STATE OF ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Thurber Arts Center
Randolph School
4915 Garth Road, SE
Huntsville, Alabama
May 20, 2023

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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Proceedings taken before Stacey L. Johnson, Certified Court Reporter and Commissioner for the State of Alabama at Large, at Thurber Arts Center, Randolph School, 4915 Garth Road, SE, Huntsville, Alabama, Saturday, May 20, 2023, commencing at 9:00 a.m.

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BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Joseph Dobbs, Jr., Chairman

Commissioner Christopher M. Blankenship,
Ex-Officio Secretary

Mr. Kevin Savoy

Mr. Grady Hartzog

Mr. Greg Barksdale

Mr. Tim Wood

Mr. Raymond Jones, Jr.

Mr. Ben Stimpson

Mr. Gary Wolfe

Mr. Brock Jones

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CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Welcome to you all.
Welcome to our second Conservation
Advisory Board meeting in 2023 for today,
May the 20th. I'm glad you're all here.

We don't have a whole lot on the
agenda, so this is going to be a
reasonably short meeting. I'm going to
dispense with admonitions and just say
let's be diligent and responsible to
everybody and let's have a good meeting.

Let me thank -- this is a
wonderful venue. It's beautiful. It's so
good to be here. Let me give some special
thanks to Adam Bernick, who is the
assistant head of the School for
Advancement and Strategy, for having us
here. Meade Davis, she's here this
morning and has been helping out and thank
you. She's the Director of Development.
David Hope, he's the Technical Director.
He's managing our microphones and the
lights, which is pretty cool. Matt
Strobe, safety and security manager; Mark
Saucer our facility director; and last, but certainly not least, Mr. James Cooper, the chief financial officer. So thank you to all of those folks. And thanks again to all of the -- the staffs from all the divisions and the directors that are here today. Thank y'all so much for taking your time and coming. Betsy, Wanda, thank you and your folks. And Deputy Director Poolos for being here and supporting us. We appreciate this very much. And the legal staff that's here, we thank you. Juliana, thank you so much.

This morning I'm going to ask Mr. Kevin Savoy, our Board member, to give our invocation.

MR. SAVOY: Will you bow your heads.

(Invocation given by Mr. Kevin Savoy.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Kevin, very much.

I'll lead us in the pledge this morning. The flag is here to my right.
(Recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance led by Chairman Joseph Dobbs, Jr.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Secretary, do we have a quorum today?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Yes, sir, we do.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

The minutes of the May 11 meeting have been distributed and read. Are there any corrections to those minutes?

As there are no corrections to those minutes, we'll sign them and move them forward and put them in the minutes. Thank you.

Just briefly we'll take a moment for each Board member -- you don't have to stand -- if you will just give your name and your congressional district. At the earlier meeting, of course, we do a district report. If you'll state your name and your congressional district
starting at the far end.

MR. BARKSDALE: My name is Greg Barksdale. I'm District 4.

MR. WOOD: Tim Wood. I'm District 7.

MR. HARTZOG: Grady Hartzog, District 2.

MR. SAVOY: Kevin Savoy, District 2.

MR. STIMPSON: Ben Stimpson, District 1.

MR. R. JONES: Raymond Jones, District 5.

MR. B. JONES: Brock Jones, District 6.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Chris Blankenship, Commissioner of the Department of Conservation.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: And I'm Joey Dobbs, Chairman today. And I'm going to remind you -- I'd like to remind you again -- these folks -- if you've got questions in your district or if you're out of your district, these are the fellows -- give them a call, ask them -- let them be your
go-between to work with you and the
Department of Conservation and Natural
Resources in helping solve your problems
or just the issues. And if you have a
positive comment, please share that with
them so that they can share it with the
Department as well.

We're going to move quickly here.
Download the Outdoor Alabama app. It's
got some great things on it. I encourage
you to do that every time.

I'm going to ask now that the
Commissioner give us his updates as well
as a PowerPoint report.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Thank you, Mr. Dobbs.

I'm going to give a quick update
on some things that have happened since
our March meeting, a legislative update
and couple of other things, and then I
want to run through some information about
the Deepwater Horizon funding that we're
handling through the departments and
GOMESA and then the outdoor recreation initiative that I thought might be of interest to the Board.

But first, let me talk about legislation that could impact the Department. There was some legislation that dealt with dams and dam inspections that was introduced. Of interest, I think, to the Board maybe, is that we have over 35 dams in the Department of Conservation that we’re responsible for either in our state lakes, in our state parks. So the legislation did have a real chance to impact us and what we’re going to be required to do. We have worked with the legislator, Senator Chambliss, on that and with a substitute that we can live with on that, and hopefully that will be introduced this next week, the substitute, if it makes it to the Senate floor. It really created a voluntary dam safety program so that entities that would like to participate in that and have access to
some BIL money from the federal government for dam safety would be able to access that. So we're supportive with the substitute.

And there's a bill that has to do with stocking, stocking fish, and what would be allowed on the Coosa River. It's passed. We substituted that bill with some language that takes away most of the things that were adverse to us in the Department. The substitute bill has passed the House, passed the Senate Committee, and it's still in need to pass the Senate if it makes it on the calendar the last few days.

