



Commission Meeting Minutes

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

523 E Capitol Avenue | Pierre, South Dakota 57501

April 3-4, 2025 | Matthews Training Center | Pierre, SD

REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING

Call Meeting to Order

Chair Rissler called the meeting to order at 1 pm CST at the Matthews Training Center in Pierre, SD on April 3, 2025. Commissioners Stephanie Rissler, Bruce Cull, Jon Locken, and Travis Theel were present, with Jim White, Julie Bartling, and Travis Bies joining virtually. With seven commission members present or online, a quorum was established. The public and staff could listen via SDPB Livestream and participate via conference or in person, with approximately 110 total participants attending via Zoom or in person.

1. Conflict of Interest Disclosure

[Action Item]

Chair Rissler requested the disclosure of any potential conflicts of interest, but none were brought forward.

2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

[Action Item]

Chair Rissler called for any additions or corrections to the regular minutes of the March 2025 meeting. Minutes are available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/archives/>.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE MARCH 2025 REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Additional Salary Days

[Action Item]

Chair Rissler called for additional salary days from the Commissioners. Additional days were submitted for approval for Commissioner Theel for one day.

MOTIONED BY LOCKEN, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE ADDITIONAL COMMISSIONER SALARY DAYS. The motion carried unanimously.

4. New Staff Introductions

[Info Item]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, introduced two new employees: A) Hunter Olson, West Whitlocks Assistant Manager B) Sam Parrish, Spring Creek Assistant Manager

Tom Kirschenmann, Director of Wildlife, introduced three new employees: A) Tonya Nayman, Rapid City Regional Office Secretary B) KayCee Smith, Outdoor Campus West, Naturalist C) Cierra Colvin, Mobridge Wildlife Damage Specialist

Public Hearing

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 2:12 pm CST for discussion from those in attendance in matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda as finalization. No testimony was provided by the public, so the Public Hearing was closed at 2:49 pm CST.

Agenda Item #6: Waterfowl Hunting Season

No testimony provided.

Agenda #7: Prairie Mountain Lion Hunting

2:14 pm: Nancy Hilding of Black Hawk, SD representing Prairie Hills Audobon Society testified virtually in opposition of prairie mountain lion hunting.

2:18 pm: Julie Anderson of Rapid City, SD testified virtually in opposition of prairie mountain lion hunting.



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2:21 pm: Paula von Weller of Deadwood, SD representing testified virtually in opposition of prairie mountain lion hunting.

2:23 pm: Tate Wells of Piedmont, SD representing SD Houndsmen Association testified virtually in support of prairie mountain lion hunting.

2:24 pm: Bret Robertson of Rapid City, SD representing SD Houndsmen Association testified virtually in support of prairie mountain lion hunting.

2:25 pm: Jeremy Wells of Sturgis, SD representing SD Houndsmen Association testified in person in support of prairie mountain lion hunting.

2:27 pm: Cody Johnson of Belle Fourche, SD testified virtually in support of prairie mountain lion hunting

2:29 pm: Patrick Weimer from SD representing SD Houndsmen Association testified virtually in support of prairie mountain lion hunting.

Agenda #8: Boating Safety

Note testimony provided

Agenda #9: Big Horn Sheep Hunting Season

2:31 pm: Nancy Hilding of Black Hawk, SD representing Prairie Hills Audobon Society testified virtually in opposition of big horn sheep hunting.

2:32 pm: Paula von Weller of Deadwood, SD testified virtually in opposition of big horn sheep hunting.

Agenda #10: Prairie Elk Hunting Season

2:33 pm: Julie Anderson of Rapid City, SD testified virtually in opposition of a prairie elk hunting season.

2:34 pm: Brad Karlen of Reliance, SD representing Karlen Ranch testified in person in support of a prairie elk hunting season.

2:37 pm: Tyler Frederick of Reliance, SD representing Karlen Ranch testified in person in support of a prairie elk hunting season.

2:39 pm: Charlie Boe of Chamberlain, SD representing Boe Ranch testified in person in support of a prairie elk hunting season.

2:41 pm: Ben Dorman of Kennebec, SD representing Dorman Ranch testified in person in support of a prairie elk hunting season.

