

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

Friday, January 31, 2025
9:00 a.m.

Board Members

Joe Hatfield, Chair
Lesley Reynolds, Secretary
Nancy Addison
Jeff Andrews
Randy Dellinger
Patrick Denney
Charles DePriest
Dan Garcia
Penn Hodge
Steve Hufstetler
Duncan Johnson
Bill Jones
Ray Lambert
Brent Layton
Mike Peavy
Paul Shailendra
Bodine Sinyard
Harley Yancey

Staff Members

Walter Rabon, Commissioner
Thomas Barnard
Trevor Santos
Jeff Cown, Director
Kyle Pearson
Taylor Fisher
Mike England
Doug Haymans
Ted Will
Angie Johnson
Karl Burgess
Tyler Jones
Thom Litts
Matt Elliott
Brett Albanese
Andre McLendon
Suzanne Passmore
Rayne Gaston
Katherine Darsey

Guests

David Kyler, Center for a Sustainable Coast
Rena Peck, Georgia River Network
George Kelecheck, Rockdale Soil & Water Conservation
Alice Keyes, One Hundred Miles
Anna Edmondson, Robbins Firm

The January 31, 2025 meeting of the Board of Natural Resources was called to order by Chairman Joe Hatfield.

Chairman Hatfield welcomed new Board member Mike Peavy who was appointed by Governor Kemp on January 1, 2025 to represent the 8th Congressional District.

Chairman Hatfield called on Suzanne Passmore, Parks and Historic Sites Division, for a moment of inspiration.

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

Chairman Hatfield called the January 31, 2025 meeting of the Board of Natural Resources to order.

Chairman Hatfield called for a motion to approve the minutes of the Board of Natural Resources meeting on December 3, 2024.

A motion was made by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Shailendra, and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the Board of Natural Resources meeting on December 3, 2024.

Chairman Hatfield called for a motion to approve the minutes of the special conference call meeting of the Board of Natural Resources on January 23, 2025.

A motion was made by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Shailendra, and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the special conference call meeting of Board of Natural Resources on January 23, 2025.

Chairman Hatfield called on Jeff Cown, Director of the Environmental Protection Division, for his report.

Director Cown provided the Board a brief update on the Environmental Protection Division's Branch Quarterly Reports, as well as the newly issued FY2024 Annual Reports for the Solid Waste Trust Fund and Hazardous Waste Trust Fund. Director Cown then recognized David Lyle and Tabitha Daniels for their thirty years of service.

Director Cown stated this concluded his report.

Chairman Hatfield called on Walter Rabon, Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources, for his report.

Commissioner Rabon called on Trevor Santos, Deputy Commissioner, to present the Board of Trustees of the Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund 2024-2025 Approved Proposal of Projects.

Deputy Commissioner Santos began by giving a brief overview of the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program. He stated that for the current funding cycle, the pre-application period opened on August 1 and closed on October 15, 2024. He further stated that projects were reviewed, scored and ranked by the review team in November and December.

Deputy Commissioner Santos informed the Board that the Board of Trustees of the Outdoor Stewardship Trust Fund had approved a slate of projects at the meeting on January 14, 2025. He stated the approved slate of projects could be found under Tab B, Item A in the board package. He added that once approved, the slate of proposed projects would be transmitted to the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees for final approval.

Deputy Commissioner Santos stated if there were no questions, he requested the Board approve the Board of Trustees of the Outdoor Stewardship Fund 2024-2025 approved proposal of projects.

A motion was made by Mr. Andrews, seconded by Mr. Shailendra, and carried unanimously that the Board approve the Board of Trustees of the Outdoor Stewardship Fund 2024-2025 Approved Proposal of Projects.

Commissioner Rabon called on Rayne Gaston, Land and Water Conservation Fund Grants Manager, for a report on the 2024-2025 list of approved projects.

