

Minutes
Board of Natural Resources
DNR Boardroom
2 MLK Jr. Drive, SE
Suite 1252, East Tower

Tuesday, August 25, 2026
9:00 a.m.

Board Members

Patrick Denney, Chair
Randy Dellinger, Vice Chair
Dan Garcia, Secretary
Nancy Addison
Jeff Andrews
Joe Hatfield
Mark Hennessy
Steve Hufstetler
Duncan Johnson
Bill Jones
Ray Lambert
Mike Peavy
Lesley Reynolds
Bodine Sinyard
Harley Yancey

Guests

Bryan Tolar, Tolar Capitol Partners
Lyndy Rogers, Georgia Natural Resources Foundation
Scott Hendrix, Georgia Power
Alice Keyes, One Hundred Miles
Davis Poole, McIntosh County Commissioner
Jack Robertson, coastal resident
Pat Farrell, coastal resident
Courtney Reich
Zachary Hennessy, Southern Environmental Law Center
Alton Brown, Resource and Land Consultants
Carolyn Rader, Center for a Sustainable Coast
Adam Betuel, Birds Georgia
Damon Kirkpatrick, Friends of Georgia State Parks

Staff Members

Walter Rabon, Commissioner
Thomas Barnard
Trevor Santos
Taylor Fisher
Kyle Pearson
Kate Iannuzzi
Haley Chafin
Jeff Cown
Anna Truscynski
Katie Bloomfield
James Boylan
Chuck Mueller
Sarah Visser
Derek Jackson
Chris Harper
Trina Morris
Mat Elliott
Chad Kaiser
Nick Bray
Andre McLendon
Doug Haymans
Jill Andrews
Jared Flowers
Carolyn Belcher
Brent Womack
Savannah Moreland
Brett Albanese
Chad Cox
Ben Cunningham
Thomas Ledford
Jim Cooley
Jason Rogers
Brian Boutell
Mika Bivens

The August 25, 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 Damon Kirkpatrick, President and CEO of the Friends of Georgia State Parks, for a moment of inspiration.

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

Chairman Denney called the August 25, 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 June 23, 2026.

A motion was made by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Sinyard and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the Board of Natural Resources meeting on June 23, 2026.

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

Director Jeff Cown recognized the late Leonard Ledbetter, who served as EPD Director from 1974-1990 and DNR Commissioner from 1984-1990, and highlighted his significant contributions to environmental protection and infrastructure funding in Georgia.

Director Cown reported that Georgia remains under Drought Response Level 1, noting that some water resources continue to reflect the effects of prolonged drought conditions.

Director Cown provided an air quality update, stating that particulate matter levels remain good, while elevated ozone levels in the Atlanta area continue to be monitored. EPD is preparing exceptional event demonstrations related to wildfire impacts for submission to EPA.

Director Cown recognized Jason Rogers and Brian Boutelle for each serving 30 years of state service with EPD.

Director Cown concluded his report.

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

Commissioner Rabon thanked Damon and the Friends of Georgia State Parks and Historic Sites for their support of the statewide SPLASH Water Safety Initiative. He stated that the Friends donated more than \$11,000 for 470 life jackets, restocking all 44 DNR life jacket loaner kiosks statewide.

Commissioner Rabon highlighted the 2026 DNR Career Academy, held July 19-25, which brought together rising high school juniors and seniors to explore DNR careers through hands-on experiences across the state. He thanked staff and Board members who supported the academy.

Commissioner Rabon reported on the August 4 Sapelo Island Community Meeting, noting that DNR staff and community representatives discussed recent work and the future of the island.

Commissioner Rabon reported that the third session of the DNR Leadership Academy was held August 11-13 at Seminole State Park and focused on leadership skills and immersive field experiences.

Commissioner Rabon reported that public affairs staff from across the Department recently met at Fort McAllister State Park to coordinate upcoming campaigns, review strategic goals and strengthen communication among divisions.

Commissioner Rabon highlighted the Department's participation in Hunting and Fishing Night with the Atlanta Braves on August 29 and noted that a portion of ticket sales would benefit the Georgia Natural Resources Foundation.

