



**Sonoma County Fish and Wildlife Commission
Meeting Minutes
January 20, 2011 – 7:00pm**

Attending
Members

Crystal Norris
Dave Cook
Dave Lloyd
Jim Lynch
Andrew Pozzi
Darius Anderson
Al Ferris
Jeff Holden
Caroline Christian

Absent
Members

Gene Gaffney
Brock Dolman
Jo Bentz

Others

Demitri Esquivel, CA Dept. Fish & Game (DFG)
Blythe Marshman, CA DFG
Jim Snyder, CA DFG
Jim Moore, CA DFG
Sarah Millus, Audubon Canyon Ranch
Emiko Condeso, Audubon Canyon Ranch
Matt Cheever, District Attorney's Office
Dagny Thomas, Ag Commissioner's Office

Chairperson Crystal Norris calls the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

Adoption of Minutes

Crystal asks if there are any additions or corrections to the November 2010 minutes.

Andy Pozzi asks that the November 2010 minutes be amended to include his comment supporting the County/Fish and Wildlife Commission taking ownership of the jet boat DFG will potentially obtain from the Sonoma County Sheriff's Department through their grant request in the amount of \$4,397.46, for *Russian River Enforcement*, first read November 2010.

Andy Pozzi makes a motion to approve the minutes as amended, with a second by Al Ferris. Motion carried with nine 'Ayes', three 'Absent'.

Correspondence

- A. Correspondence from California State Fish & Game Commission regarding various regulatory actions
- B. *Outdoor California* magazine articles:
 - a. Russian River Coho
 - b. National Geographic's reality show featuring DFG wardens in the field

Financial Reports

In November 2010, the Abalone Fund received \$75.00 from Central Collections, with a fiscal year fund balance of \$5,000.00. The General Fund received \$2,652.32 from the Superior Court, \$853.98 from Probation, \$317.55 in interest, and paid out \$6.27 in office expenses, with a fiscal year fund balance of \$52,020.04.

In December 2010, the Abalone Fund received \$25.00 from Central Collections, and paid out grant #150 in the amount of \$4,726.95, with a fiscal year fund balance of \$273.05. The General Fund received \$1,723.46 from the Superior Court, \$346.27 from Probation, \$317.55 in interest, and paid out \$450.00 in office expenses, with a fiscal year fund balance of \$52,026.31.

Crystal asks for a motion to approve the November and December 2010 financial reports as presented. Al Ferris makes a motion to approve, with a second by Dave Lloyd. Motion carried with nine 'Ayes', three 'Absent'.

Old Business

Jim Moore and Jim Snyder, California Department of Fish and Game/Bodega Marine Lab, give a report on grant #134, *Detection of invasive freshwater mussels and the agent of abalone withering syndrome in Sonoma County and surrounding waters*

Abalone withering syndrome

Jim Moore explains withering syndrome is an abalone disease discovered in the Channel Islands in Southern California in 1985 and is spreading north. It is caused by bacteria that lives in the gut, and is responsible for the devastation of red and black abalone populations in that region.

In 2007 it was discovered in the Farralons, the first time it was discovered north of the Golden Gate Bridge; last year, it was discovered in Bodega Head. It affects all species of abalone in California, and has been detected in Europe and Thailand.

The presence of the pathogen does not necessarily mean the disease will occur, as it is very sensitive to low temperatures; it doesn't do well in lower temperatures. DFG conducted an experiment with red abalone, noting that 55 degree water seemed to be a cutoff point for dormancy in the disease occurring. When raised to 62 degrees, similar to Southern California temperatures, there was a sudden onset of withering syndrome and abalone dying.

DFG anticipates there will be less occurrence of the actual disease found on the Northern California coast, barring weather variations such as El Nino, when ocean temperatures rise.

Andy Pozzi asks if there is a specific temperature break that determines whether or not a population becomes infected. Jim Moore states that colder temperatures keep infection from becoming a disease.

Al Ferris asks if the bacteria affect human consumption. Jim says it has no affect on humans and cannot be transferred from the abalone. Al then asks where the disease originated from. Jim states that it is unknown, but they speculate it may have been come up in 1982-85 from Mexico during El Nino.

