

Natural Resources Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
IDNR Headquarters
January 13, 2020 – 3:00 p.m.

Board Members

Jerry Hiller	Scott Bryant	Marshall Douglas	Marcia Polhamus
John Fleischli	Darel Martin	Tim Caughran	Joseph Mark
Lynn Gipson	Anthony Tindall		

IDNR Staff:

Director Callahan	Randy Smith	Mike Wefer	Chris Young
George Sisk	Tami Evans		

Guests:

Tomi Tranchita	Phil Steinberg	Lisa Braddock
Michael Rasmussen		

Vice Chairman Bryant opened the meeting at 3:00 p.m.

Adoption of the January 13, 2020 Agenda – Marshal Douglas motioned to adopt the January 13, 2020 agenda; Jerry Hiller provided the second. No opposition was heard.

Adoption of the November 26th, 2019 Meeting Minutes – Marcia Polhamus motioned to adopt the November 26th, 2019 meeting minutes; Lynn Gipson provided the second. No opposition was heard.

Open Meetings Act – George Sisk – All members of a public body have a duty to comply with the Open Meeting Act Training provided through the Illinois Attorney General’s Office. George provided the Board with a copy of frequently asked questions, and a printed copy of how to register. To register: www.illinoisattorneygeneral.gov under Ensuring Open & Honest Government – Register as a FOIA Officer, OMA Designee or a OMA Public Body. Training is lengthy. At the end of the training, please print your certificate and send to Tami. OMA designees are the Chair and Tami and is taken

annually. Regular board members will need to take the training once, however, if you are reappointed as a board member, you will need to re-take the training.

Public Comment Period/Bylaws – Scott Bryant – Currently there is no limit for individuals who attend meetings and want to address the board. To give individuals an ample amount of time to speak, the bylaws may need changed to reflect that opportunity. Marshall stated that in his governmental experience there is a general rule that public comments are limited to 3 to 5 minutes. George Sisk stated that the board would need a motion and a vote. Legal would then draft the bylaw change, and at the next meeting it would be presented, and if approved, would go in to affect at the next meeting. Marcia asked if there were 100 people, do we limit their time to an hour. This can be addressed in the amendment. We can encourage larger groups to have 2/3 spokespersons but if individuals want to speak, they can. We can also add that as the Chair, he or she can maintain the quorum, including an advisement to avoid testimony that is repetitious, irrelevant and/or not helpful to the body. Marshall made a motion to adopt a rule for public comments that the speaker does not exceed 5 minutes. Jerry provided the second. No opposition was heard.

Scott turned the meeting over to Chairman Fleischli.

Turkey Survey – Mike Wefer – Mike Wefer stated that IDNR along with the Natural History Survey conducted a survey of 5,000 resident turkey hunters; 3,000 were general hunters; 2,000 had landowner tags. IDNR received 2,932 questionnaire's back, 2,733 usable for a 57% response rate. On average, turkey hunters hunted 4.5 days during the 2019 Spring season and harvested an average of .4 turkeys per hunter. Most hunters were satisfied with the overall hunting experience; a rate of 76%. Darel asked the percentage of the return for landowner's vs non. Mike stated that Luke Garver, IDNR's Turkey Project Manager presented these tentative results at the NWTF state meeting and the full survey is not yet at the publication stage; we are still working on some individual analysis in counties. When the report is complete it can be found on the Illinois Natural History Survey's Human Dimensions website. 63% of hunters were satisfied with current turkey hunting regulations, 19% were dissatisfied and 18% were neither. 57% support all day hunting, 31% oppose and 12% were not sure. 44% were opposed to a single continuous season, 40% support and 16% not sure. 49% support a segmented season, 31% were not sure and 20% were opposed. 50% opposed statewide permits with no quota, 21% were not sure and 29% supported. 56% supported permits allocated by quota, 29% were not sure and 15% were opposed. 48% supported

statewide opening day on or near April 25th, 29% were not sure and 23% were opposed. 40% were opposed to allowing hunting with 410 shotguns, 25% were not sure and 29% were supportive. Darel asked if there was anything regarding the youth seasons on letting them use their tags in the first two seasons. Mike will provide the original survey and youth season results to the board. Tim added that a lot of other states have adopted the use of the 410. It provides a lot of opportunity and is an effective way to take a turkey.

