

AGENDA

Board of Wildlife Resources
Law Enforcement Committee
7870 Villa Park Drive, Board Room
Henrico, Virginia 23228

October 25, 2023
2:00 pm

Committee Members: Mr. John Daniel, Chair, Mr. Jon Cooper, and Mr. Tom Sadler

DWR Staff Liaison: Colonel John Cobb

1. Call to Order and Welcome
Mr. Daniel
2. Approval of August 16, 2023 Meeting Minutes **Final Action**
Mr. Daniel
3. Public Comment – Non-Agenda Item
Mr. Daniel
4. CPO Recruitment Update
Major Milt Robinson
5. Enforcement Solutions for the Illicit Reptile Trade in Virginia
CPO's Ritchie and Rabago **Final Action**
6. Law Enforcement Chief Update
Colonel John Cobb
7. Director's Report
Mr. Ryan Brown

8. Chair's Report
Mr. Daniel
9. Additional Business/Comments
Mr. Daniel
10. Next Meeting Date: January 17, 2024
Mr. Daniel
11. Adjournment
Mr. Daniel

Draft Meeting Minutes
Law Enforcement Committee
Board of Wildlife Resources
7870 Villa Park Drive, Board Room
Richmond, Virginia 23228

August 16, 2023
2:00 pm

Present: Mr. John Daniel, Chair, Mr. Jon Cooper, and Mr. Tom Sadler; **Board Members in attendance:** Mr. Leon Boyd, Mr. Woody Woodall, and Mr. George Terwilliger; **Executive Director:** Mr. Ryan J. Brown; **Deputy Directors:** Ms. Becky Gwynn and Mr. Darin Moore; **Director's Working Group:** Colonel John Cobb, Mr. Bob Smet, Dr. Mike Bednarski, Mr. Tom Guess, Mr. George Braxton, Mr. Paul Kugelman, Ms. Paige Pearson, Mr. Rob Lewis

The Chair called the meeting to order at 2:00 pm and welcomed everyone to the meeting. The Chair noted for the record that there was a quorum present for the meeting.

Meeting Minutes: The Chair called for a motion to approve the minutes of the May 24, 2023, committee meeting. Mr. Cooper made a motion to approve the minutes of the May 24, 2023, meeting minutes. It was seconded by Mr. Sadler. Ayes: Daniel, Cooper, and Sadler

Public Comment – Non-Agenda Item: The Chair called for Public Comment – Non-Agenda Item. Hearing none, the Chair continued with the meeting.

CPO Recruitment Update: The Chair called on Major Milt Robinson for an update.

Major Milt Robinson gave an update of the current CPO Recruitment Process.

After comments and questions, the Chair thanked Major Robinson for the update.

The Illicit Reptile Trade in Virginia: The Chair called on Conservation Police Officer's for a presentation.

CPO's Ritchie, and Rabago gave an enlightening presentation on the Illicit Reptile Trade in Virginia.

Ms. Becky Gwynn, Deputy Director, spoke regarding the Illicit Reptile Trade.

After lots of comments and questions, the Chair thanked CPO's Ritchie, and Rabago for their presentation.

Law Enforcement Chief Update: The Chair called on Colonel John Cobb for an Update.

Colonel John Cobb gave a Law Enforcement Update:

- Excellent Fieldwork by Officers (22 new officers in the field)
- Outstanding responses to Multiple Boating Incidents (Public Safety)
- Participated in 52 National Night Out Events (Educational Programs)
- Conducted over 200 Outreach Programs in the first six months of 2023, which included a recruitment component (Every CPO is a Recruiter)
- Teaching Water Safety and Boat Operation Courses to other agencies
- West Virginia K-9 Program = great cases w/Dogs & Handlers we trained

- On the Administrative side of Law, currently having to fill some key positions, both HQ administrative assistants, the Support Services Major, and the Administrative Investigations / Compliance Captain

Director's Report: The Chair called on Executive Director Ryan Brown for his Director's Report.

