners in the interior. It's all timber company land lease. Just asking for an equal opportunity,
CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Jones?

MR. R. JONES: First of all, Koty, thank you very much. Koty's been very helpful working out dog deer hunting issues and all that. I do want to point out, though, that the area that was closed and what he's asking -- if everybody was like Koty in the state, it would probably be okay. But this -- unfortunately, not everybody in the state is honorable like Koty is, and if we open an area that's been closed, it sets an incredibly bad precedent for the entire state because now we can't -- we'd have to open it for everybody, and I just want to point that out.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: And, Koty, as you know, all of these closures or permit systems were worked through for a number of years before any
actions were taken. It's been on and ongoing like these folks here. So it's, I'm sure, that the Board will take under advisement and review. Thank you for being here.

The next speaker is Ms. Susan Morrow.

MS. MORROW: Good morning, Chairman.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Good morning, Susan.

MS. MORROW: I just wanted to come up here and say thank you to all of y'all, Mr. Sykes, all the Conservation Department, for not putting any more restrictions on us dog deer hunters. We have tried very hard. And to the ones that have complaints, we have disassociated ourselves with bad dog hunters. And in our areas where we hunt, we don't turn a deer dog loose without a GPS collar on it, and we do it the right
way. We can't control all of the bad
dog hunters, but we have
disassociated ourselves with them.
And I think that the Board and Chuck
and the Conservation Department can
probably tell you that we have done a
very good job in the last couple of
years. But I just wanted to thank
y'all.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you,
Susan. Always glad to see you here.

Our next speaker is Mr. Lane
Stephens.

MR. STEPHENS: Thank you,
Chairman and Commissioners. I am
Lane Stephens from Tallahassee,
Florida, with SCG Governmental
Affairs. I am the lobbyist for the
Alabama Dog Hunters Association. I
am not here asking for anything,
Commissioner. I just want to give
some thanks and give some
information.
First, back in December, I had hoped to see Chuck at the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses. He unfortunately was not there. But I thanked him then and will thank him again now for the continued success of the Geneva State hunt that Koty mentioned earlier. And this year, it was also expanded to a one-day youth hunt. And we thank him and his staff for allowing that to occur. I was able to show some pictures from that event at the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses meeting and the legislators in attendance and those watching really enjoyed that.

And that's one of the other things I wanted to share with you was at that meeting, Alabama Dog Hunters Association, the Southeastern Dog Hunting Association, Florida State Dog Hunters Association, and the
North Central Dog Hunters Association sponsored a session on the heritage of hunting deer with families. I, along with George Worthy, the director of the Division of Hunting and Game Management in Florida, and I did that session. We talked about the heritage. We talked about the challenges that had faced this Board through demographic changes, through land use pattern changes, through larger timber holdings being broken up, and those have created challenges and you have dealt with those challenges. We have dealt with them in Florida and other states. What George and I talked about were how effective stakeholder groups and regulators can work together to develop solutions that can protect the sport and protect the rights of private landowners, both landowners who don't want dogs on their property
as well as landowners who would like to be able to hunt with deer dogs on their property. And we talked about those things that work, about the new collars, the GPS collars, the correction collars. And correction collars only work if you train your dogs to use them. Just putting it on there doesn't work.

But I was able to show a video at that meeting, a video filmed here in Alabama by several different hunters, and the legislators there and those watching at home got a real treat. They got to watch these dogs who were greatly trained break off with some of the hardest races you've ever seen and being thrown, and with a whistle or more being sounded, those dogs broke right off, came to their master, loaded themselves up in the dog box without ever being touched.
After that meeting, I was told by some of the senators that were there from other states, we need you to come show this to the folks in our state. And it was very well received.

I'm running out of time, but I am going to ask this. Many of you come to North Florida, to Panama City, to vacation, Mexico Beach. I would ask you to add them to your prayers. A forest fire started yesterday. It's already spread to over 1400 acres, eight homes have been lost, over 600 other homes are threatened. All that woodland destruction that took place in '18, it's coming to fruition. It's bad in Panama City, so pray for those folks. Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I think we can accommodate that. Thank you, Mr. Stephens, very much.
Our next and last speaker is Mr. Avery Bates.