Then there was a fish consumption advisory bill called the Shore Act that was put forward by most of several river keeper organizations. It would create a statutory requirement for ADEM to do certain things on signage, for the Alabama Department of Public Health to do certain things with the fish consumption, and then
the portion that impacted the Department of Conservation is that we would just need to make available when we sell the license electronically the websites so people can go see where the fish consumption advisories are. Like I say, we worked on this bill as well with ADEM and several of the business interests to have something that we could live with. It is in the same thing, it has passed the House, passed Senate Committee, and is waiting for the chance to get on the calendar in the Senate for final passage.

Then there's a living shorelines bill that would impact our State Lands Division down in Mobile and Baldwin Counties. Again, we worked with the sponsor, wrote a substitute for them to get that bill to something that we could live with and thought that it met his objectives without overly adversely affecting the Department and the work that we do on the coast. That bill has passed
out of Committee and House but has not had any other movement, and I don't see it having much of a chance with just a few days left in the session.

We do have some funding in the Education Trust Fund supplemental that could be of use for the Department. I'll talk a little bit more about that in the PowerPoint. But it's 15 million dollars that would go to Innovate Alabama that would be spent for outdoor recreation and consultation with the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. And then the general fund supplemental, there was eight million dollars in there for the Department. Three million dollars of that would be for an economic development project at Rickwood State Park in Blount County, and five million of that would go to ADCNR for some work for shooting ranges, state lakes, and some other opportunities. We're working to try and get both of those increased in the
final budget that passes.

    But in putting this together yesterday, I did come across what I thought was some interesting information.
Our budget for '24 if passed as we proposed, it will be 407 million dollars for the Department of Conservation. If you add the 16 million dollars for Forever Wild, that's 423 million dollars for our budget next year. Just as for information to show how things have grown over the last five or six years, in 2017 our budget was 140 million dollars. The next year was 188 million dollars. So from 2017 to now our budget is 190 percent higher than it was back in 2017. A lot of that has to do with the oil spill work that I'll mention. Of the 407 million dollars this year, 165 million of that is for oil spill projects on the coast and 70 million dollars of that is GOMESA. But that's still a testament to the good work of our staff in finding grants and finding
opportunities for us to do good work around the state, turning over every rock that we can to find money under there. So I would like to commend staff from all four of our divisions for the good work that they've done in securing funds to do good work for recreation in our state. I've said it forever that ideas just stay ideas without money, and so our staff has done a really good job of finding money to make those ideas into reality. And the people in the state of Alabama are the ones that are benefiting from that.

Just to put it in perspective, if, Mr. Chairman, you don't mind just a couple extra minutes, I'm just going to give you the funding amount for a few other departments in the state just to see how that 407 million compares. Ag and Industries, their budget is 79 million, ADEM is 323 million, ABC is 134 million, ADECA is 471 million, Forestry is 33 million, ALEA, the Alabama Law
Enforcement Agency, is 208 million. Then the bigger ones -- some of the bigger ones in the state, Corrections is 776 million, DOT is two billion, and then Medicaid 9.2 billion, and then Human Resources is in the 4, 5 billion dollar range as well. So those are the larger ones, but just to kind of give you an idea of where we rank budget-wise with some of the other agencies in the state that you hear a lot about.

Just giving an update on things from March until now, we did receive our deposit for GOMESA funding -- around a little over 39 million dollars that we received -- at the end of April. There was a lease sale for offshore oil and gas that will help with our GOMESA distribution in 2024. That money will go towards that distribution.

Our State Lands Division received two infrastructure grants recently. One is about 1.2 million dollars for 449 acres
in Mobile County, and then another grant to acquire another parcel within the Weeks Bay Reserve Management Area. Then we'll have beach renourishment projects beginning this late summer for Dauphin Island, Gulf Shores, Orange Beach, and Gulf State Park, we'll be adding sand in all of those locations late summer and through the winter.

From the Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries side, I do want to recognize that Chuck Sykes was elected president of the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, AFWA. I don't know. It may be the first time we've had someone from Alabama be the president of AFWA. It's been a long time. That's a big thing. With all the things that are going on around the country with -- especially on the national wildlife refuges and some of the federal lands and things that are going on to try and take away people's opportunity to access those federal lands
and then other legislation that will limit what we can do in our state, it's very important I think to have Chuck in that leadership role for this next year trying to help push access and protect all that we hold dear when it comes to outdoor recreation and hunting and fishing.

We did have a lot of turkeys harvested this year. When you look at the reports, it was a successful season for a lot of folks on turkeys.

For the MRD, the Red Snapper season for the charter boats, that season was set on Monday of this week. It will be June 1st through August 25th, which is a longer season than they've had in recent years.

And then at the Gulf Council meeting June 5th through the 8th in Mobile, there's a proposal that would increase the quota for the recreational Red Snapper fishermen, and if that's approved, it will be about a 110,000 pound
increase before the end of the year, which is a little over 20 percent in our quota. As you may recall, our quota was reduced about 50 percent this year compared to the previous two years because of some calibration that NOAA Fisheries did. This will help us get some of that quota back and should give us a really long, successful season for Red Snapper this year.

For Parks, with the bond money and some other things, we have construction going on in parks all over the state. So hopefully, you'll see parks in your district with construction signs going up in some of those areas. As with any construction, we'll have to close certain areas of the park. You may get some complaints from park goers, but I tell all of them that call, pardon our progress. Once we get this done, you're going to be really pleased with the finished product.

We had our managers meeting this
week at Lakepoint State Park where all the
managers from all of the parks all over
the state get together and do some
training and some good times of fellowship
and working on some initiatives. I'd like
to thank Grady for taking the time out of
his schedule to come by for dinner with
the park managers Tuesday night. I know
that meant a lot to them and a lot to me
that you took the time to come by there,
Grady. Thank you so much.