Commissioner Rabon announced that the 2026-2027 pre-application period for the Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program opened August 3 and will remain open through October 16. He encouraged Board members to share the opportunity with local governments and nonprofit organizations.

Commissioner Rabon provided an update on the Commissioner's Advisory Council's new DNR Day Out program, which allows employees to spend a day with colleagues in other divisions to learn more about their work and promote collaboration across the Department.

Commissioner Rabon reported that 14 certified cadets began the 41st Game Warden Academy on August 17, with basic mandate training beginning August 27. He also reported that three additional post-certified cadets will join the academy in January. He encouraged Board members to visit the academy and observe the training.

Commissioner Rabon thanked Board members who attended the annual Game Warden Awards Banquet and noted that Colonel Hodge will provide additional information on the awards at the September Board meeting.

Commissioner Rabon reminded the Board about the 2026 Managers Conference on Jekyll Island, October 5-6, and invited Board members to attend the dinner and awards brunch.

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

Director Doug Haymans reported that shrimp season opened June 9 and that Georgia currently has 78 licensed shrimp vessels, compared to 99 last year.

Director Haymans reported that the SAGA tug sank approximately five miles off Jekyll Island while being towed for deployment as an artificial reef. He stated that DNR is seeking approval to leave the vessel in place as a reef and has received temporary approval to install four marked and lighted pylons around it.

Director Haymans provided an update on the Department's second Exempted Fishing Permit application for red snapper and stated that the Department hopes to open the season in October if the permit is approved.

Director Haymans reported that the Coastal Resources Division completed a successful FDA audit of the State's shellfish growing areas and received a favorable verbal report.

Director Haymans reported a new state record emerald jack weighing nearly 43 pounds and provided an update on red tide monitoring in Camden County. He stated that all Georgia samples were negative and that monitoring would continue.

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

Director Chris Harper reminded the public not to feed bears or leave food and garbage accessible. He reported that three recent bear encounters in North Georgia resulted in bears being euthanized due to public safety concerns.

Director Harper reported on an archery tournament conducted in partnership with Team Realtree and noted that the Hunter Development Team also produced tree stand safety videos for the upcoming archery season.

Director Harper provided updates on alligator management and reported that Region 4 staff have captured and tagged 114 alligators, including eight recaptures.

Director Harper discussed DNR's investigation of fish kills and noted that a recent Chattahoochee River fish kill, caused by a sewage spill, affected approximately 15 miles of river and resulted in an estimated 44,000 fish killed.

Director Harper reported that aquatic biologist Zach Schumacher recently documented the first live Altamaha spiny mussel in 15 years. He stated that the discovery provides hope for the species and that staff will increase sampling efforts to determine whether additional individuals remain.

Commissioner Rabon concluded his report.

Chairman Denney called on Nancy Addison for a report of the Coastal Committee.

A motion was made by Ms. Addison, seconded by Mr. Jones, and carried unanimously 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 391-2-4.04
(Resolution attached hereto and made a part thereof)

A motion was made by Ms. Addison, seconded by Mr. Johnson, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to approve the Proposed Amendments to the Coastal Incentive Grant Program Description, Chapter 391-2-5-.01 through 391-2-5-.15
(Resolution attached hereto and made a part thereof)

Chairman Denney called on Mark Hennessy for a report of the Land Committee.

A motion was made by Mr. Hennessy, seconded by Mr. Yancey, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval for granting a Revocable License Agreements and Permanent Easements totaling 2.972± acres by the State Properties Commission and General Assembly to Southern Natural Gas Company, LLC to install and maintain a natural gas pipeline under navigable waters of the State, Harris, Talbot, Upson, Baldwin, Muscogee, Washington and Glascock Counties. (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 Commission approval for granting a Revocable License and Permanent Easement of up to 0.019± acres by the State Properties Commission and General Assembly to Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) at Flat Creek PFA, Houston County. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part thereof)

A motion was made by Mr. Hennessy, seconded by Mr. Sinyard, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval for granting a Revocable License Agreement and Permanent Easement of up to 1.77± acres by the State Properties Commission and General Assembly to Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) at George L. Smith State Park, Emanuel County. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part thereof)