The Director reported:

- Thanked Captain Angela Comer for her work and dedication to the agency and Law Enforcement and wished her well in her new job.

Chair's Report:

The Chair thanked the Colonel for his presentation and all of his updates.

The Chair announced the next Law Enforcement committee meeting will be Wednesday, October 25, 2023, and asked if there were any additional comments, hearing none, he adjourned the meeting at 3:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Frances Boswell

RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF WILDLIFE RESOURCES

Whereas, Virginia is home to 20 species of native turtles, 12 of which are identified as Species of Greatest Conservation Need in Virginia's 2015 Wildlife Action Plan; and

Whereas, turtles are one of the most vulnerable groups of vertebrates worldwide, and unsustainable take (poaching) is a significant threat to turtle species; and

Whereas, delayed maturation, small clutch sizes, low egg and juvenile survival rates, and increased vulnerability of nesting females can result in turtle populations experiencing rapid declines following losses of adults; and

Whereas, the Department of Wildlife Resources has taken efforts to reverse turtle population declines by assessing population statuses and limiting factors, protecting important habitats, developing confiscation plans, participating in the development of species genetic libraries to support repatriation of turtles to the wild, and taking law enforcement actions; and

Whereas, the DWR is a member of the Collaborative to Combat the Illegal Trade in Turtles, which seeks to coordinate state regulations to help address current conservation risks, providing additional resources for wildlife law enforcement to prevent illegal collection and trafficking, enhancing public outreach that communicates the severity and scale of the crisis, increasing resources for emergency housing and care of confiscated turtles to relieve strain on agency operations, and implementing science-based planning to guide temporary and final disposition of confiscated specimens;

Whereas, these efforts are sustained by leadership support and coordination across the biological, law enforcement, and legal and policy staffs, including through directed training, skills development, and information sharing; and

Whereas, the results of recent activities by the DWR's special operations unit investigating the illegal commercialization of reptiles and amphibians uncovered violations involving approximately 750 animals (including 650 turtles), equating to \$35,000 U.S. market potential value or \$155,000 overseas market potential value; and

Now therefore be it resolved that the Board of Wildlife Resources recognizes that the illegal trade in reptiles and amphibians is a significant threat to native species that the Board and the DWR are entrusted to manage and conserve, and

Be it further resolved, the Board directs the Executive Director to take the following actions to continue addressing the illegal trade of reptiles and amphibians in Virginia:

1. Establish replacement costs for native reptiles and amphibians of Virginia, beginning with native turtle species;
2. Establish four (4) full-time Regional Special Agent positions in the DWR's Special Operations Unit. A responsibility of these positions will be working collaboratively with the covert special agents to target the illegal trade of reptiles and amphibians;
3. Explore participation in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Task Force Officer Program;

4. Obtain specialized technology and equipment to aid in investigations;
5. Explore other authorities established within the Code of Virginia to better leverage penalties for those convicted of illegal trafficking;
6. Develop and provide training on the illegal trade of reptiles and amphibians to:
 - a. Commonwealth's Attorneys and the judiciary;
 - b. Other state and local law enforcement entities, including animal control officers; and
 - c. DWR uniformed Conservation Police Officers and recruits;
7. Develop and deliver a communications campaign to increase public awareness about the impacts of the illegal trade of reptiles and amphibians as a public trust resource;
8. Explore new sources of funding to support the training and communications efforts;
9. Explore establishing a permanent facility or a partnership with another organization for the holding of reptiles and amphibians prior to adjudication of legal cases and subsequent repatriation; and
10. Develop a repatriation plan for the return of reptiles and amphibians illegally removed from the wild, beginning with turtles.

Be it also resolved that the Board of Wildlife Resources requests the Executive Director to provide periodic updates on these actions at the meetings of its Law Enforcement Committee.

Adopted this 26th day of October 2023.