

**Wisconsin Conservation Congress and Department of Natural Resources**

**Ad Hoc Open Water Duck Hunting Committee**

**Meeting Minutes**

**Comfort Suites – Wisconsin Room**

**N5780 Kinney Road**

**Portage, WI**

**July 11, 2009**

Meeting called to order at 9:02.

Open Water Ad Hoc Committee Chairman Dick Koerner took the roll call.

Committee members present: Dick Koerner WCC, Todd Cook WCC, Guy McFarren WCC, Jeff Scott WCC, Rick Koenig WCC, Paul Gettelman WCC, Mitch Fisher WCC, Allen Shook WCC, Jon Bergquist WWF, Mark Kakatsch WWA, Roger Hanson GB Duck Hunters, Scott Wisniewski Doctari Long Lines, Richard Diaz Author of Resolution, John Holmes WWA, Dick Becker WCC, Lee Wiesner, Kent Van Horn WDNR, James Christopoulos WDNR.

Excused: Cal Barstow WWF, Todd Schaller WDNR, and Chris Jeffords Property Owner.

Chairman Dick Koerner thanked the committee from volunteering for this committee, and making the March meeting with the bad weather and icy road. Koerner then introduced a guest biologist from the WDNR from the Mississippi River and the two biologists from the USFWS Rick Frietsche and Eric Nelson. Frietsche and Nelson have worked on the Upper Mississippi River National Refuge for many years.

First order of business was to approve the minutes from March 21 meeting. Kent van Horn then revisited the motions from the minutes at the last meeting to make sure how we camp to the list of 13 lakes. Al Shook reminded Kent that in order to revisit this motions that we needed a motions to revisit the motion. Regarding the sunset rule; there will be no sunset rule, instead the decision was made to reevaluate the issue after 5 years.

Todd Cook's motion was seconded by Paul Gettelman to approve the minutes from the March 21 meeting. Motion passed with voice vote.

Kent thanked the committee and talked about the decision to form this committee. Kent asked the USFWS representatives from the Mississippi refuge to come to the meeting to discuss the federal rules on the river. We are looking at expanding open water hunting on the refuge pools.

Rick Frietsche then introduced Eric Nelson, refuge biologist from the Mississippi River. He's been with the service since the early nineties. Nelson then gave the committee a slide presentation on the history of the Upper Mississippi National Refuge.

The Upper Mississippi Refuge was established in 1924 for fish and wildlife. In 1930 the locks and dams went in pool at 14 to the lower end of Lake Pepin, then pools 4 to 14. Pools were designed to maintain a nine foot depth for navigation. Another act of congress act formed the Comprehensive Conservation Plan or CCP. Started meetings in 2001 will finish the plan in 2009. Closed areas for water fowl were crucial. Concerns for migrating waterfowl were loss of habitat, distribution of waterfowl and others. There were major losses of habitat over the years, mostly from flooding, wind and wave action

The loss of habitat in the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois, moved diver ducks to use the Mississippi River for their migration. Pools 7, 8, 9, and 13 hold most of the divers; dabblers as well, except for pool 13. Pool 7, 8, and 9 are used by migration tundra swans. Why are these pools so good? The food was there for the ducks and there are large areas for open water which reduced human disturbance for birds. 'When the refuge was established in 1924 most of the refuge was closed. A few years later open areas were reduced. The areas were not sanctuaries; they were closed for hunting and trapping; but not boating or fishing,' Nelson said.

New rules provided better distribution of ducks, carrying capacity, food resource and focus on areas that have good duck food plants. The new CCP closes areas with good food and opens other areas with less food. Island creations and barriers were installed; to improve food development areas were drawn down over the summer to promote weed growth. With areas closed to motor boat travel, they are asking voluntary avoidance of areas under 1000 acres. They are asking people to avoid travel to those areas to leave the birds undisturbed. The benefits to hunters is that the closed areas will hold more birds. Rather than a loss, there should be added opportunities. There are 250,000 hunter visits on the refuge per year.

The CCP eliminated permanent blinds on pools 12, 13, 14 and added no open water hunting on pool 11. We looking at pool 9, it is an international keystone for canvasbacks. The service begins aerial surveys during the first week in November each year. Refuge counts are as high as 265,000 canvas backs on the river; that's 67 percent of all canvas backs. The ten year average shows 61 percent of all birds on the refuge are on pool 9. There is 7500 acres of open water on pool 9. Average amount of birds were 72,000 birds on the open area of pool 9. Why so many? Abundant food and no open water hunting attract the birds. There is some disturbance because of the travel to hunting areas, commercial fisherman, and barge travel.

Having concluded his presentation, Nelson entertained questions from the committee.

Mark Kakatsch asked where most of the divers enter the river - pool 7, 8 and 9 very quickly said Nelson.

Jeff Scott voiced concern about hunters in his area will lose more hunting opportunities in Grant and Crawford counties.

There was much discussion about others pools and closings. Kent brought the group back to pool 9 and why the pool is closed to open water hunting. The CCP uses the States rules of no open water hunting on pool 9 because it protects the birds. If pool 9 is opened the feds will move to close the area to or make a sanctuary.