Chairman Denney announced that the next Board meeting will be held Tuesday, September 22, 2026, at Little Ocmulgee State Park.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Patrick Denney, Chairman

ATTEST:

Dan Garcia, Secretary

**Minutes
Coastal Committee
DNR Boardroom
2 MLK Jr. Drive, SE
Suite 1252, East Tower**

**Tuesday, August 25, 2026
9:00 a.m.**

Committee Members

Nancy Addison, Chair
Harley Yancey, Vice Chair
Randy Dellinger
Joe Hatfield
Mark Hennessy
Penn Hodge
Bill Jones
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 August 25, 2026, meeting of the Coastal Committee was called to order by Patrick Denney, Chairman of the Board of Natural Resources.

Chairman Denney called on Nancy Addison, Chairwoman of the Coastal Committee.

Chairwoman Addison called on Dr. Jared Flowers, Research and Surveys Program Lead, to present proposed final action on amendments to the red drum regulations. Dr. Flowers explained that the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's 2024 red drum benchmark stock assessment determined that the southern stock of red drum, including South Carolina, Georgia, and the east coast of Florida, was overfished and experiencing overfishing. He stated that reductions in harvest and fishing mortality were necessary to allow the population to recover.

Dr. Flowers reviewed the process used to develop the proposed regulations, including consideration of biological information, input from the Coastal Resources Division Finfish Advisory Panel, and feedback received through public town halls. He stated that five potential regulatory

options were evaluated and that all exceeded the minimum harvest reduction required by the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission.

Dr. Flowers presented the proposed regulations, which would reduce the daily possession limit from five red drum to three fish per person and increase the slot size limit from 14-23 inches total length to 15-24 inches total length. He further stated that raising the minimum size of the slot limit by one inch better protects smaller red drum that are harvested in higher proportion than other sizes by anglers.

Dr. Flowers reviewed the public comments received during the comment period, which ran through June 30, 2026. He stated that 178 responses were received, with nine considered non-relevant to the proposed rule and seven identified as additional or duplicate comments. He explained that 89 percent of respondents supported a regulatory change, while seven percent opposed the changes entirely and four percent supported some portions while opposing others. Of those supporting a change, some favored the proposed regulations while a larger number favored more conservative alternatives, particularly alternative slot limits combined with the proposed three-fish bag limit.

Dr. Flowers requested favorable consideration of the proposed amendments.

In response to questions from Mr. Hennessy, Dr. Flowers discussed the range of public input and explained that the comments represented a variety of perspectives within the fishery, including recreational anglers, catch-and-release anglers, and charter guides. He stated that selecting individual elements from the various alternatives would require additional analysis and that the proposed regulations represented a balance between biological needs and impacts to the fishery.

Chairwoman Addison called on Alice Keyes, representing One Hundred Miles, for public comment.

Ms. Keyes expressed support for efforts to address the decline in Georgia's red drum population but encouraged the Board to adopt more conservative regulations designed to rebuild the stock more quickly rather than simply remove the overfished and overfishing designations. She recommended a smaller bag limit, a larger slot limit, a vessel limit, and elimination of separate creel limits for captains and crew.

Mr. Bill Jones expressed appreciation for the public comments and the work of staff in addressing the red drum issue. He stated that he hoped the proposed action would represent the first of many steps toward improving the fishery.

A motion was made by Mr. Jones, seconded by Mr. Hatfield, 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-.04 (Red Drum).

Chairwoman Addison called on Doug Haymans, Director of the Coastal Resources Division, to present the Coastal Incentive Grant Program themes for the upcoming grant cycle.

Mr. Haymans explained that the Coastal Incentive Grant themes are presented annually for Board approval following consideration by the Coastal Advisory Council. He stated that the primary change for the upcoming cycle is a reduction from two-year grant applications to one-year grant applications due to current financial constraints. He reviewed examples of projects funded during the previous grant cycle and requested favorable consideration of the proposed program description and themes.

A motion was made by Mr. Dellinger, seconded by Mr. Jones, and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the Resolution to approve the proposed amendments to the Coastal Incentive Grant Program Description, Chapter 391-2-5-.15.

