

HUNTING AND FISHING ADVISORY EDUCATION COUNCIL

MINUTES

June 14, 2011

**WOODY CREWS
CHAIRMAN**

BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA

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Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries
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Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70808.

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AGENDA
HUNTING AND FISHING ADVISORY EDUCATION COUNCIL
BATON ROUGE, LOUISIANA
JUNE 14, 2011

1. Roll Call
2. Welcome and Opening Comments
3. Approval of Minutes of March 15, 2011
4. Enforcement Division Report
5. Office of Fisheries: Report on Spillway Floodwaters in Lake Pontchartrain and the Atchafalaya Basin
6. Office of Wildlife: Report on Flood Impacts to the Atchafalaya Basin and Batture Lands
7. Office of Fisheries: Report on the Aquatic Vegetation Control Program
8. HB 477: Expropriation from Artificial Reef Trust Fund Discussion
9. Sector Separation - Discussion
10. Set Next Meeting Date
11. Receive Public Comments
12. Adjournment

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF
HUNTING AND FISHING ADVISORY EDUCATION COUNCIL

Tuesday, June 14, 2011

Chairman Woody Crews presiding.

Stephen Babcock (substitute for Jeff DeBlieux)
Lyle Johnson
Stephen Pellessier
Mike Rainwater
Marc Barker (substitute for Nelson "Snoop" Roth)
Samuel Smith
Mike Windham

Council members Daryl Carpenter, Shane Crochet, Vance Gordon, Alexander Perret, Donald Reed, David Rousseau and Eric Sunstrom were absent from the meeting.

Chairman Crews dispensed with the **Welcome and Opening Comments**.

Chairman Crews recognized Secretary Robert Barham and asked if he would like to make any comments. Secretary Barham announced the Department was to send out a News Release on leasing out 9 blocks on White Lake. White Lake was a special place and these hunting leases were inherited from BP and Amoco. One of the leases was in excess of 18,000 acres, another lease would be 1,020 acres and the others varied in size for a total leased property of over 30,000 acres. Secretary Barham asked the Council to spread the word to their friends and he hoped they would put in a bid. The Department would be the beneficiary from the leases. Dr. Jim Richardson, a LSU Economist, was doing a study for the Department to get the fair market value for agriculture and hunting leases in the Gueydan area. This information would be used as a minimum bid for the leases. Mr. Barker asked what would be the lease term and he was told 10 years with rebid after that time. Secretary Barham added that the bid will be for an annual payment. Mr. Pellessier asked if these were existing leases but expired and were being put out for bid and he was told yes. Secretary Barham stated some of the leases would be configured differently due to drainage

systems, irrigation systems, roads or access. Chairman Crews asked who owned the surface and he was told the Department. Then he asked if the leases were in part to the White Lake hunting operation and Secretary Barham noted it was 30,000 acres outside of the refuge or managed areas. He added that the White Lake hunting lotteries would continue. Mr. Barker asked if they would be available for the upcoming waterfowl season and he was told yes. The leases would start January 1, but the Department would pro-rate the charge back to the start of the teal season. Chairman Crews asked if the leases were waterfowl only and Secretary Barham stated they were going to be agricultural and waterfowl. The bid packages would be available either on line or by mail on July 17, 2011, then 30 days later the bids would be opened. Mr. Smith asked if there would be a change to the trapping rights and he was told that would remain the same.

The Council did not have any changes or amendments to the **Minutes of March 15, 2011**, so Chairman Crews announced the Minutes were approved.

Chairman Crews stated, based on comments from members, there needs to be an agenda item for old business that could allow the Council to follow up on issues that were germane. For the next meeting, the Chairman asked for an item under Old Business relating to a report on the removal of out of production offshore platforms as it related to the Rigs to Reef program.

