

MINUTES

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

JANUARY 10, 2008

Lansing Center
333 E. Michigan
Lansing

PRESENT OR THE NRC

Keith Charters, Chairman, Traverse City
Frank Wheatlake, Vice-Chairman, Big Rapids
Mary Brown, Kalamazoo
Hurley J. Coleman, Jr., Saginaw
Darnell Earley, Lansing/Saginaw
John Madigan, Munising
J. R. Richardson, Ontonagon

PRESENT FOR STAFF

Peter Manning, Legal Counsel
Rebecca Humphries, Director
Dennis Fox, Chief of Staff
Dennis Fedewa, Chief Deputy
Arminda Koch, Resource Management Deputy
Jim Ekdahl, UP Field Deputy
Teresa Gloden, Assistant to the DNR

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

Chairman Charters called the Committee of the Whole meeting of the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) to order at 3:10 p.m.

Director Humphries thanked all who have supported her recently in the passing of her husband Bob Humphries.

Budget Update

Following is a summary of Director Humphries' discussion on the status of the Game and Fish Fund balance:

There has been much discussion recently about the fund balance in the DNR's Game and Fish Protection Fund. There is indeed a \$10 million fund balance, and that's caused a great deal of controversy. People aren't angry about not having to layoff conservation officers. People aren't angry about not having a license increase. People are angry about the department's failure to communicate appropriately and in a timely fashion that there was no longer an immediate need for a hunting and fishing license fee increase.

I appreciate and understand...and agree...we should have done a more thorough job of communicating our balance. And for that, I take full responsibility and apologize.

At this point, I think it might be helpful to talk about how we ended up with a higher-than-anticipated balance in the Game and Fish Protection Fund.

There are three reasons we finished the fiscal year with a larger fund balance than expected:

1. The DNR realized significant savings by adhering to the Governor's Executive directives to freeze hiring, trim travel, and reduce other forms of spending;
2. There was an increase from the projected number of hunting licenses sold. We had projected a 1.7 percent decrease, based on sales trends over the past several years. A portion of the increase was due to recruitment efforts, such as the introduction of the apprentice licenses and the lowering of the hunting age which occurred in 2006, and;
3. The interest and earnings on investments from the Game and Fish Protection Trust Fund experienced better returns than were forecasted.

To sum it up, the DNR did not spend its full appropriation and revenue came in higher, which gave the DNR a larger than anticipated fund balance.

One of the issues that has caused such anger and controversy is timing...when did DNR staff know? In December 2006, DNR administrative staff projected a balance of \$3.8 million at the end of the fiscal year that would end September 30, 2007. In March 2007, executive directives were issued that severely constrained our spending. That constrained spending resulted in \$4.1 million worth of savings.

In October 2007, the DNR announced at our NRC meeting that a revised balance of \$7.8 million in the Game and Fish Protection Fund was projected. While staff projected a balance of \$7.8 million at the end of fiscal year 2007, it was also projected at this time a deficit of \$2.5 million by the end of fiscal year 2008 and an even bigger deficit--\$13 million--at the end of fiscal year 2009.

This is an example of when we should have done a better job of making sure we were being heard about the fund balance, our financial situation was changing, and that there may not be an immediate need for the license package.

Instead, we believed that to best manage the resource, we needed to continue to pursue a two-year budget reduction strategy based on the projected deficits for the next two fiscal years. That reduction strategy included layoffs.

In late November, we closed the books with a \$10 million fund balance in the Game and Fish Protection Fund. At that time, it became crystal clear that neither layoffs nor additional revenue was necessary to remain solvent for another year.

While trying to ascertain why our fund balance was higher than our projections, I notified Chairman Charters.

On December 10, I met with my leadership team to notify them that they need not implement their reduction plans.

That same day, Rodney Stokes and I called each of the recently hired 14 conservation officers to let them know they would not be laid off.

Director Humphries sent out an email to all DNR employees on December 11 and also addressed the topic at a legislative committee meeting that same day. On December 13, she sent an email to the license package work group discussing the fund balance.

So, where do we go from here? Director Humphries recognizes these events have created a gap between DNR's stakeholders, the NRC, and the department, and she acknowledged the need and desire to bridge that gap and regain trust and rebuild credibility.

