

FINAL Meeting Minutes  
Wildlife and Boat Committee  
Board of Wildlife Resources  
7870 Villa Park Drive – Board Room  
Henrico, VA 23228

October 22, 2025  
9:00 am

**Present:** Mr. Jon Cooper, **Chair**, Mr. James Edmunds, **Vice Chair**, Ms. Laura Walters, Mr. Will Wampler (alternate), Mr. Lynwood Broaddus (alternate); **Board Members** in attendance: Ms. Marlee Dance, Mr. Parker Slaybaugh, Mr. George Terwilliger; **Executive Director:** Mr. Ryan Brown; **Deputy Directors:** Ms. Becky Gwynn and Mr. Darin Moore; **Director's Working Group:** Dr. Mike Bednarski, Ms. Stacey Brown, Mr. George Braxton, Mr. Michael Lipford, Ms. Shelby Crouch, Mr. Bob Smet, Mr. Paul Kugelman, Ms. Rebecca Lane (virtual)

The Committee Chair called the meeting to order at 9:00 am and welcomed everyone. The Chair noted for the record that a Quorum was present for today's meeting.

**Approval of the August 20, 2025, Committee Meeting Minutes:**

The Chair called for a motion to approve the August 20, 2025, Wildlife and Boat Committee minutes. Mr. Edmunds made a motion to approve the minutes of the August 20, 2025, committee meeting. Mr. Wampler seconded the motion. Ayes: Cooper, Edmunds, Walters, Wampler, Broaddus

**Public Comment - Non-Agenda Item:** The Chair called for Public Comment – Non-Agenda Items.

- Gary Kimberlin spoke regarding dog hunting
- Raymond Carter spoke regarding dog hunting

**Turkey Regulation Proposal:** Mr. Cooper called on Mr. Mr. Mike Dye for a presentation.

Mr. Dye gave a presentation on the Turkey Regulation Proposal.

After comments and questions, The Chair thanked Mr. Dye for his presentation of the Turkey Regulation Proposal.

The Chair called for a motion, Mr. Edmunds made a motion, I move that the Wildlife and Boat Committee recommend that the Board of Wildlife Resources adopt the amendment to the wild

turkey bag limit regulation as presented by staff. It was second by Mr. Wampler and Ms. Laura Walters. Ayes: Cooper, Edmunds, Wampler, Walters, Broaddus.

After the motion and vote, Mr. Dye provided some Turkey Program Next Steps.

**Blue Catfish Regulation Proposal:** Mr. Cooper called on Dr. Mike Bednarski for a presentation.

Dr. Bednarski presented the Blue Catfish Regulation Proposal.

After comments and questions, the Chair thanked Dr. Bednarski for his presentation on the Blue Catfish Regulation Proposal.

Speakers:

- Tom Dunlap spoke regarding the Blue Catfish Regulation Proposal
- Trey Thorp spoke regarding the Blue Catfish Regulation Proposal

The Chair called for a motion, Mr. Edmunds made a motion, Mr. Chair, I move that the Wildlife and Boat Committee of the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources put forward staff's regulatory recommendations on Blue Catfish to the full Board for adoption. It was seconded by Mr. Cooper. Ayes: Cooper, Edmunds, Walters, Broaddus, Wampler

**Regulatory Reform Proposals:** Mr. Cooper called on Mr. Aaron Proctor for a presentation.

Mr. Proctor presented the proposed regulatory reform actions staff has outlined to accomplish an overall 25% in regulatory mandates per Governor Youngkin's Executive Order 19.

After comments and questions, the Chair thanked Mr. Proctor for his presentation.

The Chair called for a motion, Mr. Edmunds, made a motion, Mr. Chair, I move that the Wildlife and Boat Committee approve the staff regulatory recommendations to meet the Agency's goal of 25% regulatory reduction per Executive Order 19 for final adoption. Mr. Cooper seconded the motion, Ayes: Cooper, Edmunds, Walters, Broaddus, Wampler

**Mange Management Plan & Response Protocol:** The Chair called on Dr. John Tracey for a presentation.

Dr. Tracey presented the Mange Management Plan & Response Protocol.

