



# Commission Meeting Minutes

## South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

523 E Capitol Avenue | Pierre, South Dakota 57501

June 11-12, 2026 | Heartland Energy, Madison, SD

### REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING

#### Call Meeting to Order

Vice Chair Cull called the meeting to order at 1 pm CST at Heartland Energy, in Madison, SD on June 11, 2026. Commissioners Bruce Cull, Travis Theel, Chuck Spring, Julie Bartling, Dean Kirkeby, Robert Whitmyre, and Kevin Nyberg were present. Commissioner Stephanie Rissler was in attendance beginning at 3:30pm Thursday. 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 92 total participants attending via Zoom or in person.

#### 1. Conflict of Interest Disclosure [Action Item]

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

#### 2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes [Action Item]

Vice Chair Cull called for any additions or corrections to the regular minutes of the May 2026 meeting. Minutes are available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/archives/>.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE MAY 2026 REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. The motion carried unanimously.

#### 3. Additional Salary Days [Action Item]

Chair Cull called for additional salary days from the Commissioners. No additional days were submitted for approval.

#### 4. License List Request – Hunt Lead Free [Action Item]

General Counsel for the Department, Nick Michels, presented to the commission a license list request from an organization called Hunt Lead-Free SD. Michels explained that this entity's stated reasons for wanting a list of deer, elk, and antelope tag holders in western SD did not fall under any of the categorical prohibitions laid out in ARSD 41:06:02:04 and that, consequently, the Department had no objection to granting Mr. Druce's request.

MOTIONED BY NYBERG, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE LICENSE LIST REQUEST. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Michels also conveyed to the Commission that, because Hunt Lead-Free SD is a non-profit with limited available funding, it requested that the Commission grant the modified fee made available in ARSD 41:06:02:06.

MOTIONED BY KIRKEBY, SECONDED BY RISSLER TO APPROVE THE AMENDEMENT FOR THE MODIFIED FEE FOR THE LICENSE LIST REQUEST. The motion carried unanimously.

#### 5. 2027 Budget Approval [Action Item]

Deputy Finance Officer, Callyn Donald, presented an overview of the FY2027 Budget, which takes effect July 1st. As part of the presentation, the Commission approved the FY2027 budget for the three informational centers: Wildlife – Informational, Wildlife – Development/Improvement – Informational, and Snowmobile Trails – Informational. The presentation outlined the agency's budget structure and budget cycle, showed the key changes from the FY2026 base budget and highlighted the legislative adopted FY27 changes which included adjustments related to the 1.4% salary package and BIT bureau billings. Additionally, the Deputy Finance Officer and the Director of Wildlife provided a brief



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update regarding Pittman-Robertson federal funds, noting the impact of the declining PR funds on future budget cycles.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE 2027 BUDGET FOR WILDLIFE – INFORMATIONAL, WILDLIFE – DEVELOPMENT/IMPROVEMENT-INFORMATIONAL, AND SNOWMOBILE TRAILS - INFORMATIONAL. Motion carried unanimously.

### 6. New Staff Introductions

[Info Item]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, introduced two new Parks Division employees: 1) Jeremy Bullion – Park Technician at Lake Louise Recreation Area, and 2) Lane Arthur – Service Forester at Custer State Park.

Tom Kirschenmann, Wildlife Division Director, introduced one new employee Brandon Welker, Education and Operations Specialist at the Pete Lien and Sons Shooting Complex.

### Public Hearing

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 2:09 pm CST for discussion from those in attendance in matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda as finalization.

#### Agenda Item #11: Youth, Mentor, and Apprentice Deer

No testimony provided.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the public hearing closed at 2:10 pm.

### Open Forum

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 2:10 pm CST for discussion from those in attendance on matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda, not as a finalization or may not be on the agenda.

2:11 pm: Representative Tim Goodwin of Rapid City, SD testified in person in support of allowing fisherman to keep one Musky.

2:14 pm: Cory Hanson of Brandon, SD testified in person in support of depredation tags for river otters.

2:17 pm: Tim Peters of Madison, SD, representing Mitchel Pheasants Forever, testified in person about Pheasants Forever helping to improve Old Stickney Lake GPA.

2:20 pm: Julie Anderson of Rapid City, SD representing Signs of Hope, testified virtually in opposition to the bounty programs.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the open forum at 2:24 pm CST.

