STATE OF ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION AND NATURAL RESOURCES

ADVISORY BOARD MEETING

Lakepoint State Park

104 Lakepoint Drive

Eufaula, Alabama

May 21, 2022

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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

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BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:

Mr. Joseph Dobbs, Jr., Chairman

Commissioner Christopher M. Blankenship, Ex-Officio Secretary

Mr. Kevin Savoy

Mr. Grady Hartzog

Mr. Greg Barksdale

Mr. Tim Wood

Mr. Raymond Jones, Jr.

Mr. Ben Stimpson

Mr. Gary Wolfe

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

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

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

(Invocation given by Mr. Raymond Jones, Jr.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Jones.

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

(Pledge of Allegiance led by Chairman Joseph Dobbs, Jr.)

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you-all. Thank you.

We have a special guest today. I'm going to ask Commissioner Blankenship to come forward and introduce our special
COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHP: Thank you, Joey.

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

We're so glad to have Governor Kay Ivey here with us today. Recently, the Governor and I visited Franklin, Randolph, Pickens, Greene, Baldwin, and now Barbour Counties where she's talked about the importance of outdoor recreation to the economy and the quality of life in Alabama. Alabama is truly a great place to hunt, fish, camp, hike, and spend time in the great outdoors.
Speaking of turkeys, we recently completed the Governor's One-Shot Turkey Hunt. This event brings in prospective industry representatives, current large manufacturers, and other valued guests to stay in lodges around the state and to compete for the title of the Grand Champion Turkey Hunter. It's also a primary fundraiser for our Conservation Foundation that provides scholarships to students at Alabama and Auburn. Thanks to Governor Ivey's support, I'm proud to relay that the Governor's One-Shot Turkey Hunt was the most successful we've ever had in the state and raised more money for scholarships than any other One-Shot. So thank you, Governor, for your support of that.

Of importance to this group, I think, is that in the time that Governor Ivey has been in office, we have acquired more than 63,000 acres of property that has gone into public ownership for the
conservation and enjoyment of our citizens forever. Wow. Thank you, Governor, for your leadership in allowing DCNR to do good work for the people and the natural resources that God has so richly blessed us with here in Alabama.

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

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

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

Y'all, hunting and fishing, camping, and outdoor recreation that's managed by the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources is a 14 billion --
with a B -- dollar economic driver for our state. That's especially good for folks in rural areas.

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

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

I'd like to thank the members of the Alabama Conservation Advisory Board for your dedication and your service to our state. One thing is for sure, in a state like Alabama, folks are passionate
about hunting, fishing, and wildlife, and they have plenty of opinions on how they should be managed. Commissioner Blankenship and his team do a wonderful job of balancing long seasons with appropriate bag limits to ensure that we do not overharvest the bounty that God has blessed us with. Alabama is truly a great place to hunt, fish, camp, hike, and spend times in the great outdoors. So let's all keep up the good work to ensure that we remain Alabama the Beautiful.

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

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

Well, let me ask our Secretary, do we have a quorum today.
COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: We do.

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

Thank you very much.

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

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

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: All right. Very good.

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

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

MR. BARKSDALE: Greg Barksdale, District 4.

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

MR. STIMPS: Ben Stimpson,
MR. HARTZOG: Grady Hartzog, District 2, Barbour County.

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

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

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

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

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

And as they're not, without a vote, the Chair will approve the minutes?
Is that okay?

Very good. So those minutes are so approved.

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

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

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

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
I'll be fairly brief. We covered so many things at the March meeting that's going on with the Department, but I do want to catch the Board up on a few items that have taken place since our last meeting.

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

So campground renovations, our day-use areas, we need some new bathroom
facilities to try and expand the day use in our parks, to build some accessible playgrounds so that our citizens of all different ability types will have the opportunity to play at our playgrounds and enjoy our parks. We have different parks that -- this park has several cabins. We have a lot of parks that don't have cabins or places for people to stay. If they don't have an RV or a motor home, they're not able to enjoy the parks as much as we would like, so we're going to build some cabins. We've got a lot of work planned with those funds, and we appreciate everybody's support on that.

We're not just waiting on the bond, though. The parks have been very successful under Greg Lein and Matthew Capps, our new assistant director. I saw Matthew -- many of you may not know Matthew. Will you raise -- that's our new Parks Assistant Director Matthew Capps. I guess new. It's been about a year now.
Still fairly new. But Matthew's doing a good job. And so every dime we make in the parks, we're putting back into the parks to do good work now.

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

We've opened the Joe Wheeler campground areas B and C that were destroyed with the tornados in December of 2019. That's reopened and is doing well.

We just completed a project at DeSoto Falls, dredged out the river there, built a new beach for the day-use area at
the falls, and we are -- we'll be paving
up there later this month with some
rubberized asphalt around that day-use
area at the falls.

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

And then I hope you enjoyed, the
ones who stayed here last night, the new
mattresses in all of our rooms in the
state park. I'm so glad to have those new
mattresses in all 1300 overnight facilities throughout the parks. And I slept like a rock last night on mine. I hope you did too. That's very satisfying to have that done.

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

The World Games is going to be coming up in July in Birmingham, and we're very pleased to host four events at Oak Mountain State Park. So we'll have the marathon canoeing, orienteering, wakeboarding, and then a skiing
competition there at Oak Mountain State Park. So that's going to be a big thing for the state. It probably hasn't gotten the press that it should, but that is -- all of these sports are either sports that are being looked at for future Olympic sports or have most recently been an Olympic sport but the host country for the last Olympics did not choose that as one of the sports that they wanted to have in the Olympics so they're having it at the World Games. So these are truly Olympic-class athletes that will be here in Alabama for about 12 days in July, so I hope that you will spend some time taking a look at that and avail yourself of the opportunity to go see some of the world's best athletes here that will be in Alabama at Oak Mountain State Park.

On the negative side for the pier at Gulf State Park that was damaged during Hurricane Sally, we've worked with the Corps of Engineers to get the permit for
that and then to bid that out. We thought the bids would come in somewhere between 4- and 6 million, 6 million being the high bid was the estimate from the engineering firm. When we bid that, the lowest bid ended up being 12 and a half million dollars, so it was more than twice what we thought would be the high bid. So we're still working with FEMA to get approval for the new amount, and so we've -- we're not going to be shutting the pier down this summer to do the construction as we had planned. We're going to work to try and get the new funding amount approved through FEMA and then move forward. We're going to have to bid that again probably later this summer, early fall. So I get a lot of questions about the pier. So that's the parks update.

From Marine Resources, Scott Bannon's got a presentation for us today, so I won't steal a lot of his thunder other than to say that our red snapper
season opens Friday. Just as information for the Board, I didn't send this to y'all yesterday. They announced the South Atlantic season for red snapper yesterday. It will be July 8th and 9th. That is their season, two days, two days.

The work that Scott and Kevin and our team have done in Alabama with the Gulf states has made a huge difference. Had that work not taken place, our season in the Gulf would probably be two days. Last year, our season in Alabama was 124 days. So that's -- when we got down to a three-day season back in 2017, that's when a lot of things changed here. We got some agreements with the other states and the federal government and were able to move forward on some things. So just putting in context what I feel like is the positives of our red snapper season -- without the work of Scott, Kevin, and their team with the other states, we'd be at two or three days. So that just shows
tangibly the work that takes place and
what that means for the economy and for
the outdoor recreation folks here in
Alabama.