Upland Game Habitat – Mike Wefer – IDNR has made one acquisition, adding 160 acres to Perduville Habitat Area increasing it from 120 to 280 acres, and has been awarded the US Fish & Wildlife Restoration Grant to begin the purchase of an additional 80 acres from willing landowners at the Chatsworth State Habitat Area in Livingston County. IDNR has also been approached by another landowner to potentially acquire another 80 acres at Chatsworth. IDNR has an MOU with Pheasants Forever/Quail Forever allowing them to cooperate on our state sites to do habitat work. Several positions, including a Natural Resource Coordinator in Gibson City, a Habitat Tech and the first of two Southern Till Plain Habitat Teams in the Southern Till Plain are in the hiring process. We hope to have two Habitat Teams on the landscape soon. John asked how the habitat team will work with the regional biologist & site staff; where do the Habitat Teams fit in? They are separate and answer to DNR's Ag & Grassland Program Manager. On sites where they are being served by the Habitat Team, there will be collaborative & cooperative efforts. A lot of the grassland sites are remote with a shortage of staff. As an example, the Habitat Team has been taking care of the Sibley Saybrook site for years, and if you look at our pheasant numbers it's made a difference. They have the time to dedicate where site superintendents may not. It's also part of our Wildlife Action Plan Strategy to service those sites. John asked what role PFQF would be taking? Tim added that PFQF is in the process of working on an MOU with IDNR so that their volunteers can do general maintenance on DNR property. PF/QF has 11,000 members and 64 chapters and we can now go to them and ask if they want to volunteer to help DNR, in conjunction with the regional wildlife biologist/site super. PFQF has farm bill biologists/technical service biologists that can go out and talk to landowners and help with plans and provide technical assistance. Sibley Saybrook is one of the best habitat areas in the state. The numbers are incredible, and the site is managed well because there are boots on the ground. It will be exciting to duplicate the process in different areas.

John asked if there was a plan with an upland game survey like IDNR does with turkey. Mike stated he wasn't aware of anything at this time. Scott asked if the quail population is still declining and if so, why hasn't IDNR reduced the bag limits? Mike stated that the bag limit is not likely the problem, but habitat. Over a million acres in grassland has been lost. John added that in looking at some of the flagship sites, like Jim Edgar, it's had a habitat & quail program since the beginning – how are we doing there? Numbers are declining. John stated that as an Advisory Board we should be figuring out why. Mike stated that on our big sites a lot of the grasslands are old, we burn at the wrong time of year, they are thick with grass and we don't do a lot of strip disking. We need more people, more time. John asked if there was a plan; the upland population seems to be ignored. If it were deer, it would be different. Mike stated that this is where the habitat teams come in. When we apply scientific management, we get results. 7 years ago, we put together a strategy to have 4 teams, 2 in Grand Prairie and 2 in the Southern Till to keep up with the grassland sites that we own. There's been a lot of competing priorities and we haven't gotten there. Darel asked if the habitat teams would be concentrating on new areas or if they will also work on existing areas. Mike added that we try to be strategic in the focal areas of the Wildlife Action Plan. We want to work on Ten Mile Creek and expand to Pyramid which is the biggest tract of grassland the state owns. Darel asked Tim if PF/QF had a plan to help on sites like this. Tim stated that one of the most popular programs they have is the Habitat Share Program where they talk to state agencies to help match the Pittman/Robertson money on leverage funding available. In turn, we take those dollars and for every .25 cents you put down you get .75. PF/QF takes chapter local dollars and match's that to PR dollars and contracts habitat work on public areas to help get them caught up. There are a lot of studies that state over 85% of wild quail only nest on sites that have been disturbed in the last 18 months. If you don't have manpower, numbers go down. If you can manage sites you will hit carrying capacity every year. PF/QF is happy to work with DNR to do whatever it takes to jump the curve. From a predator standpoint, is trapping allowed on state grounds, and is there a certain permit you need. Mike stated that it depends on the site. Scott stated that we need to do something about air predators, specifically the Red Tail Hawk. Mike stated that if we have good habitat, you will beat the predator. Red Tail Hawks are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

Darel asked about bobcats and the data collected. Are we able to recognize hot spots in the state? We have records of bobcats in every county of the state. We've recovered the resource and the population is growing; they will continue to expand. IDNR has set

regulations conservatively enough that the mortality won't take away from next years hunt.