After comments and questions, the Chair thanked Dr. Tracey for his presentation.

The Chair called for a motion. Mr. Cooper made a motion, I move that the Wildlife and Boat Committee recommend that the Board endorse the 2025-2029 Bear Mange Management Plan as

presented by staff. It was seconded by Mr. Edmunds. Ayes: Cooper, Edmunds, Walters, Broaddus, Wampler

After the motion and vote, Dr. Tracey presented some Research Project Updates, Spatially Explicit Capture-Recapture, and Capture and Movement Modeling information.

**Virginia Sea Turtle & Marine Mammal Conservation Plan:** The Chair called on Ms. Amy Martin for presentation.

Ms. Martin gave an update on the Virginia Sea Turtle & Marine Mammal Conservation Plan.

After comments and questions, the Chair thanked Ms. Martin for her presentation.

**VPA-HIP Program Accomplishments:** The Chair called on Mr. Cale Godfrey for an Update.

Mr. Godfrey gave an update on the VPA-HIP program Accomplishments.

After comments and questions, the Chair thanked Mr. Godfrey for his update.

**Wildlife Division Report:** The Chair called on Mr. Michael Lipford for a Wildlife Division Report.

Mr. Lipford reported:

**Increased wildlife response capacity** – Heath Brown began 9/25 as the new Human-Wildlife Conflict Specialist! (Heath is planning to attend meeting and can be recognized). He has worked for several years as a wildlife technician with DWR and has a depth of experience in this area. Heath has been training with the Wildlife Helpline and others. He will assist primarily with after-hours calls regarding severely injured/sick wildlife and other conflicts requiring a prompt response.

**Reporting and response for severely affected mange bears** – After hours, Heath or other DWR staff will monitor the Helpline mailbox and respond promptly to reports of severe mange. [NOTE: This is a slight change from earlier when we were planning to provide a number on that voicemail for the public to call; we think not having 2 numbers will reduce confusion.

**Hunter sampling 2025-26 season** – This season, kits will be provided to bear hunters in lieu of setting up physical sampling stations. DWR staff will be in touch with bear hunting organizations about this soon.

**Forestry Prospectus** - A Forestry Prospectus was recently developed to increase the pace and scale of forest management to benefit wildlife, produce agency revenues, and build capacity in the program to get to scale. Expecting to generate \$1M in revenue in FY25. Move to triple revenue and acreages from the average of \$400K/year in revenue on 450 acres. In FY 25, \$1.2M in revenue was budgeted and we expect to meet that goal. Retired Forester Kent Burtner leads this work along with Curtis Chandler.

**2025 Safety & Operations Meeting** – the 3rd annual meeting was hosted by Region 4 staff at Douthat State Park in mid-September. The goal of the meeting is to have peer-to-peer knowledge transfer on a variety of WMA operations needs and invited safety speakers to educate on specialized topics. Sessions included sprayer calibration for safe and cost-effective chemical application, downed powerline safety, Emergency Action Plans, small engine troubleshooting, habitat and forest management.

**Wildlife Management Area Work Unit Action Plans** – An Action Plan for each Work Unit was created. These 13 Action Plans include GIS maps of all habitat activity, an annual calendar of primary activities and a process to simplify activity reporting by staff. Action Plans will be updated annually to establish activities for the upcoming year to assist with workload management, budget development and habitat/infrastructure management. Habitat activities reported for FY25 were Forest management: 2286.0 acres; Invasives control: 136.3 acres; Wetland restoration: 562.7 acres; Prescribed fire: 1437.9 acres.

**Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza:**

- Over the last several weeks, DWR has received an increased number of reports of sick/dead vultures, primarily black vultures.
- Clinical signs and testing results indicate it is highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI).
- Sporadic locations throughout the state are represented, but a highly visible outbreak in Smyth and Washington counties in SWVA generated several media inquiries.
- So far this fall, disease has not been reported in species other than vultures, but as migration ramps up other species could become involved.