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

State Lands Division, working with
Mobile County using GOMESA funds,
Mobile County recently purchased the Cedar
Point Fishing Pier, which is kind of an
iconic place in South Mobile County, and
that takes that out of private ownership
that wanted to close that down and put
that in public ownership now and it's open
to the public. And they've been catching
a lot of fish down there. But that's a
great opportunity to get people that don't have boats or don't have the ability to get out on the water to be able to catch fish and have that in public ownership now.

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

And as I said as I introduced the Governor, since she's been in office, we've acquired over 63,000 acres of property around the state to put in public ownership, and that is, I think, quite an accomplishment over a five-year period to be able to do that. We just closed yesterday on 2600 acres along the Perdido
River, and that will have a long-lasting legacy impact in all this land acquisition for the public to be able to use these lands forever. So we've done a lot, and we've got a lot more in the hopper using the Forever Wild program, some funds from the Deepwater Horizon oil spill, some species recovery grants from Fish and Wildlife Service. Chuck and his team have done a great job working with the Fish and Wildlife Service out of the Atlanta region to identify some areas and funds that we can use in the Red Hills salamander habitat in Monroe County. So we've got a lot of good things going on in land acquisition.

Forever Wild and Freshwater Fisheries, we covered most of those things at the March meeting, but since the last meeting, the Legislature passed a piece of legislation that created an enclosure gun deer season, and you'll see that in your season and bag limit packets. That is in
addition to what we had in March. And so it sets the season for the enclosures that opt into that season. Their gun season would be October 15th through January 6th. And so we'll see this year how many people want to take advantage of that. And that's an option. It's not a requirement for them.

I don't know if you've been following some congressional legislation that could have a huge impact on the Department of Conservation is Recovering America's Wildlife Act. That's working its way through Congress. If passed, that would be the first real money for non-game and threatened and endangered species that DCNR and many of the other states have ever received. This would be a huge thing for the Department. It would really transform the way that we do work for threatened and endangered species and non-game, which, as you know, most of the funding for that comes from hunting and
fishing licenses. There's not any
dedicated funding to speak of for that,
and so this would be a real game changer
for us and many other states. And it's
gotten a lot of traction. It's passed out
of the committees in both the House and
the Senate, and hopefully will get a floor
vote. They were pushing for that sometime
before Memorial Day, but since Memorial
Day is next week, I don't know that that's
going to happen. But it is gaining some
traction there.

And as promised at the last
meeting, I've looked into the rehabber
permitting process. I talked with
Mr. Morse for a long -- Mr. and Ms. Morse
for a long time. I feel like our
standards are not too restrictive and our
process is not overly burdensome or
cumbersome. We use the national
standards. We have not created our own
standards for caging. We use those
national standards. And we've not denied
a permit to anyone who's applied and would meet those national caging standards. Those are not standards we've made up. Like I said, they're standards that are endorsed by the National Wildlife Rehabilitation group. Enjoyed our conversation with the Morses, but I do think there is opportunity for improved communication between our agency and the Alabama Wildlife Rehabbers and Conservation Society.

For instance, on the AWRCS's website, there was an outdated permit application from 2017 on the website that had incorrect information on where to send the applications, so I don't know if that has caused some issue with us not receiving some of the applications. I talked to Mr. Morse about that yesterday. They're going to fix that on the website. And I'll say this to -- I know there's a group here -- with our staff -- talked with Director Sykes this morning, and I'm
going to set up a meeting with our staff and some of the AWRCS directors and some of their folks when things settle down just a little bit after the election and probably later in June or July to be able to talk and make sure that we all understand each other and that any miscommunication from the past or if there's something that we can do to provide better information that we will do that. So I'm just letting the Board know that I'm going to make that offer to them to meet in June or early July, late June or early July.

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

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

We've had great conversations pushing forward to use some of those funds for -- it would be different than the Parks money. This would all be money that would be used for bigger shooting ranges, build new shooting ranges, maybe to build like a shooting sports trail through the state, additional boating access sites, improvements at WMAs, trail head and trail
amenity work that we really need to do on some of our properties to make those more accessible to the public, build some bathrooms, bigger parking lots, better way finding signs so that people are comfortable using our trails. And then part of that would set up a one-stop-shop website for outdoor recreation. That is a goal of mine. So if you want to -- we can take not only the work for the Department of Conservation, Forever Wild, what some of the counties are doing, cities around the state, some different land trusts, you know, all of that recreational opportunities that are, you know, on this website here or on this place or this place and there's no aggregation of that into one site, so this would be a great way for us to do that, not only for our citizens. So if you like hiking, you can just click on hiking and it can tell you geographically where to go. If you like horseback riding, if you want to canoe or
kayak, you know, all of that will be on this one website. And then we can also use this as an industry recruitment tool for people from other states that are looking to come to Alabama either -- to do business. Or now in this gig economy where people can work from home and work from anywhere, we're trying to attract a lot of those workers to Alabama, and one of the things that is very important to them is access to outdoor reaction. And so instead of something where they have to go to four or five different websites, we can send them to one place and use that as an industry and employee recruitment tool. So that's -- I could go into much more detail about that. I'm very passionate about it. I could be up here for 30 minutes talking about that, but that's what we're working with the Legislature on to fund those with ARPA dollars. And it was good to have Governor Ivey here. We've been doing visits all
over Alabama promoting outdoor recreation and camping and hunting and fishing as it relates to the economy and the quality of life. And she's such a big supporter of our department and the work that all of our staff do, and I appreciated her coming today.

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

To date, there's 158 projects that have been approved, valued at 926 million dollars' worth of work. When you add the GOMESA funding that's being managed through our State Lands Division, that's over a billion dollars of work that we're managing, just oil spill and coastal related, through the Department of
Conservation. So that is making quite a landscape change down there.

We're going to show a video here in just a minute that we showed at the summit the other night that kind of just hit some of the high points. But for your reading pleasure, I can send you one of these Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Restoration progress reports that have all 158 projects, where they are in the process, whether they're completed, underway, have been funded or planned. But this is a part of the Department that a lot of people don't know about or y'all don't see that a lot. But there is a tremendous amount of work that is making generational difference on the coast as we recover from the oil spill. When I look at the 2022 progress that we just released Thursday night and compare that to the 2018 progress report -- that was the last time we did a summit -- the amount of work that's taken place in those four years is
really just astounding. And I appreciate
Amy Hunter who's our Deepwater Horizon
Restoration coordinator and her staff and
then all of our partners throughout
coastal Alabama that are implementing
a lot of these projects. It is really
legacy projects that will transform our
coast, and so I'm very proud to be a part
of that.

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

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Please do.

(Video played.)

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

And also while I've got the
microphone still, I'd like to recognize
Carter Hendrix. I think this may be Carter's last meeting. Carter is the Assistant Chief of Wildlife, and Carter is moving on to do some fun stuff, I guess, and retiring after a great career. So thank you, Carter, for your service. I tell people that retire I'm jealous because we all want to get there some day. That's always an exciting time to think about the great career you've had and appreciate all the work you've done.

