

Minutes
Board of Natural Resources
George T. Bagby State Park
330 Bagby Pkwy
Fort Gaines, GA 39851

Tuesday, April 28, 2026
9:00 a.m.

Board Members

Patrick Denney, Chair
Randy Dellinger, Vice Chair
Dan Garcia, Secretary
Jeff Andrews
Charles DePriest
Joe Hatfield
Mark Hennessy
Penn Hodge
Steve Hufstetler
Duncan Johnson
Bill Jones (via conference call)
Ray Lambert
Mike Peavy
Lesley Reynolds
Bodine Sinyard

Staff Members

Walter Rabon, Commissioner
Thomas Barnard
Trevor Santos
Kate Iannuzzi
Haley Chafin
Jeff Cown
Anna Truscynski
Katie Bloomfield
Chris Harper
Tina Johannsen
Angie Johnson
Andre McLendon
Thom Litts
James McLaughlin
Bob Holley
Brent Womack
Doug Haymans

Guests

Dominic Kirkpatrick, Friends of State Parks
Charles Burton, North Georgia Mountain Authority

The April 28, 2026, meeting of the Board of Natural Resources was called to order by Patrick Denney, Chairman of the Board of Natural Resources.

Chairman Denney called on Scott Curry to deliver a moment of inspiration.

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

Chairman Denney called the April 28, 2026, meeting of the Board of Natural Resources back to order.

Chairman Denney called for a motion to approve the minutes of the Board of Natural Resources meeting on March 24, 2026.

A motion was made by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Hennessy and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the Board of Natural Resources meeting on March 24, 2026.

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

Director Cown reported that EPA declared a Level 1 drought response on April 27 following months of monitoring drought indicators, including precipitation, stream flows, groundwater, and soil moisture. He explained that Level 1 requires public water systems to conduct public information campaigns but does not restrict outdoor watering between 4:00 p.m. and 10:00 a.m. or impose limits on agricultural or golf course water use.

Director Cown also announced the annual open burning ban effective May 1 through September 30 for 54 counties in northern Georgia due to ozone season, along with a separate burn ban for 11 counties in southern Georgia because of wildfire conditions. He stated recreational fires and grilling remain exempt, though citizens were encouraged to check with local fire departments.

Director Cown noted that ozone exceedances in April were driven by heat, low humidity, and a high-pressure system. In response to board questions, he stated that burn ban enforcement is coordinated among EPD, local governments, and forestry officials, with citizen reports also assisting enforcement efforts.

Director Cown reported on several recent conferences and recognition events, including attendance at the 2026 Environmental Council of States Supreme Conference, which drew more than 350 attendees from 40 states and focused on the theme of balancing environmental protection with economic development. He noted that Governor Brian Kemp and South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster participated in a fireside chat during the conference. He also attended the Association of Air Pollution Control Agencies Spring Meeting in Atlanta, where he spoke in his role as president of the organization, and the 2026 Rivers Alive Award Ceremony recognizing volunteer cleanup efforts across the state. He stated that Georgia continues to demonstrate leadership in maintaining strong environmental protections and air quality while supporting economic growth.

Chairman Denney called on Commissioner Rabon for his report.

Commissioner Rabon announced that Chris Hodge was selected as director of the Law Enforcement Division effective April 16. Commissioner Rabon noted that Colonel Hodge began his career in 2001 and most recently served as captain of the coastal region overseeing 20 southeast Georgia counties. He also announced the retirement of Mike England after 36 years of service, with formal recognition planned for the next board meeting.

Commissioner Rabon addressed the ongoing wildfire emergency in southeast Georgia, reporting that two retired DNR employees lost their homes in the Brantley County wildfires.

Commissioner Rabon provided an update on the 2026 legislative session, reporting that DNR tracked more than 250 bills. He highlighted Senate Bill 148, which authorizes hunter education courses for students in grades 6–12, and explained that curriculum standards have been approved by Department of Education leadership and will move through public comment and final State Board of Education approval. He noted that teachers will be able to obtain hunter education instructor certification and offer the curriculum either as a standalone course or within existing classes. Commissioner Rabon also reported that the FY27 budget has been approved by the General Assembly and sent to Governor Brian Kemp, including funding for equipment replacement, fish hatchery operations, and facility maintenance and repairs. He thanked the General Assembly, Governor Kemp, and OPB Director Rick Dunn for their continued support.

Commissioner Rabon announced that more than \$2 million was appropriated to the newly created Vince Dooley Trust Fund, which will provide grants to nonprofits and state agencies for permanent greenspace protection, with applications expected to open next month.