Kent made it very clear that his hands are tied and there is nothing the State or this committee can do to change or expand open water hunting on the Mississippi River Refuge. If we open

areas the USFWS will move to close other areas the refuge. Rick believes that pool 4 hunting will improve.

Mitch Fisher asked why we can't open more of the shore line. The river is more than 2.5 miles wide at Ferryville, over 12,300 feet wide. He asked why that pool, pool 9, can't be opened to open water hunting within 500 or 1000 feet of shore. Nelson reiterated that any change in State regulations that allow more open water on pool 9 will result in new Federal rules that would counter those changes. The USFWS will not move or compromise on their decision.

Al Shook said we should not be greedy and leave the area alone, pool 9. It doesn't make sense to try to kill ducks out in the middle of pool 9. This area has global importance we should leave it alone. Scott habitat improvements are planned for down the road. Rick talked said that draw downs and island construction will improve habitat and expand hunting spots and opportunities.

The committee took a break at 10:40.

Meeting called back to order 10:50

Kent opened that after the last ad hoc committee meeting the group came up with the 13 lakes. He discussed with other DNR staff if there was any issues that they knew about. Next they will go to local groups.

In Vilas County, there are three possible lakes and Van Horn spoke with Linda Winn, the biologist up there. She didn't have much knowledge of open water ducks. But she didn't have any problems with the lakes that they chose. She recommended that Kent talk with the tribe because one of the lakes, Fence Lake, was on part of the reservations. Roger Hanson said that members of the Green Bay duck hunters association have hunted on all three of the Vilas County lakes and they think those were good choices. He added that there will be some good duck hunting on these lakes.

Al shook asked if we should vote on these lakes and that we go through them county by county from north to south. Dick Koerner said that he will talk to the Congresses county chairmen on these lakes and the decisions of opening these lakes to open water duck hunting. Kent said before any of the changes are implemented they will check with the local clubs in the areas.

Van Horn said that Grindstone is unique because the tribal boundary splits the lake in half. Kent said he talked with the tribal biologist and he was not encouraged. He then talked to the DNR lawyer and there is no legal reason not to hunt. This may become an issue, not sure.

Guy McFarren asked why Lac Courte Oreilles was voted down; it was because of fishing conflicts.

Shawano Lake was discussed and the biologist Kay Medaris said it may help to move the ducks off the lake to prevent so many of them die from the snail parasite that results in the lakes annual waterfowl die off. Roger said Green Bay Duck Hunters use this lake a lot. There may be some opposition from traditional shore duck hunters that use Shawano Lake.

Butt de Morts and Winneconne should not be much of an issue with user conflict of fisherman. Brian Woodberry said that there should be a better marked boundary between the two lakes

because Winneconne will not be open or it was voted down in the last meeting Van Horn and Koerner will talk to the clubs on Butt de Morts.

Castle Rock Lake: Not too much feedback but a concern is that it's a narrow lake. It may be difficult to implement a 1000 foot rule.

The Congress members here will talk about these lakes and opportunities at the district meetings in August.

Lake Puckaway is in Paul Gettelman area. One thing to be aware of is a peninsula that divided the lake up in a voluntary avoidance area. We have to be careful to make sure this stays the same if the lake is open to hunting.

Beaver Dam Lake: Brenda Kelly would like to measure the impact of opening the hunting. She may try to do some research. Opposition may be from the local land owners that hunt from shore. There may be conflict because it is a long and narrow lake. One third of the lake is in the city of beaver dam. There is not much left after the 1000 feet buffer. Also there are a lot of islands that may make it tough to find open areas. There are land owners that earn income by renting blinds.

Lake Wisconsin: Has existing quality duck hunting spaces out there. The local biologist thinks there is a good opportunity. Local warden thinks this could be trouble with local land owners because of the shot falling back down to earth. One of the best walleye fishing spots in the mid-west.

Lake Koshkonong: Bottom line, it has established land owners that are duck hunters. There are clubs on this lake. This lake may be a big problem in that it may pit duck hunters against duck hunters. The wardens 4 of them responded that they would be supportive to open water hunting. It may be best to do this as a 3 year trial period.

Boats will have to be anchored except on Lake Michigan, and green lake.

John Bergquist asked what the process is now that this group has picked these lakes. John would want this to go to the public like the spring hearings for public impute. Kent will request that Richard Koerner ask for local input. After the issues have been ironed out then we would go to the board to get their blessing for a state wide vote on the spring hearings.

The question was asked of the time line, are we trying to get this down for a vote on the spring hearings in 2010? Kent doesn't think we have the time to get it done this year. Not enough time to make presentations to the lake associations and other groups. Even after the presentations and local input, and if the NRB approves the new regulations, it would have to go for a legislative revue. The earliest this thing could happen would be 2012 duck season.

This is the last of the three meetings for the WCC and WDNR Ad Hoc Open Water Duck Hunting Committee.

Motion to adjourn by al shook, second by Mitch fisher, and the meeting adjourned at 11:57 am.

Respectfully Submitted by Mitchell J Fisher.