

NEW HAMPSHIRE FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

JULY 2, 2018 SPECIAL COMMISSION MEETING

Meeting Location: NH Fish & Game Department, 11 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301.

Commissioners Present: R. Phillipson, T. Baldwin, E. Millette, P. McInnis, B. Temple, C. Hodgdon, B. Carr, D. Patch & E. Stohl.

Commissioners absent/excused: J. Ryan, W. Morse

Executive Director Normandeau – Present

Chairman Phillipson called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m., and asked the audience to join in the pledge of allegiance.

Director Normandeau announced that the Commission was holding a Special Commission Meeting to vote on the final wildlife rulemaking proposal to go forward to JLCAR (Joint Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules) for their consideration, as a result of their preliminary objection on June 15, 2018. He reported that the Department was instructed to hold a fourth public hearing to obtain additional comments on the proposals, which was held on June 20, 2018.

He stated, “There will be no public comment taken today, written or verbal, as the public hearing was held and comment period has closed.”

Paul Sanderson, Legal Coordinator, reported on the events leading to the fourth public hearing. He reported that there were 3 public hearings held, Lancaster, Keene & Concord, with a total of 170 people attending and 105 written comments received, which were deliberated on by the F&G Commission at the April 18, 2018 Commission Meeting. He reported that on June 15, 2018, JLCAR found that those comments hadn’t been fully considered and requested a fourth public hearing be held, which was held on June 20, 2018, bringing the number of attendees to 470 and 473 comments received in total. He reported that all comments were combined and placed on the Department’s website and all Commissioners received the comments and had an opportunity to review them.

ACTION ITEMS:

Kent Gustafson, Wildlife Program Supervisor, reviewed the slide presentation as it relates to the turkey season proposal, snowshoe hare proposal, and the fox season proposal with the Commission. He reported that an additional housekeeping matter regarding the turkey season language would be addressed, as it was included in the slide presentation to the Commission, however, not included in the written language in the rulemaking proposal.

Commissioner Patch moved to approve the turkey season proposal and inclusion of written language as it relates to the taking of an additional turkey in the spring and Commissioner McInnis seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Commissioner Patch moved to approve the snowshoe hare proposal as presented and Commissioner Carr seconded. The motion carried with 6 in favor and 2 opposed (C. Hodgdon & E. Stohl).

Kent Gustafson, spoke to the decline in the gray & red fox population. He reported that the catch per unit effort is steadily going down, and has been for a while now. Generally speaking, in the latter years, the effort curve is much higher than the catch per unit effort, whereas, in earlier years, the effort curve was much lower, the take was much lower and the catch per unit effort was much higher. He stated, "This tells us that a lot more effort is going into catching fewer and fewer animals, that's a concern to us."

Kent reported that the recommendation is to reduce the take by hunters and trappers. He stated, "The Wildlife Division recommends no change to the gray & red fox proposals."

Commissioner Baldwin stated, "After listening to considerable testimony and comments, I feel that one particular comment summarized the tone of the public hearing. That was to the effect that the actual study regarding the count of the take of the red & gray fox was indeed only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the possible evidence of the overall information that should be included in the assessment."

Commissioner Baldwin moved that the red fox and gray fox season for hunting and trapping remain the same as last year and Commissioner Stohl seconded.

Much discussion ensued.

Commissioner Phillipson stated, "I like to make these decisions on sound science." He reported that he did not feel it was sound to rely on trapper information/reports, as he felt trappers needed to do better at reporting and be more accurate on reporting exactly what species they are trapping. He feels that red fox trapping is pretty much the "calculus" course of trapping and feels the average person is not going to have a high success rate.

He further reported that fur prices have a variable in this, as the lower the fur price, you end up with recreational trappers, who are trying to make a little money on this and are not going to trap large numbers of fox if it's not worth it.

In addition, he reported that his recommendations are to have a mandatory carcass turn in and a road kill survey. He stated, "This is just one more piece of the puzzle."

In closing, he reported that the Commission is also responsible for public safety, as it relates to wildlife populations.

Commissioner Carr stated, "I think that the data we have been provided with and what the Department is using is inadequate." He reported that he asked the Wildlife Division how many fox were in the state. He stated, "I believe we don't know how many are in the state, we don't know what numbers the hunters are taking; and the trappers who trap on their own property probably don't report what they take, as well as Wildlife Control Operators. We have no camera capture studies done. I believe there are a lot of animals that are not being counted." He inquired as to how many states are having this problem and whether anyone from the Wildlife Division reached out to other states.

Kent responded that he has been in touch with the State of Vermont, who reached out to him, and indicated that they are concerned about their fox population as well, and have recently made it mandatory to report fox take.

Commissioner Carr stated, "I'd like to see a mandatory carcass turn in for fox. I don't think

the Department encourages studies like this, although I really believe it should occur.”

Commissioner Patch reported that on his way home from the public hearing he saw 2 red fox run across the road in front of him, one in Tamworth and the other in Conway. He stated, “It’s kind of ironic, considering how low the population is.”

Commissioner Hodgdon stated, “I think that the motion to leave last year’s season in place is not adequate to address what we are seeing. I would agree to limit it, and that we do not have the all the data to base this decision on. I don’t think leaving it the way it is for a 2 year period is the best course of action. I think there is an alternative, not a bag limit; however, to shorten the season for a 1 year period, during which time we can collect additional data to make a better informed decision.”

Commissioner Stohl reported that back when he was a Conservation Officer, he was told that predators and small game are cyclical. He was told that every 7 years is a cyclical change. He reported that the chart being shown by the Wildlife Division seems to confirm that. He stated, “I believe Mother Nature handles excess, and not very nice, she handles it with distemper and rabies. To me, we have an excess out there. If we restrict the take of fox for 2 years, and they reproduce 2 to 6 pups per year, we are going to have fox all over the place and will have rabies all over the place. I think we need to keep the season exactly the way it is. I agree with Commissioner Patch, I see fox all the time.”

Commissioner McInnis inquired as to Director Normandeau’s feelings on the issue.

Director Normandeau stated, “I stand behind the staff, as the Commission voted to do a few weeks ago.” He reported that the proposal was to shorten the season for fox, however, the trappers wanted to maintain their opportunity. The Department received several comments to have a bag limit, and that’s where the suggestion came from. He stated, “It seems prudent to take a conservative road.” I agree with the concept of collecting additional data. Director Normandeau stated, “Kent Gustafson is a well-known Statistician and this data may not be perfect, however, it’s accurate.”

Commissioner McInnis inquired as to how Mark Ellingwood felt about the issue.

Mark responded that staff is uniformly supportive of the proposal they presented; however, understand the short comings of the data brought to the Commission.

Commissioner Carr moved to move the question and Commissioner Stohl seconded. Chairman Phillipson ruled that the motion on the floor would now come for a vote.

The motion carried with 6 in favor, 2 opposed (P. McInnis & C. Hodgdon)

At this time, 2:55 p.m., Commissioner Carr moved to adjourn and Commissioner Stohl seconded. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative.

Respectfully submitted,

Barry Carr, Secretary

Approved: _____
Robert Phillipson, Chairman