

Natural Resources Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
IDNR Headquarters – Via Conference Call
June 22, 2020 - 3:00 p.m.

Board Members:

Scott Bryant	Marshall Douglas	Darel Martin	Tim Caughran
Mick Wanless	Anthony Tindall	Kerry Leigh	

IDNR Staff:

Colleen Callahan	Chris Young	Randy Smith	Tami Evans
George Sisk			

Public:

The June 22, 2020 was open to the public via conference call. Only one person, Gretchen Steele identified herself.

Vice Chairman Scott Bryant opened the meeting at 3:00 p.m. The June 22, 2020 Natural Resources Advisory Board meeting was held via conference call. Roll call was given; quorum was met.

Marshal Douglas motioned to adopt the June 22, 2020 meeting agenda; Tim Caughran provided the second. No opposition was heard.

2021-2025 Waterfowl Season Dates – Director Colleen Callahan – Director Callahan thanked everyone for their patience and support as we traverse in this current situation.

Board members were provided a copy of Randy Smith’s presentation which included a summary of the waterfowl hunter safety data that was presented at the previous NRAB meeting. Due to COVID 19, the US Fish & Wildlife Service extended the due date to

July 1st, hence the meeting today. Board members did not vote on waterfowl at the last NRAB meeting.

Chris Young stated that when the stay at home order began, we were asked to delay all public meetings as much as possible. We are hopeful to have an on-line platform where we can hear and see each other at the next meeting.

We are asking the board to look at recommendations and options that were provided in Randy's presentation and make a recommendation so that the director can take it into consideration before our package is sent to the USF&W Service. The director will then add your input to everything that's been received and formulate her decision upon submission to the USF&W Service.

Kerry Leigh respectfully requested that people identify themselves when speaking.

Scott asked for recommendations. Kerry stated that she has received a few emails regarding the impacts of climate change and the late migration of ducks. Has IDNR looked at climate change impacts? Randy stated that regarding climate change and migration timing in general, IDNR conducts several different waterfowl surveys across the state; results are included in the presentation. If we look at migration peaks from years ago you will see those peaks shifting slightly later. We're not necessarily doing anything big picture in terms of climate change, but in the proposal, it's clear that there is a strong contingent of hunters that want to hunt later in the year. A lot of hunters prefer to hunt mallards and they seem to be the most impacted. Our proposed season dates reflect that by slightly shifting later to accommodate those desires for later dates.

Darel Martin asked how much of a later date, a week/two weeks? Public land becomes not accessible if shifted to a later date. Randy stated that the Illinois/Mississippi River Confluence and Carlyle Lake are all shallow and freezing is a concern. A lot of hunters don't continue to hunt once things freeze. In the presentation, it steps through each of the zones and gives the current dates and the proposed dates for the next 5-year period. When looking at these dates, virtually every year there is a balance between two weekends. In this set of recommended dates, we are trending towards later opening dates in several zones while taking into account not moving it too much later and not opening during the first gun season. It's about a week later in two or three of the five years in each zone. Darel asked if the south & south central zone are the most

affected. Randy stated the north & central zones are a little later for three years, the south central two years and that the south is the most impacted.

Scott asked about dates for peak migration. It states that peak migration on the Illinois River is from 11/3-11/9. The line then declines to where the duck season will still be going but there will not be birds on the river. On all the state sites in the MRA, Horseshoe Lake in Granite City and the Quincy area are not utilized the last week of duck season. It's been stated that 67% of all waterfowl hunting in Illinois is on public land, but we are cutting the public out of hunting for over a week so that the private club/landowner can profit. Scott added that waterfowl in the central zone used to be bigger and started on the 15th of October. We are steadily losing waterfowl hunters and losing access to our public hunting areas. Randy stated for that area, he doesn't disagree but it's a big zone, and other areas are experiencing exactly the opposite. The northeast portion of the central zone doesn't have ducks until the last week or two of the season, from Braidwood down to the eastern half of the state. Scott stated that we were going to alleviate that with the zone line move to appease part of that problem, but now due to survey information from 3,000 people, it's not happening. How much input was given by site superintendent's in the waterfowl areas, and how much input did they give go into these decisions? Randy stated that opinions were asked of all waterfowl superintendents regarding season timing and zone preference. It's a small number of staff but the response rate wasn't great. Scott stated that this isn't his personal agenda, but seven different waterfowl groups that he represents does not agree with most of this. They want to see the zone line changes, especially in the south up through the eastern area. In the last meeting, it was stated that the survey said that the people didn't want to make the zone line change because the western side would be closed for hunting and those hunters would move to the eastern side to hunt – the south zone line through Decatur. Randy stated that 3 open houses in the areas that would have been impacted by the zone line change, Wilmington, Springfield and Champaign. Turnout was poor and support for that change was not strong amongst the open house attendees. If folks wanted that change, they would have showed up and been overwhelmingly supportive. Of 170 total open house attendees, only 25% supported the option one change. Champaign and Wilmington have been the loudest and most consistent vocal proponents on making a change. Only 9 people showed up in Champaign.