The DNR budget is Director Humphries' top priority. The crux of the issue is the need to improve how to communicate internally and externally. Therefore, she has implemented monthly meetings with all the division and office chiefs to make sure the budget is tracked, to ensure timely decisions are made, and to manage the budget as it deserves. These monthly updates will be provided to the NRC and the Hunting and Fishing License Program Development Work Group members, and will be made available to anyone else who is interested.

Staff will be working to better manage the DNR's budget, spend appropriations and rebuild programs for the future.

One step taken in that direction occurred on January 9 when Chairman Charters and Director Humphries met with Governor Granholm and were successful in getting her commitment to allow the DNR to hire employees in a timely fashion and to provide relief from the spending constraints. The DNR administrative staff is also currently working to develop better, more realistic projections of expenditures based on spending patterns, rather than on appropriated levels. Better, more realistic projections of revenue will be developed, and that may require outside help.

The DNR welcomes any analysis or outside review, the first of which is from the Senate Fiscal Agency. As always, full disclosure of all department financial information is offered.

This situation has created credibility problems for the Department, for the NRC and for each of us personally. Director Humphries said she is committed to fixing the problem. She said that she believes all agree that there is too much at stake to lose sight of the fact that the DNR needs to find long-term, stable funding for conservation to ensure our natural heritage for the next generation and beyond.

Commissioner Earley thanked the Director for the forthright analysis of the fund balance. Considering his experience with governmental fund balances, he said he is happier that there is a \$10 million fund balance rather than a deficit and understands how this can happen. He said that a "fund balance" does not mean there is money in the bank and does not believe funds have been mismanaged. The problem that exists is with the communication process and said better communications are needed.

Commissioner Madigan said he had attended a sports group meeting in Escanaba recently and concern was expressed about the program cuts that were being made and the resulting fund balance. The sports men and women questioned what the DNR is doing to provide the services being paid for through hunting and fishing license fees.

Director Humphries said there is not much flexibility in how the monies are being spent, but that managers are committed to looking at the programs and determining where funds are needed. **Commissioner Madigan** said that, as difficult as this meeting was, he was amazed that the resources users say they want to assist the DNR but didn't feel they were adequately informed.

Commissioner Coleman applauded the Director for coming forth with the information and for her honesty. He said because the DNR followed the Executive Directives, the result was not a surplus, but it is actually a reduction in services. He believes that the disappointment by the public is the lack of communication earlier on rather than the fact that there is a fund balance. He said now is a good time to create the story of how to put the DNR budget back together.

Commissioner Brown commended the DNR for managing the budget and keeping the DNR solvent.

Commissioner Wheatlake referenced a January 9, 2008 memorandum from Jessica Runnels, Senate Fiscal Agency, regarding the "Hunting and Fishing License Revenue" explaining where the \$10 million fund balance came from. In this memo, Ms. Runnels states, "If the current Fund balance is used to cover all the appropriations for FY 2007-08, the DNR estimates that it has a \$12.0 million deficit pending for FY 2008-09 and a \$15.0 million deficit for FY 2009-10. The structural problem of having expenditures that exceed annual revenue still needs to be addressed for future fiscal years...Just to maintain programs at current levels requires increased revenue to cover rising expenditures due to inflation, growing utility costs, and collective bargaining agreements. The current model for funding these programs is insufficient to meet needs and expectations. There are three options available: increase hunting and fishing fees to meet the appropriation and expected expenditures, decrease expenditures through program reductions, or find an alternative method of supporting game and fish programs in the State." **Commissioner Wheatlake** said the bottom line is, if the resources are to be cared for, more money is needed.

Commissioner Richardson said the mistake made was with communication of the fund balance issues. However, the DNR did a good job in cutting costs to end up with a fund balance. He will review the budget monthly.