John asked if we could have a Habitat harvest update at the next meeting.

Waterfowl Regulations – Randy Smith, Wetland Wildlife Program Manager –

Waterfowl are a federally regulated species and protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act. It's a cooperative management process between the states and the federal government. The Feds through the Flyaway Council establish the federal framework for which we set our waterfowl hunting regulations. Once waterfowl zone lines are set for a 5-year period they can't be changed. Zone lines must be contiguous and use readily identifiable features. The options that the Feds allow us to use are 4 zones with no split. IDNR has used this since 2011 and was instrumental in the Feds allowing 4 zones. Illinois has the most thorough process between the different ways that we collect data. No other state in the 14 state Mississippi Flyaway does as much as Illinois does. We try and give hunters as much say as possible and we rely on the biology as much as we can to come up with a plan based on the interaction of these two things. Since 2006 IDNR has set its season dates for the same five-year period as we set our zone lines.

Our selection is due to the USF&W by April 30th. We look at biological data, conduct aerial surveys around the state weekly and bi-weekly, collect harvest and freeze up data as calculated by the state climatologist's office. We collect an annual mail survey that's mailed to 6,000 waterfowl hunters based on duck stamp sales, and over the past three years we've done an additional 3,000 mailed surveys. We've met with 13 constituent waterfowl groups around the state either face to face, by email or by phone. We've conducted 5 open houses around the state and solicited emails from those who were unable to attend for feedback. We have given anyone who is interested in providing feedback to us every opportunity between the public open houses and solicitation of email.

Our goals through this process is to maximize hunter satisfaction by maximizing days in field, waterfowl available to them during those selected season dates and to provide opportunities for the way individuals like to hunt. We want to recruit and retain hunters with simple regulations, understand needs and desired outcome for our hunters. We also want to maintain transparency of this process; we want our hunters to understand how this process works. Our expected outcome is to set regulations for

the 2021-2025 waterfowl seasons. We want to maintain support of our constituent groups and gain support for the regulations that we select as measured by our Illinois Waterfowl Hunter Survey. Our timeline began a year ago by sitting down with waterfowl groups so that they could provide feedback on things that IDNR should include in its waterfowl hunter survey after last years season. The survey is the best way to survey the average waterfowl hunter.

Randy provided a power point presentation and provided the board with a detailed overview of that presentation. A copy of the presentation will be provided to the board.

Season dates are dictated by zones. The reason for zone line changes are to provide hunters with their preferred season dates to better match availability of waterfowl. The options we presented to hunters through the waterfowl hunter survey and at the open houses were based on previous requests, discussions and consistent responses on the waterfowl survey. The same set of questions have been asked the last three years.

IDNR's proposed Option 1 divided the central zone in half north to south putting the eastern half in with the south-central zone to give them approximately a two week or so later date; based on hunter survey responses and aerial inventories. 56% of hunters in this zone responded that the season was too early, 63% in the eastern half and 45% in the western half. These are hunter preferences in initiating this zone line change. Hunters impacted by this change on the east half of the central zone were 41% in favor, 30% opposed and 28% showed no preference. Virtually everyone else in the state was more opposed than in favor or no preference.

When looking at the information collected, the central zone, affected and unaffected counties, open house attendees, email responses and IDNR staff responses, only lukewarm support was given for Option 1. Three open houses were held in the affected area and only 25% of those attendees were in favor of the change. There is no clear mandate to make this change.

IDNR's proposed Option 2 is to move the zone line between the south and south-central zone line north. This change would raise the zone line to Route 14 and Highway 154. Rend Lake and Carlyle would remain in the same zone. 54% of south-central hunters said the season was too early. 43% of hunters impacted by the change were in

favor; 53% of hunters not impacted by the change were opposed. There is no clear mandate to implement this change.

IDNR's proposal is for no change. There was no clear mandate for Option 1 or Option 2. 88% of hunters responded that they felt the county they hunt most often is in the correct zone. They may not agree with dates, but they don't want to change the zone they are in.

