

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

Tuesday, October 28, 2025
9:00 a.m.

Board Members

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

Guests

Damon Kirkpatrick, Friends of Georgia State Parks
Lyndy Rogers, Georgia Natural Resources Foundation
Deb Phillips, Georgia Industry Environmental Coalition
Mark Woodall, The Sierra Club
Sherman Neal, The Sierra Club
Brian Foster, Georgia Conservancy
Michael O'Reilly, The Nature Conservancy
Will Harlan, Center for Biological Diversity
Joel Truss, ACCG

Staff Members

Walter Rabon, Commissioner
Thomas Barnard
Trevor Santos
Kate Iannuzzi
Taylor Fisher
Haley Chafin
Jeff Cown
Anna Truscynski
Angie Johnson
Matt Elliott
Trina Morris
Brett Albanese
Clint Peacock
Charlie Killmaster
Carolyn Belcher
Katherine Darcey
Jessica James-Weems
Kathy Knowlton
Casey Jones
James Boylan
Chuck Mueller
IB Parnell

The October 28, 2025, meeting of the Board of Natural Resources was called to order by Chairwoman Lesley Reynolds.

Chairwoman Reynolds called on Laura Whitaker, CEO of ESP, Inc., for a moment of inspiration.

Chairwoman Reynolds adjourned the Board meeting to move into the Committee meetings.

Chairwoman Reynolds called the October 28, 2025, meeting of the Board of Natural Resources back to order.

Chairwoman Reynolds called for a motion to approve the minutes of the Board of Natural Resources meeting on September 23, 2025.

A motion was made by Mr. Hatfield, seconded by Mr. Johnson, and carried unanimously to approve the minutes of the Board of Natural Resources meeting on September 23, 2025.

Chairwoman Reynolds called on Jeff Cown, Director of the Environmental Protection Division, for his report.

Director Cown updated the Board on several employees who have worked thirty and twenty-five years for the State of Georgia, informed the Board of the EPD Quarterly Reports, gave an update on the federal government shutdown, and the upcoming Legislative Policy Academy in Savannah.

Chairwoman Reynolds call on Walter Rabon, Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources, for his report.

Commissioner Rabon stated that the 2025 Leadership Academy will wrap up its final session at Unicoi State Park and Lodge, with graduation scheduled for November 12th. He encouraged Board members to attend.

Commissioner Rabon stated that the 2025–2026 Georgia Outdoor Stewardship Program (GOSA) pre-application period has closed, and a total of 44 applications were received, requesting a total of \$93 million in funding for conservation projects. He further stated that last fiscal year, GOSA provided more than \$20.6 million in funding to support projects across 16 counties throughout the state. He noted that the tri-fold in front of the members highlighted this accomplishment and others featured in the FY25 Annual Report.

Commissioner Rabon stated that the 2026 DNR Career Academy application is now open and will remain open through November 17th. He encouraged the Board to share the included flyer with any rising juniors or seniors interested in exploring careers in natural resource management.

Commissioner Rabon stated that on Wednesday, October 15th, the Department was given the opportunity to present to the Senate Study Committee on Making Georgia the No. 1 State for Tourism during their meeting in Valdosta. He further stated that the Department appreciated the opportunity to speak about the ways DNR's work supports tourism and local economic growth across the state.

Commissioner Rabon stated that in the upcoming month, DNR members will participate in two key events: the Georgia Recreation and Park Association Conference Trade Show on Jekyll Island on November 4th, and the THRIVE Disability and Inclusion Resource Fair on November 13th at the Summit Family YMCA in Newnan. He further stated that these events provide great opportunities to showcase the Outdoors Beyond Barriers initiative and highlight DNR's offerings across the state.

Commissioner Rabon stated that Governor Brian Kemp officially proclaimed October 18th as Ranger Hotline Day. He further stated that the Ranger Hotline Program, an initiative of the Georgia Natural Resources Foundation, enhances the effectiveness of Georgia's Law Enforcement Division Game Wardens by encouraging citizen involvement in detecting and reporting violations of game and fish laws. He added that the program also provides monetary rewards for information that leads to the arrest of poachers.

Commissioner Rabon shared a recent production and testimonial video highlighting the importance of tree stand safety and thanked Board Member Duncan Johnson for sharing his story and delivering such an important safety message, which was also shared on social media for hunters nationwide. He added that the video was produced pro bono, thanks to contacts made by Corporal Levi Thompson, and thanked the participating Game Wardens: Sergeant Matt Garthright, Corporal Saxon Campbell, Corporal Levi Thompson, Game Warden First Class Cory Bohannon, Game Warden First Class Kyle Kervin, and Game Warden Chason Brogdon.