2:42 pm: Dalton Grassle of Lower Brule, SD representing Lower Brule Sioux Tribe Wildlife, Fish and Recreation Department testified in person in opposition of a prairie elk hunting season.

2:43 pm: Nancy Hilding of Black Hawk, SD representing Prairie Hills Audobon Society testified virtually in opposition of a prairie elk hunting season.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the public hearing closed at 2:49 pm.



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Open Forum

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 3:07 pm CST for discussion from those in attendance in matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda, not as a finalization or may not be on the agenda.

3:09 pm: Matt Tucker of Rosebud, SD representing the Rosebud Sioux Tribe testified virtually in opposition of the prairie elk hunting season.

3:10 pm: John Jarding of Rapid City, SD testified virtually concerning the Unit 27A deer population.

3:13 pm: Mike Jarding of Rapid City, SD testified virtually concerning the Unit 27A deer population.

3:17 pm: Penny Svenkeson landowner in Fall River and Custer Counties, SD virtually concerning the deer population in Unit 27A.

3:20pm: Nancy Hilding of Black Hawk, SD representing Prairie Hills Audobon Society testified virtually in opposition of beaver trapping, the nest predator bounty survey, and the river otter action plan.

3:23 pm: Bret Robertson, SD representing SD Houndsmen Association testified virtually in support of mountain lion hound hunting and deer population in 27A.

3:26 pm: Jeremy Wells of Sturgis, SD representing SD Houndsmen Association testified in person in support of mountain lion hound hunting.

3:28 pm: Tate Wells of Piedmont, SD representing SD Houndsmen Association testified in person in support of mountain lion hound hunting.

3:29 pm: Jim McDougal from southwestern SD testified virtually in support of mountain lion hound hunting.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the open forum at 3:31 pm CST.

5. #236 Petition to Eliminate Closed Area on Lake Francis Case

[Action Item: Petition]

Eric Storms presented his reasons to the GFP Commission for removing the current regulation which does not allow fishing between December 1 to April 30 in the area between the railroad bridge and I-90 bridge Causeway in Brule and Lyman County waters. Director Kirschenmann described the current regulation creates more complexity to rules, does not positively impact fish populations, and that fact that internally GFP has been begun preliminary discussions around this same regulation. Kirschenmann shared the department recommendation of accepting the petition and opening it up for public comment. The GFP Commission unanimously accepted the petition and will begin the rule promulgation process.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY THEEL TO ACCEPT THE PETITION AND BEGIN THE RULE PROMULGATION PROCESS. The motion carried unanimously.

6. Waterfowl Hunting Season

[Action Item: Finalization]

The Commission took action to finalize all waterfowl proposals presented by Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator. Specific changes to administrative rule are to increase the daily bag limit for pintails from one to three and decrease the bonus blue-winged teal season from 16 to 9-days. In addition, the Commission took action to repeal the Special Canada Goose hunting season in Bennett County and all rules referencing this season and absorb Unit 3 for the Canada Goose Hunting season into Unit 2. This will add additional days of Canada Goose hunting opportunity in Bennett County.



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MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO APPROVE THE DUCK HUNTING SEASON FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO APPROVE THE EARLY FALL CANADA GOOSE FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY LOCKEN, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE GOOSE HUNTING SEASONFINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY LOCKEN, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE SPECIAL CANADA GOOSE HUNTING SEASON FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

7. Prairie Mountain Lion Hunting

[Action Item: Finalization]

The commission took action to finalize changes to the prairie mountain lion season. John Kanta, Terrestrial Section Chief presented changes including allowing the initiation of the pursuit of a mountain lion with dogs outside the Black Hills Fire Protection District to occur anywhere, where permitted by the landowner. Because this season is open year-round, this change would become effective twenty days after the modified rule is filed with the Secretary of State's Office. The commission also took action to exclude examples of closed areas Wind Cave National Park, Jewel Cave National Park, and Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO APPROVE THE PRAIRIE MOUNTAIN LION HUNTING FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

8. Boating Safety

[Action Item: Finalization]

Law Enforcement Section Chief Sam Schelhaas presented a finalization recommendation of two boating rules. Schelhaas pointed out that there were a few style and form changes made by the Legislative Review Committee, however, none of the changes affected the substance of the original proposal. The commission voted to approve the finalization recommendation.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE BOATING SAFETY FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

9. Big Horn Sheep Hunting Season

[Action Item: Finalization]

John Kanta, Terrestrial Section Chief presented a finalization recommendation for the big horn sheep hunting season. The commission took action to expand the unit boundary for BHS-BH4 to include those portions of Lawrence and Meade counties west of Interstate 90 and clean-up unit descriptions. The commission also voted to reduce the total number of bighorn sheep licenses from ten in 2024 to seven in 2025.

