

**Natural Resources Advisory Board
November 26, 2019
Meeting Minutes**

Call to Order

Roll Call

Board Members Present:

Scott Bryant, Marshall Douglas, Marcia Polhamus, Darel Martin, Matt Langendorf, Tim Caughran, Mick Wanless, Joe Mark, Lynn Gipson

IDNR Staff Present:

Director Callahan, Tami Evans, Tim Schweizer, Rachel Torbert, John Fischer, Steve Baggerly, Mike Wefer, Jared Duquette

Guests:

Ken Polhamus, Mike Polhamus, Tomi Tranchita, Andrea Allen, Peter Kroner, Kristen Thirion, Katherine McGill, Mary Lynn Kroner, Pam Sundeen

Vice Chair Scott Bryant opened the meeting at 1:00 p.m. Roll call was given.

VC Bryant stated that pursuant to Sections 2(c)(11) and 2(c)(15) of the Open Meetings Act, NRAB would vote to go into closed session to discuss 1) pending litigation affecting the Natural Resources Advisory Board and 2) professional ethics & performance of NRAB when advising the IDNR. Marshall Douglas provided the motion to go into closed session; Marcia Polhamus provided the second. No opposition was heard. All guests and IDNR staff were asked to leave the room.

At 1:32, the public and IDNR staff were allowed back in the room.

Matt Langendorf motioned to adopt the November 26, 2019 agenda. Marcia Polhamus provided the second. No opposition was heard.

Marcia Polhamus motioned to adopt the July 22, 2019 meeting minutes. Matt Langendorf provided the second. No opposition was heard.

Boat Access Grants – Steve Baggerly – IDNR Grants staff received 12 project applications for the FY2020 Boat Access Area Development Grants requesting approximately \$1.8 million dollars. It is estimated that \$725,000 will be available. 6 projects are recommended for funding, and one as an alternate should additional funding become available. Those recommended for funding include: Calumet City, Cook County Forest Preserve District, City of Jacksonville, City of Marseilles, City of Galesburg, and the City of Marengo. Village of Port Byron will become the alternate if funding becomes available. Tim Caughran motioned to accept Grants staff recommendation; Marshall Douglas provided the second. No opposition was heard.

OSLAD Grants – Scott Bryant – Scott & Matt Langendorf sat through a 12-hour day of listening to 103 OSLAD & LWCF grant proposals. As chair of the committee, it is Scott's recommendation that the board approve 83 FY2020 OSLAD grant applications. Marcia Polhamus motioned to accept the recommendation; Matt Langendorf provided the second. No opposition was heard.

Land & Water Conservation Fund Grants – Scott Bryant – There were 9 LWCF Projects presented at the OSLAD hearings. Scott recommended that the board approve all 9 projects. Lynn Gipson motioned to accept the recommendation; Marcia Polhamus provided the second. No opposition was heard. Scott urged the board to sit in the OSLAD/LWCF grant hearing process. It's a long process, you learn a lot and you really see how these municipalities work on getting things done for our youth and for the public. Matt added that it also gives you a tremendous amount of confidence in staff. They had it laid out impeccably.

R3 - Jared DuQuette - Jared provided a progress update on the overall R3 front. The new website Hunt Illinois should be developed and ready by the end of December. The website will function like a web app on your mobile phone and you will be able to see things in real time. It's a contemporary resource that will include google maps, allow individuals to find their nearest hunting area for squirrel, deer, etc., and includes a distilled down version of the hunter fact sheet that will be easy to read. It will go out to all our R3 partners for review. The Statewide R3 Strategy met last March. Approximately 20 NGO's participated to start developing task group setups for youth programs, adult programs, target shooting, etc. The Plan is about 75% done. There