The **Enforcement Division Report** began with Lt. Col. Joey Broussard stating the majority of their time was spent on the flood protection measure and public safety associated with the high waters. He noted over half of the agents were involved with "flood fighting" and public safety. Activities included patrolling the levees, keeping the public off the levees and protecting wildlife as well as assisted the Corps of Engineers and Concordia Parish officials. After the locks were opened, the Mobile Command Unit was set up with 24 hour detail from Morganza to Morgan City. During May, the remaining agents issued 1,134 citations (boating safety and fishing licenses) and 427 warnings. During the flood event, there was one bear killed when it was hit by a train on the trestle. Lt. Col. Broussard noted there were 21 boating accidents with 4 fatalities during the month. Chairman Crews stated he has run aground in South Pass twice in the last 4 months and wondered how he could get the word out and Lt. Col. Broussard felt the Corps of Engineers was aware of the situation and would need to do a lot of

dredging. He mentioned they could get with the Coast Guard and do a broadcast across the marine band in addition to public service announcements. Mr. Barker felt it was frustrating to know there have been 23 drowning deaths related to not wearing a life vest. Lt. Col. Broussard added that a majority of the deaths could have been prevented if the victims had worn a life vest.

The next item, **Office of Fisheries: Report on Spillway Floodwaters in Lake Pontchartrain and the Atchafalaya Basin** was a joint presentation by Mr. Jonathon Winslow and Mr. Harry Blanchet. Mr. Winslow talked first on the effects on the Atchafalaya Basin from the flood waters. He mentioned there would be some positive and negative impacts but they would not be known for some time. A big problem in the Spillway was nuisance aquatic vegetation and staff was hopeful the flood waters would push some out, but felt they would get caught in the trees. Also, the flood waters could possibly help with the submerged aquatic weeds. As far as fishing, the flood waters would create habitat cover and increase available forage. When the water drops, there is the potential for fish kills due to bad water dumping from the swamps into channels. Staff was aware of the Asian carp swimming through the Morganza floodway and Mr. Winslow noted this was not a new introduction. He added they were interested in seeing how this event affects the population. Chairman Crews asked if bad waters meant low oxygen and Mr. Winslow stated that was correct and added that it did not include nutrients. Mr. Babcock stated that Ducks Unlimited received correspondence on the Corps of Engineers shutting down the water lily control program. Mr. Winslow explained that on October 1, 2011 the Corps of Engineers will no longer fund spraying water hyacinths. The Department will have to cover areas they have not covered in the past and do not know where the funding to do it will come from. Chairman Crews asked that an aquatic weed item be on the agenda for the next meeting. Mr. Barker asked how much flushing of the hyacinths would occur and stated he hoped the flooding would have cleansed the area. Again, Mr. Winslow mentioned that the hyacinths get caught in trees and for it to be flushed out, the water would have to go above the tree tops. Mr. Johnson stated he was in Lake Decade and saw plenty of hyacinths.

Next Mr. Harry Blanchet began his presentation showing maps of Lake Pontchartrain from a point where it was clear to the point where it filled up with water from the Bonnet Carre Spillway.

Another point to note was the muddy water from the Atchafalaya Basin in Vermilion Bay. The long term effects of the flooding would be several fold but staff did not know how much as of yet. In looking at discharges from the Bonnet Carre since 1927 and other flood years, the only common thing was each was different. This year east of the Main Delta, there was a significant plume of turbulent waters going into the Breton Sound area. These turbulent waters are carrying nutrients which could cause a series of algal blooms and hypoxia in the area. If offshore winds carry these hypoxia areas closer to shore, this can create issues with fish kills and crab kills. Moving further west, Mr. Blanchet stated there was normally a hypoxic area the size of New Jersey and he was curious to see what the state size would be this year. The waters in Lake Pontchartrain have become fresh and not as muddy but it should return to normal during the fall. Until then, there may be more fish kills in Lake Pontchartrain than usual and it could even contain different fish species. Chairman Crews asked why the events were so different since he felt they were not only cyclical but uniform. Mr. Blanchet explained that the discharge itself was one reason for the differences and noted how the opening of the spillway was different the last time as compared to this year. Another difference was the fact that the Mississippi River Gulf Outlet was closed this year but was open the last time and these factors make differences in the circulation within the lakes. Mr. Barker asked what the time lapse on the Lake Pontchartrain pictures was and he was told the first was taken in late May and the last was taken the week of June 6th. Mr. Smith asked how has the salinities affected the Sabine and Calcasieu Lakes and Mr. Blanchet stated there are more fish in Sabine Lake since the salinities were higher. He added it was unique to have flood conditions surrounded by drought conditions, which allows for more marine species in Sabine and less freshwater species.