**Virginia Gray Fox Project:** In coordination with Virginia Tech, the DWR Furbearer biologist set and collected 71 trail cameras for the Virginia Gray Fox Project across 13 counties in central Virginia from April-Sept 2025. These cameras were set on public and private lands ranging from rural to urban environments for at least 6 weeks, capturing all wildlife species that passed by the cameras. The data provided by these cameras will contribute to the project's goals of assessing the current gray fox population across Virginia, as well as determining factors influencing their occurrence.

After comments and questions, the Chair thanked Mr. Lipford for his report.

**Fish Division Report:** The Chair called on Dr. Mike Bednarski for a Fish Division Update.

Dr. Bednarski reported:

Fall fishing is ramping up in Virginia - from a stocking standpoint, that means we've completed our fall channel catfish stocking and are beginning our fall trout stockings. We will stock 50K catfish by the end of next week. These fish underpin a large part of our FishLocalVA initiative which provides quality fishing opportunities in developed areas across the state. With fall trout stocking, we are stocking waters across the state with catchable brook, brown, tiger and rainbow trout now through the spring. We will stock approximately 700K fish during the season and if you'd like to join us for a stocking run, get in touch with Aquatics.

After comments and questions, the Chair thanked Dr. Bednarski for his report.

**Boating Division Update:** The Chair called on Ms. Stacey Brown for a Boating Division Update.

Ms. Brown reported:

Ms. Brown mentioned how DWR celebrated the beginning of October with National Customer Service Week. We have 17 staff in our customer service section and their work consists of managing the processes around registering and titling motorboats as well as assisting customers with their purchase of hunting and fishing licenses. While many customers utilize our online services for these purchases, so far this year, our customer service section has processed over 54,000 transactions related to boat registration and titling, about 65% of their work, and almost 18,000 transactions related to hunting and fishing. Our staff also manages a call center – so far this year we have handled over 76,000 calls. Again, the majority of those calls are related to boat titling and registration, but about 20% of these calls are calls to our “information desk” for people to ask questions (and get answers) for anything related to wildlife, hunting, fishing, boating, and other similar topics! We also respond to emails sent to a customer service shared email box and a boat title and registration shared email box. These mailboxes have received over 5,000 emails this year to date. Our customer service staff does a tremendous job to make sure our constituents have all the information and licenses needed to hit the woods or the water!

Several staff members from the Boating Division attended the National Association of State Boating Law Administrator’s annual meeting and conference. Two staff members provided presentations during the conference. Staff came back armed with information regarding a variety of topics – such as how to write better boat incident reporting narratives, e-titling for vehicles, and how to identify illegally imported boats. Much of the information gained during this conference will be put into practice during the coming year.

She shared a few more numbers from the Boating Safety and Education Program. They have had over 20,000 students take a boating safety course. The number of boating incidents this year is in line with the number of incidents last year with 71 total incidents which includes 10 fatalities, 44 injuries, and 30 incidents that had damage over \$2,000 or a total loss of the vessel.

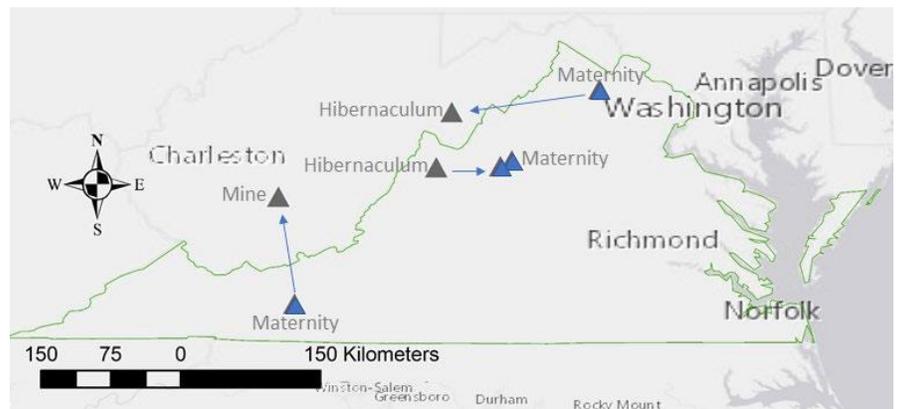
Finally, Ms. Brown mentioned that last she was proud to provide the National Association State Boating Law Administrators Paddlesports Committee Honors award to Brian Vincent of Appomattox River Company and a former DWR Board Member. This award recognizes the work of Mr. Vincent through his social media channels for his retail company to consistently highlight paddling safety messages in all their work. She mentioned that YakAttack, a kayak fishing brand headquartered in Farmville, Virginia, also received this award.