As part of the renovations of the
parks, we hosted a public meeting in
Northport for Lake Lurleen State Park just
to kind of get input from the public on
what they wanted to see when we do the
renovations at that park. It is in need
of almost a total rebuild, and so we
wanted to involve the public. I thought
we might have 20 or 30 people show up.
Well, we had over a hundred people that
came to the community center to voice
their opinions on what they would like to
see out of the park. As a matter of fact, they canceled the church service on Wednesday night at the Baptist church near the park so that all the members could come and share their thoughts. So it was great to have that type of interest in the work that we're going to do at Lake Lurleen State Park.

So with that, except for an update on the PowerPoint, Mr. Chairman, that's it. Do you want people to move down so they can see the screen?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: The Board, if you'd like to move down, there's some seats reserved down front so that we can all enjoy the PowerPoint.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: I'll do my best not to kill you all by PowerPoint. I promise this will be quick and hopefully painless.

We talked a lot of hunting and fishing, about our parks, about a lot of the other stuff that we have going on in
the Department of Conservation, and those rightfully so take up a lot of time at these Conservation Advisory Board meetings. But looking at the schedule for this meeting, I didn't think that it would be super full, so I wanted to take about ten minutes and just share some of the information about the work that's taking place around the state when it comes to the Deepwater Horizon work that our section headed by Amy Hunter and her staff are doing on the coast, along with an update on GOMESA because those two things kind of work together.

All right. The big takeaway from this slide is that we have a billion and 29 million dollars in projects underway in Mobile and Baldwin Counties that we're managing through our Deepwater Horizon section, 176 individual projects. That is pretty substantial. I mean, that's a lot of lot of money, a lot of work that goes on. We have six people in that section
that are managing that, so we keep --
that's a pretty lean section and they're
doing a very good job. It's making
generational changes on the Gulf Coast.
We would never want to go through another
Deepwater Horizon oil spill for sure.
Eleven lives were lost and it was a
terrible, terrible thing for our coast.
However, we're trying to do good work with
the money that came from that and make
sure that we are taking this seriously and
making good work with it. So hopefully we
would surpass that billion dollars in
projects this year. I thought that was
kind of a pretty big milestone.

These are the different funding
sources. There are five different funding
sources that we manage. It's through the
Federal Restore Council. It's a direct
component. I'm the Governor's designee on
that council. For bucket 2, I'm the
Governor's designee. Bucket 1 and bucket
3 are managed by the Alabama Restore
Council. That's made up of six mayors -- the mayors of Orange Beach, Gulf Shores, Fairhope, Dauphin Island, Bayou La Batre, Mobile, the County Commission Chairman from Mobile, County Commission Chairman from Baldwin County, the Governor, and the state docks director make up the ten members of that group. And that is for bucket 1 and bucket 3. However, the Department of Conservation is the administrator for that group, so we manage all of those projects after that group selects them. The Natural Resource Damage Assessment -- the Commissioner of Conservation, and the GSA director are the trustees for Alabama for the NRDA projects. And then the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Gulf Environmental Benefit Fund -- the conservation agencies in those states are the consulting agency for those. So it's different sources of funds that make up that billion dollars in projects.
I just want to run through some of the different types of projects. I'll do this pretty quick. So the first one is replenish and protect living coastal resources. That includes restoration of oysters and oyster reefs projects. We've built about 30 million dollars in artificial reefs, increasing funding for research, response for marine mammals and sea turtles, conservation of bird nesting and foraging habitat, as well as constructing a wildlife rehabilitation center and sea turtle triage facility in Orange Beach.

To support enhanced community resilience, this is important for all of our state, but particularly our coastal areas that try and do some things that make us more resilient for storms and drought and economic downturns, just things that make our communities stronger where they can be resilient when negative things happen in our state.
As an aside, the Governor, by executive order, just created a resilience council for the state about two weeks ago, and the Commissioner of the Department of Conservation is one of the members of that resilience council as we look at ways to make our state more resilient.

But we're funding projects for resilience on the coast that includes construction of Auburn University's Gulf Coast Engineering and Research Center in Orange Beach to improve engineering practices in the coastal environment. We replaced -- or are building a new office for ADEM in coastal Alabama. We have done a lot of work supporting the promotion and marketing of the seafood industry through the Alabama Seafood Marketing Commission that has been funded through here. And then supporting the city of Fairhope's working waterfronts and green space initiative along the coastline in Fairhope, and then provide economic
development and infrastructure. This is 179 million dollars, 11 projects. These are some of the larger projects that have been funded. It includes the construction of the Africatown Welcome Center, which will include either the Clotilda or pieces of the Clotilda as part of the Welcome Center. And if you recall, the Clotilda was discovered a couple of years ago. Our State Lands Division working with the Alabama Historical Commission has done a good job of trying to protect that shipwreck that was found in the Mobile-Tensaw Delta. That was the last slave ship to bring slaves from Africa to the United States, and so that Clotilda will be part of that Africatown museum. Africatown was the part of the city of Mobile just north of Mobile where the people that came from that ship settled and built this community there just north of the Cochran Bridge in Mobile.