Ms. Gaston began by giving a brief overview of the Land and Water Conservation Fund Program. She stated for the current funding cycle, the pre-application period opened on September 1 and closed on October 31, 2024. She stated 31 applications were received and 18 projects were selected to continue the application process by submitting a formal application. Ms. Gaston presented a list and map showing those projects selected for the second-level application process.

Mr. Sinyard asked when the next funding cycle for the Land and Water Conservation Program would open. Ms. Gaston responded that the 2026-2027 funding cycle was anticipated to open in the fall of 2026.

Ms. Gaston stated this concluded her report.

Commissioner Rabon began his report by welcoming new board member, Mike Peavy.

Commissioner Rabon stated that after 34 years of service, Larry Blankenship, Director of Human Resources, would be retiring. He further stated Dan Roach had been hired to serve as the new Director of Human Resources.

Commissioner Rabon gave a brief update on the progress of the legislative session and the five pieces of legislation the Department would be pursuing this session.

Commissioner Rabon gave an update on the Département's recovery efforts and impacts of Winter Storms Cora and Enzo. He stated for both storms, DNR activated Task Force Teams and Strike Teams, opened warming stations at Georgia State Parks, worked with local EMA Directors and Sheriff Offices to assess local needs, and utilized social media channels to share safety messages and promote warming stations.

Commissioner Rabon stated two new gangways were installed for the ferry service on the Marsh Landing Dock in Darien, GA and the Meridian Ferry Dock on Sapelo Island. He stated Myrick Marine Contracting installed the new GatorDock aluminum gangways that were engineered and manufactured by CMI Limited. He further stated the Attorney General's Office retained a private engineering firm to conduct an independent investigation into the cause of the collapse of the gangway at the Marsh Landing Dock. He added an inspection of all gangways across the state is being conducted to ensure safety for all visitors.

Commissioner Rabon informed the Board that Andre McLendon was hired as the new Assistant Director of the State Parks and Historic Sites Division. He stated Mr. McLendon had over 30 years of service with the Division, most recently servicing as the Region Manager over nine sites.

Commissioner Rabon invited the Board to attend the Georgia Park Ranger Academy at Brasstown Valley Resort on Monday, February 17, 2025.

Commissioner Rabon stated the 39th Game Warden Academy started with 19 cadets and is now down to 13. He further stated the application period for the 40th Academy is open through February and 208 applications have been received for that class.

Commissioner Rabon gave a brief update on disease detection, which was discussed at the special called conference call on January 23, 2025. Commissioner Rabon stated that earlier this month, DNR's Wildlife Resources Division received confirmation from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Veterinary Services Laboratories that a hunter-harvested deer had tested positive for Chronic Wasted Disease (CWD). The deer was harvested at the end of November 2024 near the Lanier and Berrien County line, and the sample was collected as a part of DNR's routine surveillance. He added that the Department would continue to communicate with the public and be transparent throughout this process.

Commissioner Rabon acknowledged the work of Ted Will, Lee Taylor, Tina Johannsen, Charlie Killmaster, and Katilin Goode.

Commissioner Rabon called on Ted Will, Director of the Wildlife Resources Division, for his division report.

Director Will called on Charlie Killmaster, State Deer Biologist, for an update on Chronic Wasting Disease in Georgia.

Mr. Killmaster began by updating the Board on hunting and its impact in Georgia. He then gave an overview of CWD including signs and symptoms, spread amongst the population, distribution across the United States, and surveillance and prevention efforts.

Mr. Killmaster stated DNR's CWD response plan was activated immediately following the confirmation of the positive test which included hunter and landowner notification and public outreach efforts. Mr. Killmaster further explained the Department would work with landowners and hunters for immediate and long-term management of the disease. He concluded by stating that CWD will require continual surveillance and adaptive management long term.

Commissioner Rabon opened the floor for questions. Mr. Killmaster answered questions from the Board on the topics of the testing process, sampling techniques, regulations for deer processors and strategies other states have utilized for CWD management.

Director Will stated this concluded his report.

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

Director Haymans updated the Board on dock stakeholders' meetings; the shellfish industry meeting and future rules for the summer harvest; artificial reef deployments; an update to the Recreational Fishing webpage; and CoastFest.