Over multiple years we have asked if season dates were too early or too late. Each zone trends towards too early. 48% in the north zone are happy with the dates. 54% in the Central zone said it's too early. Open house & email respondents trended slightly towards late. South-central trends towards early. 2021, 2022 and 2023 couldn't be moved back a week because it falls on the first gun deer season.

South zone hunters were evenly split. In general, their responses were to maximize the January dates in the south zone. IDNR is proposing to move away from the Thanksgiving Day opener in 2021, 2024 and 2025 to the Saturday of Thanksgiving weekend. This provides an additional 24 days of January hunting over the course of 5 years.

There was some interest in changing the timing of the youth waterfowl hunting season. 188 folks that participated in youth hunting, including the 1,200 that did not participate wanted the timing to stay one week prior to the regular duck season opener.

There are no proposed changes to Goose season and we will continue to maintain a 15-day September season opening with ducks in all zones. There was some displeasure on how the central zone is structured. There is a split in the middle of goose season during duck season because we are only allowed a maximum of 107 days of migratory bird hunting.

Proposed Teal season dates for 2021 & 2022 will shift to the weekend following Labor Day.

Last year Congress passed legislation creating two special hunting days for veterans and active duty military. States may choose to implement them or not, and of the 14 Mississippi Flyaway states only 4 have done so. The special hunt days must be two weeks of the regular duck season, either on the front end or on the back end and they may overlap existing youth hunting days. They may also occur after the close of the

season and can be outside of the federal framework. Legislation did not include geese which would take additional days away from the 107- day season. On the survey we asked about the timing of implementation but did not ask if it should be implemented. At the open house's folks were in favor of implementing the special hunt; email comments generated 84% in favor. The most common strategy is to overlap with youth season. Randy's recommendation is to see how it works in other states. 60% of duck hunting takes place on public land and there could be a concern on crowding and taking away opportunities from others if implemented.

There are no proposed changes to IDNR zone lines. In the north, central & south central we are not proposing any changes to duck season timing but will trend those dates slightly later as appropriate based on aerial inventories and hunter preference data. In the south zone we are moving away from the Thanksgiving opener and try to use slightly later dates to maximize those January hunting days.

Scott stated that the MRA accounts for about 35% of public hunting. The last two weeks of the season on the largest waterfowl area in the state no one can hunt. The experience on public areas is going down. Randy added that every year is different. The IL/Mississippi River Confluence area trends towards earlier date due to shallow, marsh habitat.

Board Comments:

John acknowledged the receipt of communication regarding the Tranchita situation. Upon advice from IDNR Legal Counsel we will withhold comment due to pending litigation.

Jerry asked/motioned the board to consider changing the meeting time to 1:00 p.m. instead of 3:00 p.m. Marshal provided the second; no opposition was heard. Motion carried.

Scott asked if there was a reason we no longer have a waterfowl advisory board in the evening so that constituents could participate.

Public Comments:

Tomi Tranchita thanked the group for the opportunity to speak and passed out materials to the board. Ms. Tranchita stated that her 4 federally licensed, non-