MOTIONED BY LOCKEN, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE BIG HORN SHEEP SEASON FINALIZATION. Yea Votes (6) Rissler, Bartling, Locken, White, Cull and Theel. Nay Votes (1) Bies. The motion carried.

10. Prairie Elk Hunting Season

[Action Item: Finalization]

Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, presented a finalization recommendation for the Commission to take action on for all changes to the Prairie Elk hunting season. Specific changes to administrative rule are to increase the season length in Prairie units PRE-09A and PRE-27A to Sept. 1 through Dec. 31 and allow landowner-own-land resident only antlerless elk hunting in these units. In addition, administrative rule changes would expand the Prairie unit PRE-WRA to include all areas west of



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the Missouri River that are not currently in a Prairie, Black Hills, or Custer State Park elk hunting season unit.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE PRAIRE ELK HUNTING SEASON FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY LOCKEN, SECONDED BY WHITE TO APPROVE THE PRAIRIE ELK HUNTING SEASON LICENSES FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

11. E-Tagging

[Action Item: Proposal]

Chad Switzer, Wildlife Deputy Director, presented a proposal for changes to the tagging and transportation rules for the implementation of an e-tag system. With these changes and upon successful comprehensive testing of the e-tag system, the current locking seal tagging requirement and allow for e-tagging will be a legal method and operate concurrently until e-tagging is implemented for all hunting seasons (big game and tundra swan) that require tagging.

MOTIONED BY LOCKEN, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE E-TAGGING PROPOSAL FOR MAY FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

12. Mentored Hunter

[Action Item: Proposal]

Chad Switzer, Wildlife Deputy Director, presented a proposal for the GFP Commission resulting from Senate Bill 41 from the 2025 Legislative Session. The proposed will streamline the mentored hunting program by the following: 1) the mentored hunter, or mentee, would be issued their respective license and be the holder of their license (previously, the license was issued to the mentor); 2) there would be no group size restriction for mentoring hunting; 3) consent for mentored hunting would now be verbal or written (previously, written consent was required); and 4) the proposed change would allow the GFP Commission to establish criteria and conditions for other mentored hunting season.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO ADOPT THE PROPOSAL FOR MAY FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

13. Deer Proposal and Population Status Update

[Action Item: Proposal]

Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, presented an information to the Commission to review deer hunting seasons and proposed several changes to administrative rule for the Apprentice, Archery, Muzzleloader, and Black Hills Deer seasons. The most significant change would be to expand the Sioux Falls municipal archery deer hunting unit and create a municipal archery deer hunting unit in Hot Springs. In addition, administrative rule would be modified to allow the Commission to specify archery and muzzleloading deer antlerless only hunting units and license types via administrative action. License number recommendations were shared with the Commission for firearm deer hunting seasons, which consisted of a 17% reduction in the number of licenses to increase deer population growth rates across much of South Dakota. These proposals and recommendations are scheduled for finalization at the May Commission meeting.

Andrew Lindbloom, Senior Wildlife Biologist, and Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, presented a proposal for deer license allocation and presented a population status update. GFP conducts multiple biological and harvest surveys to evaluate mule and white-tailed deer populations across South Dakota. Overall harvest in 2024 was approximately 47,100 deer and slightly lower than 2023. Recruitment rates for both species improved in 2024 compared to previous years and the past 2 winters have been mild with minimal estimated overwinter losses. Hemorrhagic disease losses in most areas of the state have been minimal, but southeast South Dakota experienced substantial losses. The commission proposed reducing