Commissioner Rabon stated that on October 8th, LED Command Staff joined Alabama and Florida counterparts at Lake Seminole for the Annual Tri-States Meeting. He further stated that discussions focused on the latest trends and investigative techniques in Conservation Law Enforcement, strengthening teamwork across state lines.

Commissioner Rabon stated that in late September, Lieutenant Wanda Roberts, Corporal Ryan Locke, and Game Warden Ben Hawkins attended the 66th Annual NASBLA Conference in Des Moines, Iowa. He further stated that Game Warden Hawkins was recognized as Georgia's Boating Safety Officer of the Year, and Corporal Locke was honored as both Georgia's Operation Dry Water Officer of the Year and the 2025 National ODW Officer of the Year.

Commissioner Rabon stated that on September 16th, the Special Operations Group and K-9 units supported Governor Kemp's Protection Detail during the Rivian ribbon-cutting ceremony in Morgan County. He further stated that Game Wardens assisted with security operations, including area sweeps for unauthorized personnel or weapons and maintaining surveillance throughout the event.

Commissioner Rabon stated that on October 14th and 15th, the Outdoor Dream Foundation partnered with Game Wardens Corporal Levi Thompson and Game Warden First Class Cory Bohannon to host 8-year-old Camden from Aiken, SC, on his dream whitetail deer hunt in Warren County. He stated that with help from the Game Wardens and his family, Camden harvested his first deer, a doe, on the first day, followed by a 9-point buck the next morning.

Commissioner Rabon stated, shifting to the Parks Division, that the Georgia Park Ranger Academy was held August 11–14 and September 29–October 2 at Fort Yargo State Park, with an expanded class of 22 students. He further stated that participants completed hands-on scenarios, including new Human Resources exercises and a DNR Team session. Commissioner Rabon added that under Assistant Director McLendon's guidance, students also practiced maintenance skills like operating mowers, mini excavators, and water line repair.

Commissioner Rabon stated that from October 2–12, the Parks & Historic Sites Division showcased Georgia State Parks at the Georgia National Fair, which drew a record 612,706 visitors. He further stated that the booth, staffed by park personnel and volunteers, sold 129 Annual Park Passes during the 11-day event and promoted the connection between outdoor recreation, the Georgia Grown Market, and agritourism.

Commissioner Rabon stated that exciting improvements are underway across Georgia State Parks: Don Carter State Park now has a brand-new 3,100 sq ft indoor group shelter; George T. Bagby State Park, Phase II construction is underway on lakeview amenities, including an RV campground with 32 sites, 10 cottages, a new linen facility, and pedestrian trails; The Reynolds Mansion on Sapelo Island is receiving major upgrades to its mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, along with life safety improvements like a fire suppression and alarm system; Cloudland Canyon State Park's East Rim Overlook Trail is being rehabbed, featuring a fully ADA-compliant cantilevered overlook and an accessible outdoor classroom; Indian Springs State Park is adding nine premium yurts (including one ADA-accessible) that are the first in the system with private restrooms and showers in each unit; and George L. Smith State Park is developing 32 premium RV sites and a comfort station.

Commissioner Rabon stated that the 2026 Weekend for Wildlife is quickly approaching and, as of the previous Friday, fundraising totals are \$310,000 ahead of the same time last year. He further stated that the event is only \$5,000 away from \$1.8 million in fundraising, with 82 sponsors, \$30,000 in in-kind donations, and 297 guests seated for the banquet. He encouraged members to confirm

their attendance before the event is sold out. Commissioner Rabon thanked Foundation Director Lyndy Rogers and all who contributed to the success of the Weekend for Wildlife.

Commissioner Rabon then called on Carolyn Belcher, Chief of Marine Fisheries, to provide an update from the Coastal Resources Division.

Ms. Belcher gave an update on red snapper; red drum management; the 2025 Georgia Resiliency Conference; the 2025 shrimp season; blue crabs; and artificial reef deployment.

Mr. Bodine Sinyard asked for an update on oyster farming permits, but Ms. Belcher did not have that information and could not provide an update.

Commissioner Rabon then called on Charlie Killmaster, State Deer Biologist, to provide an update from the Wildlife Resources Division.

Mr. Killmaster updated the Board on the Hog Down Awards Program; CWD in Georgia; the Outdoors Beyond Barriers Fall Hunts; and the new bass license plate.

Commissioner Rabon stated that this concluded his report.