Chairwoman Addison then called on Mr. Haymans to introduce the next item concerning proposed amendments to Chapter 391-2-1 governing private recreational docks in state-owned tidal water bottoms. Mr. Haymans emphasized the significant public interest in the proposed rules and thanked staff for the extensive work involved in developing the revised proposal. He then called on Jill Andrews, Chief of the Coastal Management Section, to present the item.

Ms. Andrews presented the revised proposed rule. She explained that the proposal represents the fourth time the department has presented the rule during the rulemaking process. She reviewed the extensive stakeholder engagement, public hearings, town halls, and other opportunities for public input that had occurred over approximately one and a half years.

Ms. Andrews stated that the department received more than 125 comments on the proposal presented in June. She explained that there was general support for establishing formal rules but disagreement regarding several provisions, particularly the proposed dock width, walkway dimensions, and procedural requirements. Staff therefore returned to the proposal and made substantial revisions.

Ms. Andrews reviewed the principal revisions to the proposed rule. She explained that maintenance would now be divided into minor and major maintenance. Minor maintenance, such as board-for-board replacement and similar routine work, would not require notification to the department. Major maintenance involving structural components, pilings, floating docks, barges, cranes, or other significant equipment would require notification, but would not require a new full application unless the department determined that an updated revocable license was necessary.

Ms. Andrews stated that the maximum fixed walkway length proposed in June would increase from 1,000 to 1,500 linear feet. She also explained that the revised proposal would allow fixed walkways to span waterways wider than 20 feet under specified conditions, including minimum clearance requirements and professionally engineered drawings.

Ms. Andrews stated that for multi-family docks, the proposed maximum fixed deck size would increase from 400 to 600 square feet. She also reviewed revisions to lighting provisions, including the potential for seasonal lighting restrictions for docks visible from sea turtle nesting beaches.

Ms. Andrews explained that the variance provision had been revised to remove the previous 10 percent maximum extension for fixed walkways. The department would instead evaluate variance requests on a case-by-case basis and could require additional professional drawings, waterway assessments, and measures to minimize impacts to vegetated marshlands.

Ms. Andrews explained that the proposed rule would streamline the process for transferring information when a property changes ownership and would provide notice to property owners before compliance inspections. Ms. Andrews also stated that the provision making violations of the rule a misdemeanor had been removed.

Ms. Andrews stated that, following Committee direction, the revised proposal would be placed on public notice with a public comment period extending through September 30, 2026. Staff anticipated returning to the Board in October for final consideration.

Chairwoman Addison opened public comment for the item.

Mr. Davis Poole, McIntosh County Commissioner and a member of the Marsh and Shore Protection Committee, expressed support for the revised proposal. He stated that the changes represented a reasonable balance between stewardship of coastal resources and access for riparian property owners. He particularly supported the revised maintenance provisions, increased walkway length and width, increased fixed deck size for multi-family docks, and lighting provisions intended to protect sea turtles.

Mr. Jack Robertson, a coastal property owner from Chatham County, thanked staff for addressing concerns raised during the previous meeting. He discussed his experience involving the revocation of a dock license and stated that the revised rules would provide a more sensible process for property owners. Mr. Robertson expressed support for the revised provisions concerning walkway length, maintenance, and administrative review.

Mr. Pat Farrell, Chatham County resident and former county commissioner, expressed support for the changes to dock width and length. He stated that the high cost of constructing long

docks naturally limits the number of such structures and encouraged the department to simplify the permitting process so that property owners and contractors can more easily understand and navigate the requirements.

Ms. Courtney Reich expressed support for formal regulation of private recreational docks but opposed the revised proposal, stating that it would weaken protections for coastal marshlands. She raised concerns regarding the increased allowable dock footprint, the ability to span larger tidal creeks, the unlimited variance process, and the lack of a comprehensive inventory and scientific analysis of existing private docks. She encouraged the Board not to move forward with the proposal as presented.