Jeff Holden asks how the pathogen spreads. Jim Moore states that it spreads via an oral/fecal transfer through kelp and ocean currents.

Andy would like to know if there are any abalone farms and if they are affected. Jim Moore explains that withering syndrome affects all abalone, and the abalone farms are affected by this. There are no longer any farms in Northern California, only Southern.

Invasive freshwater mussels

Jim Snyder explains that quagga and Zebra mussels are invasive Eurasian mussels. Quagga mussels first appeared in the US in the late 1980's in the Great Lakes region. The first Western state discovery of quagga mussels was in Lake Havasu in January 2007; the first zebra mussels were detected in January 2008 in the San Histo Reservoir just outside of Hollister.

The zebra mussel infestation is the only one so far, unfortunately the quagga mussel has spread throughout California. They attach to boats, rocks, piers, and infrastructure, causing ecological damage and economical problems. They completely change the entire food web in a water body. Mussels are fresh water only and not tolerant to salt water. There haven't been any new infestations discovered for awhile, which is a good sign.

DFG is in the process of sampling lakes around the northern part of the state. They have collected over 400 samples thus far, sampling Spring Lake, Lake Sonoma, and Lake Berryessa. They sample late spring, early summer, middle of summer and late summer/early fall. The results will be sent to the Water Manager of the local municipality being studied, and the Invasive Species Manager at DFG in Sacramento.

They are working with local water districts and municipalities to develop response and mitigation plans as mandated in the Fish and Game code.

The mussel larvae have a distinctive signature similar to a cross, which is easily detectable in plankton.

Andy asks if they are temperature sensitive like the abalone. Jim Snyder explains they can survive down to freezing temperatures,

Al Ferris asks if there is something akin to a poison that can be used on the mussels when the water levels drop and they are exposed. Jim Snyder says potassium chloride is used to kill them, but exposed mussels cannot survive very long out of water tend to die after 48 hours when exposed. Al then asks how they are spread via boats. Jim says the adults can survive if attached to boats transferred immediately from one body of water to another, and can survive in trapped water pockets in the manifold and other 'hidden' places on the boat.

Mr. Snyder thanks the Commission for the grant award used to purchase a centrifuge and partially fund a microscope used in their ongoing research.

Captain Steve Riske, DFG, is requesting a grant in the amount of \$4,397.46, for *Russian River Enforcement*, third reading

DFG warden Demitri Esquivel is in attendance on behalf of Captain Riske. Captain Riske has

examined and driven the boat and would like to proceed with the grant request. He's sent the paperwork to Paul Kraus at the California Department of General Services for processing.

Darius will call the Director of Fish and Game to get the final word on DFG accepting the boat now that he has confirmed Captain Riske wants it.

Crystal states that she will contact Captain Riske to confirm the details and that the Commission will vote on the grant request at the February meeting.

New Business

Introduction – Matt Cheever, Deputy District Attorney

Matt Cheever is with the Environmental and Consumer Protection Unit of the Sonoma County District Attorney's Office. He has worked environmental cases for the past year and a half, and has now taken over with the retirement of Jeff Holtzman. He states that environmental cases are a priority to the new District Attorney, Jill Ravitch,

He works closely with DFG wardens and says they are doing a great job.

Andy says he feels it is important to get the new judges on board regarding repeat offenders and asks Matt how to go about outreach. Matt says he will pass the message on to his supervisor. Crystal says that in the past, the judges didn't seem to have a comprehensive understanding of the types of cases that brought fines to the Commission and would like to see this change in the future – so the judges are aware that any restitution monies for cases prosecuted in the county go back toward projects in the county. Matt will look into it.

Crystal says she will forward Matt a list of previous Commission grant awards to pass on to the new District Attorney.

John Kelly, PhD – Director, Conservation Science & Habitat Protection, and Emiko Condeso, Biologist/GIS Specialist, Audubon Canyon Ranch, are requesting a grant in the amount of \$8,216.00, for *Heron and Egret Project – Sonoma County*, first reading

Emiko Condeso works with the Cypress Grove Research Center of Audubon Canyon Ranch and introduces Sarah Millus, the field biologist for this project.