### 7. Petition 256 – Tagging of Harvested Preserve Birds

[Action Item: Petition]

Director Kirschenmann provided a brief summary of the two petitions as they both pertain to Private Shooting Preserves and tagging/transportation rules. The petitions were brought forward by Mr. Sal Roseland requesting the Commission to adjust rule to allow birds harvested on Private Shooting Preserves to be transported to either the lodge or processing facility without attaching leg tags, however they must accompany the birds and once processed at the facility then inserted in packages. The first petition addressed the process of “how” preserves would carry out this process and respective




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
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requirements and the second petition included an exception clause within the transportation permit rule to allow this process if a preserve operator chose to use this method.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY WHITMYRE TO APPROVE THE TAGGING OF HARVESTED PRESERVE BIRDS PETITION. FINAL ACTION WILL BE IN JULY. Motion carried unanimously. 

### 8. Petition 257 – Preserve Transportation Permit

[Action Item: Petition]

MOTIONED BY NYBERG, SECONDED BY WHITMYRE TO APPROVE THE PRESERVE TRANSPORTATION PERMIT PETITION. FINAL ACTION WILL BE IN JULY. Motion carried unanimously. 

### 9. General License Provisions - Definitions

[Action Item: Proposal]

Staff recommended modifying the administrative rule defining a buck and bull by removing the term “polished antler” and replacing it with “antler.” This change would allow hunters to legally harvest velvet-antlered deer or elk. The Commission adopted the proposal, with final rule consideration scheduled for the July Commission meeting.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO ADOPT THE PROPOSAL. FINAL ACTION WILL BE TAKEN IN JULY. Motion carried unanimously.

### 10. Spring and Fall Turkey Seasons

[Action Item: Proposal]

Staff presented updates on the Spring and Fall Turkey Seasons.

- For the Spring Season, the recommendation splits Day and Codington counties into separate hunting units.
- For the Fall Season, the proposal allows the use of rifles statewide—except in Minnehaha County—and aligns Fall Season Units with Spring Units, excluding the Black Hills.

The Commission adopted the proposal, with potential finalization at the July meeting.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY NYBERG TO ADOPT THE CUSTER STATE PARK SPRING WILD TURKEY HUNTING SEASON PROPOSAL. FINAL ACTION WILL BE TAKEN IN JULY. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY NYBERG TO ADOPT THE SPRING WILD TURKEY SEASON PROPOSAL. FINAL ACTION WILL BE TAKEN IN JULY. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY THEEL TO ADOPT THE FALL WILD TURKEY SEASON PROPOSAL. FINAL ACTION WILL BE TAKEN IN JULY. Motion carried unanimously.

### 11. Youth, Mentor, and Apprentice Deer

[Action Item: Finalization]

The Commission approved changes closing these seasons in nine southeastern counties: Bon Homme, Clay, Davison, Hanson, Hutchinson, Lincoln, Turner, Union, and Yankton. These seasons previously allowed the harvest of antlerless whitetail deer. Closing them is intended to help low deer populations in these counties recover more quickly toward management objectives.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY SPRING TO APPROVE THE YOUTH, MENTOR, AND APPRENTICE DEER FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

### 12. Antelope Survey and License Allocation

[Action Item: Wildlife]

Staff reported on pronghorn population trends based on recent herd composition and aerial surveys. Although the population has grown over the past two years, it remains below the



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statewide objective. Accordingly, the Commission approved license recommendations that include a 1% increase in buck only licenses. No doe or kid harvest opportunities are currently available.

MOTIONED BY SPRING SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE ANTELOPE LICENSE RECOMMENDATIONS. Motion carried unanimously.

### 13. Big Game Depredation Hunts

[Action Item: Wildlife]

The Commission approved a resolution authorizing the Game, Fish and Parks Secretary to issue big game depredation permits for the next three years. Each year, up to 600 permits, plus 200 additional landowner/operator permits, may be issued for each species group—deer, antelope, and turkey. No more than 100 elk depredation permits may be issued annually.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY SPRING TO APPROVE THE RESOLUTION. Motion carried unanimously.

### 14. Law Enforcement Overview of Recruiting and Training

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Law enforcement chief, Sam Schelhaas, provided an update on the hiring and training process for conservation officers. The presentation started with what the hiring process looked like, the timeline involved and then ended with what the wildlife training officer program entails.