MR. BATES: My name is Avery Bates. I'm vice president of the Organized Seafood Association of Alabama. It's a blessing to be here today.

I'll tell you, we have had some good seasons this year, especially on oysters. What a blessing it was to see my brothers. They're still able to oyster. You can get an oyster that's worth more than it's ever been worth. You sell it to the public that should enjoy it. It's a wonderful thing for a properly licensed commercial fisherman to be able to fish, supply the fish to the citizens of this state and this country. We love to see people eat whether it's freshwater catfish or whatever fish, put it on the table like you put it
on his table.

Our Commissioner of Agriculture, along with Patti and a number of other people, got to enjoy some good seafood at the seafood banquet. The place was packed out. They enjoyed good boiled shrimp. We like to see people eat wild caught seafood from our bays, our rivers. We want to see y'all continue to let these fishermen catch fish from our waters, all kinds of fish.

You know, 9280 says -- that's to define what seafood is. It is all saltwater fish. It says that in 9280. But it also says in other places in 911 section that you're allowed to catch other species. We want to include another species and put it back like it was a few years ago.

We support -- I talked to our commercial fishermen. We support
this bill and House Bill 334, and I'm just telling you that. But I want to add some other things too.

This is important to keep feeding America. What's sad to see is imported China oysters on the markets. We see them in a lot of stores. China don't like us. Do y'all know that? China does not like us, but we buy a lot of stuff from China. Russia does not like us, and we're still buying fuel from Russia.

What's sad is when we don't put our own people to work feeding our people with our food. Thank goodness for Grady giving us a fair shake.

And in all of that, Grady's got $200,000 to come up to make some new oyster reefs. Anybody want to match that here? I hope so. Why? The more oysters you have, the more fish you have. The more fish you have, the more crabs you have and
everything else, cleaner water.

I'm here to tell you we want to see our bottoms increase. And not only that, but our Commissioner working according to 924 part E with the federal government putting, whether it's GOMESA funding or what, to clean our waters up. We've got a pipeline that's been okayed. They extended our waste treatment plant. Dilution is the solution. How many times have you heard that, Scott? Scott, thank you for working with our fishermen. There's approximately over 300 oystermen out there, and it was a blessing.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. We understand. Thank you so much.

MR. PATE: I would like to make one point, and I'm talking about some of the things we do in the Department of Ag. One thing we're real pleased that we were able to get a $200,000
grant that we're going to be able to
use down in Baldwin and Mobile
Counties to help grow the seafood
industry. And so we're rolling that
out, I guess, within the next few
months. But we've put a real
emphasis and we're fixing to do some
things with the traveling to try to
promote Alabama seafood. There's a
huge international show about trading
seafood into the EU in particular,
and we're going to attend that. And
so we're trying to really support the
Alabama seafood industry.

MR. BATES: We love to see the
Department of Agriculture do what
it's been doing, standing behind our
working people that work on the
water. What a blessing it is to see
you showing up and supporting us like
you have and keep supporting us.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you,
Avery.
MR. BATES: We like to see Alabama eat seafood.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: We do too. We love seafood. I do.

Our next speaker is Mr. Don Nelson.

MR. NELSON: Thank you for allowing me, Mr. Chairman, to speak this morning. I'll make it as quick as I can. It's hard for a mayor of about 20-plus years.

I'm the mayor in Creola, Alabama. And, Ben, I'd like to get a chance to talk to you for a second after the meeting. What I want to talk to y'all about briefly is a success story in Butler County. And there's been no complaints for dog deer hunting in Butler County last year or the year before. And there's five keys I want touch on. One of them is the gentlemen sitting right there, Mr. Grady and Ms. Pat. They
I'm the president of Big Rack Hunting Club in Butler County for over 50 years. When Grady calls, I listen. When Pat calls, I listen, because I know they've got something that we need to take care of, and we have that relationship that we do. Mr. Don Knight has got up and talked a little bit. Mr. Lonnie Miller has called. I appreciate y'all utilizing them gentlemen. That's the second key that helps a good dog hunting club do the things right. I empathize and sympathize with y'all's problems, and we don't want to go there. And I appreciate y'all bringing that up.