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

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

Take just one moment away from the agenda. I was directed at our last meeting to put together a letter of gratitude to one of our CEOs who was the
National Wild Turkey Federation's Officer of the Year this past year, Mr. Drake Hayes. And I will -- for the Board, you're going to get a copy of this if you don't already have it, but Betsy's asked me to read it to you.

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

Our next --

MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes. I'm sorry.

MR. HARTZOG: Since you've deviated, could I ask for a deviation?
CHAIRMAN DOBBS: What is your deviation?

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

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

So the GOMESA distribution is -- that comes to the four producing states in the Gulf -- is derived from production numbers based on an inverse proportion to where that rig is located in proximity to
Alabama, so we get money from all the oil and gas work that's taking place in the Gulf. The further that rig is from Alabama, the less we get from that particular rig, if that makes sense, and so that's how that -- it's a very complicated and super long formula with all those rigs out there. That's one part of it. And then the second part is the percentage of the leases that -- when the leases are sold, the same way, an inverse proportion of where those leases are comparing that to Alabama. That money is how that's divided among the four states.

So that's where it hurts us is on the GOMESA side. When they're not leasing those properties, that's not an addition to our GOMESA funds. So this past month, we received our deposit. This year it was about 28 million dollars for Alabama. Under the Trump Administration when we had the last lease sales, our portion was about 49 million, I think, yeah, 49
million. So you see it makes that much
of --

MR. HARTZOG: Roughly half.

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

Anything else you want to add?

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

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

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Agreed.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

So I'm going to step back one
moment, something that was my fault that I
didn't have, but I'm going to read the
Conservation statement, our pledge, to you
just to have it so you'll remember.

(Sportsman's Pledge read.)

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

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

Director McCurdy?

Director Lein?

Director Bannon?

MR. BANNON: Yes.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Director Scott Bannon
from Marine Resources Division.

MR. BANNON: Good morning, everyone.

And, Greg, thanks for the new
mattresses. The snoring report I got from
my wife this morning must mean that they
were successful and worked.
And also this is the second time this week I've gotten to attend one of our state park facilities for a meeting, and it is a blessing in Alabama to have such great facilities. I was at the lodge earlier this week, and, Greg, the staff -- and for those of you if you have not visited our state parks, we have amazing staff at each of these locations, and I usually try and commend them for what they do because, one, they're coming to work and I appreciate that, and the work they do is absolutely amazing. And it's tough to compete with the private industry, so I'm appreciative of that.

A couple of quick notes. I just want to say thank you to the Commissioner. A side note, the Commissioner and I -- about 25 years ago, he picked me up for my first day at work as officers in the field. So two dreamer officers running around getting the boat stuck and chasing bad guys, and so it's pretty amazing as he
went through this report at what we've
been able to be a part of over the last --
his 28 years, my 25 years. And who'd have
thunk it. So for all the staff here in
the front and in the back, you never know
where you may end up. So it's pretty
amazing that we're here today talking
about some very positive things that have
occurred within our Department.

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

A quick note, the recreational
fishing license sales in Alabama have been
on an increase. If you look at the graph right there, that's a positive thing, but it also means that there are a lot of people coming to the Gulf. A lot of people are moving there, and then a lot of people are coming and visiting there. So our license sales reflect that, and it's been in a positive direction and that's to the benefit of us. As managers, it gives us some funding, because, again, we don't use General Fund money. We use our license money.

There's a little note at the bottom that says the Gulf Reef Fish Endorsement was created two years ago to help with the research and the reef fishery. This will be our third year. So for the first two years, we sold 23,000 of those and then it doubled to 56,000 in the second year, and that helps identify the world of anglers that are participating in offshore fishing. They're participating in reef fishing. So that's a great way to
identify that group if we're working
through some of our federal challenges
across the Gulf and we're partnering with
other states. It's only a $10 permit, but
it identifies the world of anglers and
that money goes back into the fishery.

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

The commercial fishing industry is
a very challenging industry. 2008 when
the housing market took a plunge, that
impacted a lot of our commercial
fisheries, such as shrimping in
particular. It was pretty sad to go see
all the boats in areas like Bayou La Batre
and Bon Secour with U.S. Marshals stickers on them where they were -- they had defaulted on their loans. It's a little struggle to rebound. Costs are a little bit challenging in that world. And then we had, you know, Deepwater Horizon in 2010. Previous to that, we had some hurricanes. Hurricanes are always a persistent challenge, and that really impacts our fisheries.

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

If you see charter boat down there, it goes up. We've increased -- we
have our federal for-hire fisheries, your charter boats that go offshore and you go fishing. That number has stayed fairly constant. But our in-shore fishing guides, the folks that take you on speckled trout trips and red fish trips, those have increased and it's become a way to provide access to folks. So that number has increased slightly.

And there's a new line in there, oyster aquaculture. And I didn't catch this, but apparently when you average three years across ten years and there's lots of zeros, the average looks really bad, but there's -- we've only had that permit in place for the last couple of years. And you see 19, 18, 17, those are oyster farms. Those are the folks that are farming oysters that if you're going to restaurants and you're getting these really pretty half-shell oysters and they're costing a lot of money, that's a high-value product that's produced in
South Alabama. They're in high demand all across the country, especially on the east coast. If you go to New York City, you're very likely to get an Alabama oyster that's going to cost about six bucks apiece to consume that.

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

So this one's really busy, but this -- we just wanted to throw a lot of numbers at you. These are some of the things over the last few years that we've been spending money on and kind of the total dollars that -- the top -- the reef
projects there that you see, those are the
things that are going on offshore and
inshore. If you fish down in the coastal
areas, we have some inshore reefs that are
located in Mobile Bay, Mississippi Sound,
the Perdido system. Those are areas where
we create habitat, we increase habitat in
those areas, and recreational anglers can
go there, your charter guys, your inshore
guys can go there. And so we have those
type. Then we have the offshore zone, and
I'll show you some pictures of that in
just a minute. But it takes a lot to get
all that in to work. You have to do some
surveys, the cultural resources surveys.
You have to identify the bottom types.
The permitting process is pretty
difficult. I have a great staff. Craig
Newton is one of our staffers who takes
care of most of that, and he works for
Kevin Anson, our chief science officer.
And it takes a lot of pushing up hill to
get this stuff done. And then I don't
know if any of you have ever worked with the State's bid system. To get these going, it's a little bit challenging. But these are the dollars that come to the state of Alabama that are coming back to you as citizens of the state of Alabama and actually to the citizens of the United States, because people from all over the country come to fish offshore.

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

In the Gulf in the estuary systems, we need those oysters. They clean the water. They're a sign of a healthy water system. They feed a lot of the other critters that are out there. So without oysters, the whole system is out of whack. So it's not only an effort to
build up the opportunity to go catch oysters and eat, it's an opportunity to increase our fishing habitat and water quality.

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

You'll see the planting numbers right there toward the bottom. 2014 and 2016 cultch planting, that's putting oyster shell and rocks and things out there. So we did it three years in a row with some funding. And, again, it's a substantial amount of money. And we're
working on what we call a spat-on-shell project. We're going to create a hatchery at our facility in Gulf Shores where we'll breed the oysters; and then we'll take them to our Dauphin Island facility and we'll put them -- the larvae on shells and let them grow out a little bit, and then we'll put those out in the wild. We'll use that to help kick-start some reefs that have struggled and also to enhance our current system or current reefs.