Director Haymans stated his report was concluded.

Commissioner Rabon recognized Chairman Joe Hatfield for his year of service to the Board serving as Chair.

Commissioner Rabon stated this concluded his report.

Chairman Hatfield called on Nancy Addison, Chairwoman of the Coastal Committee, for her report.

A motion was made by Ms. Addison, seconded by Mr. Sinyard, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to approve the Reappointment of Davis Poole to the Coastal Marshland and Shore Protection Committees.

Chairman Hatfield called on Paul Shailendra, Chairman of the Land Committee, for his report.

A motion was made by Mr. Shailendra, seconded by Mr. Johnson, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to enter into a Twenty-Five (25) Year license with the Army-Corps of Engineers for the 9,999.56± acres West Point Lake tract, West Point Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Troup and Heard County.

A motion was made by Mr. Shailendra, seconded by Mr. Johnson, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval enter into an agreement with the Valdosta Lowndes Parks & Recreation Authority to lease the 2.92± Little River Boat Ramp, Lowndes County.

Chairman Hatfield expressed appreciation for the opportunity to have served as the Chairman and to the Board members, Commissioner Rabon, and staff for their service to the Department and to the Board during his tenure.

Chairman Hatfield called on Ray Lambert, Chairman of the Nominating Committee, for the 2025 Officers.

Mr. Lambert stated the slate of officers was presented to the Board at the December meeting and he would like to move they be approved.

A motion was made by Mr. Lambert, seconded by Mr. Sinyard, and carried unanimously, that the Board elect Lesley Reynolds as Chairwoman, Patrick Denney as Vice Chairman, and Randy Dellinger as Secretary for the 2025 Board of Natural Resources Officers.

Chairman Hatfield turned the Officer of Chairman over to Ms. Reynolds.

Chairwoman Reynolds presented an engraved gavel plaque to Mr. Hatfield and thanked him for his service on the Board and as Chairman for 2024.

Chairwoman Reynolds expressed her appreciation for the Board's support and that she looked forward to working with them throughout the next year.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Lesley Reynolds, Chairwoman

ATTEST:

Randy Dellinger, Secretary

**Minutes
Coastal Committee
A.W. Jones Heritage Center
610 Beachview Drive
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Friday, January 31, 2025

9:00 a.m.

Committee Members

Nancy Addison, Chair
Bill Jones, Vice Chair
Randy Dellinger
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Penn Hodge
Brent Layton
Lesley Reynolds
Paul Shailendra
Bodine Sinyard
Harley Yancey
Joe Hatfield

Board Members

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Dan Garcia
Steve Hufstetler
Ducan Johnson
Ray Lambert
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Guests

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Rena Peck, Georgia River Network
George Kelecheck, Rockdale Soil & Water Conservation
Alice Keyes, One Hundred Miles
Anna Edmondson, Robbins Firm
David Boone, Boone Forestry

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Katherine Darsey

The January 31, 2025 meeting of the Coastal Resources Committee was called to order by Joe Hatfield, Chairman of the Board of Natural Resources.

Chairman Hatfield called on Nancy Addison, Chair of the Coastal Resources Committee.

Chairwoman Addison stated she would request the Committee recommend the Reappointment of Davis Poole to the Coastal Marshland Protection and Shore Protection Committees.

A motion was made by Mr. Jones, seconded by Mr. Shailendra and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the Resolution to approve the Reappointment of Davis Poole to the Coastal Marshland and Shore Protection Committees.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

**Minutes
Land Committee
A.W. Jones Heritage Center
610 Beachview Drive
St. Simons Island, GA 31522**

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Nancy Addison
Patrick Denney
Charles DePriest
Dan Garcia
Penn Hodge
Steve Hufstetler
Brent Layton
Harley Yancey
Joe Hatfield, Board Chair, Ex-officio

Board Members

Jeff Andrews
Duncan Johnson
Bill Jones
Ray Lambert
Mike Peavy
Lesley Reynolds
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Guests

David Kyler, Center for a Sustainable Coast
Rena Peck, Georgia River Network
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Katherine Darsey

The January 31, 2025 meeting of the Land Committee was called to order by Joe Hatfield, Chairman of the Board of Natural Resources.

