

Minutes
Board of Natural Resources
A. W. Jones Heritage Center
610 Beachview Drive
St. Simons Island, GA 31522

Friday, January 27, 2023
9:00 a.m.

Board Members

Bill Jones, Chair
Dwight Davis, Vice Chair
Nancy Addison
Nick Ayers
Randy Dellinger
Patrick Denney
Charles DePriest
Dan Garcia
Joe Hatfield
Penn Hodge
Kevin Jackson
Ray Lambert
Tim Lowe
Paul Shailendra
Bodine Sinyard
Miki Thomaston
Gary Vowell
Dee Yancey

Guests

Alice Keyes, One Hundred Miles
Beth Vowell
Bill Clark, Okefenokee Swamp Park
Charles McMillan, Georgia Conservancy
Deborah Y. Reed, Okefenokee Swamp – Reeds Grocery
Ebony Garard, Sowing Seeds
George Penniman, Concerned Young Citizen
Henrietta Bailey, Sowing Seeds
Kim Bednarek, Okefenokee Swamp Park
Kim Thayer
Lakesha Nixon, Sowing Seeds
Lee Weeks, Coral Hospitality

Staff Members

Mark Williams, Commissioner
Walter Rabon
Cathy Barnette
Kate Iannuzzi
Donald Kirkland
Artica Gaston
Thomas Barnard
Jeff Cown
Steve Friedman
Ted Will
Doug Haymans
Karl Burgess
Tyler Jones
Jill Andrews
Carolyn Belcher
Kathy Knowlton
Paul Medders
Jared Flowers
Julie Califf
Ellis Johnson
Bill Donohue
James Hamilton

Richard Dunn, Director
John Eunice

Mark Osterhaus, Coral Hospitality
Mary Floyd Ayers
Rena Peck, Georgia River Network
Reverend Antwon Nixon, Sowing Seeds
Spud Woodward
Susan Inman, One Hundred Miles
Sylvia Everett, Sowing Seeds
Wade Herring, Concerned Citizen

The January 27, 2023 meeting of the Board of Natural Resources was called to order by Chairman Bill Jones.

Chairman Jones welcomed four new board members and introduced Charles DePriest, District 13, from Villa Rica, GA; Dan Garcia, District 11, from Kennesaw, GA; Penn Hodge, District 6, from Roswell, GA; and Kevin “Catfish” Johnson, Member-at-Large, from Savannah, GA.

Chairman Jones introduced Reverend Mark Baker, Senior Pastor of Greater Works Ministries, for a moment of inspiration.

Chairman Jones adjourned the Board meeting to move into the Committee meetings.

Chairman Jones called the meeting of the Board of Natural Resources to order.

Chairman Jones welcomed Dr. David Allen to the Board meeting and asked him to step to the podium for a presentation, along with Commissioner Mark Williams, Mr. Dwight Davis, and Mr. Tim Lowe.

Mr. Davis provided a brief history of the Rock Howard Conservation Achievement Award and stated that the award was created to recognize individuals who have made great contributions in support of the mission of the Department of Natural Resources. He stated that on behalf of the Board of Natural Resources, it is his honor to present the 2022 Rock Howard Conservation Achievement Award to Dr. David Allen.

Mr. Davis stated that among Dr. Allen’s many extraordinary contributions, his greatest accomplishment was the founding of the Georgia Natural Resources Foundation (GNRF). He further stated that Dr. Allen provided the initial funding for the formation of the GNRF and served as its initial Chairman of the Board. He added that currently Dr. Allen is the emeritus Chairman

of the Georgia Natural Resources Foundation Board. He further added that he can think of no one more deserving of the Rock Howard Conservation Achievement Award than Dr. Allen and his life of service to all Georgia citizens should serve as a standard of excellence for all that follow.

Dr. Allen thanked the Board for the award and for their service.

Chairman Jones called for a motion to approve the minutes from the November 29, 2022 Nominating Committee meeting.

A motion was made by Mr. Sinyard, seconded by Mr. Yancey, and carried unanimously that the Board approve the minutes from the November 29, 2022 Nominating Committee meeting.

Chairman Jones called for a motion to approve the minutes from the December 7, 2022 Board of Natural Resources meeting.

A motion was made by Mr. Yancey, seconded by Mr. Thomaston, and carried unanimously that the Board approve the minutes from the December 7, 2022 Board of Natural Resources meeting.

Chairman Jones called on Richard Dunn, Director of the Environmental Protection Division, for his report.