One of the larger projects in this
section was to create -- working with the port of Mobile to build a roll on/roll off facility in our bulk handling part of the State Port Authority. That project is very instrumental with all of the automobile manufacturers in our state. The roll on/roll off facility is a place where you can import and export things that roll on and roll off ships, primarily cars -- cars and trucks. So for Hyundai, Honda, Toyota, even the Kia plant just across the state line in Georgia, the Mercedes plant in Vance, they can all utilize this facility now to export vehicles out of Alabama through the port of Mobile without having to go to Savannah or Jacksonville or other places. So this is really a good asset not only for the port but for all those automobile manufacturers throughout the state. So we're very proud to have partnered with the port on the funding for this.

And we've funded significant road
improvements in Baldwin County on Highway 181, Highway 31, Canal Road.
We've worked with the Department of Transportation on those projects.

Helping to conserve habitat, this is primarily land acquisition. You'll see about 150 million dollars listed for land acquisition at the time these slides were produced. So far we've acquired more than 13,000 acres of land in coastal Alabama to protect and provide recreational access. That includes acquisitions at the west end of Dauphin Island and the Grand Bay Savanna, Pilot Town in Fort Morgan, Gulf Highlands property in Fort Morgan, which is really one of the last undeveloped portions of the beach that was not part of either Fort Morgan or the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge. The Perdido River, we have multiple parcels. I'll come back to that. In Weeks Bay, multiple parcels. Dauphin Island Inner Island and beach front parcels, Oyster Bay, a large
acquisition there, and then the Bon Secour
Refuge. We've purchased three different
large pieces of property on the Three
Rivers Area that we have transferred to
the Bon Secour National Wildlife Refuge.
So all that together is really protecting
a lot of property.

I did give you a map that I keep
in my folder as we're trying to do some of
these acquisitions. Just wanted to show
how the Department is working together.
So when you get back to your seats,
you'll see this little map there. We have
the Perdido Wildlife Management Area
already established in the north part of
Baldwin County that goes really south of
I65 down close to I10. And then we have
the Lillian Swamp Forever Wild property
that was at the mouth of the Perdido River
right there in Perdido Bay. So we have
been working over the last six years to
connect both of those Wildlife Management
Areas so that we would have a real
distinct wildlife corridor that goes about 50 miles or so of river frontage from one end to the other down Perdido Bay, which at the time seemed like a pretty monumental task, but with all of the divisions of the Department working together -- Parks has some land that started the acquisition there that was a conversion. State Lands has property there. Forever Wild, Chuck and his group have use of PR dollars for part of that. And then we've gotten a coastal wetlands grant and used some GOMESA funds to piece together almost that whole entire corridor. We have a couple of parcels between I10 and the bottom of the Wildlife Management Area that we need to close up. And now we have another initiative with about 15,000 acres adjacent to part of the Perdido Wildlife Management Area that we're working with landowners to try and secure that for the future. So hopefully, when we're done in the next couple of
years putting all of that together, we'll have well over 30,000 acres along the Perdido River corridor, about 50 miles of canoe trail and river frontage all the way down through Perdido Bay that will be public-held ownership. So just wanted to share that map with you. It just kind of shows where we started with the idea and how, working together across the divisions and with the Deepwater Horizon section, we've been able to really be successful in putting all that together for the people of Alabama for perpetuity. And this one acquisition that was made through the Federal Restore Council along the Perdido River -- this is a 2,644 acre parcel that we purchased last year.

And then restoring water quality, we created a water quality program for Mobile and Baldwin Counties to help improve all the septic and sewer operations and many other things, but primarily that's what it is on these
utilities to help them so they don't have as many sanitary sewer overflows or that the effluent that's being treated that goes into our waterways is at the level that it should be so that it improves water quality. And a lot of projects there. These are projects funded through the Deepwater Horizon but also as part of our GOMESA funding over the last few years. We have done several septic to sewer conversions in some of our coastal areas down around Fowl River and in Grand Bay and Bayou La Batre that were really close to the water where we thought it was prudent to try and get those septic systems onto a city sewer to keep from having impacts on our fisheries. And so these are just a quick list of -- when it says multiple -- we've done multiple projects on Dauphin Island, the city of Orange Beach, and Bayou La Batre. So those are all the communities that have been positively impacted by our water
quality program and the things that we funded there.

And then going back to these. Most of these we have required a match from the utilities, so we didn't do -- a lot of these we're not doing them at a hundred percent funding as the utilities provide somewhere between 10 and 25 percent match for these so that we can stretch those funds as far as possible and so that the rate payers and the utilities have some skin in the game. And it's helped them really prioritize the projects and do the things that they think will have the most positive benefit.

And then enhance recreation, this includes -- you know, during the oil spill, it wasn't just the environment that struggled or had problems or was impacted, it was also the people. You know, we had lost recreational access to the beaches, to fishing, to a lot of other things, and so as part of the natural resource damage
assessment, there is a big portion of that
that is for recovery of loss of
recreational use. So those include
projects that -- at our state parks, we're
doing the Lodge at Gulf State Park and the
28 miles of trails there. That's probably
the most obvious example of that. We're
also expanding the campground at Meaher
State Park. We have a trail that's going
to go all the way from where it stops now
on Fort Morgan Road close to the Peninsula
Golf Club all the way to the end of Fort
Morgan and other improvements and blueway
and greenway development in the city of
Mobile and then Conservation acquisitions.
And then we've also made improvements to
the Gulf State Park Pier even though that
was impacted by Hurricane Sally the day
after we finished the improvements to the
pier, and then we've rebuilt the Fort
Morgan pier. Scott Bannon, Marine
Resources Division, managed that project.
So we're very proud of those recreational
improvements for access.