Chairwoman Reynolds called Ray Lambert, Chairman of the Environmental Protection Committee, for his committee report.

A motion was made by Mr. Lambert, seconded by Mr. Hatfield, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Proposed Grant Criteria for the Georgia Diesel Emissions Reduction Program, Chapter 391-3-21-.15.

Chairwoman Reynolds called on Harley Yancey, Chair of the Land Committee, for his committee report.

A motion was made by Mr. Yancey, seconded by Mr. Layton, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commissioner approval to enter into a fifteen (15) year lease with the U.S. Army-Corps of Engineers for approximately 6.80± acres of the Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) and Law Enforcement Division (LED) Northeast Region Office, Lake Sidney Lanier, Hall County.
(Resolution attached hereto and made a part thereof)

Chairwoman Reynolds called on Mark Hennessy, Vice Chair of the State Parks and Historic Sites Committee, for his committee report.

A motion was made by Mr. Hennessy, seconded by Mr. Johnson, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Proposed Amendments to Rule 391-5-1-.03.

Chairwoman Reynolds stated the next item, found under Tab H, is a petition to protect diamondback terrapins from mortality in blue crab pots by requiring bycatch reduction devices. She further stated there was one person signed up to speak on this item.

Will Harlan, Center for Biological Diversity, presented the Petition to Protect Diamondback Terrapins from Mortality in Blue Crab Pots by Requiring Bycatch Reduction Devices and requested that the Georgia Department of Natural Resources grant this petition and initiate rulemaking proceedings to amend its current regulations to require bycatch reduction devices or similar gear modifications on all blue crab pots in waters less than 200 ft. in width or within 100 ft. of a river or sound shoreline (where diamondback terrapins are found).

Chairwoman Reynolds called on Matt Elliott, Chief of the Wildlife Conservation Section, to present the Department's response. Mr. Elliott stated that while the Department shares an interest with the petitioner in addressing terrapin bycatch in the crab pot fishery, DNR cannot amend our current regulations due to critical information gaps that include: the lack of statewide estimate of abundance, assessment of newly developed bycatch reduction devices, and the lack of an assessment of economic impacts on commercial and recreational crab fisheries.

Mr. Elliott answered questions from the board members concerning timelines, population estimates, and mortality rates.

Chairwoman Reynolds stated with no further questions, she would entertain a motion.

A motion was made by Mr. Hatfield, seconded by Mr. Sinyard, and carried unanimously that the Board adopt the Resolution denying the petition for the following reasons: Department staff are going to be using improved methodology to survey terrapin abundance in 2026; there is a lack of comprehensive evaluation and performance of the effectiveness of newly developed bycatch reduction devices under Georgia-specific fishery conditions; and it is necessary for staff to complete an assessment of economic impacts on commercial and recreational crab harvesters including gear modification costs, potential catch reductions, and operational feasibility. (Resolution attached hereto and made a part thereof)

Chairwoman Reynolds stated the final item of business would be appointing the Nominating Committee for the 2026 Officers of the Board of Natural Resources. She further stated she has selected Ray Lambert to Chair the committee and Nancy Addison, Duncan Johnson, and Bodine Sinyard to serve on the committee. She added the Nominating Committee will report to the board at the December meeting.

Chairwoman Reynolds announced the next meeting of the Board of Natural Resources would be on December 2, 2025, at Young Harris College.

There being no further business, Chairwoman Reynolds adjourned the meeting.

Lesley Reynolds, Chairwoman

ATTEST:

Randy Dellinger, Secretary

**Minutes
Coastal Committee
DNR Boardroom
2 MLK Jr. Drive, SE
Atlanta, GA 30334**

**Tuesday, October 28, 2025
9:00 a.m.**

Committee Members

Nancy Addison, Chair (via conference call)
Randy Dellinger, Vice Chair
Charles DePriest
Joe Hatfield
Penn Hodge
Mark Hennessy
Bill Jones
Ray Lambert
Brent Layton
Mike Peavy
Harley Yancey
Lesley Reynolds, Board Chair, Ex-Officio

Board Members

Patrick Denney
Jeff Andrews
Steve Hufstetler
Duncan Johnson
Bodine Sinyard

The October 28, 2025, meeting of the Coastal Committee was called to order by Lesley Reynolds, Chairwoman of the Board of Natural Resources.

Chairwoman Reynolds called on Randy Dellinger, Vice Chairman of the Coastal Committee, who called on Carolyn Belcher, Chief of Marine Fisheries to brief the Committee on the proposed amendments to the Saltwater Fishing Regulations, Rule 391-2-4-.04.