### 15. Outdoor Campus East Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Kip Rounds, Regional Wildlife Supervisor, provided an update on the ongoing expansion project at the Outdoor Campus in Sioux Falls. The presentation started with a brief background of the Outdoor Campus and classes offered since it opened in 1997, followed by the primary goals of the expansion project. The commission was provided updates and pictures of different areas of construction, along with total general completion timelines. Some areas, such as the new classrooms, bathrooms, and game processing room, will be completed by mid-June. The entire project is scheduled to be complete by October 2026. The November GFP Commission meeting is scheduled to be in the new classroom space, along with a ribbon-cutting event.

### 16. 2025 Small Game Harvest Report

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Jacob Wolfe, Wildlife Biologist, provided an update on pheasant and grouse populations and hunter activity. Pheasant hunter numbers remained relatively stable during the past season, while harvest increased—an indicator of strong and potentially growing pheasant populations. For prairie grouse, both hunter participation and harvest declined. However, harvest two years ago was unusually high, so this season's numbers likely represent a return to typical harvest levels. Additionally, drought conditions and variable hunting conditions in parts of the state may have contributed to reduced grouse harvest.

### 17. Walleye Genetics

[Info Item: Wildlife]

BJ Schall, Fisheries Biologist in Sioux Falls, presented the results of a research project that evaluated Walleye genetics in 11 lakes in eastern South Dakota and Lake Oahe. The results of research indicated that there was little genetic variation among lakes in South Dakota. West 81 Lake showed some slight divergence from the other waters, but the remaining 11 lakes had similar genetics. Additionally, GFP compared the genetics of South Dakota Walleye against Walleye from Southern Minnesota (Lake Sarah) and from the Mississippi River along the Iowa border. Each of the sources (South Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa) appeared to represent different genetic strains. Over the next 4 years, GFP will stock Walleye fry from Minnesota and Iowa into lakes in eastern South Dakota and compare the success against South Dakota strain Walleye.



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### **18. Youth Trapping Recruitment Program and Coyote Bounty Updates** [Info Item: Wildlife]

Jacque Ermer provided a summary of the 2026 Youth Trapping Recruitment Program and the Coyote Bounty Program. The Youth Trapping Recruitment program was open only to resident youth under the age of 18 starting March 1, 2026. The program closed on April 22 after reaching the program maximum of \$200,000 (\$10/eligible tail). A total of 728 youth participated. The Coyote Bounty Program is new this year and began on April 1 for all South Dakota residents. The Coyote Bounty program will run until July 1, 2026 unless the maximum of \$300,000 (\$30/eligible tail) is reached before then. To date about 3,200 coyote tails have been submitted by 454 participants of which 124 are youth.

### **19. Community Fishery Study** [Info Item: Wildlife]

Aysah Dondlinger, SDSU graduate student in the Natural Resource Management School, presented findings from his research on use, demographics, preferences and constraints of anglers, especially youth, fishing eastern South Dakota CFPs. Fishing pressure on CFPs is high with his five study waters (totaling 44 acres) supporting nearly 20,000 hours of fishing pressure during summer 2025, similar to fishing pressure on a much larger water body (e.g., Lake Madison - 2,642 acres). Angler catch rates and fishing pressure increased right after fish were stocked. Angler satisfaction was generally high and trip satisfaction with youth was nine times more likely to be high when they were satisfied with the number of fish they caught. The age distribution was dominated by younger anglers who had a preference for catching largemouth bass, were introduced to fishing by parents, grandparents and other family members, and got a lot of their fishing information watching videos. Stocking preferred fish species, having fishing opportunities close to home and fishing with family and friends were of highest importance to young anglers.

### **20. Private Lands Habitat Program** [Info Item: Wildlife]

Will Gallman, Private Lands Habitat Biologist out of Brookings, presented on available private lands habitat programs, importance of partnerships in private lands conservation, public access programs, and challenges and opportunities they run into on a daily basis. Will also highlighted different private lands projects that are happening in region three. These included grassland restoration projects, Riparian Buffer Initiative (RBI) projects, Walk in Areas (WIA), and Controlled Hunter Access Program (CHAP) areas.

### **21. License Sales Report** [Info Item: Wildlife]

Director Kirschenmann provided an overview of this month's license sales report. License sales remain consistent from the May report. Small game license sales are up while fishing licenses are slightly behind last year and 3-year average. Weather may have resulted in fewer fishing license sales and the department continues to reach out to anglers. June will be a big month as the combined deer draw will happen towards the end of June with an application deadline of June 23. Statistics also show that all elk hunting seasons had a higher volume of applications than last year.