Chairman Charters said that it is not his intent to justify the \$10 million fund balance in the Game and Fish Protection Fund. When he was made aware of it he was embarrassed and felt his and the DNR's credibility was at issue. He said he owes an apology to the many people who "stuck their necks out" on behalf of the resource and pushed for a license fee increase. There was a definite failure to communicate. He said he should have stopped the push for hunting and fishing license fee increases in August 2007 and moved forward with issues for 2008. Certainly by October, he said, the DNR should have communicated that the projections were inaccurate. Since that was not done, **Chairman Charters** gave his solemn commitment to improve future communications and projections and will proceed based on what is the best for the

resource. He said what is best for the resource is to have sound, solid funding to move forward. He apologized for the miscommunication, said he is embarrassed, but said that he is committed to move forward.

NAMING POLICIES

Dennis Fedewa reviewed the proposed NRC Policy #26.24-07, Criteria for Naming Department-managed Lands and Facilities and the proposed Department Policy Governing Private-Sector Partnerships and Donations.

The NRC policy on naming rights has not materially changed since its adoption in October 1978 and subsequent revision in 1987. As written, the policy addresses only the naming of Department-managed lands and facilities and endorses the use of names that reflect geographic characteristics, cultural attributes and geographic location as the criteria for naming such lands and facilities. It also prohibits the naming of lands and facilities after individuals, except at the discretion of the NRC. The DNR recommends the NRC update Policy No. 26.24-07 to allow naming rights within a structural framework governing private-sector partnerships and donations. Naming rights in perpetuity would require approval by the NRC and would have to meet the absolute highest standards of value for the privilege of assigning a name to a DNR-managed land or facility.

Mr. Fedewa also presented the proposed policy providing direction and procedures to follow when promulgating a sponsorship opportunity or handling one received unsolicited by the DNR. This is developed to be responsive to new and emerging private-sector opportunities and the need to work effectively in meeting both DNR requirements and those of the prospective private-sector partner. The proposed policy includes very strong language on the issues of ethics, the selection of appropriate partners, limitations and the critical issues of proportionality in recognizing sponsors and partners. This proposed policy has been reviewed by the Waterways Commission, the Citizens' Committee for Michigan State Parks and the Natural Resources Trust Fund Board.

WINTER OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES UPDATE

Ron Olson, Chief, Parks and Recreation, distributed a summary of over 470 events and activities held in Michigan state parks or recreation areas in 2007 – 144 of which were held for the first time last year. He also distributed a list of 102 scheduled events planned for January through March, 2008. Many of the activities are in the planning stages, and more will be added as time goes on. **Mr. Olson** said he greatly appreciates the work and dedication by staff that goes into these events as well as developing partnerships. Many of the staff put in off-duty time toward these activities.

Mr. Olson said that Motor Vehicle Permit sales were good over the holidays.

DIRECTOR'S ACTION ITEMS

Director Humphries reported there are two Director's decisions pending from Kennecott Eagle Minerals Company in Marquette. One is the "Mining and Reclamation Plan pursuant to Metallic Mineral Lease M602 in Marquette County." The other is the "Surface Use Lease for nickel and copper sulfide mining productions facility in Marquette

County.” These are decisions being made as land managers on behalf of the State of Michigan – not as a regulatory agency.

Staff is continuing to work on a few remaining areas of concern. Therefore, **Director Humphries** will not be rendering a decision on these issues at this meeting. She believes it is extremely important to make sure that the process is thorough, transparent as possible and has the ability to withstand the scrutiny of any appeals that may follow a decision.

The areas that are still being reviewed by staff include the following:

- 1) Public comment has focused on the desirability of using state property for this purpose. The DNR asked Kennecott to provide specific rationale and data to support the assertion that the proposed surface facility and portal location were the best available from a resource, operations, and safety perspective. While Kennecott’s response did support the positive elements of the proposed surface location, it did not discuss how the proposed site is superior to other available options.
- 2) The potential for subsidence over the ore body during mining operations continues to be reviewed. We asked for details in how Kennecott planned to monitor for subsidence. Their response raised additional questions about the systems planned for monitoring for subsidence and the planned response if subsidence is detected.
- 3) The mining and reclamation plan identifies an anticipated maximum rate of water inflow into the mine. The DNR is reviewing corrective action plans if water inflow exceeds the planned maximum.

Staff recently met with the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, and is still reviewing the issues raised during the discussion on the pending decisions.