Chairman Hatfield called on Mr. Paul Shailendra, Chair of the Land Committee. Mr. Shailendra called on Brent Womack, Chief of Real Estate.

Mr. Womack stated the first item for consideration is seeking approval to enter into a Twenty-Five (25) Year license with the Army-Corps of Engineers for the 9,999± acres West Point Lake tract, West Point Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Troup and Heard County.

Mr. Womack stated the Department first entered into a lease agreement with Army Corps of Engineers in 2000. He further stated the Department will continue to operate the area as a Wildlife Management Area during the duration of the term of this renewal and that the license agreement will come at no cost to the Department.

A motion was by Mr. Denney, seconded by Mr. DePriest and carried unanimously that the Committee recommends the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to enter into a Twenty-Five (25) Year license with the Army-Corps of Engineers for the 9,999.56± acres West Point Lake tract, West Point Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Troup and Heard County.

Mr. Womack stated that the final item for consideration is requesting approval to enter into an agreement with the Valdosta Lowndes Parks & Recreation Authority to lease the 2.92± Little River Boat Ramp in Lowndes County.

Mr. Womack stated this is a twenty-five-year lease. He further stated the Authority will continue to maintain responsibility for the general facility maintenance at no cost to the Department and the Department will continue to operate the boat ramp parking area.

A motion was by Mr. Garcia, seconded by Ms. Addison, and carried unanimously that the Committee recommends the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to enter into an agreement with the Valdosta Lowndes Parks & Recreation Authority to lease the 2.92± Little River Boat Ramp, Lowndes County.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Minutes

Wildlife Resources Committee

A.W. Jones Heritage Center

610 Beachview Drive

St. Simons Island, GA 31522

Friday, January 31, 2025

9:00 a.m.

Committee Members

Charles DePriest, Chair

Harley Yancey, Vice Chair

Jeff Andrews

Randy Dellinger

Patrick Denney

Dan Garcia

Penn Hodge

Steve Hufstetler

Duncan Johnson

Brent Layton

Lesley Reynolds

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Joe Hatfield, Board Chair, Ex-officio

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The January 31, 2025 meeting of the Wildlife Resources Committee was called to order by Joe Hatfield, Chairman of the Board of Natural Resources.

Chairman Hatfield called on Charles DePriest, Chair of the Wildlife Resources Committee. Mr. DePriest called on Brett Albanese, Assistant Chief of the Wildlife Conservation Section, to present Georgia's 2025 Draft State Wildlife Action Plan.

Mr. Albanese stated the State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) is required for funding under the State and Tribal Wildlife Grants program and serves to guide proactive conservation efforts before Georgia's animals and plants become rarer and more costly to conserve and restore. He stated the plan must be updated every ten years and requires both public and agency engagement to develop and implement the plan.

Mr. Albanese stated the draft plan was guided by technical committees led by Department staff and included outside experts from different universities, agencies and conservation organizations. He further stated SWAP revision assessed the conservation status of over 1,400 native species and prioritized the Species of Greatest Conservation Needs based on their conservation status within the state and global significance of Georgia's population. He stated the plan also highlights conservation opportunity areas which focus on conservation efforts on the highest priority public lands and encourage voluntary conservation areas on the highest priority private lands.

Mr. Albanese stated the public engagement period would open on February 19, 2025, and close on March 21, 2025. He further stated comments on the draft plan could be submitted on the Department website and these comments would be used to update SWAP before submission to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for approval in June.

Mr. Albanese concluded his presentation.

Chairman DePriest stated there was one speaker and called on David Kyler, co-founder and Director of the Center for a Sustainable Coast.

Mr. Kyler gave public comment related to the State Wildlife Action Plan draft.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.