Ms. Alice Keyes, representing One Hundred Miles, opposed the revised proposal. She stated that the proposed 1,500-foot, six-foot-wide walkway could cover approximately 9,000 square feet and expressed concern that the proposal would substantially increase the allowable footprint of private docks. Ms. Keyes cited public comments requesting stronger size limitations and encouraged the Board to retain science-based standards, clarify definitions, and reconsider the variance process.

Mr. Zachary Hennessy, staff attorney with the Southern Environmental Law Center, urged the Board not to proceed with the proposal as presented. He raised concerns regarding potential environmental impacts from larger docks, private access to state-owned marshlands, and Georgia's proposed standards in comparison with neighboring states.

Mr. Alton Brown, Resource and Land Consultants, expressed support for the revised proposal and commended the department's rulemaking process. He stated that the proposed six-foot width was important for access, including ADA accessibility, and believed the revised proposal struck an appropriate balance between private access and resource protection.

Ms. Carolyn Rader, representing the Center for Sustainable Coast, expressed opposition to expanding private dock allowances. She emphasized the public trust nature of Georgia's coastal marshlands and encouraged the Board to rely on scientific information and the original conservation purposes of the Coastal Marshlands Protection Act when establishing dock standards.

Mr. Adam Betuel, Executive Director of Birds Georgia, expressed opposition to the proposed changes. He discussed potential impacts to marsh birds and other wildlife, including habitat fragmentation, marine debris, and increased dock density. He encouraged the Board to seek additional scientific information before changing the existing standards.

Following public comment, Chairwoman Addison invited questions and comments from Committee and Board members.

Mr. Jones stated that he believed the Committee should consider two modifications to the proposal: maintaining a hard stop at the first creek measuring 20 feet or greater in width and retaining a 10 percent limit on variances beyond the proposed 1,500-foot walkway maximum.

Mr. Andrews asked staff to explain how the proposal had been revised to allow an unlimited variance. Mr. Haymans explained that the revision followed additional consideration of public comments and discussions among Board members, legislators, and department staff. Mr. Andrews expressed concern that removing clear limits could make the rules more difficult to administer and could encourage property owners to exceed the intended standards.

Mr. Haymans responded to questions regarding local government involvement, explaining that Coastal Resources Division is responsible for the state's dock permitting and revocable licensing requirements, while local jurisdictions may have separate requirements for electrical, plumbing, building, or other matters. He also explained the department's enforcement process, which may include field notifications, notices of violation, consent orders, administrative orders, and administrative hearings.

Mr. Haymans responded to questions regarding multi-family docks, explaining that up to four adjoining property owners may share a dock and that deed restrictions would be required. He also clarified that the larger fixed deck allowance is intended for multi-family docks.

Mr. Haymans explained the department's inspection and notification process and noted that staff currently have limited resources to identify unauthorized construction. He stated that advance notification of construction and maintenance is important to allow the department to verify that work is consistent with approved plans.

Mr. Haymans also explained the private dock application process. He stated that property owners may apply directly to the department and that staff are available to conduct pre-application meetings, establish the jurisdictional line, review proposed dock locations, and assist applicants in understanding the requirements. He stated that, for complete applications without complicating factors, revocable licenses can generally be issued within 30 to 60 days. He further noted that the department is developing a digital permitting system to streamline the process.

Mr. Lambert expressed support for retaining the 1,500-foot maximum with a 10 percent variance and maintaining the 20-foot creek limitation.

A motion was made by Mr. Jones, seconded by Mr. Lambert, and carried unanimously, that the Committee recommends two modifications to the private dock rules presented by Coastal Resources Division: (1) a 1,500-foot maximum walkway length with the possibility of a 10 percent variance; and (2) maintaining a hard stop at the first 20-foot-wide creek.

Mr. Haymans stated that staff would revise the proposed rules and public notice to reflect the Committee's direction and would work with legal counsel to complete the revisions. He stated that the department's goal remained to return to the Board in October for final action.

Chairwoman Addison thanked Ms. Andrews and Coastal Resources Division staff for their work and noted that the discussion and public comments had provided valuable information to the Committee and Board members.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

**Minutes
Land Committee
DNR Boardroom
2 MLK Jr. Drive, SE
Suite 1252, East Tower**

Tuesday, August 25, 2026

9:00 a.m.

