



Commission Meeting Minutes

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

523 E Capitol Avenue | Pierre, South Dakota 57501

May 7-8, 2026 | Custer State Park Event Barn, Custer, SD

REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING

Call Meeting to Order

Chair Rissler called the meeting to order at 8 am MT at the Custer State Park Event Barn, in Custer, SD on May 7, 2026. Commissioners Stephanie Rissler, Bruce Cull, and Travis Theel, Kevin Nyberg, Julie Bartling, Dean Kirkeby, Robert Whitmyre and Chuck Spring were present. With eight commission members present, a quorum was established. The public and staff could listen via SDPB Livestream and participate via conference or in person, with approximately 97 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.

Governance

[Info Item]

Nick Michels, General Counsel for the department, conducted a governance meeting to educate the commissioners about their role in state government. Topics included the history of the Commission, conflict of interest laws, the Commission's quasi-legislative functions, the Commission's quasi-judicial functions, and the Commission's meeting format in relation to South Dakota's open meeting laws. Callyn Donald, Deputy Finance Director, spoke on the topic of the Department's budget, and Kevin Robling, Department Secretary, spoke on the topic of the North American Wildlife Conservation Model.

2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

[Action Item]

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

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE APRIL 2026 REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Additional Salary Days

[Action Item]

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

Public Hearing

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 2:04 pm MT for discussion from those in attendance in matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda as finalization.

Agenda Item #4: Black Hills Firearm Elk Season

2:04 pm MT: Dana Rogers of Hill City, SD representing the South Dakota Wildlife Federation testified in person in support of increasing the elk management objective.

2:06 pm MT: Mike Kintigh of Hermosa, SD representing the Schlecht Ranch testified in person in favor of the Black Hills firearm elk season.

2:10 pm MT: Clinton Rittburger, landowner from Hermosa, SD, testified in person in favor of the Black Hills firearm elk season.

2:13 pm MT: Travis Hartshorn, landowner from Hermosa, SD, testified in person in favor of the Black Hills firearm elk season.

2:14 pm MT: Jesse Sorenson, landowner from Hermosa, SD, testified in person in favor of the Black Hills firearm elk season.



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2:15 pm MT: Chris Vinatieri, Rapid City, SD testified in person in support of increasing the elk management objective.

Agenda Item #5: Deer Licenses

No testimony provided.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the public hearing closed at 2:18 pm MT.

Open Forum

Senior Staff Attorney Nick Michels opened the floor at 2:18 pm MT 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.

2:19 pm MT: Jeff Olson of Rapid City, SD representing the Black Hills Sportsmen, testified in person to thank the department for continued support for Sportsmen Against Hunger. He also spoke in support of the Elk Management Plan.

2:21 pm MT: Craig Hindle of Custer, SD representing the Custer County Commission, testified in person requesting support for the Custer Fairgrounds shooting range.

Senior Staff Attorney Michels closed the open forum at 2:23 pm MT.

4. Black Hills Firearm Elk Season

[Action Item: Finalization]

The commission was petitioned at the April commission meeting to change the antlerless elk season dates in Black Hills firearm elk unit H4 to run concurrent with any elk season dates in October. The commission adopted the petition and made it a proposal. Season dates for antlerless elk licenses for the 2026 season will be October 1 – 31 and December 1 – 16.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY WHITMYRE TO FINALIZE THE PROPOSAL. The motion carried unanimously.

5. Deer Licenses

[Action Item: Finalization]

The commission finalized administrative action to specify the number and type of licenses for the Archery, Muzzleloader, East River, and West River Deer hunting seasons. Archery and muzzleloader licenses were changed from any deer to any buck license types and licenses for East River and West River Deer hunting seasons were reduced by 1,400.

The commission also proposed a change to administrative rule that would close the Youth, Mentored, and Apprentice Deer hunting seasons in nine hunting units in southeastern South Dakota with an objective to reduce doe harvest and increase population growth in these areas. The commission will take final action on this rule change proposal at the June commission meeting.