releasable coyotes were the subject of an illegal raid by Conservation Police that resulted in the death of 3 of 4 coyotes. Ms. Tranchita asked the board to urge the Governor's office to ask IDNR to find a resolution to end this for all. IDNR is rewriting and applying rules that do not and have not ever applied to others in the state with non-releasable coyotes. IDNR is insisting that after 13 years operating as a licensed USDA exhibitor, offering education to the community that I now need a hound running permit to operate my educational based facility. FOIA'd information found that only two hunting clubs in the entire state hold this permit. There are multiple zoo's, educational facilities and private owners who have non-releasable coyotes that do not hold this permit that is being asked of me. Most other facilities in my area, except for Flint Creek Wildlife where 3 of the animals died, that has adult, non-releasable coyotes hold a furbearing permit and a USDA Exhibitors License. The hound running permit is considered by most a form of canned hunting. Despite only having my USDA license I was only charged with not renewing a \$25.00 furbearing permit. IDNR is now telling the courts that I need a hound running permit to keep my non-releasable animals. The double standard is being applied to me and unfair. Under the USDA rules I am forbidden to participate in animal fighting or bait training with the animals in my possession. I have provided a copy of the animal welfare act, USDA guidelines so you can understand what I am trying to say. As an exhibitor to the public, the hound running permit does not apply to me. Animal fighting is a federal felony and our society does view hound running as horrendous. To learn that Illinois is one of the last few state's to not have banned the practice and to learn that an educational facility holding animals in what they view as sanctuary status is being refused permission to operate unless IDNR classifies me as a type of canned hunting operation. I teach people how to avoid conflict with coyotes. Is IDNR expecting a federally licensed exhibitor to violate federal licensing rules by expecting me to abide by state rules that don't apply to my situation? There's not one other state that expects this. I've been generous in my willingness to mediate in order to end this and rightfully resume my life. My monetary investment is well over \$20,000 and I want my remaining property back. I have been accused of keeping these coyotes as backyard pets but for 13 years I've spoken out against it. Teaching the public about wildlife was my connection to the community. IDNR should appreciate the dedicated commitment and assistance to their own mission has taken that away from me. My government has stripped me of peaceful and purposeful life. All because an overzealous officer heard a howl. There were no issues and no complaints. He knew I had a license, but he never knocked on my door to see what I was doing. I was never given the chance to renew a \$25.00 permit. How is it that a tax paying citizen lawfully and peacefully operated for 13 years under this

agency's acknowledgment? If IDNR is going to stick with the absurd hound running permit then every other educational facility, every zoo, every private owner should also need a hound running permit. I urge this board to use its authority granted by the governor to stop wasting taxpayer dollars, to agree to mediation and let us end this for all. This board has an obligation to the governor and to the citizens of this state to see that IDNR acts in their best interest not in the agencies best interest.

Phil Steinberg stated that 13 years ago Ms. Tranchita took on 4 rescued coyotes that could not be released. During these 13 years she has cared for them in safe enclosures. Prior to their seizure none had escaped or posed any threats to humans or animals. Ms. Tranchita maintained federally permits to take care of them. There doesn't seem to be any rational reason for this. She simply wants Luna back in her care. It would be a blessing for them to be reunited for whatever time Luna has left. These coyotes were kept for public educational purposes just as many have been doing legally for many years. To insist that she needs a hound running permit makes absolutely no sense. If I am honest, I am deeply saddened that IDNR would put an educational program in the same category of people that bait wildlife. All coyotes under Ms. Tranchita's care were healthy and happy. They had routine veterinarian care, unannounced federal inspections, enrichment and interaction with there own species. There was never a single infraction. I can't believe that this has gone on for 10 months at the expense of Illinois taxpayers. I am appalled that the Agency continues to bully this person. I am asking the board to do what is humanly just and reunite her with Luna.

Lisa Braddock - I've listened today a lot about the conversations regarding managing wildlife in the state and making sure hunting doesn't interfere with certain times but I wonder what consideration has been given to Ms. Tranchita who has spent a decade of her time, energy and financial resources to take care of 4 animals that no-where to go. She took them in and did one of things that's in the mission statement – to educate about the natural resources of our state. I would understand if there had been an escape or a threat of someone being hurt, but that's not been the case. For a \$25.00 permit, this nightmare started in April and continues to this day. The bond I have with my dog is no less important as it is to Ms. Tranchita. If any of you are animal lovers and have pets, think about it in that way. If you forget to renew your license, they don't take your car away, and they sure don't knock on your door and take anything from you and deny you your rights. How much money was spent by IDNR to punish someone who failed to renew a \$25.00 permit? Is there more that we don't know? This looks like a grudge. Someone has over-stepped their bounds or has made a mistake. Luna

is still a live and we sit with the hope that some how we move on. Why is so much attention spent on this one coyote? Why can't she go back to where she was for over a decade? Nothing has changed other than the man that knocked on that door.

Listening to everyone talk early about limiting the public comment period is kind of insulting. When members of the public have something important to say this is our only way to speak. As a public servant you make a choice to be on an advisory board; don't shove out the public. Thank you for the opportunity. I hope we can figure out a way communication can remain, and Luna can go home.

Michael Rasmussen – I own an on-line website and many emails I receive was the legalization of marijuana and 2nd amendment rights. I suggest the IDNR put something in print so that people know what the law is.