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

So this Mounds and Furrows system is a way to look at an oyster reef that is no longer productive. And we found out
that the low oxygen levels on the bottom -- there's oxygen in the water and the critters need that. Well, on the bottom, it's hypoxic, it's dead. So we're elevating some sections, and you can see like the red is the top of the mound so those are mounds that you see at the top, and then on -- and there's furrows. There's a length of shell that is deployed, so that brings that shell higher in the water column into the exposed oxygenated water. And so we're hoping to start seeing wild oysters grow in those areas and that it will regenerate on its own or we'll use that spat-on-shell project to help enhance those and to kick-start is the term I like to use for that. But that's what you see where you -- it's almost like a furrow in a farm field on the left and then some mounds you see on the right. And this is one of those sonar pictures that we get when we do our surveys.
So our oyster harvest for our wild harvest in Alabama, it occurs in a very small area. Just to kind of put a frame of reference, when you see that little spit of land that looks like an arrowhead pointing south, that is the last tip before you get on the causeway going to Dauphin Island. That would be the Dauphin Island Bridge that goes through there, and it's Dauphin Island at the very bottom. It's kind of a busy slide.

We had some challenges with the way that we were managing oysters. We had these large areas, and the catchers would work in a very small area and harvest a small area too much. They would work too hard in some small areas. And the only ability we had was to close a whole area, but there were still oysters there that they needed to go work. And they need to work the oysters, one, to harvest the product, but, two, to turn that bottom to allow new oysters to attach.
So we developed this grid system. There are 500 square meters and that -- we actually expanded this to the entire waterway. But we use this grid system, and they can go to outdooralabama.com and they can find out where they are. And we'll highlight the open grids, so we'll say these areas are open to harvest. And then we can move them 500 meters at a time. That was a huge benefit to the catcher and to the resource to be able to just move them a little bit to get them off the hot spots -- and I'm going to show you the hot spots in just a minute -- and then they report to us which grid they are in. Those are lettered and numbered. I know it's really busy there. But they have to come in at the end of the day and buy their tags for their harvest, and they buy them from us and they tell us which grid they were working in. So they can do it from a smartphone or they can just look on the land. And they're really good at
line of sight, lining up a couple of things. I was in U45, and that's a great management tool.

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

So then you see those are the hot spots where people work. So the blue circles that are bigger, that means there was more harvest that was conducted in that area. So the one blue that's furthest to the top right there, that's where they go day one. When we open a season, they head there and they start working. You can literally hop boat to boat and -- so that shows you that they were working a very small area, but I had
to close the entire area north of there to
get them out of there previously. Now
with the grid system, we literally
close -- we can close one grid at a time.
We can close 500 square meters and just
get them out of that.

And so at first, they were a
little like -- it was dead silence in the
meeting when we announced it. They were
like we don't know what's going on, but
then they saw the benefit that we're just
moving them a few feet at a time and kept
them working. Our harvest estimate for
2022 was about 22,000 sacks, and we closed
the season at about 50,000 sacks. It was
all because we could keep them moving and
not having to close big areas. And they
started figuring out that, hey, this is a
benefit to us. And so those -- the bigger
the circle, the more harvesting that went
on there. And that's how we closed the
area. I told the staff, I said, let's
literally play Tetris with this, and they
will begin to learn to work around it and
they did. And on the east side of the --
to the right-hand side there, those dots,
our harvest estimate over there was zero.
We ended up harvesting almost 11,000 sacks
over there because we were able to open
those areas and move those folks around to
harvest that. So it was a great benefit
to the state to turn more bottom and a
great benefit to oyster catchers.

So this is a little bit of the
history. Oystering struggled for a little
bit, a lot of environmental conditions
that were counterproductive. So you can
see back as far as 2011 and 2012 the
season days and the number of sacks that
we were harvesting, and they were
dwindling. We had come off the years of
drought and some other challenging
environmental conditions, and so we were
working very hard to figure out how we
move forward. The staff came up with some
great plans.
But we were at a zero day season there in 2018 and 2019. That's counter to what we do in the Department of Conservation. Our job is to keep things moving and to open things up for folks. So to have a zero season is -- I kind of have hurt feelings about that. So like how do we start making things better, and the staff worked very hard to continue. And part of that grid system was a big factor in that. So you see we're on an increase. We started doubling our harvest each year. That 50,000 sacks right there equates to about 4 million dollars to the catchers.

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

So our license sales -- on the slide earlier, there was a year we only
sold like 94 licenses. This year, we sold 409, so that was all due to the fact they could go make money. We were open 79 days. There were a few bad weather days. I did some quick estimates. If a person worked 70 days, at the average -- the sack limit is six sacks. At the average weight of 85 pounds a sack and a price of 85 cents on average per sack, if they worked only 70 days and they got six sacks a day, that person made $28,000 in 70 days. And for some of those guys who are really good, they literally worked about one to two hours a day to get those six sacks. So we see that as a great benefit to a community who has suffered, as, again, you look at those licenses over the history. And another thing that we added in there -- there's an asterisk on 21 and 22 -- is that we never accounted for recreational oyster harvest. So this year, we started requiring people who were getting their recreational limit of a
hundred oysters to come in and report, and so that helps us in management to know that -- so there were 1,177 trips out on the oyster reef. You can only go when it's open, and that -- it's a little bit different equivalence, so it worked itself out to be about 706 commercial sacks so -- but this is the first year we ever accounted -- we never had no idea how many recreationally caught oysters were being harvested, so that's a good management tool.

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

So the pride of Alabama is probably the world's largest and best managed -- whether it's the largest or
not, there may be a little argument, but I promise you it is the best managed artificial reef zone in the world, the amount of research that we've put in there, the effort that we've put into this. It's about 1200 square miles off the coast of Alabama that is designated as artificial reef zone. It's permitted by us to deploy material out there. Private individuals can deploy material out there. They just get a permit from us. Our private -- they've been going up, right, Kevin? There for a while after the housing market took a plunge, we saw very little activity from the private world to put reefs out there, but now we're seeing a lot -- several hundred, I think, last year that's -- so you can go buy an artificial reef and pay a company to deploy it or you can deploy it yourself. You have to meet certain standards -- it's on our website -- and get a permit from us and you can go put it wherever you want.
You just have to tell us kind of the generic area, what zone it's in, but you get to put it where you want and it becomes your reef until it hits the bottom. Then it's technically public. We don't publish it, but somebody else can fish on it whether you like it or not.

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

The little triangle up to the left
is what we call the Alabama Wildlife Federation Zone for the money that they've
done and the participation they've done. And I'm going to show you in just a minute
some work that they did there. So they've helped to put material in there, and our
private-public partnerships are crucial in this.

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

So I made some calls -- that's the advantage of having a Rolodex -- and talked to some folks. The Alabama Wildlife Federation was helpful in this.
And within a couple of days, they partnered with people to get transportation, the permitting done, and those 72 pieces of pipe became artificial reefs very quickly. So that was material that did not go to a landfill, that was material that was able to be repurposed. We don't dump trash out there. Some people say that. No, it's all inspected. There's a very high standard for things that go out there. But we've done that with other projects, and that private-public partnership is a benefit.