was little, if any input from those that attended and that has been a barrier in wrapping things up. Jared stated that this is his top priority and it will give us direction as an agency towards working together. It is expected to be complete in April. Another top priority is the barrier for access to hunting opportunities and land. We know from our surveys that that is our biggest barrier. IRAP is looking to expand and we are working to provide them data. We are working with our urban deer biologists on a guide for municipalities to consider urban deer hunting and how to implement/open an opportunity that can be effective and safe. We've been talking with the USF&W regarding their Field Pothole Initiative, an initiative that works with landowners to set aside wetland areas that can't be farmed and to open those areas up for hunting opportunities. Internally, we are discussing moving away from windshield cards and looking at an online check in and check out system through the website. An analysis recently showed that we've doubled the number of licenses DNR offers since 2006. Even though Pittman Robertson monies have increased, we are losing money. We are looking at what licenses are most effective, what people buy and moving forward in a way where we increase that money. The Target Shooting on Marksmanship Act allows federal funding to be dedicated to increasing, developing and improving shooting ranges. 60% to 65% of our Pittman Robertson money comes from target shooters; It's a big group of people that we need to accommodate. We've recently started working with the UofI Extension to expand our wild game meat donations which helps gets meat to those who need it. IDNR is working with a company in Chicago to create some short videos on the role of hunting and conservation and the diversity of hunters. Staff have been doing a lot of public appearances, interviews, etc.

Guest Peter Kroner asked where IDNR was with automatic renewal with license and permits. Jared stated that it lies in the Legal office.

Mentoring Program – Marcia Polhamus/Mike Wefer – Marcia stated that they met with the Assistant Director, Wildlife representatives and the ICF Executive Director on November 14, 2019. Mentor training, background checks, IT and insurance were discussed. We are researching these areas and plan to meet in January, and then with NGO's and other organizations. Mike stated that we are also working through data sharing issues as it is a separate agency within state government.

Habitat/Pheasant Stamp Fund – Mike Wefer – Both Habitat & Pheasant Fund Stamp meetings were held recently. There have been recurring issues mostly regarding guidance to those that are applying for these grants. It is suggested that we get both

groups together and go through each issue and provide set guidance, possibly in January. Scott stated that he has had a lot of calls, including a past director who wrote the statute. He along with a lot of the hunting constituents do not believe the habitat stamp fund is being administered properly.

Turkey Survey Update – Mike Wefer – The surveys are collected and have been sent to the Natural History Survey. We've received excellent response; 60% from hunters, 63% from landowners. We should have numbers the next time we gather. Marcia asked if they could be sent to them.

NRAB 2020 Dates – Colleen Callahan – Selected dates for 2020 include: Monday, January 13th, Monday, April 20th, Monday, July 27th. All meetings will begin at 3:00 p.m. The November date will be determined after conversations with the ICF Executive Director. The consensus of the group is to have the meeting/Director's Hunt the week after Thanksgiving and have the meeting on the Monday morning.

Director's Comments

Director Callahan stated that the department's 2020 budget allows us to hire up to 1,250 staff. At the end of October 1,205 staff were on board; an increase of 6. Assistant Director John Rogner is working on strategic planning, something that hasn't been done for a long time. The Employee Handbook hasn't been updated and it's been 20 years since there's been a discussion on a Work from Home schedule. Foundationally, the director stated that she believes in the three C's, communicate, collaborate and connect. We are meeting monthly with CMS to discuss maintenance needs at all our sites, and quarterly as it relates to personnel, hiring needs and processes. We have met with Department of Agriculture to discuss the 35,000 acres IDNR has, one of the largest land holders in Illinois and much of that IDNR has agricultural leases on; how should we be utilizing that land, should it be more sustainable, should we be using solar, etc. We have submitted a climate action plan to the Governor's office, and meetings are scheduled with the Governor's Management & Budget to discuss our 2021 budget. The Illinois Conservation Foundation events speak for themselves. The Foundation has new leadership and there is more activity than we have had recently.

Board Comments

Scott stated that there are few members that have expired terms. If you are not reappointed, it's been his pleasure to work with everyone over the past few years.