But that includes some GOMESA projects. We have 54 GOMESA projects that we have underway or completed, 120 million dollars on the coast. Like I said, we just got the deposit for this year, so the Governor will be announcing the 2023 awards late spring or early summer, probably early summer. But those projects include multiple boating access improvements, some land acquisition, other public access for parks in Mobile, Spanish Fort, Daphne, you know, for parks on the water so that the public has access to the water, water quality improvements, scientific research and fieldwork, help with the University of South Alabama and others, and then some economic development-type projects.

This is -- I've hit on this briefly with the Board, but the Innovate Alabama Commission was set up by the Governor and the legislature to look at
opportunities for us in Alabama and the things that we can do to differentiate us from other states to either attract workers or retain workers and continue to improve the quality of life in Alabama. One of the things that came out of that was that outdoor recreation because of the beauty that we have in the state -- and we were talking about that briefly right before this meeting started, you know, what is the prettiest part of our state. I think if you start at the top and go all the way down to the bottom, there's not a prettiest part. They're all just different. They're all pretty. We've got a lot of woods, we've got a lot of water in our state, and so that gives us great opportunities for recreational access, and it is a way to differentiate us from other states and to bring workers here, to retain the workers that we have that are leaving colleges and universities. And so Innovate Alabama created this council on
outdoor recreation. It's me, Bill Poole, the finance director, and then Peter Inge from Birmingham and Darrell Ezell who is here at HudsonAlpha in Huntsville that are the four members of this outdoor recreational council to look at ways that we can enhance our recreation, how we can take full advantage of it. And so the four of us had a certain amount of knowledge and we were -- but we thought it best to try and put together a group, a roundtable, of people from all over the state so that we had input from people from all different geographic areas and from all the different sectors of outdoor recreation. So we wanted to make sure we had canoeing, kayakers, hikers, bikers, somebody that -- the horseback riding trail interests, hunting and fishing, bird watching. You know, anything that could be outdoor recreation related, we wanted to make sure that somebody from this group had a voice to share. And Tim Wood was
gracious enough to accept the invitation to represent you all in the hunting and fishing side on this outdoor advisory roundtable.

We had 19 members of the roundtable, which I thought was going to be unmanageable. We wanted to keep this to eight or ten people, but once we started looking at the different geographic areas and the recreation types, we really kept expanding that to make sure nobody was left out. And I will say with those 19 members everybody worked diligently, provided great input, and so we had a list of 13 recommendations that we're going to take back to Innovate Alabama at their June meeting on things that can be done to take advantage of our assets in Alabama.

One of those things I think you'll probably all agree is that there's not a good inventory of outdoor recreational assets in the state. We have our own
website. Outdoor Alabama has a lot of information, the Forever Wild website, a lot of communities have trails, but there's no single inventory of all those assets in the state so we think we need that inventory. What the inventory will show, I think, are several things, one, what great assets we do have. When you aggregate all that together, it's going to be a lot. It's going to be a lot of miles of trails, a lot of access sites, a lot of boat ramps, a lot of, you know, different ways that people can enjoy the outdoors, but also identify the gaps, where in the state we don't have boat ramps or we don't have trails or we don't have things that the public can get out and utilize. And then we'll create a one-stop shop website and mobile access for people to be able to find this information. I think that's going to be the top two recommendations that come out of it that we'll hit the ground running for those.
And that's it. It took more than ten minutes. I apologize. But I do like talking about this stuff because I think it's important for the Board and for the public to see some of the work that goes on out of the main public eye of things that are happening in the Department. So with that, I will invite you back up and I'll take any questions that you might have so that you can use the microphone so the public can hear.

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Commissioner. Very good. That was enlightening. That's a lot of information and it certainly begs the questions. And thank you for putting that together and spearheading this effort. And this money has been great for the state.

Thanks so much.

Any questions from the Board for the Commissioner?

All right. Well, we'll move on.
And our next part of the meeting is public commentary, which is very important to the Board. It's very important obviously to the people that are here to speak. It's important to them. Before I do that, I will let you know that I have polled all the directors of all of the departments, Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries, Marine Resources, State Parks, State Lands, they don't have any reports for us today. So thank you and thank you for being here.

So with the public commentary today, we only have five speakers. I'll ask the speakers to come to the podium. I'll begin with the first one. For the folks in the audience, I ask you to be respectful today and let's let them make their presentation for us. And I would ask the speakers that come do not engage the Board directly or the staff. Refer your questions to the Chair, me, so that Ms. Johnson, who is keeping the record, is able to get every detail. So that just
makes it work so much better, and she
doesn't step on my foot later.

Today our first speaker is
Mr. Dallas Allen.

MR. ALLEN: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Today, I want to just bring up
some things that I saw the past couple of
seasons in the spring turkey season in
Alabama.

Currently, the way that the State
has it set up with the date push back, an
April 1st date, it's kind of allowing
non-residents to jump around from state to
state, and we're seeing an increase in
overcrowdedness throughout our state
public lands. Today, I just want to bring
up some recommendations that I've reached
out to some groups. I've created a couple
of polls on some Facebook groups that have
shown an overwhelming majority that
Alabama resident turkey hunters would love
to see some changes.

Some of the those changes kind of
mimic Mississippi. Mississippi went to a draw system I believe this past season allowing somewhere around about 1100 non-resident state licenses to be purchased, and I think there was about 1500 applications. I would like to see the state of Alabama do something similar and maybe create a system that would allow non-residents -- not to take away their rights to come to our state and enjoy our lands, but just spread out the crowd.