After comments and questions, The Chair thanked Ms. Brown for her update.

**Non-game Program Update:** The Chair called on Ms. Amy Martin for a Non-game Program Update.

Ms. Martin reported:

- **Little Brown Bat Overwintering in West Virginia:** A Virginia Tech graduate student working on fall bat habitat use at the New River Gorge National Park and Preserve mist-netted and radio tagged a little brown bat first captured in Virginia in 2021. As part of DWR’s survey and monitoring efforts at little brown bat maternity colonies we banded adult females and juveniles of both sexes between 2012 and 2021. Major objectives of this effort were to determine productivity and survivorship of a species highly impacted by White-nose Syndrome. This work was conducted at 3 maternity roost, one each in Loudon, Rockingham, and Wythe counties. On September 26 the VT graduate student captured an adult male that was first captured as a young-of-the-year on July 7, 2021, at the Wythe County maternity roost. While recaptures are rare, we now have linked little brown bats from each of the known maternity colonies to winter roosts (Figure 1). These findings help DWR, and our conservation partners protect important habitats utilized by a rare species.



- **Virginia’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Breeding Bird Atlas:** Virginia’s Second Breeding Bird Atlas is a project to document the current geographic distribution and status of all of the Commonwealth’s breeding birds. The overarching goal of the Atlas is to generate information for the benefit of avian conservation. Improved understanding of where our breeding bird species currently occur, in what numbers, and how their distribution has changed since Virginia’s First Atlas over 30 years ago enables us and our partners to better target conservation planning and efforts to geographic areas where they are most needed. It also provides us with a data set against which we can make future comparisons.

In order to implement this ambitious project, the VDWR partnered with the Virginia Society of Ornithology and the Conservation Management Institute at Virginia Tech, along with a legion of over 1,400 volunteers who collected millions of bird observations across the state. Atlas data collection took place between 2016 and 2020, followed by data review, analysis and content production over the past five years. The results of the Atlas will be unveiled on October 31 through a freely accessible website. Its core component will be Species Accounts for 203 of Virginia’s breeding bird species. The Accounts will feature maps of breeding distribution, breeding evidence and abundance, supported by interpretive narratives highlighting the status and conservation needs of individual species.

- **City of Alexandria Mussel Restoration:** On September 30<sup>th</sup>, staff completed the final mussel release in the Potomac River as part of a mitigation project. We completed the project one year early and produced more animals than expected. A total of 39,080 individuals representing 4 species were released over two sites in the river. Coupled with the mussel propagation and releases, the Potomac Riverkeeper offered education and media attention to the effort.

- **Tiger Salamander Habitat Management:** On October 16<sup>th</sup>, Lands & Facilities, Outreach, and Nongame staff trimmed back buttonbush (*Cephalanthus occidentalis*) at a State Endangered tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum*) breeding site in York County. Tiger salamanders prefer open canopy wetlands, and the site had become overgrown with buttonbush. They cleared approximately 1/8 of an acre, which will hopefully stimulate aquatic vegetation resulting in more favorable conditions for tiger salamanders. This is only 1 of 3 known breeding sites in the Coastal Plain.