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approximately 12,900 firearm tags and closing 19 additional units to antlerless archery and muzzleloader hunting to address lower deer populations.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN ON MENTORED AND YOUTH DEER HUNTING SEASON. THE FINALIZED VERSION WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE COMMISSION IN MAY 2025.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY BIES TO ADOPT THE APPRENTICE HUNTER DEER PROPOSAL FOR MAY FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY LOCKEN, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO ADOPT THE ARCHERY DEER PROPOSAL FOR MAY FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY WHITE TO ADOPT THE GENERAL MUZZLELOADING DEER SEASON PROPOSAL FOR MAY FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY BIES, SECONDED BY CULL TO ADOPT THE BLACK HILLS DEER SEASON PROPOSAL FOR MAY FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN FOR THE CUSTER STATE PARK DEER SEASON. THE FINALIZED VERSION WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE COMMISSION IN MAY 2025.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN FOR THE WEST RIVER DEER SEASON. THE FINALIZED VERSION WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE COMMISSION IN MAY 2025.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN FOR THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE DEER SEASON. THE FINALIZED VERSION WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE COMMISSION IN MAY 2025.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN FOR THE EAST RIVER DEER SEASON. THE FINALIZED VERSION WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE COMMISSION IN MAY 2025.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN FOR THE DEER HUNTING SEASON LICENSES ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION. THE FINALIZED VERSION WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE COMMISSION IN MAY 2025.

14. Black Hills and Custer State Park Elk Hunting Seasons

[Action Item: Proposal]

Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, presented a proposal to the Commission to review Black Hills and Custer State Park Elk hunting season structures. License number recommendations were shared with the Commission. A 15% increase to any elk licenses and a 63% increase to antlerless elk licenses was recommended as a result of elk helicopter population survey conducted in February. These license number recommendations are scheduled for finalization at the May Commission meeting.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN AS THERE WERE NO CHANGES TO THE PROPOSAL. FINALIZATION WILL TAKE PLACE IN MAY 2025.

14a. Elk Survey Results

Byron Buckley, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented results from the 2025 Elk Aerial Survey and related information on license changes. The winter 2025 elk estimates for the Black Hills and Custer State Park were 7,922 and 795, respectively. GFP staff were excited to announce that due to the higher elk populations, we can recommend more hunting opportunities in the Black Hills and Custer State Park this year. Staff proposed an increase in the Black Hills from 1,582 to 2,197 (Including Any Elk tags, Antlerless tags, Firearm, and Archery) and in Custer State Park from 20 to 35 (Including Any Elk tags, Firearm, and Archery).



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15. Fish Production Development Plan Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Michael Barnes, program administrator presented information that provided an overview of the state hatchery system and hatchery operations. The overall goal of maximizing angler satisfaction was emphasized along with principles guiding hatchery operations. The 2021 hatchery plan was revisited. While hatchery construction at the Ft. Pierre office and in collaboration with SDSU were abandoned, considerable progress occurred with RAS fabrication and installation at all three hatcheries. These RAS systems are producing fish in numbers and sizes not previously available. Walleye production in particular has increased dramatically since 2021. The return-on-investment has been exceptional. Additional RAS systems are under construction at Cleghorn Hatchery, with even more planned at Blue Dog Hatchery. The emphasis moving forward will be at Blue Dog hatchery, focusing on water supply improvements and RAS construction. State hatchery production has increased dramatically in the past 15 years, with additional increases expected as more RAS systems become operational.

16. Hunting 101 Program Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Derek Klawitter and Clint Whitley presented on the hunting 101 program that happens at the Outdoor Campus' in Sioux Falls and Rapid City. They shared the history, purpose and impact of the program. They also shared some stories of participants that took the program and how they showed success. This highlighted the value that data can't always show. Lastly, they shared the plans for the future of this program and what they plan to do to continue its growth and impact.

17. River Otter Action Plan

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Alex Solem, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented the "North American River Otter Action Plan, 2025-2029. This action plan guides management efforts for river otters for the next five years. Objectives of this plan include determining the population status of otters, using sustainable harvest strategies, informing the public on river otter ecology, and promoting the conservation of riparian habitat. The department will ask The Commission to adopt the action plan at the June meeting.

18. Prairie Dog Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Mark Ohm, Wildlife Regional Supervisor and Mike Klosowski, Wildlife Regional Supervisor presented and update on prairie dogs. Prairie dog control requests for service continue to increase, with 132 requests in 2024 and over 16,000 acres being treated. Average costs per acre treated remained similar to FY24 at \$29.44/acre with total expenditures from SDGFP topping \$381,000. With continued dry weather increased requests for service are expected again for this coming year. Several other bait types were evaluated including Rozol and Kaput. While these products may be useful in limited circumstances, average costs of three times zinc phosphide and significant time commitments make their widespread use in our program unlikely.