Director Dunn updated the Board on the 2023 Governor's budget, EPA's proposed lowering of PM2.5 NAAQS, and Twin Pines Minerals Mining Land Use Plan public comment period.

Director Dunn stated this concluded his report.

Chairman Jones called on Mark Williams, Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources, for his report.

Commissioner Williams welcomed the new board members and thanked Chairman Jones for his service this past year as chairman. He stated that the department reached new heights under his leadership.

Commissioner Williams called on Walter Rabon, Deputy Commissioner, for action on the Board of Trustees of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Fund 2022-2023 approved projects.

Deputy Commissioner Rabon stated the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program (GOSP) is a grant and loan program administered by the Department of Natural Resources, as authorized in O.C.G.A. Chapter 6A of Title 12, "The Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Act." He further stated it

now comes before the board to approve the 2022-2023 proposal of approved conservation projects recently approved by the GOSP Board of Trustees.

Deputy Commissioner stated that since the inception of the GOSP, we have completed thirteen projects with \$106 million in total project costs and \$18.7 million of GOSP funds. He further stated that all projects are progressing as expected and are on schedule with four grants recently reaching completion this past October. He added this current 2022-2023 cycle brought 55 applications, 40 of which were from local governments and NGOs and 15 from state projects. He further added that of the pre-applications that were received from local governments, NGOs, and state projects, the project total would have been \$206 million with \$107.8 million of requested funding.

Deputy Commissioner Rabon stated the Grants Unit has done a great job getting the word out and educating the public on this program. He further stated that this cycle they had more than 150 people registered for virtual workshops throughout the year and the scoring team has reviewed the applications according to the evaluation criteria and is in compliance with the authorizing legislation. He added that he would like to publicly thank Soheila Naji, Kathy Knowlton, and Matt Elliott for their great work.

Deputy Commissioner Rabon stated that the pre-application process opened on August 1, 2022, and closed on October 14, 2022. He further stated that there were three types of funding: local parks and trails of state and regional significance, state stewardship, and state land acquisition. He added that funding limits were set at \$500,000 as a minimum and \$3 million at a maximum for local parks and trails. He further added that the slate was reviewed and approved by the GOSA Board of Trustees on January 10, 2023.

Deputy Commissioner Rabon stated the approved project slate totaling \$28,669,305 is pending approval by the Board of Natural Resources. He further stated that once approved by the Board the approved project slate will be transmitted for final review and approval to the chairpersons of the House and and Senate Appropriations subcommittees that maintain oversight authority over the Department of Natural Resources and must take place by January 31, 2023.

A motion was made Mr. Ayers, seconded by Ms. Addison, and carried unanimously that the Board approve the Board of Trustees of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Fund 2022-2023 Approved Proposal of Projects.

Commissioner Williams provided a legislative update and stated that the department has several agency bills and is continuing to closely monitor and track all legislation. He stated that Governor Kemp released his budget report and includes two highlights for the DNR: \$4,195,000

has been added for DNR's portion of a new statewide public safety radio network, and \$2,000 has been added in cost-of-living adjustments statewide for all full-time employees.

Commissioner Williams recognized Aaron Mitchell and Jaime Hockin with Georgia Power Company and publicly thanked Georgia Power for generously donating six Ford F-150 Lightning trucks that will be utilized across all of the divisions. He stated that Georgia Power has been and continues to be a great friend of the department and Georgia's outdoors and he looks forward to their continued partnership.

Commissioner Williams called on James Hamilton, North Georgia Mountains Authority, for an update on Lake Blackshear Resort.

Mr. Hamilton stated the Lake Blackshear lodge with fourteen rooms, and eight villas with 64 rooms, were constructed in 2002 and opened in 2003. He further stated that historically the operators, Coral Hospitality, have always had a challenge with the structure and dealing with leaks and other issues. He added that last summer the situation accelerated rapidly when reports started coming in that the floor in both levels of the lodge tower were literally starting to sink, some to the point of three inches or so. He further added that it is a serious challenge, so the NGMA and DNR's Chief of Engineering and Construction brought in Shear Structural, a structural engineer company, to look at the floor joists and discuss repair options. He stated the company reported that the floor joists were undersized and spread too far apart for that application and could not bear the weight much longer. He further stated that some of the joists have already started to break. He added that the advice from the structural engineer is to close the tower from public use and research the best approach for repairs.