Commissioner Coleman noted that he has received a great deal of mail and e-mails containing public comments on Kennecott. He said it is difficult to balance legal requirements with public perception but the regulatory and legal requirements need to be clearly identified.

Commissioner Madigan asked for an open communication process as this issue proceeds.

The Committee of the Whole meeting adjourned at 4:15 p.m., and the Public Appearances portion of the NRC meeting convened at 4:30 p.m.

RETIREMENT ANNOUNCEMENT OF JIM EKDAHL, UPPER PENINSULA FIELD DEPUTY

Director Humphries reported that on February 1, 2008, the DNR will say goodbye to one of its loyal, long-time friends. Jim Ekdahl is retiring, and we will see one of the best people to ever serve the citizens of Michigan go on to his new role as retiree, bird hunter, grandfather, husband and die hard Yooper.

She said it is with regret that we part ways with Jim, but his service to the State of Michigan and the DNR has been outstanding, and he can walk away knowing that his time was well served and his professionalism appreciated more than she can ever fully express.

Jim began his career in the DNR in 1974 as a Conservation Officer, stationed in Norway and Sault Ste. Marie after graduation from Michigan State University and a short stint as a patrol officer with the Charlevoix County Sheriff's Department. In 1980 he was promoted to Sergeant serving as Area Law Supervisor for Oakland County, serving his dues as many a Yooper must, south of the Mackinac Bridge.

In 1983 he was named as the Assistant Superintendent of the Special Investigations Unit for Law Enforcement Division, based in Lansing. In 1985 he was promoted to District Law Supervisor in Baraga, allowing him to return to his beloved Upper Peninsula.

Jim Ek Dahl is currently the Upper Peninsula Field Deputy, having been named to that position 1998, after working as the interim U.P. Field Deputy for a year prior to his permanent appointment to the position. In his role as the U.P. Field Deputy, he is responsible for the oversight of all U.P. operations for the DNR and serves as the representative of the DNR Director in the Upper Peninsula.

Jim serves another major role in DNR, as the Statewide Coordinator of Native American Issues, a position he assumed in June 1994. In that capacity, Jim has served as the DNR's lead on all tribal issues, including treaty rights, negotiations and maintenance of communication continuity with the tribes of Michigan and Wisconsin.

This past fall, years of intense negotiations with five Native American Tribes in the 1836 Treaty area culminated in a consent decree which will guide inland hunting and fishing rights for those Native Americans into the future.

This monumental achievement is historical in its scope and impact, and will be looked upon for generations to come as one of the key documents of guiding principle in its time.

He serves on the DNR's Management Team, the Statewide Council and the Land Exchange Review Committee in addition to his regular assignments.

Jim will settle into his retirement in Baraga County with his wife Peggy. His children and grandchildren can look upon Jim with great pride, knowing that he served a long and exemplary career.

Director Humphries and the NRC extended their best wishes to Jim and Peggy and wished them a fond farewell from the DNR and said all will miss his great sense of humor, witty comments, professional manner and friendship. He will be missed.

The NRC and the DNR presented Jim with a white pine plaque recognizing his 33 plus years of employment with the DNR.

Creig Grey, DNR Law Enforcement, Roscommon, said that Jim was instrumental in getting conservation officers semi-automatic guns versus the revolvers previously used,

creating more safety for the officers. **Grey** honored him with a retired conservation officer badge.

Jim said it is not easy to leave a job when you know that every day you work you make a difference with what you do. He thanked everyone for many good years and for recognizing his years of service.

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Chairman Charters recognized an elementary school class from Grand Blanc who were attending to experience a public meeting. These students had sent letters to Director Humphries with their opinions relative to nickel mining.

PUBLIC APPEARANCES

Johnathan W. Edgerly, Augusta, thanked the DNR for allowing an early disabled antlerless deer hunt at Ft. Custer and said it was a very satisfying. He was disappointed to hear that a National Guardsman who was severely injured in war, but could not qualify to hunt from a standing vehicle. He supported the proposed special firearm deer hunt for disabled hunters, Wildlife Conservation Order, Amendment No. 1 of 2008.