Committee Members

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

Board Members

Bill Jones
Ray Lambert
Mike Peavy
Bodine Sinyard

The August 25, 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 presented Item A, a request for approval to grant revocable license agreements and permanent easements totaling approximately 2.972 acres by the State Properties Commission and General Assembly to Southern Natural Gas Company LLC to install and maintain a natural gas pipeline under navigable waters of the state in Harris, Talbot, Upson, Baldwin, Muscogee, Washington, and Glascock counties.

Mr. Womack explained that the request concerned the portions of the proposed pipeline that would cross navigable waters of the state and was not an approval of the pipeline route. He stated that the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission has jurisdiction over the pipeline route. The proposed agreements would cover crossings of Standing Boy Creek, the Flint River, the Oconee River, the Chattahoochee River, and the Ochopee River.

Mr. Womack stated that DNR staff had reviewed the proposal and had no objections. Because the easements would not directly benefit the department, staff recommended that any monetary consideration be established by the State Properties Commission.

In response to a question from Mr. Hennessy regarding the acreage estimates, Mr. Womack explained that Southern Natural Gas had completed detailed plans and drawings and expected to remain within the acreage footprints presented. He stated that if the company required additional acreage or changed the approved footprint, the matter would need to return to the Board for consideration.

Mr. Womack requested favorable consideration.

A motion was made by Mr. Garcia, 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 for the granting of a Revocable License Agreements and Permanent Easements totaling 2.972± acres by the State Properties Commission and General Assembly to Southern Natural Gas Company, LLC to install and maintain a natural gas pipeline under navigable waters of the State, Harris, Talbot, Upson, Baldwin, Muscogee, Washington and Glascock Counties.

Mr. Womack presented Item B, a request for approval of a revocable license agreement and permanent easement of approximately 0.019 acres by the State Properties Commission and General Assembly to the Georgia Department of Transportation at Flat Creek Public Fishing Area in Houston County.

Mr. Womack explained that the request was necessary for the Georgia Department of Transportation's work to replace a bridge on State Route 7/U.S. 41. He stated that DNR staff had reviewed the proposal and had no objections. He further stated that the property is not a Heritage Preserve and, therefore, a change of use was not required. Because the easement would not directly benefit the department, staff recommended that any monetary consideration be established by the State Properties Commission.

Mr. Womack requested favorable consideration.

A motion was made by Mr. Andrews, 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 for the granting of a Revocable License Agreement and Permanent Easement of up to 0.019± acres by the State Properties Commission and General Assembly to Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) at Flat Creek PFA, Houston County.

Mr. Womack presented Item C, a request for approval of a revocable license agreement and permanent easement of approximately 1.77 acres by the State Properties Commission and General Assembly to the Georgia Department of Transportation at George L. Smith State Park in Emanuel County.

Mr. Womack explained that the easement was requested as part of the Georgia Department of Transportation's work to replace the bridge on State Route 26 that provides access to George L. Smith State Park. He stated that the property is Heritage Preserve-dedicated but that a change of use was not necessary because the bridge replacement would provide continued and improved access to the park and its recreational, historical, and natural features. Because the easement would benefit the department, staff recommended that it be granted at no cost. DNR staff reviewed the proposal and had no objections.

In response to a question regarding the existing bridge and whether acreage associated with the existing bridge would revert to the state, Mr. Womack explained that the new bridge would be constructed adjacent to the existing bridge while the existing bridge remained in use. He stated that the department typically does not immediately revert the existing easement and that additional consideration of utility locations could result in a related item being brought before the Board at a future meeting.

Mr. Womack requested favorable consideration.

A motion was made by Mr. Andrews, 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 for the granting of a Revocable License Agreement and Permanent Easement of up to 1.77± acres by the State Properties Commission and General Assembly to Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) at George L. Smith State Park, Emanuel County.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Minutes
Wildlife Resources Committee
DNR Boardroom
2 MLK Jr. Drive, SE
Suite 1252, East Tower

Tuesday, August 25, 2026
9:00 a.m.