The third thing that we found out is quality of the members. And Susan touched on this a little bit. I don't want bad members that
cause problems and gives dog hunting a bad name. Don't want it. Don't want to go there. Those people won't be invited to my club. And they need to be stopped from what they're doing.

One thing additional is -- they touched on it this morning -- is a tracking system. The Alpha System is the best thing that's ever happened for a dog hunter. You train your dogs.

Now, I've got a flip phone. I'm a dinosaur. I'm the only person in here with a flip phone this morning, but I'm learning how to use my Alpha System. It works. Our club invested over $15,000. Everybody when they turn loose a dog, they use the Alpha System. So that helped us right there.

And the last thing that's probably the most key thing is your
conservation officers. My members
tell me what a great interaction they
have with your conservation officers
in Butler County. Please pass -- I
don't know if Mr. Reeves is here, but
pass it on that we appreciate that
relationship. They do a great job.

In looking around this
morning -- I'm an old retired Marine
Corps colonel of 30 years, and I can
see any one of your officers would
pass as a good Marine looking at
their appearance, their
professionalism, and their demeanor.
And I appreciate that.

It takes those five things I
think to make your job a lot easier,
and I hope it goes well. My club
appreciates what you're doing.

Any questions? That's as
quick as I've ever talked.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any questions?

Mr. Nelson, thank you very
much. Thank you for your service.

And our honor guard is sharp as a
tack. They're incredible. They're
well squared away.

Our next speaker is Mr. Eric
Ray.

MR. RAY: I'm not representing
any organization. I'm a property
owner in Talladega County. My
property is adjacent to the Talladega
National Forest. I've got about 80
acres. I've had problems over the
years with dog hunters, and basically
what I find is they release their
dogs on the county road. And there's
anywhere from four to eight property
owners between there and the national
forest, and I'm one of them. And so
they drive the dogs through our
property, and then in the national
forest.

And I applaud these dog
hunter associations and the clubs for
their high technology and their
ability to track their dogs and
control their dogs, so there's no
reason for them to do that. They
know that there's property between
where they release the dogs and the
national forest. So rather than just
complain, I think with the technology
that they have and the knowledge they
have about their dogs and control
they have over their dogs, that's
great. So they should not be adverse
to having severe penalties for
trespassing across people's property.
So rather than just complain, I
propose a solution. Let's penalize
the bad dog hunters, and the good dog
hunters shouldn't be concerned about
it because they're not going to be
violating people's property. So
let's just put a penalty on bad dog
hunters.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Great idea.
Thank you.

Any questions from the left or the right?

Well, that concludes our public comments and speakers for the day. And our next —

MR. HARTZOG: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'm sorry. Mr. Hartzog?

MR. HARTZOG: Can I have the floor for a minute?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, you may.

MR. HARTZOG: When Mr. Avery spoke, he spoke about oyster restoration and he said about the money that I would be matching. I wanted to make it clear that the quarter of a million dollars that's being given for oyster restoration came from Alabama Wildlife Federation. And also we need to thank this gentleman right here...
because Officer Bannon can tell you
that we have a tremendous new
addition to the reef system because
of Kevin's family providing trucking
for the reefs. So the seafood
industry in Mobile Bay is greatly
enhanced by Alabama Wildlife
Federation and specifically by
certain Board members. And I want to
thank Kevin for doing that. But I
didn't put up the money for the
oyster restoration.

But two points I want -- is
that I would love Chairman Dobbs to
write a letter to Conservation
Officer Drake Hayes on behalf of the
Board recognizing him for his being
recognized by the NWTF. So I don't
know whether I need to do that in the
form of a motion, but I'd love to see
that done from the standpoint of the
Board recognizing Officer Hayes.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: That is
something that we've discussed we're going to do that. We can do that by unanimous resolution. It was a unanimous resolution, so no one opposed that. So we have a resolution that we're going to write a letter of recognition and thank you and congratulations to the gentleman who won Officer of the Year from the National Wild Turkey Federation.

Is that it?

MR. HARTZOG: No. Second thing. This is from -- I'm probably going to get a black eye but anyway. Representative Hanes called me, oh, a month or so ago concerning -- and Mr. Bates brought it up about commercial fishermen about the House Bill 334. Mr. Hanes has talked to me a lot. I've in turn called because I always like to get both sides of every story. And I've been talking with the assistant director, and, you
know, I hear one thing on one side
and one thing on the other. In
reading Tommy's bill, it kind of
makes somewhat sense with them
wanting to increase license fees to
earmark that money strictly for
production of paddlefish.