So all the blue dots are the recent work that we've done. You can see 456 of the 25-foot tetrahedron modules -- that's a pyramid. That's a big word to say pyramid. You're going to see a picture of that -- 1200 of the juvenile reef modules, 327 circalittoral modules -- another big word. That means they're just close to shore. Then the inshore reefs, we just set the bids for that, and they're
about to do about a million dollars' worth of work on the four little blue dots way up in Mobile Bay up there, but those are going to be enhanced or create new artificial reefs on the inshore side.

So this is an example of some of the material that goes out there. So those 25-foot pyramids up there on the left with a pole sticking out of the top -- for those of you that are familiar with offshore fishing, we call that an Amberjack pole. They like to circle around that pole. So we had some discussions. The federal government calls them attractants, and we call them habitat. When you first deploy these, they are attractants. They just come there because fish are nosey. They're kind of like people, they want to go check out the new kid in the neighborhood. But eventually, the growth starts to develop on there. These pyramids are designed very specifically to promote growth. And
then it creates its own little ecosystem from the bottom to the top, and that's why the pole is up there. You'll see the -- like I said, the Amberjack swim around. Grouper and snapper and other reef fish like to get on the insides and hide in there. And the apex predators, the sharks, they're part of the system. They will come hover around there, and it keeps everything in balance. And then you'll see the smaller reefs there to the right that were deployed from a -- that's our contractor there on the Gulf coast who does a lot of that work for us. And so, you know, that allows -- that's a different type of habitat there with the circle disks, and we use those in a lot of areas where the water depth is shallow. And then the barge right there by Alabama Power Company, they filled it full of -- it's a boiler and some other material that's inside of there, and I think it was a 110-foot barge. So they filled it full
of water until it literally sank to the bottom, so now that becomes -- at first, it's just this really cool thing underwater. Within about three years or so -- three to four years, Kevin -- it starts to kind of get this growth on it and some different things.

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

Just a few highlights of what we do down there. The top picture is the Claude Peteet Mariculture Center. We have 35 ponds out there that we do research in. We partner with other universities and other agencies to do some research. Right now, we have a big partnership with Auburn
University doing some shrimp studies. We raise fish there inside the building. There's a big, long, white building right there where we have the ability to -- right now, we're doing Florida Pompano, spotted seatrout, and southern flounder. We've done red drum. We've done striped bass. Have we done anything else in there?

MR. ANSON: Red snapper with Auburn.

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

This is a little bit about what it looks like. Those are flounder laying in the bottom of the tank. And flounder like to try and match the color of their
environment, so they're trying to turn blue. They can't quite make it, but they turn that lighter color. Then that's a flounder over a light. I guess they're trying to -- those are determining the sex of those?

MR. ANSON: In the female, the ovaries.

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

So just about to close out here our 2022 private recreational fishing seasons. For the three big species in
Alabama, these three are all required to be reported through our Snapper Check Program. It's a way for us to account for the harvest off the state of Alabama.

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

So we're going to open May 27th, that's this Friday, Memorial Day weekend, and it will be open four-day weekends until the quota is met. Last year, a little bit choppy weather early in the season, and so that affects the effort. And once school starts, usually in August you see that we will have a drop in effort. But we went all the way to Christmas. It was the last weekend of the
year when we closed. That's the benefit of the State of Alabama managing our fish. We determine that. We learn to provide the seasons based on what the anglers in Alabama want. Right now, the season is designed to provide the most access to the most people. There are some different things that we could try, but we're trying to get through a few things.

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

This year, there's a new requirement called the venting tool or the -- a descending device is required.
Discards of fish are important to us.
That actually counts against us in the quota. There's a method to work through that in our -- Kevin has a really big math program like they talked about earlier that we use, but to return fish and give them the best opportunity to survive. They suffer sometimes from barotrauma, which is they come up from depth too fast and it bloats the fish. You can vent them or you can descend them back to depth, and it releases the air out of their bladder. There's a program called Return 'Em Right. You can go to returnemright.org and watch a training video. They were giving away free descending devices, but they've given away a lot of those. They're just about gone. But the training video is about 15 minutes. It's amazing and it shows how that device takes that fish back to the bottom and it releases it and it swims away, so it's healthy and its chances of survival are much greater. So we hope you
get the opportunity to come down and fish. Saltwater fishing license, angler registry, which is free, and your $10 Gulf reef fish endorsement.

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

And then we went into state management. We passed a program to where the states get to manage their quota, the
five Gulf states. Alabama has the smallest amount of coastline, and we have 26.2 percent of the fish. And that's because we have the world's finest artificial reef system. Of the neighboring states, Mississippi, most of their fish are really caught in our reef zone, and in Florida in the panhandle, a lot of their fish are caught off the coast of Alabama. And the fish have expanded because of the habitat we've created in Alabama, so we felt that it was very important to Alabama. Again, about 6 percent of the coastline; we get 26.2 percent of the fish. And so we've managed that with our Snapper Check Program. Our goal is not to go over. If we go over, then we reduce it the next year. So we've actually been a little bit under these last couple of years, which is fine. That means there's fish left in the water, and we've provided lots of access to our anglers. But our goal is to
provide as much access to the fish as we can. But that just shows you the benefit of the state of Alabama managing those.
Instead of being single-digit seasons, we are out to -- again, we fished -- we should fish around 245 days if the weather is good, but the weather was challenging, so we ended up going 124 days.

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

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

So if you look at the last three years, four years, it's kind of leveling out a little bit. As long as it looks fairly level like that, we're in excellent shape. You're going to get lots of opportunity. It's just harder to catch the big trophy fish. They're further offshore, they're a little harder, little smarter. It's kind of like that big buck, it's kind of tough to get to. But we have
lots of fish off the coast of Alabama. The state of Alabama was the -- there was a Great Red Snapper Count done across the Gulf of Mexico, and that was the work done by Dr. Sean Powers at the University of South Alabama that designed this program across the Gulf of Mexico to count how many fish are in the Gulf. It was a great program. You will start to see fisheries, I think, around the country start to try and do programs like this. And we're actually moving to -- Amberjack is the next species. But just wanted to show you why, if you go to the Gulf, you're not catching those big fish. The fish are still there. There's plenty of fish. They're just going to be smaller closer to shore. The reef zone goes 70 miles offshore, and there's 1200 square miles of it. You haven't fished all of it, so go give it a shot.

That's a triggerfish coming up to the camera. We do some ROV work. They go
down there. And so they like to come --
they're kind of nosey. They're kind of
like kids at Mardi Gras, they see the
camera and they go out there.

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

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

And sorry, sir, but that concludes
my report.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you. Very
instructive. Most instructive and
interesting. Thank you, Director Bannon.

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

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

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

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

MR. MORSE: Sir, I'm sorry. Can I interrupt for just a second? The reason being is Commissioner Blankenship referenced me and him having a
conversation. Can I have a few minutes just to say our point, that when we talked about it there was a two-way conversation and not all conversations are relayed.

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

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP:
Mr. Chairman, I would say that there are two sides to that and that's what the public comment period is for.

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

Please, when you come to the podium, speak up for the court reporter's benefit so that she gets everybody's name and can hear every word. We've done a good job so far, haven't we?
Our first speaker today is Mr. James Allen.