Ms. Belcher stated that a recent review of 391-2-4-.04 revealed four errors that could only be characterized as scrivener's errors. The errors include adding the accidentally deleted text "(Hexanchus nakamurai), and oceanic whitetip shark" back into the list of prohibited sharks and correcting the unit of minimum size limit to Fork Length (FL) for Bluefish, Sheepshead and Tarpon.

Ms. Belcher stated that public comment would be received through Friday, November 28, 2025. She further stated that following the comment period, the Board would consider the proposed rules at the December Board meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

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

**Tuesday, October 28, 2025
9:00 a.m.**

Committee Members

Ray Lambert, Chair
Bodine Sinyard, Vice Chair
Nancy Addison (via conference call)
Jeff Andrews
Patrick Denney
Penn Hodge
Steve Hufstetler
Bill Jones
Duncan Johnson
Brent Layton
Lesley Reynolds, Board Chair, Ex-Officio

Board Members

Randy Dellinger
Charles DePriest
Joe Hatfield
Mark Hennessy
Mike Peavy
Harley Yancey

The October 28, 2025, meeting of the Environmental Protection Committee was called to order by Chairwoman Lesley Reynolds.

Chairwoman Reynolds called on Ray Lambert, Chairman of the Environmental Protection Committee. Chairman Lambert called on James Boylan, Chief of the Air Protection Branch, to present Proposed Grant Criteria for the Georgia Diesel Emissions Reduction Program, Chapter 391-3-21-.15.

Mr. Boylan stated that the purpose of the grant is to reduce diesel emissions that can negatively impact human health and the environment by assisting public schools with school bus replacements. He further stated that the program is funded through the federal Diesel Emission Reduction Act (DERA).

Mr. Boylan stated that amendments being added will encourage replacement of 2009 model year or older buses, require replaced school buses to be scrapped, and require project applicants to provide a 75% match. He further stated that the funding available is \$668,005. He added that the first priority will go to public school systems in counties that were designated as maintenance for the 2015 ozone standard. He further added that the second priority will go to

public school systems in counties designated as maintenance for the 2008 ozone standard and the third priority is all remaining public school systems.

Mr. Boylan stated that EPD will issue the first solicitation for applications within 4 months of DNR Board approval of the grant criteria and if funds remain after initial distribution of funds, additional solicitation will be issued. He further stated that grant criteria do not include a DNR Board briefing, public hearing, or 30-day public comment period.

Mr. Boylan requested a favorable consideration.

A motion was made by Mr. Denny, seconded by Mr. Sinyard, and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend the Board adopt the Resolution to approve the Proposed Grant Criteria for the Georgia Diesel Emissions Reduction Program, Chapter 391-3-21-.15.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

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

Tuesday, October 28, 2025

9:00 a.m.

Committee Members

Harley Yancey, Chair
Duncan Johnson, Vice Chair
Nancy Addison (via conference call)
Jeff Andrews
Randy Dellinger
Joe Hatfield
Mark Hennessy
Penn Hodge
Steve Hufstetler
Lesley Reynolds, Board Chair, Ex-Officio

Board Members

Patrick Denney
Charles DePriest
Bill Jones
Ray Lambert
Brent Layton
Mike Peavy
Bodine Sinyard

The October 28, 2025, meeting of the Land Committee was called to order by Lesley Reynolds, Chairwoman of the Board of Natural Resources.

Chairwoman Reynolds called on Harley Yancey, Chairman of the Land Committee, who called on Brent Womack, Chief of Real Estate, to present the action item.

Mr. Womack stated that the item seeks approval to enter into a 15-year lease with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for approximately 6.8± acres. He further stated that the lease covers the location of the Wildlife Resources Division and Law Enforcement Divisions Northeast Region offices in Hall County.

Mr. Womack stated that the lease agreement will provide essential office space for both divisions to support their regional operations. He further stated that over the past decade, the Department has made several improvements to the facilities. He added that under the terms of the lease the divisions will operate and maintain the office space and will pay an administrative fee for the duration of the agreement.

Mr. Womack requested favorable consideration.