The next item, the **Office of Wildlife: Report on Flood Impacts to the Atchafalaya Basin and Batture Lands** was presented by Mr. Scott Durham. He began stating there were 2 different situations beginning north of the Mississippi River with high water occurring and the batture going under and the deer in that area going over the levees into the agricultural fields and understory. All of this activity occurred before the fawning period, so there were no young deer that could possibly drown. But in East Carroll Parish, a large agricultural area got wet due to a levee breach. These conditions can affect fawn recruitment, stresses the habitat and the deer's recovery

depends on habitat recovery. When the Morganza Spillway was opened, the goal was for the waters to rise one foot every 24 hours, but on Sherburne there was a 4-6 foot rise in an 8 hour period. This rise caused some deer to be trapped and mortality occurred. Pictures taken during the flood event were then shown. On one particular day, about 200 deer came out of the Lottie area ahead of the water and headed onto the highway, traffic was slowed and the deer made it to agriculture lands. Mr. Durham mentioned there were high areas that did not go under water as well as spoil areas the deer and other animals could refuge to. Deer, armadillo and hog mortality occurred during this event. More pictures of the South Farm area after the peak were shown. Staff counted 22 dead deer during their surveys. Chairman Crews asked if there were any historic data to overlay projections on how bad the event may be. Mr. Durham felt staff would be able to calculate mortality estimates and they would look at upcoming season dates. He mentioned there was no sign of dead deer south of Interstate 10 even though there was a low density for deer in that area. Also, it was noted, there was not a lot of mortality in the lower Basin since the deer were accustomed to high water. Deer mortality occurred on Sherburne WMA and north of the WMA. Mr. Durham felt there may be a conservative change in the season dates on the WMA. Action on private lands would be to step up efforts with DMAP clubs by using common sense and hunter observation which were important. Mr. Johnson asked, on a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the worst, how would this event be rated. Mr. Durham rated it a 6, and added it was significant as well as serious. Mr. Pellessier asked if the 200 deer that left Lottie would go back and Mr. Durham stated they would go right back to that area but there may be some movement as the deer looks for food. Chairman Crews asked Mr. Durham to come to their next meeting to learn more on projections.

Office of Fisheries: Report on the Aquatic Vegetation Control Program was handled by Mr. Jonathan Winslow. As of May 31, 2011, herbicides were applied to about 48,000 acres of vegetation. Most of the vegetation sprayed was common salvinia, giant salvinia, water hyacinths and hydrilla. About 350,000 acres of public water bodies were sprayed for these nuisance vegetations (which was down about 80,000 acres from 2010). Research on weevils with LSU was ongoing especially for giant salvinia. The effort was to grow them and stock them in south Louisiana in order to control the giant salvinia. Chairman Crews asked if the weevils were from South America and Mr.

Winslow thought LSU may have gotten them from South America but they are breeding in Louisiana and there are plenty in south Louisiana. He added that they will not grow in north Louisiana due to the colder temperatures. Chairman Crews stated he was interested in bioremediation control and felt salvinia was very hard to kill.

Chairman Crews then began the discussion on **Sector Separation** asking if there was anyone from the National Marine Fisheries Service. Mr. Myron Fischer with the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries introduced himself and stated he sits on the panel. Chairman Crews stated he found the snapper regulations horrible and the sector separation issue scared him. Mr. Fischer stated there was a meeting the week before the Council met and they voted to add an additional 345,000 pounds of red snapper to the recreational sector. At the August meeting, dates would be assigned, such as weekend seasons. Mr. Fischer noted they need the public's participation to give their ideas since this is where changes occur. He agreed that there are more red snapper now than ever before. The Miami Science Center recommended the highest allowable take of red snapper, but that was reduced as a precautionary measure by the SSC (Science and Statistical Committee) before it went before the Council. The range for snapper, from south Texas to Fort Myers, Florida, was much bigger than anyone anticipated it would be and were easy to catch. The red snapper fishery was a recovering fishery. Mr. Fischer talked about sector separation for mackerel, as an example. The mackerel plan recognizes 2 sectors, commercial (32 percent of the quota) and recreation (68 percent of the quota); within that commercial sector there are further divisions (hook and line commercial gets 83 percent and gill nets get 17 percent). The new idea for sector separation was dividing those people with their own boats versus those on charter boats. Beginning in the late 1980's charter boats were catching over 70 percent of the red snapper and those boats were on a moratorium to where they cannot grow, but the recreational vessels can. With the charter boats losing harvest, they were driving them to request more of the fishery. The projected yields, the recreational quota may be 3.8 to 3.9 million pounds of the 7 million pounds. Chairman Crews asked if there has been any discussion on allowing the snapper fishery be managed in a multi-region effort as opposed to gulfwide. Mr. Fischer stated there was a lot of emphasis to go east-west dividing at the Mississippi River. But he noted they wanted to divide it further to 5 individual states. The average size of red snapper