Emiko explains they are not associated with the National Audubon Society. They are a small, local non-profit and perform monitoring work north of the Bay, covering nine counties, and work in conjunction with the San Francisco Bay Bird Observatory. There are 172 colonies being monitored, with a volunteer staff of 50. Volunteers track every nesting attempt per season and make four to five trips to each nest.

This monitoring project is different from other monitoring projects as they are studying breeding success rates, which is normally not easy to fit into one project. They are able to make associations with breeding failures and changes in habitat and environment. They disseminate the information to national wildlife refuges, open space districts, planning departments, and development agencies. They published an atlas in 2006 covering twenty years of nesting, and also publish a mapping product for use in land planning and development.

Jeff Holden asks what the impetus of this project was. Emiko explains that herons and egrets are excellent biological indicators, numerous in populous, sensitive to environmental changes, good wetlands indicators, bio-accumulators, the top predators in their ecosystem - and because they aren't endangered, they don't require special permits to be researched or observed. Jeff then asks if there are any major trends. Emiko says the trends indicate a stable and increasing population.

Al Ferris asks what percentage of the requested budget is designated for staffing hours. Emiko explains that most of the grant request amount is allocated towards staffing hours. They will receive over 500 volunteer hours for the project equating to over \$12,000.00 in in-kind contributions for labor.

Dave Cook asks if the egrets are a considered a species of concern. Emiko says they are not, but this type of research can alert them to any drastic changes that can affect their status. She says they are protected when they are nesting.

Caroline Christian states that organizations such as Audubon Canyon Ranch provide science that really means something; they provide publications and information that is useful to a wide spectrum of educational institutions and local agencies.

Jeff asks where the birds nest. Emiko says they nest primarily in wetlands.

Crystal states this is the first reading, and the second will be heard at the February 2011 meeting.

Fiscal Year 2011-2012 Budget

The Abalone Fund has projected revenue of \$5,000.00, and budgeted expenses of \$5,000.00 for 2011-2012 fiscal year.

The General Fund has projected revenue of \$41,000.00, and budgeted expenses of \$58,550.00 for the 2011-2012 fiscal year, with a net reserve of -\$17,500.00.

Jim Lynch makes a motion to approve the 2011-2012 fiscal year budgets as presented with a second by Andy Pozzi. Motion carried with nine 'Ayes', three 'Absent'.

Reports and Comments

Commission –

- Jeff Holden says it is lamb season at his house; there are lots of little lambs running around his yard.
- Dave Cook went diving at Salt Point in some kelp beds. He dove down 40 feet looking for rockfish and sighted a whale overhead – about 30 feet long, with a tail span of 6 feet.
- Jim Lynch is getting out a couple times a week for the end of duck season.

- Al Ferris says the Feather River Hatchery is inundated with steelhead and the salmon is better than it's been. He has also experienced a gray whale overhead while diving. He thanks the Commission Secretary for sending out a Holiday greeting to the Commission on his behalf in December while he was ill.
- Andy Pozzi asks Darius to enquire with the Director of Fish and Game about the new fishing license procedure and format.
- Darius Anderson has been spending a lot of time in Sacramento recently dealing with the massive budget cuts proposed by the new Governor. He says the new Governor is nonsense and is realistic about cuts that need to happen. There are going to be major redevelopment cuts to local municipalities. The cuts will affect a current redevelopment project he is involved with on Treasure Island. If tax increases are not approved, the school year could be cut up to eight weeks. The Director of Fish and Game is now on 'Acting Director' status until the Governor reorganizes the Department. He will likely continue to work for the Department, but no longer be the Director.
- Caroline Christian says the spring 2011 semester begins in two weeks at Sonoma State. She discusses the massive budget cuts coming to higher education and lauds the Fish and Wildlife Commission for offering annual scholarships.

Scholarships Discussion

Per Caroline's request, the Commission brainstorms potential options for revamping the requirements for the scholarship applicants regarding:

- Including post-graduate students
- Creating more scholarship awards dividing up the current amount of \$5,000.00 budgeted annually
- Creating one or two more awards at the current base of \$2,500.00 per award
- Allocating one award for undergraduate and one for post-graduate students

Crystal states the discussion will be revisited in June 2011, after this year's scholarships have been awarded.

With no further business, the meeting is adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Dagny Thomas
Commission Secretary