And Mr. Fred and I have
talked, and I brought up the fact
that Tupelo Hatchery in Tupelo,
Mississippi, was raising paddlefish
and took the fish out of the
Pascagoula River, was raising them.
They quit about two years ago.
Mr. Fred told me this morning that
the reason they stopped was they got
the resource back into shape, that
the majority of the reason for them
doing that was the fact of the
hurricane devastating the population
there in Mississippi, you know,
several years back. But Tommy's bill
provides for an increase in license
fees, and the license money goes
directly to Fish and Wildlife for the
use of growing the fish.

    It has been told to me that
a guy in a hatchery in Kentucky can
take two male fish and two female
fish from Alabama so the genetics
don't get messed up and produce a
hundred thousand fingerlings.

    And I know we've got money
coming forward with the -- I want to
call it CARES -- from federal money
from the reclamation money of a
million and a half dollars. I know
Game and Fish is asking for some of
it and Parks and Game and Fish and
the hatcheries and all that. It
seems like it might be if the fish is
in an endangered situation why use a
hatchery anyway for raising these
paddlefish. But if you do -- 40
licenses at a hundred fish apiece,
that's only 4,000 fish coming out of
the resource. According to Mr. Avery from the commercial fisherman down in Mobile, the Delta, the paddlefish are as thick as they can be.

I went back and read. The main thing was the Department --
Fred's situation or what he said was we closed the season because in the fourth year of the season there was 135 violations. And I brought that up to Tommy, and Tommy said, Grady, he says, none of those violations were for actual taking of the improperly sized fish or taking too many fish or anything. It was the fact that maybe the net didn't have the type of buoy on it or a boat left the dock too soon or whatever. It's my understanding that Tommy asked for a list of all the violations so that he could have those, and the Department has yet to furnish those to him.
It sounds like -- in one way it sounds like a good bill if the resource -- if it was -- if we're going to add back more. If we're going to take 4,000 fish out and we're going to add a hundred thousand back in, we're increasing the population instead of decreasing the population. But I went back and pulled the actual press release from the Department back when the season was closed, and it says -- and I want to ask after I get through. It says this is when it was first allowed for them to go back to fishing. And I'm reading the article. It says, the fish has recovered enough and considered robust enough to support a regulated commercial fisherman. In 2013, they initiated that. Okay. Then when it was closed, it was cited because of the 135 violations that the analyst reports that some of the
paddlefish harvesters were -- and it uses the word -- didn't say they ever caught them. It said likely falsifying reports. Okay. So there's no documentation that there was actually more fish taken than was supposed to.

Further on in the same press release that came from the State, it said that based on reviewing the biological information, the future commercial paddlefish seasons could -- didn't say would -- but said could lead to overfishing and jeopardizing long-term sustainability. I would like to see before this next meeting that list of violations.

And also, Mr. Fred, or you want to turn it over to Fisheries. When was the last time any population was done on the paddlefish?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: On
this issue if you'll address the
questions to -- the legislation is
currently being -- has been
introduced, so I'd appreciate that.
I think that's more appropriate.

MR. HARTZOG: We couldn't pass a
regulation?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP:
You're speaking about some
legislation that's working through --

MR. HARTZOG: The process is we
had -- before when the Department
granted the four-year license, did
legislation do it or did the
Department do it?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: It
was under a special permit from the
Department.

MR. HARTZOG: Okay. So I mean,
so this Board could do the permit for
the commercial fishermen if they so
desired?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: This
Board could recommend that, yes.

MR. HARTZOG: Could I then ask for that sampling and ask a question on that sampling?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: We had a very robust presentation on this last year from Chris Greene in the Fisheries section about the paddlefish, and I provided you information. We discussed it. Would -- I can't see staff to see if there's -- I don't want to put you on the spot with a particular question about stock assessment. But we have done population information on this species along with the others.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: What's the question?

MR. HARTZOG: Has there ever been any population studies on the paddlefish for the last two or three years?