MR. ALLEN: Good morning. I'm James Allen from Jefferson County. I am the avid hunter my wife will be referring to in a moment. I have been hunting and fishing since I was five. In fact, several years ago, I was in the process of getting a hunting book published. If hunting was recognized as an addiction, I would certainly meet every criteria. Over the years my wife has realized the reality that thousands of Alabamians are just as passionate about their love for wildlife as I am about my passion and love for the great outdoors.

Recently, I've been made painfully aware of the lack of resources for injured and orphaned wildlife in Alabama. I discovered that for years hard-working stakeholders have tirelessly tried to work with this agency to create better wildlife rehabilitation policies but to no avail.
I've learned that there is only one point of contact in the entire state, and the wildlife application is set up in such a way to discourage and turn down those willing to volunteer their services, yet doing what is asked of them to become permitted wildlife rehabilitators. Critically since the application permit allows inspection after business hours, it arguably requires that applicants sign the application under duress and coercion. The application process is certainly overreaching to say the very least.

So what's the solution? It's simple. Bridge the gap by allowing AWCRS to develop a diversified wildlife rehabilitation board creating standard qualifications of interests and stakeholders to become permitted wildlife rehabilitators. This invaluable resource to Alabamians will also allocate more resources such as time and money to these agencies. Our immediate neighboring
states have successful rehabilitation
programs serving their citizens and
wildlife in need. So should Alabama.

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

With that said, I am in disbelief
that wildlife rehabilitators are dragged
through so much in the permit application
process when obtaining a hunting and
fishing license only takes a matter of minutes. For Alabamians who have a passion for helping injured wildlife, the process --

MS. JONES: Time.

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

MR. ALLEN: -- is almost unachievable.

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

Our next speaker is Ms. Stacey Allen.

MS. ALLEN: I'm Stacey Allen, an animal lover from Jefferson County. When I was getting my undergrad degree, I met a sweet young man who loved dogs. Years later, he sent a text message to me with a photo, and in the photo was something shocking to me. It was a dead deer. Apparently, he was a hunter, proud of his latest victim. I showed my best
friend that photo and said, I will never
speak to this guy again. Nevertheless,
the man is now my husband.

Our neighborhood backs up to a
nature park, and over the years, I've
found a number of injured and orphaned
wildlife. Recently, we had the
opportunity to help reunite a displaced
baby squirrel with its mother. It
certainly was the moment of a lifetime for
me. I'm fortunate and grateful to have
always known an expert that I can call for
help. As an experienced previously
permitted rehabber, she is incredibly
knowledgeable, and I've learned so much
from her. Anytime I wanted to keep the
injured baby as a pet, she educated me on
why that was not a viable option. No
matter how difficult it was to say
goodbye, I trusted my friend and followed
her instructions. With each case, I
learned more about our state's
regulations, and I learned what was best
for the animal. Later when friends came
to me with injured or orphaned wild
animals, I passed on that same information
and remembered which resources to
recommend.

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

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

Like thousands of others across
Alabama, my husband has purchased a
license to hunt and to harvest animals in the name of love and care for our natural resources. If he is allowed a piece of paper to take away lives, he should just as easily be able to obtain a piece of paper that allows him to save lives when he encounters injured and orphaned wildlife.

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

Finally, I'm asking that the public have access to more educational materials regarding the preservation of our state's most valuable resources, our native species that call Alabama home.
The creation of a diverse board of wildlife professionals and advocates AWCRS proposes is a major step to ensure more wildlife rehabilitation permits are issued to those experienced to share their expertise and education with the general public on when and how to intervene with our native wildlife species, but most importantly, let's not forget passing down the tradition of caring for our beautiful state's wildlife species for generations to come.

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

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

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

I'm a veterinarian with 24 years of experience. I live in Enterprise, Coffee County, Alabama. I have a small
animal practice, Westgate Veterinarian Hospital, for 20 years and now I am the veterinary medical officer for Ft. Rucker, Alabama. I've been working with Big Bend Wildlife Sanctuary through my veterinary practice since 2012. Through this time frame, I've witnessed John and Terry rehabilitate hundreds of injured animals. Many of these injured animals have suffered due to humans, either directly like being struck by a vehicle, being shot by bullets and arrows, or being held in captivity by citizens that think they're doing a good deed by rescuing a wild animal, or indirectly, like domestic animals, poisons, or fences that entangle wild animals.

Few people are knowledgeable and capable enough to rehabilitate wild animals. John and Terry have given the citizens of Alabama a facility to do just what is stated on the Outdoor Alabama website by providing, quote, a resource
for the public by prescribing an appropriate and humane course of action for wildlife in need, end quote. They have done this with no cost to the state, no cost to the public. Everything has been supported by private funds and donations. I've personally given of my time, veterinary diagnostics, and practice resources to support this worthwhile cause because I believe that Big Bend Wildlife Sanctuary is a valuable community resource. Now they are closed. Burdensome governmental regulations have forced John and Terry to shut the doors of Big Bend Wildlife Sanctuary to the public. Now I have to wonder how many of these animals will suffer and die cruel, painful deaths because there's nowhere convenient to help them or what the public will attempt to do unlicensed and uneducated home rehabilitation potentially putting wildlife at risk and exposing the public to zoonotic diseases like rabies.
I close with sharing the highlight of my veterinary career was when John and Terry brought in a magnificent bald eagle that had been found in Samson, Alabama. It was hypothermic and weak. Terry said we needed to perform blood work to evaluate its health status and determine its sex per governmental regulations. How many people ever get to touch a bald eagle, much less take a blood sample. With the expertise and care from Big Bend Wildlife Sanctuary, the eagle was returned to full health. A few weeks later, I witnessed the release of this adult female eagle back near its home. I was touched forever as I watched it fly away. Without Big Bend Wildlife Sanctuary, I honestly believe this national treasure, this symbol of freedom, would have suffered and died on the side of the road. It has come to my attention there was once hundreds of licensed wildlife rehabilitators in Alabama, but now there are only 13 on the
Outdoor Alabama website list of rehabbers.

As a tax paying citizen of Alabama, I ask why is this.

MS. JONES:  Time.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS:  Thank you very much.

Our next speaker is Ms. Amy George.

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

When the public seeks advice for wildlife they found, outdooralabama.com states, quote, trust that your intervention is not required. But since you can't legislate compassion and the public is not turning a blind eye to wildlife in need, doesn't it make more sense to have skilled wildlife specialists determining the needs of intervention, rather than the ill-equipped citizens
making poor decisions potentially affecting public health?

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

The advantages of having multiple permitted rehabilitators in all 67 Counties: We are your best educators to determine leave it alone, mom comes home; rebuilding a nest; or just moving babies out of harm's way is what's most appropriate. We discern if wildlife is diseased, protecting the public from zoonotic diseases, lessening the liability of their safety. We participate in our state's wildlife rabies testing program. We advocate not keeping wildlife as pets or novices raising wildlife often
resulting in sick animals being released back into inappropriate locations. Some spare no expense obtaining rabies pre-exposure vaccines at a thousand dollars. We teach education classes at symposiums in and out of state. And here's a big one. We alleviate cost and manpower for Alabama's DCNR, naturally saving untold tax dollars. Just the 501(c)(3) I founded answers 2500 initial hotline calls annually taking full advantage of a captive audience.