A motion was made by Mr. Andrews seconded by Mr. Hufstetler and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend the Board adopt the Resolution to authorize the Commissioner to seek State Properties Commission approval to enter into a fifteen (15) year lease with the U.S. Army-Corps of Engineers for approximately 6.80± acres of the Wildlife Resources Division (WRD) and Law Enforcement Division (LED) Northeast Region Office, Lake Sidney Lanier, Hall County.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

**Minutes
Parks and Historic Sites Committee
DNR Boardroom
2 MLK Jr. Drive, SE
Suite 1252, East Tower**

**Tuesday, October 28, 2025
9:00 a.m.**

Committee Members

Mark Hennessy, Vice Chair
Nancy Addison (via conference call)
Randy Dellinger
Patrick Denney
Charles DePriest
Duncan Johnson
Bill Jones
Ray Lambert
Brent Layton
Bodine Sinyard
Harley Yancey
Lesley Reynolds, Board Chair, Ex-Officio

Board Members

Jeff Andrews
Joe Hatfield
Penn Hodge
Steve Hufstetler
Mike Peavy

The October 28, 2025, meeting of the Parks and Historic Sites Committee was called to order by Lesley Reynolds, Chairwoman of the Board of Natural Resources.

Chairwoman Reynolds called on Mark Hennessy, Vice Chair of the Parks and Historic Sites Committee, who called on Jessica James-Weems, Chief of Administration, to present to the Committee on the proposed amendments to Chapter 391-5-1-.03.

Ms. James-Weems stated that this action would update the rule to increase parking pass rates and adjust language regarding collection and validation of the parking pass. She further stated that these changes are proposed because the parking pass rate has not increased since 2009 and the division will start using technology to expedite the collection and validation of each parking pass. She added that the changes are not complex, should have no impact on public health or natural resources, and should have virtually no cost to implement.

Ms. James-Weems stated that the committee was briefed on this item at the August 26, 2025 board meeting and public notice was issued the same day. She further stated that eight comments were received, seven not in favor of increasing the parking pass rates and one in favor.

Ms. James-Weems requested a favorable consideration.

Vice Chairman Hennessy stated there were two speakers signed up to give comment on the action item.

Sherman Neal, The Sierra Club, spoke in opposition to the parking pass increase, citing that increasing the cost of entry would negatively impact veterans in the state.

Damon Kirkpatrick, Friends of State Parks, spoke in favor of the proposed amendments.

A motion was made by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Yancey, and carried unanimously that the Committee recommend that the Board adopt the Proposed Amendments to Rule 391-5-1-.03.

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, October 28, 2025
9:00 a.m.**

Committee Members

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

Board Members

Nancy Addison (via conference call)
Patrick Denney
Randy Dellinger
Bill Jones
Ray Lambert
Harley Yancey

The October 28, 2025, meeting of the Wildlife Resources Committee was called to order by Lesley Reynolds, Chairwoman of the Board of Natural Resources.

Chairwoman Reynolds called on Charles DePriest, Chairman of the Wildlife Resources Committee, who called on Tim Keyes, Wildlife Conservation Section Program Manager, to brief the committee of the proposed amendments to Bird Island Rule 391-4-7-.03.

Mr. Keyes stated that the Bird Island Rule was established in 1998. He further stated that these remote, offshore bars are areas that are the most diverse and productive nesting sites for beach-nesting birds and provide roosting and foraging habitats. He added that most species are conservation-priority species, meaning they are rare, threatened or declining.

Mr. Keyes stated that due to the constantly changing nature of the coastal and estuarine systems, the Rule requires updating. The proposal includes removing the Pelican Spit site from the rule; adding two dredge spoil islands, Brunswick Bird Island and Cumberland Dividings; including a natural bar, Ogeechee Bar, as closed seasonally; and updating the names of Williamson Island to Little Tybee Island Natural Area. He further stated that listing these sites explicitly in the Rule allows the Law Enforcement Division to enforce the closures. He added that the proposed amendments also clarify that certain nesting islands are completely closed to boat landing during the nesting season.

Mr. Keyes stated that following this briefing, the proposed amendments would be noticed to the public and open for public comment from October 31st through November 30th. He further stated the division plans to present the proposed amendments to the Board of Natural Resources for consideration and adoption at the January 30, 2026, meeting.

Chairman DePriest stated there were three speakers signed up to give comment on the proposed amendments.

Susan Inman, 100 Miles, spoke in support of the proposed amendment and additionally recommended DNR close Ogeechee Bar year-round; prohibit dogs on all islands; and add foundation material to newly created islands to increase resiliency.

Abby Sterling, Manomet Conservation Sciences, spoke in support of the proposed amendments and additionally recommended that DNR include specific provisions to add new sites and adjust rule as coast evolves and include year-round closures in key spots.

Bob Cooper, retired professor from UGA and serving on the Board of Directors of Birds Georgia and the Georgia Audubon Society, spoke in support of the proposed amendments and additionally recommended that DNR ban all dogs; permanently close the Ogeechee Bar; and include provisions that allow staff the flexibility to open and close these areas.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.