- **Virginia Wildlife Magazine: Hellbender Story** – On September 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>, DWR State Herpetologist and Media Manager met with Virginia Tech and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) staff to gather information and media material for a feature story in Virginia Wildlife Magazine and DWR’s YouTube page. The story is primarily focused on the hellbender conservation partnership between VT and DWR, that is partially funded through a State Wildlife Grant and Paul G. Allen grant but will include the USFS post-Hurricane Helene restoration and recovery efforts. Look for this soon in Virginia Wildlife



After comments and questions, the Chair thanked Ms. Martin for her update.

**Director’s Report:** The Chair called on Mr. Ryan Brown for a Director’s report.

The Director reported:

- He thanked and commented Mr. Aaron Proctor, Mr. Cale Godfrey, Dr. Mike Bednarski, Ms. Amy Martin, and Ms. Stacey Brown for their work and efforts with Regulatory Reform Proposals.
- Announced that he will attend the SEAFWA in the following week.
- Announced that we will be hearing more about the Coal Easement in Southwest VA
- He gave a report of the 2025-2026 Season Harvest Updates for Early Seasons

Youth/Apprentice Deer Weekend

Statewide Archery Deer Season Opening Weekend

Early 3-Day Bear Firearms Season

Youth/Apprentice Bear Weekend

Elk Hunt

**BACKGROUND:** Preliminary harvest reports are available for the deer and bear youth/apprentice hunter weekends, the early 3-day bear season, the opening weekend of the statewide archery deer season, and the elk hunt. Final harvest figures for the deer and bear seasons will be available in early 2026.

### Youth/Apprentice Deer Hunter Weekend (September 27-28,2025)

- Weather was not ideal (rain Saturday), but not a major challenge • Preliminary harvest was 2,638 — up 8% from last year
- Antlered buck harvest – 1,482
- Antlerless harvest — 1,156

### Statewide Archery Deer Season Opening Weekend (October 4-5,2025)

- Preliminary harvest was 3,732 — up 40% from previous year.
- Antlered buck harvest — 1,470
- Antlerless harvest — 2,262
- Current harvest running above last year — storm systems have affected harvest numbers to past 2 weekends

### Early 3-Day Bear Firearms Season (September 29 — October 1,2025)

- Seven (7) counties in SW VA — Buchanan, Dickenson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Washington, and Wise
- Had applied to 16 counties the previous 2 seasons, and originally included 41 counties when implemented in 2017 to decrease bear populations WBR
- Preliminary harvest was 56 bears — up 7% from harvest in same area during prior year
- 37 males and 19 females harvested

### Youth/Apprentice Bear Hunter Weekend (October 11-12, 2025)

- Preliminary harvest was 98 bears — 27% decrease from previous year, but similar harvest to 5-year average of 103 bears
- 56 males and 42 females
- Excellent mast conditions in many areas are reducing bear movements and vulnerability to hunters

### 2025 Elk Hunt (October 11 - 17: 2025)

- All six (6) hunters harvested an elk and made some great friendships and memories
- We continue to thank our private landowners who provide 17,000+ acres for elk hunting
- Also thanks to the community, partners, and friends who participated in the Elk Camp/check station aspects of the hunt and make the experience extremely special for our hunters
- Seven (7) past hunters and their families returned to Buchanan County for the 2025 elk hunt, travelling from Virginia, North Carolina, and Maryland to be part of the event • Three 6x6 and three 7x7 bulls were harvested
- Live weights ranged from 701 — 810 lbs.

- B&C green scores ranged from 256 4/8 — 366 6/8, but all were trophies in the eyes of the hunters and DWR
- One bull had ear tags and GPS collar, meaning it was a Kentucky elk which had made its way to Virginia after being captured in Pike County, KY in January 2023 —15 miles away from the site of harvest
- One bull had a double cusped ivory which is the only reported instance of this condition in eastern elk herds
- Quote from one of the hunters - "I originally came to Buchanan County for the elk, expecting to be treated like an outsider. But now as I'm leaving, I realize the elk are second to the people. I feel like part of a family now. "
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**Chair's Report:** The Chair asked if there were any additional business or comments, hearing none, he announced the next meeting to be Wednesday, January 21, 2026, and adjourned the meeting at 12:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Frances Boswell  
/s/