George Lindquist, UP Whitetails Association, Inc., proposed giving deer hunters statewide the option of one buck tag for the year or buy the combination license with both tags restricted – one three points to the side, the other four points to the side. One buck hunters would still have the option of antlerless tags, where available. From a biological standpoint, UP Whitetails believes these proposed regulations will save a lot of yearling bucks, which will, in turn, help buck-to-doe ratios and start getting some age classes back into the buck herd. The one buck hunter would still have the option of antlerless tags where available. **Mr. Lindquist** said this proposal is supported by UP Whitetails, the UP Sportsmen's Alliance and Quality Deer Management Association in the Upper Peninsula. **Commissioner Madigan** said the proposal has merit, but asked that Wildlife Division biologists prepare the pros and cons of it to be discussed in the next couple of months at the NRC Policy Committee on Wildlife and Fisheries.

Commissioner Wheatlake said he supports the concept but will need to review it further. **Commissioner Madigan** recommended getting as much support from hunters statewide. This issue was referred to the NRC Policy Committee on Wildlife and Fisheries.

Morris Langworthy, Osceola County Parks Commission, requests approval of a lease from the DNR to operate and develop Sunrise Lake County Park located within State forest boundaries. **Lynne Boyd, Chief, Forest, Mineral and Fire Management**, said that the rules state that only rustic campgrounds can be located within State forest boundaries and the campground being proposed by Osceola County is not considered rustic. Options include: 1) Osceola County buy the property and the State forest boundary would need to be moved; or 2) the County would run the campground as rustic. Discussion ensued relative to the funding source restrictions on this property. Since this property was purchased with Game and Fish Protection Funds, Federal assent regulations would prohibit the lease of this property for the purposes identified by

Osceola County. This issue was referred to the NRC Policy Committee on Land Management for further consideration.

Chauncy Moran expressed appreciation to the DNR employees for their stewardship of Michigan's precious natural resources. He requested that Director Humphries not sign the lease to Kennecott and reviewed his reasoning for requesting delay including the following:

1. All of the permits necessary for implementation have not been acquired;
2. It is not clear where the rock ends at the surface as it may be covered which leaf litter or woody debris;
3. Worst case estimates for flooding on the property are incorrect.

Dave Borgeson, Michigan Resource Stewards, supports a healthy deer herd. He proposed the following: shun high fenced hunting; avoid allowing crossbows in the early archery season; ban baiting; abandon the muzzleloader season; eliminate the early youth hunt or restrict it to antlerless deer only; control technology. He encouraged the DNR and the NRC to be vigilant and aggressive in protecting the quality of hunting and its public image by adopting regulations that set high standards of sportsmanship and defend the spirit of fair chase.

Chairman Charters asked **Mr. Borgeson** why he didn't mention going from using longbows to compound bows when discussing changing and improving technologies such as muzzleloaders. **Commissioner Wheatlake** said he appreciates the input, but isn't sure he agrees with eliminating the youth hunt or restricting it to does only.

Bob McReavy, Roscommon, appreciates the reduction in doe permits on public lands to zero in Roscommon County, but recommends eliminating doe permits on private lands also. He said that major changes need to occur immediately to get hunting heritage moving and requested that clearcutting in Roscommon County cease.

Ed Spinazzola, Quality Deer Management Association, said that quality deer management demonstrations have shown positive harvest results. He recommended eliminating quality deer management guidelines and suggested decisions be made on the merits of the quality deer management results. He supports the proposal made earlier in the meeting by George Lindquist where one has the choice of purchasing a single buck license good for all seasons with the current antler restrictions in place and the second license choice being a combination license but both with antler restrictions. He recommended that combo license buyers get a free antlerless tag, good for any season and any location in Michigan.

For the southern area of the Lower Peninsula, the above rule should be viewed as a learning curve for hunters. Then after a few years, the Wildlife Division should evaluate bioharvest data for possible antler rule restriction changes. Discussion ensued relative to existing demonstrations in effect in Michigan in Leelenau and Iosco counties.