MOTIONED BY SPRING, SECONDED BY CULL TO AMEND THE FINALIZATION FOR UNIT 49B.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO TABLE THE MOTION FOR THE AMENDMENT. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY SPRING TO TAKE THE MOTION OFF THE TABLE. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY KIRKEBY TO RECIND THE MOTION. Motion carried unanimously.



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MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY NYBERG TO APPROVE THE DEER LICENSE FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY NYBERG SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE RULE CHANGE PROPOSAL FOR YOUTH, MENTORED, AND APPRENTICE DEER HUNTING SEASONS. Motion carried unanimously.

6. Elk Action Plan

[Action Item: Wildlife]

The commission adopted changes to the elk action plan to increase the proportion of archery licenses in the Black Hills, remove the hunter success criteria for any elk license recommendations, and modify the Black Hills population objective from 6,000-8,000 to 6,000-9,000.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY WHITMYRE TO APPROVE THE ELK ACTION PLAN. The motion carried unanimously.

7. Antelope Hunting Season License

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, shared information about Prairie and Custer State Park Antelope hunting season license numbers from 2025. Staff are currently completing the biennial fixed-wing aerial survey which will be used to recommend license types and numbers that will be finalized at the June commission meeting.

8. Hatchery Development Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Mike Barnes, Program Administrator, gave a presentation describing the hatchery-staff initiated improvements in recirculating aquaculture (RAS) infrastructure occurring at the three state fish hatcheries over the past 12 months. Of primary focus was the engineering background and plans for Blue Dog State Fish Hatchery, including drilling new wells, installing a new main water line, replacing aging water filtration units and associated plumbing, and the construction of a new RAS building. Cost estimates for the next four fiscal years were also provided.

9. Walleye Spawning and Spring Stocking Update 2026

[Info Item: Wildlife]

An update was given by Jake Davis, Program Administrator, to summarize walleye spawning operations in eastern South Dakota, which provided fertilized eggs for hatching, raising and subsequent stocking of walleye and saugeye into over 90 state waters. During spawning, staff collected over 97 million eggs from 8 waters in the eastern portion of the state. A brief update was also provided that staff have stocked a number of sportfish species, such as channel catfish and crappie, into 94 waters in the state.

10. AIS Operation Plan

[Info Item: Wildlife]

An update was given by Jake Davis, Program Administrator, to provide an update on upcoming AIS activities, which included both details on the annual Communications Plan, as well as the Operational Plan. The Communications Plan will again use a variety of techniques to disseminate AIS information to users, including gas station TV's, emails and social media posts. The Operations Plan outlined the detection and monitoring efforts as well as the watercraft inspection program for the 2026 field season.

11. Belle Fourche Walleye Regulation Evaluation

[Info Item: Wildlife]

An update was given by Gene Galinat, Wildlife Biologist, about the recently changed walleye regulation at Belle Fourche Reservoir. The regulation was changed to a 15-inch minimum, two fish daily limit with one allowed over 20 inches. Around 1,000 walleye were tagged in spring of 2025 and 2026 to determine



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exploitation (harvest) rates under the new regulation. Harvest has been estimated at <20% in the first year after the change and the tagging evaluation will continue for one more year.

12. Region 1 Habitat Highlights

[Info Item: Wildlife]

David Mallet, Wildlife Biologist, presented updates of habitat projects conducted by Region 1 habitat staff on GPAs. Projects discussed were food plot plantings, native grass restoration, deciduous tree release projects in the Black Hills, pine thinning, non-native species removal, and tree and shrub planting projects.

13. License Sales Reports

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Director Kirschenmann provided a short summary of license sales through the month of April. License sales remain good with fishing licenses a little behind last year compared to this time. Weather during the month of April could have played a key role in licenses sales and as an agency we are conducting key marketing and outreach to our anglers. Not many changes in small game license sales.