Committee Members

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

Board Members

Nancy Addison
Randy Dellinger
Bill Jones
Ray Lambert
Harley Yancey

The May 19, 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, Chairman of the Wildlife Resources Committee, who called on Trina Morris, Wildlife Conservation Section Program Manager, to provide a briefing on the proposed revisions to the rules pertaining to the protection of endangered, threatened, and unusual species.

Ms. Morris reminded the Committee that the department is responsible for periodically reviewing and updating Georgia's protected species list, which has not been comprehensively updated since 2006. She stated that the Department used information developed through the 2025 revision of the State Wildlife Action Plan to identify species of greatest conservation need and prioritized the highest priority species when developing the proposed revisions.

Ms. Morris stated that the Department conducted a public nomination period in June, receiving 62 official submissions, in addition to comments and suggestions provided directly to technical teams. Technical teams reviewed the submissions in July, and the resulting proposed revisions were included in the Board materials.

Ms. Morris stated the proposed changes include removing 40 species from the protected species list, adding 145 species, updating the status of 66 species, and making numerous taxonomic name changes. She also highlighted a proposed exemption for certain protected plants to allow their sale, transportation, and possession. She explained that the exemption is intended to support Georgia's growing native plant industry and reduce permitting and tagging requirements for plants that are commonly produced and sold as horticultural stock rather than harvested from the wild.

Ms. Morris provided several examples of proposed changes. She discussed the Sicklesfin Redhorse, which was added to the protected species list in 2006 before it had been formally described and named. She noted that significant conservation work over the past 20 years has helped prevent 77 at-risk species from requiring listing under the federal Endangered Species Act.

Ms. Morris also discussed the proposed addition of the spotted skunk, explaining that skunks are currently managed as game species and may be trapped for their fur. Because trappers cannot control which skunk species they capture, the Department has worked with trappers on education and encouraged the release of live spotted skunks and reporting of both live and dead captures.

Ms. Morris stated the proposed changes also include additional protections for certain non-game species. She explained that Georgia currently allows the taking of 14 groups of species, including frogs and venomous snakes. She discussed the ornate chorus frog as an example of a species for which state listing would prevent intentional take and allow the Department to focus on habitat conservation, particularly wetlands.

Ms. Morris stated that the eastern diamondback rattlesnake received the most public nominations, with seven nominations. She noted that habitat loss, intentional persecution, and commercial exploitation are significant threats to the species. The eastern diamondback was petitioned for federal listing in 2012, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined that listing may be warranted while noting that protections in Georgia were inadequate. Ms. Morris explained that adding the species to Georgia's protected species list would make intentional

killing unlawful and provide an opportunity for the department to address threats and improve habitat while reducing the need for federal listing.

Ms. Morris reported that the revised rules would be available for public comment beginning Friday, with comments accepted through the Wildlife Conservation Section. A public hearing will also be held, and the Department anticipates returning to the Board in October with final recommendations.

In response to a question regarding the eastern diamondback rattlesnake, Ms. Morris clarified that the species is currently included among the 14 groups for which intentional take is allowed and that the proposed listing would make intentional killing unlawful.

In response to a question regarding the frequency of future updates to the protected species list, Ms. Morris explained that the State Wildlife Action Plan is revised every ten years and that the Department hopes to align future reviews of the protected species list with that schedule.

A question was asked whether listing additional species could create restrictions similar to those associated with the federal Endangered Species Act and potentially affect Georgia's timber industry. Ms. Morris explained that Georgia's laws differ from the federal Endangered Species Act and emphasized that the purpose of state listing is to allow the Department to manage species populations appropriately and address conservation needs at the state level, with the goal of preventing federal listing.

Mr. Hufstetler then called on Carolyn Rader, Georgia Botanical Society, for public comment.

Ms. Rader expressed support for the proposed native plant exemption and encouraged efforts to promote the availability of native plants through nurseries, noting the benefits to pollinators and overall ecosystem health. She also expressed support for protecting the eastern diamondback rattlesnake, emphasizing its importance to Georgia's ecosystems.

There being no further business, Mr. Hufstetler concluded the Wildlife Resources Committee meeting.