My passion and expertise is educating the public and reuniting babies back to nature. For example, a caller called begging us to take a fawn found wedged in a cinder block six inches wide. I convinced them to give us and the fawn's mother a chance. The photo in your packet speaks volumes how that baby was saved from an unintentional kidnapping. This book represents only one of nine years of a thousand wildlife admissions. Please
keep in mind this is from just one group in our state.

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

Thank you sincerely for your time.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

Mr. John Morse is our next speaker.

MR. JONES: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: I'm sorry.

Mr. Jones?

MR. JONES: Could I get the door on
the left side closed? This glare is killing me.

Thank you.

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

Since 2012, the citizens have been asking the agency, DCNR, to improve the wildlife rehabilitation program. Ten years later, it remains a dysfunctional system. The director, WFF, stated that these stakeholder rehabbers, for which public demand increases each year mind you, were not needed in Alabama and the wildlife rehabbers are a necessary evil. He went on to express a sinister hatred for some native animals, especially raccoons as it was, without a clue how vital they are to our ecosystem. This was witnessed by three people, not just made up by me. Is this an attitude that reflects responsible management, no; a productive stakeholder partnership, no; or is it an arbitrary, very negative attitude
trying to exclude wherever he can get away with it.

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

The rehab application and approval process has been held hostage by the same negativity. The permit process has become a steel door. It is the root cause of the ongoing dysfunction. I'm sorry, but in their own words by facts and the numbers, it sure feels like they just don't want to respect the job. This must stop. As a result, we have dozens of people not permitted. But are they out trying to help the best they can? Are they doing it right or maybe doing it
wrong? That matters to us as professionals as it should matter to you, especially in regards to public safety.

The inability to work with our government, specifically including this manager's area, results in no transparency, no cooperation, and no respect for the rights of the stakeholders, wildlife rehabilitators pursuing the wildlife's interest. This is negligence. The citizens have a right to depend on this agency. So now we must deploy -- depend on your authority to ensure that the public can do so. Please support the pursuit of the wildlife interests as we know and you know and respect and accommodate others. You even have the luxury of being able to embrace the generous offers that AWCRS have proposed as a solution to assist you in doing so. AWCRS are willing for the benefit of all parties to create a diverse board of specialists to help adjudicate
this process. They will use national guidelines appropriately, help assure quality standards, help protect the public, help protect our wildlife, and lighten the loads of game wardens and other agencies. But be clear, this became -- this is the only solution that we have come up with, and we want to be part of the solution. We have a problem; we have a solution and we're asking your help for it.

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

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

Our next speaker is Terry Morse.

MS. MORSE: Good morning. My name is Terry Morse of Coffee County and a member of the AWCRS, an alliance of professionals created as a solution that will now bring to this table an experienced, knowledgeable alliance to serve as a formal liaison, one willing to work with
both the State and the stakeholders, to address the current dysfunction of our state's wildlife rehabilitation program, improve the quality of this valuable resource, and develop into public service that the state and our citizens can depend on and be proud of. Whatever the problem, obstacles, excuses, personalities are that have stifled our state's opportunity to succeed at that, we need you to recognize that this dysfunction and half-measured attempts to pretend everything is okay is not okay. It has and it continues to unfairly punish the public as we speak, and it's past time to stop, to regroup, to better organize, and to move forward.

To that end in addition to forming an allied stakeholder group, we constructed the package you have each been given a copy of. We make all these efforts and as well as traveling to attend these meetings to hopefully assure you that irrefutable challenges exist with our
state's management of this program and
that for ten years now it is unfairly
failing the stakeholders and the citizens.
We all need this program, and we need it
to function. I now appeal to you not to
ignore that chronic dysfunction exists and
to intervene as we need you to do today,
to help us all unite to remedy that.

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

The State has had ten years to
listen, to acknowledge, and to get serious
about thoughtfully addressing and
improving these issues. We asked, we
waited, we begged, we hoped, but things
got worse, not better. So as the saying
goes, don't come whining to the table
without also bringing a solution.

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

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

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

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, thank you.

Our next speaker today is Michael Shehan.

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

In the last CAB meeting, it was stated that the State had approved all completed applications received in the last -- since 2013. That number was five. There was five applications in almost a decade. There's 5 million people in the
state of Alabama. That doesn't sound right. The states around us, Georgia, has 200-plus rehabbers, Florida has over 500. We have 13. Those numbers don't sound right.

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

Rehabilitation provides a public service to Alabama wildlife and the
citizens, and not to mention, it reports back data that is important to conservation. It's not a hobby and shouldn't be treated like one.

So at the last meeting, Director Sykes stated that just because our differences of opinion exist, that his opinion is not wrong. However, if you base your policy on that opinion, that opinion has to be backed by facts, and there is absolutely no research, no evidence, that rehabilitation of wildlife is detrimental to anything or anyone. In fact, it provides a service to the state and to the people of the state that prevents untrained citizens who mean well but don't know what they're doing putting themselves and the animal at risk by trying to help them, because people are not going to put the animal out and just leave it to die. And before a predator ever finds this animal, it's going to get eaten alive by maggots and it's going to
dehydrate and die. People are not going
to do that, and that's the part that the
State doesn't let people know, that when
you leave the animal for a while that's
what's going to happen to it. So please
look at the packets and meet with us to
fix this.

Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

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

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

COMMISSIONER BLANKENSHIP: Gotcha.

Thank you.

MR. M. SHEHAN: Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Our next speaker is
Niyah Shehan.

MR. N. SHEHAN: Hello, I'm Niyah
Shehan from Morgan County. I'm 13 years
old, and I spend a lot of time in the woods.

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

One way of helping restore the ecosystem is by rehabilitating the injured or needy animals. It should be up to you to put policies in place that allows people to help preserve the great range of wildlife this state has to offer. This means that the application process for future wildlife rehabbers must be responsive, respectful, and understanding while still making sure that potential rehabbers take the precautions to keep the animals and rehabilitators safe. Plenty of people want to rehabilitate wildlife in Alabama, but during the poor application system they cannot help animals in need.
Many of us are asking for a change to the application system, and I hope you will do the right thing.

Thank you for your time.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

The next speaker is Lindsey Wilmer.

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

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

Our next speaker will be Brandon Jackson.

MR. JACKSON: I'm Brandon Jackson from Walker and Cullman Counties. Thank you for all that you do to conserve and protect Alabama's wildlife. Thank you for the recent rod use rate on the Sipsey Fork. It has helped to cut down on some of the conflict that was seen on the river, and so we really appreciate that. I think it's helping to take a step in the right direction.
However, we do still need your help. We are seeing increased usage. I know I probably sound like a broken record saying that over and over, but I've got some data that I want to share with you that will back that up. But also due to Gorgas Fossil Plant closing, the generation schedule below Smith Lake Dam has changed.