For reference, I hunt Choccolocco Wildlife Management Area, the Hollins Wildlife Management Area, and the land between. The opening week was very frustrating for residents. We put a lot of work in finding turkeys, not to claim that they're ours, but we would just like to see something -- maybe a draw system -- that would allow a non-resident to -- like our SOA system where they can choose the dates they want to come to our state, they can choose the lands they would like to
visit and like to hunt, and they would be
chosen in a random lottery. Everybody
would get chosen. It doesn't have to be a
restriction but -- so we wouldn't take
revenue away from the state per se. But
that would allow overcrowdedness to be
spread out through our lands.

Also, there's been some
recommendations for bag limits to be
changed. It's pretty noticeable that
there's been a decline in our turkey
population in recent years. We have had a
successful season the past few years, but
we would like to see some changes there.

Out of the Facebook poll, 213
hunters, only 14 suggested not changing
anything. So that tells you about
95 percent of the state residents would
like to see a change.

MS. JONES: Time.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: And I failed to
mention and because of my failure, I'm
going to let you continue for a minute or
so to make your point. But we have three
minutes to speak. For the speakers who
are here, we're allowed three minutes, and
I failed to mention that so please
continue.

MR. ALLEN: Thank you, Chairman. I'll
wrap it up. So if anything would be under
consideration, a draw system I would like
to see in place. That seemed to be the
overwhelming response. Basically as a
resident turkey hunter in Alabama, I just
see that this state sees the opportunities
shared to non-residents as it does
residents. And for me, a privilege for
living in the state, you should be showing
at least some type of privilege and us to
be able to choose whichever way we'd like
to be able to and maybe leaving a
non-resident where they have options but
they can't all attack one specific area.

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.
And just for the record, he has provided
copies of all his recommendations and his Facebook survey to the Board; is that correct?

MR. ALLEN: Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any questions?

Thank you very much, Mr. Allen.

Our next speaker is Thomas McMeans. And let me remind you again it's three minutes. The Chair and the Board reserve the right to add or allow some additional moments to make a point. So Mr. Thomas McMeans.

MR. MCMEANS: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

My name is Tom McMeans. I'm a resident of Decatur, Alabama. The reason I'm here to address the Board is the impact of a new planned Tennessee River bridge in Decatur across the river, which will, I think, negatively impact Swan Creek Management Area.

I am 73 years old. I have been hunting on Swan Creek since I was a teenager in the 1960s. To go duck hunting
there was a great adventure to make the trip over from Lauderdale County where I live.

I currently shoot at the firing range on Swan Creek weekly. The firing range has been upgraded. It is now under the leadership of Captain Wendell Fulks and Jud Easterwood and Drew Able. It is a pristine facility. It is safe. It is comfortable. It has not always been that way. Years later without the supervision and the improvements I've seen very dangerous behavior and discourteous behavior, and it is comfortable and safe and I commend these men for the work they've done.

A new river bridge is needed in Decatur for economic development and for traffic congestion. There is a study underway by the City of Decatur, a two-million-dollar feasibility study, to build a bridge between the existing river bridges and the ten miles downstream
around the Browns Ferry Nuclear Plant. A bridge cannot be built upstream because it would cross federal property, which is Wheeler Wildlife Refuge. It cannot get too close to Browns Ferry because there's a five-mile exclusion radius around the nuclear plant. I retired there. All spent nuclear rods that's ever used there are there. They are in ground in casks. They cannot be transported. So the area between the bridges -- the existing bridges and Browns Ferry is the prime area where they want to build the bridge. If they come across there, they will come across the dewater area, and that will eliminate the 30 blinds, the duck hunting will be gone. If they get too close to the range, it will have to be shut down because of the safety concerns because you cannot have a major highway next to an area where people are firing high-power rifles, and so that would impact that.

On May the 2nd, there was a
meeting in Decatur by the TTL Corporation, which is the advisors. They're trying to route the new bridge. I went there and indicated that maybe they could thread the needle from the west end of Swan Creek and Mallard Fox, cross the river to the north, turn east, impact I65 and US 31 and at the new 565 extension that comes around from 565 to I-65, and that was my suggestion. It would preserve our hunting and shooting. It would not deny a new bridge.

MS. JONES: Time.

MR. MCMEANS: Okay. I've had conversations with local officials. I will not identify them. They were private conversations. I was told once we don't care about the management area, the second comment was wildlife doesn't enter in, and the third comment I just received a few days ago, well, you'll just have to find another place to hunt and shoot. The threat is here. The threat is real. We are in danger of losing it, and I just
want to know can we do anything.

Thank you for letting me make my
comments.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you,
Mr. McMeans.

Commissioner?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP:
Mr. Chairman. Mr. McMeans, thank you for
sending that information. I think you
gave it to Captain Fulks, and he sent me a
couple of different things from Decatur
concerning the bridge.

MR. MCMEANS: Yes, sir.

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: I have met
with the government relations person that
represents the city of Decatur to express
our concerns. They've assured me -- he
assured me that our concerns were being --
that your concerns were being taken into
account to either try and thread that
needle or to move that bridge further west
to get the trucks off of the road and then
come up that way and turn back east to get
into I65. And so thank you for bringing that to our attention through Captain Fulks and I'll just let you know that I appreciate you sending that. Continue to provide information so we can make sure we stay on top of it to make sure our interests and your interests are protected there.