Chris Young suggested that the board put specific recommendations/resolutions together for a vote for the department to consider.

As a board member, Scott stated that we need to have the 3rd weekend in October in the central zone, and we need to look at the splits and zone lines in different parts of the state. Our first line responders, site superintendents have the pulse of the hunting community and should be listened to.

Scott recommended that the central zone needs to be a week earlier. The southern zone is fine as there has been a lot of push for the southern zone to be later.

Kerry Leigh asked about the several duck hunting organizations that supported zone line changes. Did they submit an organizational letter of support for changes? If so, those membership levels could show as supporting that proposal instead of just the few people that came to the meetings. Randy added not specifically. Randy met or contacted 13 different groups and received thoughts. Some groups did submit letters of support, some did not. IDNR conducts mailed hunter surveys, about 5,000 a year. Over the last three years we've increased that amount to sample in specific target areas that will be impacted by these changes. 60,000 duck stamps are sold in the state but there are only 40,000-45,000 active duck hunters. A large percentage of the population is surveyed annually. Kerry commented that it must be expensive to send out surveys and suggested that it might be helpful to have the waterfowl organizations send out surveys to their members.

Chris asked if there was any other board members who may have recommendations that they would like to fold into a resolution for Director Callahan.

Mick Wanless stated that moving it up earlier would affect a lot of crops, millet, harvest, etc. It's not something that can be controlled, some will like it, some will not.

George Sisk, IDNR Legal Counsel asked to make sure that the recommendations are pertaining to the only agenda item at this meeting. Chris Young stated yes.

Darel Martin asked if the zone lines were changed would that satisfy the members in the Braidwood area? Or by doing the zone line change would it affect the date change? Yes. We didn't recommend the Option 1 change because of how it may impact harvest to those that like to hunt wood ducks, green wing teal early in shallow marshes. It would help those hunters that hunt mallards around large bodies of water, power plant areas. It became hard to recommend the change because of the potential negative

impacts. Scott added that he didn't have that in perspective and asked where those folks are. Randy stated that Iroquois County, and those in the Shelbyville area are concerned of being froze out well before the season ends.

Darel Martin motioned to move forward with IDNR's Option 1 and make the season 7 days earlier in the central zone. Anthony Tindall provided the second. Roll call was given for board vote.

Kerry Leigh – No

Anthony Tindall – Yes

Mick Wanless – No

Tim Caughran – No

Darel Martin – Yes

Marshall Douglas – Yes

Scott Bryant – Yes

The motion passed 4 to 3. Darel stated that moving it forward, in the central zone 2021, 2022, 2023 would be moved up one week. In 2024 & 2025 it will stay on October 26 & October 25th.

Anthony Tindall stated that going forward it would be very helpful to have individuals and organizations put their concerns and/or recommendations in writing.

Public Comments:

Gretchen Steele thanked everyone for doing this under less than optimal circumstances and wanted to clarify that the recommendation is for Option 1 for zone line changes and seven days earlier start in the central zone.

Director Callahan thanked everyone for their patience and understanding. Clearly this has been a difficult decision without consensus. A decision will be made by July 1st.

Work is being done remotely as much as possible. IDNR headquarters is expected to be closed to the public through September 1st.

The closure of our parks and fish & Wildlife & recreational areas are now open with some restrictions as it relates to playground areas, etc.

A black bear has visited our state; IDNR Office of Law Enforcement is monitoring its movement.

IDNR wildlife staff and volunteers have continued to conduct the annual goose round up to monitor population. Natural Heritage biologists have been doing prescribed burning for wildlife habitat. The LaSalle Fish Hatchery stocked over 182,000 walleye fingerlings in 13 downstate lakes. Alligator Gar stocking will begin in waters adjacent to the Illinois River; Emiquon Preserve and Thompson Lake.

The 2020 Waterfowl Blind Drawings were canceled due to social distancing and crowd requirements. Existing blind holders will maintain those blinds through the current season.

IDNR has initiated the process to change the administrative rule for refunds for spring turkey hunting permits. The proposed rules, if passed by JCAR, would authorize the department to issue refunds for those who were not able to use them due to the closures. This process is being conducted in accordance with Illinois law. The process is open for comment currently.

Marshall asked if there had been any discussions on the Grand American moving to Missouri this year and if it would be back. The decision was made by IDNR, the Illinois Department of Public Health and the Governor's Office. As we looked at the international competitors coming in and no protocol for screening it posed great problems. The decision was made on health & safety. There is an agreement that the Grand will remain in Illinois in 2021 and beyond.

Scott stated that there is a new liaison to the Army Corps of Engineers and he has heard nothing but positive feedback and to please welcome him aboard.

Anthony thanked IDNR staff for their continued responsiveness to the Cook County Forest Preserve District during these times.

Director Callahan thanked Randy Smith, Mike Wefer & Chris Young for their hard work on the Waterfowl recommendations.

Marshall motioned to adjourn at 4:10 p.m.; Darel Martin provided the second.