MR. GREENE: Our staff has been
out and sampled --

MR. HARTZOG: And has the
samples shown --

MR. GREENE: A lot of data.

MR. HARTZOG: That's all I
wanted to try to find out.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Remember,
direct these questions to me so I
don't get my car keyed by Ms. Johnson
when she leaves today.

Grady, you've got a lot to
do here. You've got $250,000 money
to match with the oyster reefs and
probably a million dollars to do the
paddlefish thing.

MR. HARTZOG: Well, this guy
probably provided more than 250-- in
transportation for free.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: We're going to
-- the science -- it was what was
made in the past. There was a rule
made, and we're going to leave it
there for the time being.
So with that, we move on to
-- if there are no more questions, we
move on to unfinished business. Is
there any unfinished business before
this Board today? Any motions on the
table?

There being no unfinished
business, we have new business as an
agenda. And what new business do we
have today? Is there a motion?

MR. SAVOY: Mr. Chairman, I have
a formal motion.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you,
Mr. Savoy.

MR. SAVOY: In accordance with
the requirements of the Alabama State
Legislature, I make a motion to
approve the increase in all licenses
and fees levied by the Department of
Conservation and Natural Resources
where applicable based on the
increases in the Consumer Price Index
as published and using the formulas
for said increases as previously
approved.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right.

There's a motion to increase the CPI.

May I read it again?

CPI motion, in accordance
with the requirements of the Alabama
State Legislature, I make a motion to
approve the increase in all licenses
and fees levied by the Department of
Conservation and Natural Resources
where applicable based on the
increases of the Consumer Price Index
as published and using the formulas
for said increases as previously
approved. That's the motion.

Is there any discussion?

Do I hear a second?

MR. BARKSDALE: Second.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: And let's vote
on that.

MR. PATE: I was trying to get
in the discussion. I guess Chris and
I are in the same boat. I mean, we don't do that at the Department of Ag unless there's a need. I mean, is there some financial shortfall, or is this just something that y'all do periodically or...

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHPH: This is something when the Legislature changed the license structure in 2008, they implemented a provision in there that to keep that license and the revenue of the Department current with that level of funding that when the Consumer Price Index -- that when we have an increase in that that would keep small increases as we move forward instead of having it in one large increase every ten or 15 years. So we're going with the statute that was put in place for a small license increase periodically.

MR. PATE: I wouldn't even think we'd have to vote on it if you're
saying it's already --

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: The law requires this.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. So there's a vote before the Board increasing the Consumer Price Index based on federal government -- all those in favor?

Let's have a show of hands.

It's unanimous.

MR. PATE: No, it wasn't either.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'm sorry. I thought you had your hand up.

MR. PATE: I did not.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: So one nay. So that passes.

Are there any other unfinished -- or new business? Any motions or anything?

MR. SAVOY: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, Mr. Savoy?

MR. SAVOY: One statement before I make a motion. I appreciate the
credit that my colleague next to me has given to me for the oyster reef program that we've been working on, but I just want to mention the individuals that made that happen. If you want to know more about it, I urge you to go to the Alabama Wildlife Federation site. It's a great program, very successful, and I encourage everybody in Alabama along the coast to go out and enjoy themselves and look at the reefs.

Thank you.

The motion I have is related to our turkey season. It was brought to our attention. Several of us got calls about this. And we would -- the topic is putting the days back in place for our youth and disabled veterans. So the motion I would like to make would be to institute those days back in there for those two groups. Thank you.
CHAIRMAN DOBBS: That is a motion, then, that you would bring forth at the next meeting.

MR. SAVOY: Yes.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much. We can expect that from you then.

All right. If there's no further business, our next meeting will be in May. I think it is the 21st of May. And that will be in Eufaula, Alabama.

Thank you very much, everybody. Safe travels home.

Thank you.

(Proceedings concluded at 11:45 a.m.)
REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

STATE OF ALABAMA

AUTauga COUNTY

I, Stacey L. Johnson, Certified Court Reporter and Commissioner for the State of Alabama at Large, hereby certify that on March 5, 2022, I reported the proceedings in the matter of the foregoing cause, and that pages 3 through 180 contain a true and accurate transcription of the aforementioned proceedings.

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

This the 27th day of April, 2022.

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