Commissioner Rabon welcomed the 11th class of the DNR Leadership Academy at Charlie Elliott Wildlife Center and described the program as a series of five three-day sessions focused on leadership development and institutional knowledge for 18 employees per class. He invited board members to attend future sessions.

Commissioner Rabon also reported that fisheries staff are conducting spring population monitoring and stocking efforts statewide, including largemouth bass, striped bass, hybrid bass, walleye, and more than 50,000 trout at 80 stream locations, with stockings continuing through Labor Day. He stated that DNR stocked 11 million fish statewide in FY25 and is on track to meet or exceed that number in FY26.

Commissioner Rabon announced the relaunch of the SPLASH water safety initiative, originally created under Governor Deal, with updated public education materials to be released during Water Safety Month in May to help reduce water-related deaths and injuries. He also announced upcoming events, including a ribbon cutting for the renovated Champney River Boat Ramp near Darien on May 1 and Hunting and Fishing Night with the Atlanta Braves on August 29 against the Colorado Rockies, featuring outdoor-themed activities and exhibits at The Battery before the game.

Commissioner Rabon called on Angie Johnson, Director of the Parks and Historic Sites Division, for her update.

Director Johnson updated the board on renovations at George T. Bagby State Park, America's 250th Celebration, the National Association of State Park Directors, Roosevelt's Little White House Ceremony, Tanzania National Parks Visit, National State Park Leadership School, Vogel State Park Dam Repairs, Georgia Power Partnership, Etowah Indian Mounds Artifact Recovery, and the 2026 Preservation Award for Excellence in Rehabilitation.

Commissioner Rabon called on Lt. Col. James McLaughlin for a report on the Law Enforcement Division.

Lt. Col. McLaughlin updated the board on the emergency response to the south Georgia wildfires and the Unified Command with the Georgia Forestry Commission, Game Warden Academy Graduation, turkey season safety, special operations training, national leadership training, and ongoing challenges within the division.

Commissioner Rabon concluded his report.

Chairman Denney called Randy Dellinger for a report of the Coastal Committee.

A motion was made by Mr. Dellinger, seconded by Mr. Johnson, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to approve the Proposed Amendments to the Rules of Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Saltwater Fishing Regulations, Rule 391-2-4.
(Resolution attached hereto and made a part thereof)

Chairman Denney called on Mark Hennessy, Chair of the Land Committee, for the committee report.

A motion was made by Mr. Hennessy, seconded by Mr. Johnson, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commissioner approval to acquire through donation the 129± acres Bo Ginn National Fish Hatchery from the National Park Service, Magnolia Springs State Park, Jenkins County. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part thereof)

A motion was made by Mr. Hennessy, seconded by Mr. Johnson, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commissioner approval of reversionary deed language of approximately 13,843.5± acres conveyed by donation by the Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT), in Bleckley, Lee, Long, Jeff Davis, Madison, Montgomery, Murray, Putnam, Screven, Taylor, and Upson County. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part thereof)

Chairman Denney called Steve Hufstetler, Chair of the Wildlife Resources Committee, for a committee report.

A motion was made by Mr. Hufstetler, seconded by Mr. Johnson, and carried unanimously, that the Board approve the Proposed Amendments to Subject 391-4-2, Hunting Regulations, Migratory Gamebirds.

Chairman Denney announced that the next Board meeting will be held Tuesday, May 19 at 9:00 am in the DNR Boardroom. He stated that due to items on the agenda that are more complex in nature and may require additional time for presentation, discussion, and public comment, the Coastal Committee meeting will be held on Monday, May 18 at 2:00 pm.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Patrick Denney, Chairman

ATTEST:

Dan Garcia, Secretary

**Minutes
Coastal Committee
George T. Bagby State Park
330 Bagby Pkwy
Fort Gaines, GA 39851**

Tuesday, April 28, 2026

9:00 a.m.

Committee Members

Randy Dellinger (Acting Chair)
Charles DePriest
Joe Hatfield
Mark Hennessy
Penn Hodge
Bill Jones (via conference call)
Ray Lambert
Mike Peavy
Patrick Denney, Board Chair, Ex-Officio

Board Members

Jeff Andrews
Dan Garcia
Steve Hufstetler
Duncan Johnson
Bodine Sinyard
Lesley Reynolds

The April 28, 2026, meeting of the Coastal Committee was called to order by Patrick Denney, Chairman of the Board of Natural Resources.

Chairman Denney named Randy Dellinger as the Acting Chair of the Coastal Committee. Mr. Dellinger called on Doug Haymans, Director of the Coastal Resources Division, to present the action item.

Director Haymans presented the proposed amendments to Saltwater Fishing Regulations for shellfish summer harvest extended periods. He stated that the public comment period closed the previous week and the division received 8 comments which were all positive from both recreational and commercial fishing communities.