was projected to be 7 pounds or larger and when a fishery was managed on a quota by the pound system, the larger the fish equals to a shorter season. Chairman Crews added he did not like being dictated to without being given a chance to make his comments known. The Chairman noted Sector Separation would not be on the agenda again, but he warned the Council that this would be a significant issue in the future. Mr. Fischer stated catch shares was not interwoven with sector separation but it could be made so. Mr. Babcock wondered if there was discussion on dividing the quota between the 5 states and basing that quota on the stocks. Mr. Fischer mentioned the snapper fishery has covered the Gulf of Mexico. Understanding Mr. Babcock's question, Mr. Fischer stated they may not be able to change size limits but change when the season occurs and bag limits. Mr. Babcock then asked if the season could be 22 weekends and he was told the recreational fishery really liked this option but the commercials did not like it.

The next agenda item, **HB 477: Expropriation from Artificial Reef Trust Fund - Discussion** began with Chairman Crews stating Mr. Doug Peter was the Program Manager for the Artificial Reef Program which allows oil rigs to be dropped in certain areas within the Gulf of Mexico. He then asked Mr. Peter if Governor Jindal was taking funds from the Artificial Reef Fund to help with budget shortfalls. Mr. Peter stated there would be a ruling on House Bill 477 within a week. He added that there was about \$32 million in the fund, and if the bill passes, \$26.6 million would be moved into the state budget. Chairman Crews asked what were the funds from the Artificial Reef used for. Mr. Peter stated that for the last 5 to 6 years, the budget has not exceeded \$1 million. These monies were used for salaries, operation and maintenance, equipment, research and artificial reef development. Chairman Crews stated he was opposed to this action and asked if Secretary Barham spoke on this issue and Mr. Peter did not know. Chairman Crews asked if the Council should voice itself on the issue. Mr. Johnson asked where does the money come from and Mr. Peter explained that when an oil company participates in the program, they generally save money and the Department receives about 50 percent of the cost differential of how much it would cost to take the platform completely to the shore versus taking it to a reef site and deploying it as permanent habitat. Mr. Johnson stated he was also opposed since this was not taxed money. Chairman Crews stated this was a government decision, normally taking money from other people, but this was taking money from hunters and fishermen. He then

asked Mr. Peter what the revenue curve was looking like. Mr. Peter stated they look at each platform and do a cost differential on it which depended on the structure. For the last 3 years, the average has been \$7.6 million. Chairman Crews asked if there was information on rigs that were to be removed. Mr. Peter knew there were 3,000 platforms off the coast of Louisiana and about half would not become permanent reefs. There are between 500-800 structures more suitable to become reefs but he did not know the timeline on removing those structures. Also there are 80 structures now in the permit process with an average of 25 platforms deployed each year. Chairman Crews then commented that if the state takes this money, he hoped they would leave it alone for quite a long time. Also, he suggested that with the timing, the Council should forgo the effort of a resolution. Mr. Pellessier mentioned that House Bill 531 passed the House unanimously but a Senator pulled the bill after hearing a lot of objection and it was now dead. He felt the Council still may have time to influence the Senate. Chairman Crews hoped that level heads would prevail. He then asked Mr. Peter what was the size of the biggest area and he was told the biggest permitted area was 700 acres and the average size was 364 acres. He then noted that the average size for a platform was 1 to 2 acres.

The Council originally set the **Next Meeting Date** for September 12, 2011 beginning at 1:30 PM but after the meeting the Chairman was called noting that date was a Monday, so he changed the meeting date to Tuesday, September 13, 2011.

There were no **Public Comments** heard.

Chairman Crews asked that Election of Officers be included on the agenda for the next meeting.

Chairman Crews **Adjourned** the meeting.