Thank you.

MR. MCMEANS: Thank you, sir.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

No other questions from the Board?

MR. HARTZOG: Chris, have we looked at the bridge does go across -- I'm sure there'll be mitigation and where those mitigation funds might extend to and any additional grounds that would be close by that would add to the waterfowl unit?

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: I think that would be a part of their feasibility study that they're undertaking right now. They've just begun that feasibility study earlier this year, and I think the public
meeting that they had was one of their first public outreach portions of the feasibility study. So I don't think they've gotten very far. It's a long answer to your question.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any other questions?

All right. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. McMeans, very much.

Our next speaker is Mr. Norman Alexander.

MR. ALEXANDER: Good morning, Mr. Chairman. I'm here this morning on behalf of farmers and people that's had accidents hitting deer.

I'm from Blount County. I'm in zone C and we only get 25 days of doe season, and I'm not really an avid hunter. I'm mostly a farmer, cattle farmer, dirt farmer. And we're just overrun with deer. We try to do what we can putting fences around our crops and this, that, and the other, and putting perfume, all kind of stuff to try to keep the deer out of our
fields. It works for a couple of days, and then they come in there about the time you're getting ready to pick and they wipe it out. So very simple, we would just like to get it changed.

Zone A nearly encompasses zone C, and they have doe season from the start of hunting season to the end of hunting season. And that's all. I just wanted to get that changed.

I don't see that it will help on the accidents because there's being so many subdivisions and stuff being built that's pushing the deer in different places, but we're having a lot of accidents. And I've got names here of people that's hit deer, farmers. We just need some help.

I started -- when I first started, I talked to David Standridge, and I told him, I said, what can I do. We need some help. And he kindly guided me in this direction to this Board here, so that's
why I'm here today to just get everybody, if y'all would, to look at it and see if we can get some changes to try to get a hold on this deer population. But that's all I've got to say. Just plain and simple, we'd just like to get that changed.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Alexander. Hold your position for just one moment.

Are there any questions from the Board?

The Department of Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries has heard you, and, as I understand it, you're asking for more doe days, a longer doe season in zone C?

MR. ALEXANDER: Right.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: They heard that and they will react, and we'll have an answer for you at some point here in the very near future.

Yes?

MR. WOOD: Mr. Alexander, I'm in
agriculture also, so I feel your pain. But I've had lots of conversations with farmers in our area who can kill a doe a day, and they're trying to -- want to increase it to two a day back like it used to be. And so I asked them, I said, well, if we go to two, are you going to go out and kill them, or are you going to get depredation permits. And I even went to lodges who were farmers and also run lodges, and they cannot get their hunters to kill the doe. We can raise the limits, but nobody is killing these does because we're watching on TV everybody's killing the big buck. Everybody wants to kill a big deer. So we can increase it, but the problem's going to be are they going to participate in killing does. That's going to be the cure. We've got the depredation permits that's available to a hunter. I'm assuming -- I don't know if it's -- is it legal in those areas?

MR. SYKES: (Nods head.)
MR. WOOD: So that's going to be -- to me, I think that's going to be the only way that you're going to be able to get any action. Nobody wants to kill a doe.

MR. ALEXANDER: I looked into that about three years ago and had the warden come out to my property, and he looked it over and said, yes, you've got a problem. We will give you a permit. And he said, I'll go back and get all the paperwork done, and then when you get -- your crop starts coming in, I'll call the Blount County Sheriff's Department for when you go to shooting at night when they get a call they'll know it's you. He said, leave the deer laying. I don't like to waste nothing. I hate to see anything go to waste. So I feel like that's very wasteful. And if these hunters would shoot these does -- and I'm guilty when the days end, but I don't get to go that much like I used to. But they just -- you know, like, you're exactly right. They
just won't shoot them. But we're going to have to do something to try to get a hold on them.

MR. WOOD: So I recommend you get with the Department and work with them, because they'll -- that's not been difficult to get and just follow through and go ahead and start the depredation. That's my recommendation.

MR. ALEXANDER: Us farmers, we're going to keep complaining to see what we can do.

MR. WOOD: I'm in the agriculture business, so I understand fully.

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

Thank you, Tim.

Our next speaker is Ms. Paige Camp.

MS. CAMP: Hey, everybody. I'm Paige Camp. I'm from Clay County originally and recently I was elected to a state position within the Alabama Dog Hunters
Association. I'm not here to complain to you guys today. I'm just trying to update you on a situation that had previously been brought up at the last CAB meeting.

My very first day on the job was meeting with a private landowner in Horns Valley, Alabama. And for those of you who are not familiar with that area, it's the Clay County-Talladega County line. After he brought the problem to us, I was a little ashamed because, as I said, I'm from there, and I decided that we had to do something amongst ourselves or we were going to lose the hunt as we knew it.

I want all of you to know that from that day I have developed a team and I've had boots on the ground attempting to rectify this situation. He brought us game camera pictures from a group of dogs continuously encroaching on his property. I called everyone that I knew. I started with citizens that were there, and then I went to people who just maybe had ties to
there. As of right now, they have heard from me every single week, and they're going to continue to hear from me every single week until we have this situation rectified. I have made it extremely clear to all of them and I want to make it clear to everyone here, not just the Board but everybody in this room, this is not an accurate representation of this organization and it's destroying the reputations of our hunters who have worked tirelessly to build themselves some form of rapport in the community. The plan is to have this diplomatically and efficiently handled in a way that will satisfy both sides. What our current plan is is to not only request a heavier presence of game wardens if it's possible, but to continue to reach out to everybody in the counties and even if they're not from the area anybody who hunts in that area. When I tell you that we talk to people every week, we've done it every
week. I want all of you to know that we don't give up very easily, which I'm sure you already knew, and our goal is to make sure that we do not lose our hunt there. We want everybody to feel that we respect them just as we want to be respected by them.