Mr. Hamilton stated the NGMA decided to have the engineers look at the rest of the lodge building and it was determined that two rooms close to the tower were starting to sag and all the floor joists throughout that building were the same size and spacing apart and likely to experience the same problems. He further stated that out of an abundance of caution and at the guidance of the structural engineers, the decision was made to close the lodge to the public. He added that understanding that the lodge and the eight villas were constructed at the same time, and due to the water leaks with some of the villas, they hired the structural engineer to determine if the villas have the same floor joists problems. He further added that fortunately none of the floors were deflecting but there were other structural issues of concern that related to the exterior siding, and the failure of the siding was destroying the sheathing and in some cases was destroying some wall studs on loadbearing walls.

Mr. Hamilton stated a contractor was brought in to look at the villas and determine the likelihood of getting these villas repaired and reopened as soon as possible. He further stated the result of that report was an estimate of \$475,00-\$625,000 for repairs per villa.

Mr. Hamilton stated the authority is working closely with political leadership and multiple board members and have also commissioned a very well-regarded hospitality consultant, R. M. Woodworth and Associates. He further stated that R. M. Woodworth and Associates are helping them look at what possibilities might exist if a sizeable reinvestment goes back into the Blackshear property, and does it need to be the same as the current model with repairs or does it need to be a different model that might be a much better option financially and a better option to serve the public. He added that he will continue to keep the DNR board and NGMA board fully apprised as they move forward and appreciates everyone's support throughout this endeavor.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Hamilton stated that all other facets of the park will remain open including the golf course, campgrounds, and cabins.

Mr. Hamilton stated this concluded his update.

Commissioner Williams called on Colonel Thomas Barnard, Director of the Law Enforcement Division, for a division update.

Colonel Barnard updated the Board on the Law Enforcement Division's personnel; Buffalo Swamp hunter rescue; tornado response; Wilmington River boat incident; notable cases; radio system; and a hunting season overview.

Colonel Barnard stated this concluded his update.

Commissioner Williams called on Jeff Cown, Director of the State Parks and Historic Sites Division, for his update.

Director Cown updated the Board on the Christmas and holiday programming; the affects of the arctic blast at Black Rock Mountain, Hardman Farm, Kirbo Center at Florence Marina, Amicalola Falls Lodge, and Unicoi Lodge; First Day Hikes; staff attendance at the Southeastern State Parks Programming Seminar; new residence at Kolomoki Mounds; and the 15th Annual State Park Leadership School.

Director Cown stated this concluded his update.

Commissioner Williams called on Doug Haymans, Director of the Coastal Resources Division, for his report.

Director Haymans updated the board on the 2022 shrimp season; the new edition of Coastlines Georgia; and the 2023 CoastFest being held on Earth Day, Saturday, 22, 2023.

Director Haymans stated this concluded his update.

Commissioner Williams called on Ted Will, Director of the Wildlife Resources Division, for his update.

Director Will updated the Board on the comprehensive revision of the State Wildlife Action Plan to maintain eligibility for federal funding; Economic Development and Infrastructure; Keeping Management of Species at the State Level; Recovering America's Wildlife Act; and the WRD's FY2022 revenue and expenditures.

Director Will stated this concluded his update.

Commissioner Williams stated this concluded his report.

Chairman Jones called on Nancy Addison, Chair of the Coastal Committee, for her report.

A motion was made by Ms. Addison, seconded by Mr. Hatfield, and carried unanimously that the Board approve the re-appointment of Dr. Valerie Hepburn to the Coastal Marshlands Protection Committee and Shore Protection Committee.

Ms. Addison stated this concluded her report.

Chairman Jones for a motion to approve the salary increase for Commissioner Mark Williams.

A motion was made by Mr. Lambert, seconded by Mr. Ayers, and carried unanimously that the Board approve the salary increase of Commissioner Mark Williams to \$225,000 per year.

Chairman Jones called on Ray Lambert, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, for his report.

A motion was made by Mr. Lambert, seconded by Mr. Yancey, and carried unanimously that the Board approve the following slate of officers for 2023: Dwight Davis, Chairman; Joe Hatfield, Vice Chairman; and Gary Vowell, Secretary.

Chairman Jones thanked the members of the Board for their support and service and Commissioner Mark Williams and the DNR staff and Director Rick Dunn and the EPD staff for their hard work and dedication. He congratulated the 2023 officers and passed the gavel to incoming Chairman Dwight Davis.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Dwight J. Davis, Chairman

ATTEST:

Gary Vowell, Secretary