14. Bison Hunt License Allocation for Trophy and Non-trophy

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, provided the Commission with the resident and non-resident allocation breakouts for both Custer State Park Trophy and Non-trophy Bison hunting seasons for 2026 and 2027.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY NYBERG TO APPROVE LICENSE ALLOCATIONS. The motion carried unanimously.

15. CSP Park & Resort Summer Outlook

[Info Item: Parks]

Matt Snyder, Regional Park Administrator, and Josh Schmaltz, Regency Company CEO, shared information on the upcoming season. Camping reservations are strong the parks in the West Region. They discussed efforts to do more regional marketing efforts to combat the high gas prices currently being experienced. The Resorts are seeing strong reservations with an uptick in weddings and corporate events this summer and into the fall. Overall, staff are excited and ready to welcome another tourism season.

16. Projects in the West Region

[Info Item: Parks]

Matt Snyder, Regional Park Administrator, presented several projects that have been recently completed or in the planning stages. Projects range from a new park shop at Shadehill Recreation area to bridge repair and maintenance on the Mickelson Trail. Custer State Park saw some much-needed water improvements to French Creek Horse Camp along with planning for a new comfort station at Sylvan Lake. Angostura staff have several camping cabin improvements going on as well as planting 1,100 trees along with a drip irrigation system.

17. CSP Fire Protection Partner

[Info Item: Parks]

Sterling Smith, Staff Forester, and Jason Gooder, Division Staff Specialist, shared information on how the wildland fire command structure works within Custer State Park and the surrounding area. They discussed qualifications needed for firefighting and how resources are dispatched to fires. The different complexity levels of both wildfire and prescribed fire were also discussed.

18. Bison Herd and Range Conditions

[Info Item: Parks]

Bailey Eitel, Wildlife Biologist and Chad Kremer, Bison Herd Manager shared information on drought conditions in Custer State Park with one of the driest springs the park has ever experienced. Discussion was had about forage availability through the summer as well as how many bison are planned to be surplus between hunts and the fall auction due to the drought.



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19. Mickelson Trail Events for 2026

[Info Item: Parks]

Shannon Percy, District Park Supervisor-District 14 of Parks & Recreation, provided the Commission with an update on the four Marathons, Summer/Fall Trail Trek events and all the winter/spring events on the trail. Shannon also informed the Commission that the interpretive signs and trail maps are being updated this year.

20. Veterans Experiencing the Outdoors Donation Program

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented a new initiative "Operation Outdoors" that the department is planning to roll out in the next month that will provide for a donation platform for the public who utilize State Parks. The goal of the program is to assist with outdoor recreation program partnerships with local communities and organizations for Veterans seeking therapeutic/wellness opportunities using State Parks. Currently, the department hosts several of these opportunities annually and believe there is a demand for more of these across the State. State Parks will serve as the host for these with local service clubs, veteran groups, etc. serving as the event leads.

21. Marketing Plan for 2026

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented the 2026 marketing plan along with Amy Bailey who is currently contracted with GFP to provide marketing assistance to the Parks Division for the 2026 season. Amy provided the Commission with the goals, tactics, target groups and other information related to the 2026 marketing campaign.

22. April and YTD Camping Unit and Revenue Reports

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, presented the April monthly and year-to-date report numbers for the Division of Parks & Recreation related to camping units and revenue. April camping units were down 18% for the month due to poor weekend weather and 4% YTD. The Parks Division revenue was down 9% overall for the month of April and 2% YTD. Annual park entrance license sales remain very strong especially double license sales that have been promoted this spring to customers making camping reservations. The 3-year historical comparisons indicating revenue and permit sales were shared along with data on lodging and camping units.

23. Adjourn

[Action Item]

A Regular Commission Meeting will be held on June 11-12 at Heartland Energy, Madison, SD starting at 1 pm CST.

MOTIONED BY NYBERG, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 10:07 AM MT ON May 8, 2026. Motion carried unanimously.

Submitted respectfully,

Kevin Robling, Department Secretary