I appreciate your time.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. We appreciate that very much. I don't think there are questions from the Board.

Thank you very much.

Our last speaker is Mr. Don Knight.

MR. KNIGHT: I'm Don Knight, and I'm sure all of you have seen me here before. But I'm here today just to let you know that our dog hunters and the organization that I'm involved in are very happy with what's going on right now. We've been doing real good. We think the complaints are way down. We haven't been having any problems. I don't get too much complaints
right now, but I'm here if they want to
let us know and we'll try to help them.

The problem's up in the national
forest. I've been working with the Board
mainly over in Talladega County and
Calhoun County, and I'm getting the
hunters together to have meetings and
we're working on that to get it done.
Quite frankly, we want to know what
problems we've got and try to get them
straightened out among the hunters before
we meet with the people that are
complaining, and that seems to be a
problem, getting them to meet. Okay. But
we will get there. We will give them
every opportunity to meet with our
hunters, but I've got to know how the
hunters feel before I meet with people
that's got the complaints. Okay.

I want to thank each and every one
of you for what you've been doing. Our
game wardens, we appreciate them more than
ever. They're doing a great job for us in
the counties where we don't have problems
and the places where we do have problems,
we want them to work and get those people
that are causing the problems. We want to
do that every way we can. Grady I've
worked with so many years now, we're both
grey headed. When we started this job, we
was black headed. But it works that way,
doesn't it, Grady? We want to thank you
for what you're doing.

We would still like to have some
opportunities to work on the dog hunter
situation as far as the permit system. If
we get a chance to get a club that wants
to get off of it, maybe listen to them and
let them have an opportunity to get off of
it. We'd like to have counties opened
back up or have the opportunity to open
back up if there's any opportunities. If
the people in the county don't want it,
then we're not going to have it because it
won't do anything but cause us trouble.
But for the ones that would like to have
it open, we'd like to have that opportunity to meet and talk and see what we can do about that. Like I said, the dog hunting situation, it's been so much more peaceful. I've enjoyed hunting for a few years and that makes a lot of difference. It really does.

And so we also want to make sure that the Board understands that we are not agreeing with the bill that's being put in by the Alabama Dog Hunters Association on the dog trespass and everything like that. We do not agree with that and we don't want it. So we just have to handle it the way we can.

Thank y'all for letting us talk.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you always for coming here, Don.

Any questions for Mr. Knight today?

Thank you so much for coming. We appreciate you being here and your time, the number of years that you've been
involved with us.

That is all of our speakers.

That's all I have listed, so that's the end of our public comments.

Our next agenda item will be unfinished business. I think that all of the requests from the previous meeting have been identified and answered by all divisions or the directors of their groups, so we will move on. There is no unfinished business before this Board at this time.

The next agenda item after that is the new business that faces this Board. And I think that with regard to announcements, I don't have any as relates to visitors here today. So is there any new business before this Board today?

Are there any motions before this Board today?

Mr. Jones?

MR. R. JONES: I move for the approval of the seasons, their dates and
times, all bag limits, creel limits, and restrictions and all other items set forth in the current proposed regulations and season recommendations as it relates to all sections and divisions of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: There's a motion on the floor to approve -- and I'll shorten it -- to approve the seasons and bag limits. And I would ask you to read that motion one more time, please.

MR. R. JONES: I move for approval of the seasons, their dates and times, all bag limits, creel limits and restrictions, and all other items set forth in the current proposed regulations and seasons recommendations as it relates to all sections and divisions of the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. There's a motion on the floor. Is there a second?

MR. B. JONES: Second.
CHAIRMAN DOBBS: It's seconded -- the motion is seconded by Mr. Brock Jones.

Is there any discussion?

There being no discussion, I would ask that we take a vote to approve or disapprove those, and we will vote by a show of hands.

All those in favor?

The motion carries unanimously.

Is there any other new business before the Board today?

All right. There being no additional business, no announcements, I'm going to adjourn the meeting.

Thank you for you all being here.

We got it done pretty quick.

MR. R. JONES: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes.

MR. R. JONES: Since this is my district, I just wanted to welcome everybody to Huntsville and thank y'all for being here and enjoyed having you. I hate the weather's not cooperating, but
hopefully you'll spend some time here in our town.

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Well, that's -- I didn't thank Mr. Jones for his helping get this beautiful venue, but he did in securing this. And what a pleasure it's been to be here. So, again, we'd like to come back.

That's all we have. The date and time of the next meeting is to be determined. It will be put out on the secretary of state's website at the appropriate time.

So with that, we're done. Thank you very much for being here. Safe travels home. I hear it raining out there, so be careful.

(Proceedings concluded at 10:04 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 May 20, 2023, I reported the proceedings in the matter of the foregoing cause, and that pages 3 through 66 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 22nd day of July, 2023.

/s/Stacey L. Johnson
STACEY L. JOHNSON, CCR
Commissioner for the State of Alabama at Large
CCR 386, Expires 9/30/2023
COMMISSION EXPIRES: 6/22/2027