19. License Sales Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Director of Wildlife Tom Kirschenmann shared some general information on license sales from December 15 through March 31. In all, license sales remain strong. In particular, fishing license sales are better at this point than compared to the last three years. The department will continue to monitor license sales; however, all indications would suggest sales to remain ahead of last year.

20. Go Outdoors Management System

[Info Item: Parks]

Cassy Behnke and Ashley Waibel presented information to the commission regarding updates on the new events management system through GoOutdoors South Dakota. Their presentation covered the user journey within the system, demonstrated its functionality, and highlighted key features such as waiting lists, HuntSAFE, internal data collection, and customer feedback. They also discussed how these tools can help achieve the department's and division's goals.



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21. Park Volunteer Recruitment Effort

[Info Item: Parks]

Rachel Comes, Statewide Volunteer Program Coordinator, updated the Commission on the state park volunteer program recruitment. The variety of recruitment efforts used were presented including social media and print ads. It was noted that recruitment costs are under \$5,000 for a program with a fiscal impact of \$1.4M. To date onsite park host position vacancies are at 2% and the focus for 2025 is to increase commuter, event, and group volunteers to meet the goal of increasing volunteer hours by 5%.

22. Ft. Sisseton Festival Preview

[Info Item: Parks]

Fort Sisseton manager Ali Tonsfeldt provided the GFP Commission a sneak peek at the Annual Fort Sisseton Festival being held the 6th, 7th, and 8th of June. This event the second largest event held by GFP and typically target up to 10,000 attendees and over 200 campers. Staff focus on a family friendly, inviting atmosphere with many activities for kids and history buffs alike with the intent to keep folks engaged for the entire weekend. She also formally invited the GFP Commissioners to stay a bit longer after the June meeting in Aberdeen and take the time to visit this festival event.

23. Statewide and Missouri River Boat Ramp

[Info Item: Parks]

Pat Buscher, Regional Park Supervisor and Jason Jungwirth, Senior Wildlife Biologist addressed the April 2025 US Army Corps of Engineers Missouri River Run-off forecast with commissioners. The virtual spring meeting on April 1st was attended and forecast information was shared during this annual presentation. Lake Oahe will see run-off from improved mountain snowpack conditions, and this expected run-off coming into the Missouri River Reservoir can only be improved with localized moisture yet to be seen this spring. The elevation of Lake Oahe is expected to decline gradually and remain stable once mountain snowpack flows into the system. Lake Oahe boating conditions will remain like 2024, with 17 of 23 State Park boat ramps placed and to remain in service throughout the summer. Marina offering at Spring Creek and Indian Creek are expected to operate at full capacity this season.

Statewide drought conditions are on the increase causing potential access issues on smaller bodies of water while larger bodies of water are holding their own. Most fish populations are also doing very well as can be seen in the participation levels so far this winter and spring. Low water should not deter anglers and users from opportunities as there are ample ways to recreate, which can be found on the Aquatic Access Map on the GFP website. The aquatic access map is a great location to stay in the know on any and all types of fishing access from boat, shore, ice and streams as well as stocking and survey reports.

24. March Park Camping Unit and Revenue Report

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented the March monthly and year-to-date report numbers for the Division of Parks & Recreation related to camping units and revenue. With the cool weather in March camping units were down for the month and YTD approx. 120 units but remain relatively close to the 2024 numbers. The Parks Division revenue is up 3% YTD with entrance license sales remaining strong. Various graphs and charts were shared with the Commission to depict how park revenue comes in on a monthly basis throughout the year as well as the impact of the new non-resident park entrance license fees as compared to other entrance fees. Commissioners were also shown a graph that depicted how reservations come in over a typical 90-day reservation window, which staff will be used to market unreserved available camping sites.



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26. Adjourn

[\[Action Item\]](#)

A Regular Commission Meeting will be held on May 8-9, 2025, at the Event Barn in Custer State Park starting at 1 pm MST.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY LOCKEN TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 11:19 AM CST ON APRIL 4, 2025. Motion carried unanimously.

Submitted respectfully,

Kevin Robling, Department Secretary