Director Haymans requested favorable consideration.

A motion was made by Mr. Hatfield, seconded by Mr. DePriest, and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the Resolution to approve the Proposed Amendments to the Rules of the Georgia Department of Natural Resources, Saltwater Fishing Regulations, Rule 391-2-4.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

**Minutes
Land Committee
George T. Bagby State Park
330 Bagby Pkwy
Fort Gaines, GA 39851**

Tuesday, April 28, 2026

9:00 a.m.

Committee Members

Mark Hennessy, Chair
Penn Hodge, Vice Chair
Jeff Andrews
Randy Dellinger
Dan Garcia
Joe Hatfield
Steve Hufstetler
Duncan Johnson
Lesley Reynolds
Patrick Denney, Board Chair, Ex-Officio

Board Members

Charles DePriest
Bill Jones (via conference call)
Ray Lambert
Mike Peavy
Bodine Sinyard

The April 28, 2026, meeting of the Land Committee was called to order by Patrick Denney, Chairman of the Board of Natural Resources.

Chairman Denney called on Mark Hennessy, Chair of the Land Committee, who then called on Brent Womack, Chief of Real Estate, to present the items.

Mr. Womack stated the first item was requesting approval through donation for 129± acres Bo Ginn National Fish Hatchery from the National Park Service, Magnolia Springs State Park, Jenkins County. He further stated the property is adjacent to Magnolia Springs State Park and contains part of a Civil War archaeological site. He added that the acquisition would protect the park against future development while improving public access.

Mr. Womack requested favorable consideration.

A motion was made by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Hatfield, and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend the Board adopt the Resolution authorizing the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to acquire through donation the

129 ± acres Bo Ginn National Fish Hatchery from the National Park Service, Magnolia Springs State Park, Jenkins County.

Mr. Womack stated the second item would be the approval of reversionary deed language for approximately 13,843.5 acres convey by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources across 11 counties. He further stated these properties were previously approved for donation since 2021 but reversionary language was inadvertently omitted. He added that the federal resources require reversionary interest when federal funds were used to acquire properties transferred at less than fair market value.

Mr. Womack requested favorable consideration.

A motion was made by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Hatfield, and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend the Board adopt the Resolution authorizing the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval of revisionary deed language of approximately 13,843.5+ acres conveyed by donation by the Georgia Department of Transportation (DOT), in Bleckley, Lee, Long, Jeff Davis, Madison, Montgomery, Murray, Putnam, Screven, Taylor, and Upson County.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Minutes
Wildlife Resources Committee
Land Committee
George T. Bagby State Park
330 Bagby Pkwy
Fort Gaines, GA 39851

Tuesday, April 28, 2026
9:00 a.m.

Committee Members

Steve Hufstetler, Chair
Joe Hatfield, Vice Chair
Jeff Andrews
Charles DePriest
Dan Garcia
Mark Hennessy
Penn Hodge
Duncan Johnson
Mike Peavy
Lesley Reynolds
Bodine Sinyard
Patrick Denney, Board Chair, Ex-Officio

Board Members

Randy Dellinger
Bill Jones (via conference call)
Ray Lambert

The April 28, 2026, meeting of the Wildlife Resources Committee was called to order by Patrick Denney, Chairman of the Board of Natural Resources.

Chairman Denney called on Steve Hufstetler, Chair of the Wildlife Resources Committee, who called on Tina Johannsen, Assistant Chief of Game Management, to present two items.

Ms. Johannsen presented the annual waterfowl regulations with only one change from the previous year. She stated that the ending date will shift back to January 31st regardless of the day of the week, rather than always ending on Sunday as previously modified. She clarified this change was in response to hunter feedback and does not change the number of days or limit.

Ms. Johannsen requested favorable consideration.

A motion was made by Mr. DePriest, seconded by Mr. Yancey, and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board approve the Proposed Amendment to Subject 391-4-2, Hunting Regulations, Migratory Gamebirds.

Ms. Johanssen stated the next item would be a briefing on the proposed amendments to hunting regulations. She further stated that this is an off-year cycle year for amendments, but changes are needed due to new legislation and property acquisition.

Ms. Johanssen stated these amendments are needed to clarify issues related to hunting regulations on wildlife management areas – prohibit the use of drones to locate game and hogs; clarify rules related to quota hunts, fox and bobcat hunting, and night hunting restrictions; and set hunting regulations for the newly acquired Upatoi Natural Area in Talbot County.

Ms. Johanssen stated the public comment period would close on May 31, 2026, and that she plans to present these proposals and any public comments received to the Board for consideration at the June 23, 2026, meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.