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

So Alabama Power's part of their license 2165, their recreational plant update placed cameras along the Sipsey
Fork for seven months from March the 5th through November the 1st. They accounted for 16,204 anglers on the Sipsey Fork during that time. Here's why that's important. Not counting natural mortality or death due to predation, we know exactly how many fish were in stock in terms of trout. So when you take that and divide it up by the numbers of days during that period, you've got 68 people per day fishing the Sipsey Fork. You have 1200 fish per month. That's 240 limits per month available for catch. If you pretend that none of them die from any other source, that's three and a half days' worth of fishing if every angler were to catch their limit. So even if you take half of that, that's one week of those fish for the entirety of the month. We'd like to see -- we would ask the Board to look at utilizing some special regulations that would allow for more anglers to access those fish for a longer period of
And we recognize that there is another issue. The bid process is a problem in that we're getting stock each month. During the summer months when we see the highest usage, we're seeing fewer fish numerically being stocked. They're a slightly larger fish, which means that we get fewer of them, and that's restricting what the Department would like to do in terms of alternating between more fish, larger fish each month. And so I don't know how to address that. I don't know if the Commissioner has any ideas about that. We would like to see -- have some of those issues resolved.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Brandon. Next speaker is Travis Johnson.

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

First, I would like to thank the Advisory Board members for all that y'all do for our state and for hunting rights.
I'm vice president of the Alabama Dog Hunters Association for Dale County, Henry County, and Barbour County Chapter. We're here today on behalf of our youth hunters in our communities. Our association believes that the youth of this state needs more opportunities to utilize the natural resources provided to them, such as the Barbour County WMA. We're proposing for the access to be granted to hold a one-day youth deer dog hunt at the Barbour County WMA. If granted, the youth from this county and surrounding counties would have the chance to experience hunting with hounds firsthand.

Our association demands the practice of ethical hunting, and we want to instill this into our youth hunters as well as respecting all landowner rights. Since the application of GPS tracking and training collars have been issued in hound hunting, we now have an excellent training
capability to allow us to solely control
the dog at all times. Across the state of
Alabama with the use of these GPS collars
in place, there have been almost no
complaints from private landowners.

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

Geneva County, their hunt's
located in the National Forest. Their
hunt's been a huge success since back in
2018. It was a two-day event back then.
In 2020, they went to a solely youth hunt. They've turned loose over a hundred dogs all day long with no complaints as far as from private landowners nearby. And I would like to see us be able to do that at the WMA in Barbour County.

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

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Travis.

Our next speaker is Shane Perrilloux.

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

So I'm a landowner in Oakman, Alabama, Walker County. I've got 50 acres, and I'm surrounded by some timber company land as well as about 300 acres of
private property. And I'm a stalk hunter and I'm a bow hunter. And before you, you'll see a spreadsheet that I put together from game cameras on my property from this past hunting season. Now, on the left-hand column, you'll actually see the different hunting seasons broken out by week, and the dates listed start on a Friday and run to the following Friday. And what you'll see in that data is that there were three different opportunities where I was able to capture stray hunting dogs on my property. I contact Fish and Game to report those with photo evidence. The center column are the pictures I've caught on game cameras for the rest of the season. The date and the time those pictures were taken, there were 75 incursions by stray hunting dogs on my property on game cameras. And on the right-hand column, you'll actually see times we're on the stand with deer and food plots trying to be good
When I stood before you in Jasper, I made the statement that I am not anti-dog hunting, and I'm not. I don't want to restrict anyone's hunting rights. I don't want to restrict anyone's tracking rights, fox hunting rights, whatever they may have. I'm a supporter of everyone's hunting rights. But I also think there should be respect for the property owner's rights and the ability to hunt the way we wish to hunt without being infringed upon and impaired by someone else.

And the challenge here is that there is no enforcement actions being taken for these hunters. I have repeat offenders by name on that spreadsheet in front of you. I have a hunting club where they incurred -- every one of those pictures came from the same hunting club. But, again, there's no enforcement, because I have physically laid hands on a
strange dog, not aware of that dog's vaccination status, not aware of that dog's aggression level, and you're asking me to be the enforcer of my property. Something is wrong with this paradigm, right?

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

Thank you.

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

Thank you.

Our next speaker is Mr. Charles Stewart.

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

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

Landowners need immediate relief from the constant hunting dog encroachment on private property. If you research the past ten years of the Advisory Board minutes, you will see that there has been
complaints of hunting dog encroachments at almost every meeting. Today is no different.

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

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

So for the dog encroachment issue, I ask this Board to implement the dog permit system south of Highway 84 in
Covington County, Alabama. That would bring all of Covington County under the permit system.

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

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

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

MS. JONES: Time.

MR. STEWART: -- around their property.

In addition, priority should be given to those property owners who have actual dog encroachment on their property.
Thank you.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Stewart.

MR. WOLFE: Mr. Chairman, question.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, Mr. Wolfe.

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

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

MR. WOLFE: South of 84.

MR. STEWART: Yes, sir.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Next speaker is Mr. Lane Stephens.

MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Yes, Mr. Hartzog.

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

Mr. Charles sent out an email to the Board that had some inaccuracies in it. Yes, we did -- when trying to
mitigate the problem, I asked would the
club and Mr. Charles possibly agree to
split the cost of a fence along his
borderline. Mr. Charles declined and
said, you know, no way whatever. I want
to commend the dog club for saying that
they would pay for a hundred percent of
the fence, not what was in his email to
y'all that his only option was given to
him was to pay for half the fence, which
was incorrect because the dog club paid --
agreed to pay for a hundred percent of the
fence.

The second thing was option -- he
said the only other option he was given
was to call them every time he hunted. I
asked the dog club as a courtesy to him
for when he does have his family and
grandkids and all there if he called on an
occasional basis and asked for them not to
hunt the north end of their lease, they
would honor that. And I thought the club
was gracious in telling Mr. Charles that
if a special occasion came, they would try to honor and accommodate his request of no hunting. So the two statements he made at the end of his email were incorrect.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you, Mr. Hartzog.

Our next speaker --

MR. STEWART: Can I answer that, sir?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: No, you cannot.

Thank you very much.

MR. STEWART: Thank you.

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

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

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you very much.

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

And our next order of business is unfinished business. Is there any unfinished business before the Board today?
There being no unfinished business, then we move on to new business, the new business before the Board today.

MR. SAVOY: Mr. Chairman?

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Mr. Savoy.

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

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

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Thank you.

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

MR. HARTZOG: Second.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Is there any discussion?

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

All those opposed?

No opposed. The ayes have it.

Is there any other unfinished business?

Mr. Jones?

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

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: That would be the turkey motion and as well the registered
deer enclosure motion?

MR. JONES: Correct.

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

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

MR. STIMPSON: Second.

CHAIRMAN DOBBS: Any discussion? There being no discussion, we'll do this again with hands in the air. All those in favor?

Any opposed?

The ayes have it.

Is there any additional new business before the Board today?

Mr. Hartzog?

MR. HARTZOG: Mr. Chairman, when we started the meeting, we said was anybody to be recognized, and I didn't see Craig out in the audience. I'd like to recognize Craig. Craig was with the Turkey Federation, National Wild Turkey Federation. He's been a great help to the
Turkey Federation and was a great help with the Governor's One-Shot, so I'd like to commend Craig for his work for the National Wild Turkey Federation, Craig Harris.

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

Any other business?

Any other comments?

Nothing?

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

Thank you-all for being here.

This was a good meeting.

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

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

(Proceedings concluded at 10:54 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 21, 2022, I reported the proceedings in the matter of the foregoing cause, and that pages 3 through 126 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 September, 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