### **22. Strategic Marketing Using Dashboard Data** [Info Item: Parks]

Hilary Morey, Outdoor Recreation Engagement Specialist gave an overview of how the Parks Division can use information from GoOutdoors South Dakota to better understand current park users and to help drive future marketing efforts. The presentation showed snapshots of user demographics (age brackets), where our park users are traveling from, reservation frequency by age, and midweek camping patterns. The commission learned how this information and trends in the data can be used to inform future marketing efforts such as digital ads targeted by geography and reactivation campaigns targeted to lapsed users. Future efforts will include involving the Department's Human Dimensions Specialist to identify motivations of various park user groups, as well as evaluating marketing efforts to determine their effectiveness.



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### **23. Custer State Park Resort Lease RFP**

[Info Item: Parks]

Custer State Park Resort Lease RFP – Sean Blanchette, Business Administrator for the Division of Parks and Recreation, provided an update to the prospectus for the Custer State Park Resort prospectus issuance. Blanchette explained that the Department received four proposals in response to the prospectus which closed on June 5, 2026 and that the review process has begun. Blanchette provided an overview and timeline of the planned proposal review process which will include bidder interviews. The proposal selection recommendation is to be presented to the Commission for their approval at the September 2026 meeting. Final contract approval is planned for the October 2026 meeting.

### **24. Park Division Assets**

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, provided the Commission with an overview of the scale and complexity of the Parks Division capital asset program that ranges from campgrounds, boat ramps, bathrooms, and various other park amenities. These facilities and structures are set up to both assist campers in enjoying their overnight stays as well as bringing in day-use visitors who are drawn to the parks for these diverse features. Asset Management is one of the Dept.'s 4 Strategic Pillars and is critical to the success of the Parks Division and the customers who use it.

### **25. North Point Breakwater Project**

[Info Item: Parks]

Derek Dorr, SE Regional Parks Supervisor informed the Commission on the progress on a new wave attenuator/breakwater design being piloted at North Point Recreation Area. Manufacturing has now been completed on four of the six planned breakwater pods, including two pods constructed by the North Point staff, one by Eureka Manufacturing, and one by the Springfield Penitentiary. Installation of the first four pods is scheduled for early June once the barrage is secured for a couple weeks.

This design was patterned off an existing structure from Nebraska and was developed to improve long-term maintenance efficiency by allowing staff easier access to the structure without the need for costly dive teams. The project will also address increasing challenges caused by zebra mussels, which have accelerated wear and maintenance concerns on the older tire-style breakwater system. As a result, the original tire breakwater design has reached the end of its service life and has been removed from the area. GFP looks forward to evaluating the effectiveness and durability of this new system as part of ongoing efforts to improve marina infrastructure and visitor experience at North Point Marina.

### **26. America 250 Update**

[Info Item: Parks]

The Commission received an update on Adventure 250: Make Your History in South Dakota State Parks, the 2026 annual park theme celebrating the America 250 initiative. The presentation highlighted strong early participation, with over 1,000 participants engaging in park adventures, creating visitor-generated content, and encouraging repeat visitation. Staff shared the program's comprehensive promotional strategy, including digital outreach, social media, partnerships, and park-level engagement, as well as efforts to use Adventure 250 as a tool to support campground occupancy. The Commission also received information on the value of partnerships, including sponsorship support from the Independent Insurance Agents of South Dakota, and the program's role in increasing awareness and connections to South Dakota State Parks.

### **27. May and Year to Date Camping and Revenue Reports**

[Info Item: Parks]

May and YTD Camping and Revenue Reports - Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented the May monthly and year-to-date report numbers for the Division of Parks & Recreation related to camping units and revenue. May camping units were running slightly ahead of last year for the month (133 units) with nice weekend weather and slight behind YTD (127 units). The Parks Division revenue was down 3% overall for the month of May as well as YTD. Annual park entrance license sales remain very strong including 7-day passes at CSP in spite of the weather and road construction challenges the park



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has faced. The 3-year historical comparisons indicating revenue and permit sales were shared along with data on lodging and camping units.

### **28. Adjourn**

[Action Item]

A Regular Commission Meeting will be held on July 9-10 at The Galley, in Webster, SD starting at 1 pm CST.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY WHITMYRE TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 10:02 AM CST ON June 12, 2026. Motion carried unanimously.

Submitted respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kevin Robling".

Kevin Robling, Department Secretary