Bryan Reynolds, UP Sportsman's Alliance, believes the Director relative to her analysis of the Game and Fish Protection Fund balance. **Mr. Reynolds** supports the proposal presented earlier by George Lindquist, but does not support managing deer harvest the same throughout the state. He believes something needs to be done to

improve the deer age classes, specifically bucks. **Commissioner Brown** asked how one might manage deer when 96 percent of the land in her area in Kalamazoo is private land.

Richard Cronk, Rolling Oaks Archery, has hunted since 1949 and opened his business in Roscommon in 1996. His business grew until 2000, then flattened for two years, and declined after 2002. Area hunters have told him they have seen deer sightings decline and saw less in this past year. He personally has observed less deer and more clearcutting.

Mike Thompson, St. Helen, said clearcutting is rampant in his area. He has predominantly oak in his area.

Ron Easterly, Roscommon, said he is still very frustrated with how clearcutting is occurring in Roscommon County and said he does not want globalization on Michigan's forests.

Commissioner Madigan inquired if there is a decline in deer in the area due to the lack of habitat.

Larry Helvie, Crawford County, questioned if clearcutting timber harvest revenue is going to Lansing? **Director Humphries** responded that the revenues from timber harvest go into the Forest Development Fund. He also questioned what gives the DNR the right to sell land for parks in Roscommon. **Director Humphries** replied that the DNR has statutory authority to do so.

Ed Nellist, Roscommon County Board of Commissioners, supports the proposed theme park in Crawford County and believes it would benefit the economy in the area.

Dave Smith, Beaverton, supports a ban on deer baiting.

Jeness Weigand said shooting at the Island Lake Shooting Range causes noise and lead pollution and the shooting sheds have not proved to reduce noise levels. She requested a sound analysis be conducted with surrounding homes and requested a meeting with Director Humphries.

Ellen Nitz requested a meeting with the DNR, NRC, Island Lake Shooting Range concessionaire Pat Liske, Green Oak Township, etc., regarding the noise levels from the shooting range.

Tom Barnes, Michigan Association of Timbermen, is a forester and a wildlife manager. He has hunted on public lands in Crawford County and said the hunting is great in areas where the trees have been cut. He said forest and wildlife management go hand-in-hand, and deer utilize the regeneration areas. He said that forestry is a \$12 million industry in Michigan and believes the DNR is doing a good job of managing the forests and wildlife.

Chairman Charters said before **Jim Ekdahl** leaves the spot as timekeeper for the NRC public appearances for the last time, he doesn't think the people of Michigan will ever understand what Jim has done for the resource. He said State government and the citizens of Michigan owe Jim a debt of gratitude for what he has done. **Jim** responded that he has enjoyed his employment with the DNR and the company of the NRC.

The Public Appearances portion of the meeting adjourned at 6:29 p.m., and the Regular Meeting of the NRC convened at 6:29 p.m.

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APPROVAL OF MINUTES – DECEMBER 6, 2007 NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION MEETING

Commissioner Coleman made a motion, supported by Commissioner Wheatlake, for approval with one correction: Page 10 should state that NRC Chairman Charters appointed Commissioner J. R. Richardson as a Committee member, versus Committee Chairman Coleman. Motion unanimously carried with the correction.

SPECIAL FIREARM DEER HUNT FOR DISABLED HUNTERS WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ORDER, AMENDMENT NO. 1 OF 2008

Commissioner Madigan made a motion, supported by Commissioner Earley, for approval. Motion unanimously carried.

FALCONRY REGULATIONS FOR 2007-2008, WILDLIFE CONSERVATION ORDER, AMENDMENT NO. 2 OF 2008

Commissioner Madigan made a motion, supported by Commissioner Earley, for approval. Motion unanimously carried.

DIRECTOR'S ACTION

Director Humphries said she will approve all Director's Action items on the Agenda except: **One Mining and Reclamation Plan pursuant to Metallic Mineral Lease M602 in Marquette County; and One Surface Use Lease for nickel and copper sulfide mining production facility in Marquette County.**

NRC POLICY COMMITTEE ON WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES - Report

The NRC Policy Committee on Wildlife and Fisheries held a meeting at 2:15 p.m. on January 10, 2008 at the Lansing Center, Lansing. Commissioners Madigan (Committee Chair), Earley and Charters were present for the Committee. Commissioners Brown, Coleman, Richardson and Wheatlake were also present (see attached Minutes).

COMMISSIONER REPORTS

Commissioner Madigan attended meetings with sports groups relative to the budget and other DNR matters; received several letters regarding issues including the Kennecott Mine lease; and looks forward to ice fishing.

Commissioner Coleman said he supports Director Humphries and staff and recommended moving forward on budget matters.

Commissioner Wheatlake said the biggest validation of the current budget situation for the DNR is from the Senate Fiscal Agency memorandum Re: Hunting and Fishing License Revenue. He said he will participate in future budget activities from a business perspective and will assist where he can.

Commissioner Earley reiterated that he appreciates the forthrightness of the DNR relative to the Game and Fish Protection Fund balance, but said it must be realized that this fund balance does not necessarily mean this is money in the bank. He supports better communications of DNR issues.

Commissioner Richardson said he will miss Jim Ekdahl, stating that he has character and strength as expressed in the diversity of issues Jim tackled. **Commissioner Richardson** said he is proud of Michigan's resources and looks forward to managing those resources in 2008.

Chairman Charters said it has been an interesting month; looks forward to moving forward; and will assist in any way he can.

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The meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

NRC POLICY COMMITTEE ON WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES

The meeting convened at 2:18 p.m. All Commissioners were present.

Steve Schmitt, Wildlife Division, presented a preliminary update on Bovine Tuberculosis (TB) and Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) surveillance for 2007. Final prevalence rates will be presented at the March NRC meeting. For 2007, the Wildlife Division has tested a total of 8,018 deer, 160 elk, and 8 moose for bovine TB. Currently, there are six culture-positive deer. In addition, there are 19 probable suspects. Two of the suspects are from outside the four-county TB core area in Iosco County. A total of 161,617 deer have been tested for bovine TB since 1995, with 572 positives. The DNR is once again involved in the capture, test, and cull project, which involves live-trapping deer and testing them for TB using the “rapid test” in the field in several high prevalence townships in DMU 452 during January and February. **Chairman Charters** asked that the DNR have a media plan in place if the TB suspects are confirmed in the Iosco area. The DNR needs to be proactive in notifying the local media of this situation.

Regarding CWD, during 2007 the DNR tested 1,292 deer, 158 elk, and 8 moose. No positives were found. Fifty-one target animals were observed exhibiting neurological dysfunction and emaciation, so they were collected and tested for CWD. No positives were found. The Michigan Department of Agriculture tested 592 captive cervids for CWD in 2007. No positives were found.

Chief Doug Reeves, Wildlife Division, provided an update on the 2007 deer and elk hunting seasons. Wildlife Division is not recommending a January elk season because management goals were achieved during the two hunts during 2007. For the 2007 elk season, 61 any elk licenses were issued and 56 were harvested; 120 antlerless licenses were issued and 110 antlerless elk were harvested. All tribal licenses were filled.

Mr. Reeves mentioned that a number of elk were taken near a critical roadway in the area, which is important given the elk/vehicle accidents that have been occurring there. Two individuals shot more than one elk; one of those individuals shot three.

Mr. Reeves presented information on the 2007 deer hunt. There were 724,236 individuals who purchased a deer license, which is down 1.4 percent from 2006. These individuals purchased a total of 1,533,541 kill tags, which is down 0.5 percent from 2006. Almost 68,000 youth purchased a deer license, which is about the same as 2006. The DNR has checked about 5.1 percent more deer than last year. The mail survey will be sent the week of January 21. In addition, the online survey is available again this year. Approximately 11,312 individuals have submitted an online survey at this time.

Mike Bailey, Wildlife Division, provided a proposed list of 2008 committee issues. He asked the Commissioners to review the proposed list, so it can be discussed at the next NRC meeting. **Commissioner Coleman** requested that Fisheries Division provide an update on inland rivers and the health of those rivers. **Fisheries Division Chief Kelley Smith** will add to the calendar.

Commissioner Wheatlake requested consideration by Wildlife Division of a size limitation for conibears on private land.

The meeting adjourned at 2:55 pm.