Public Comments

Tomi Tranchita - Tomi Tranchita thanked everyone for the opportunity to speak and asked that they consider helping resolve what has become a bad situation for all involved. Ms. Tranchita stated that she has been a licensed wildlife educator for 13 years. In 2006 she acquired her USDA class D license and agreed to take on non-releasable coyotes. She invested over \$20,000 in prison grade, professionally installed enclosures, and inspections were passed by USDA and state veterinarians for 13 years with no violations. On April 24, a seizure led by IDNR Officer Joshua Mooi resulted in 3 or 4 healthy coyote's deaths and one's suffering. Video's of the seizures caused public outrage. Ms. Tranchita stated that she has over 44,000 signatures on two petitions, been interviewed by the local media and has the support of welfare animal groups. One of the coyotes, Luna is being held 150 miles away. She is 13 years old and is living in stress. Ms. Tranchita stated that she was charged with several hunting violations but has only been asked to plead guilty to one charge - not having a furbearing permit valid for 2019. In exchange for her guilty plea, Luna was released from indoor imprisonment. Ms. Tranchita stated that she was told that she needed an educational permit. She applied and has never been responded to. In court, she was told she needed a hound running penning permit. She applied but it was denied. Only two facilities in the state hold this permit and they are hunting clubs. Other facilities with educational coyotes are not required to have this permit and believes that this is illegal selective enforcement. Ms. Tranchita stated that she believes the search warrant was falsified and Sgt Mooi neglected to inform the magistrate that Ms. Tranchita held licensing. There was no warning to renew a simple, \$25.00 permit. He did not knock on her door but interviewed neighbors. Ms. Tranchita has a civil lawsuit and has offered to withdraw it if she can restart her educational program with her one surviving coyote, Luna. Ms. Tranchita stated that the state has refused to respond and stated that she has done everything possible to comply, and now she is here to ask for the Board's help. Please urge IDNR to acknowledge that I am in compliance and can continue my educational pursuits. Please help me get my one living coyote back to her safe haven. Please end this nightmare for Luna and for her and show the American public that it can work with its stakeholders. Thank you for your consideration. Ms. Tranchita left materials for anyone to review.

Kristen Thirion – Ms. Thirion stated that she was not here because of Ms. Tranchita's coyote but empathizes with her situation as a pet owner. As a veteran and a patriot, I am very concerned with the how's & why's. How did we get to a situation where a citizen is subjected to an early morning raid and traumatically separated from her animals when a simple permit renewal was all that was necessary? To understand, I submitted a couple FOIA requests to IDNR, but what I received back was essentially useless. I couldn't find any efforts to reach out to Ms. Tranchita and rectify the situation. In my research, I came across an IL Conservation Police bi-weekly report. My FOIA request of November 7th request was - all documents regarding the random commercial inspection of a furbearing mammal breeder conducted by CPO Sanford, CPOT Elliott under the purview of Captain Jed Whitchurch as summarized in the IL Conservation Police bi-weekly report dated June 10, 2019 it was discovered that the breeder was in possession of a red fox without valid permission to do so. After the issuance of a citation, the breeder was permitted to gain compliance by purchasing a furbearing mammal permit. Ms. Thirion received a copy of the field report, dated 5/19/19 with reviewing supervisor as Sgt Mooi and read it to the board and asked why the same courtesy wasn't provided to Ms. Tranchita. There are petitions circulating, posts are circulating throughout the world and humbly asks that the situation come to end.

Andrea Allen - Ms. Allen drove from Dallas, TX. She would like to refute the idea that she heard in the hall – they are not a bunch of crazy cat ladies. She is a proud animal advocate and married into a hunting family. She is appalled at the act of government overreach. A citizen's property has been stolen on a fraudulently obtained warrant by the state. I am asking you to please urge the Governor to put an end to this.

Katherine McGill – Ms. McGill flew in from Florida and thanked everyone for their time and stated that they are serious in supporting Ms. Tranchita. Ms. Tranchita has made several attempts to solve this and I don't understand why she is getting ignored. I come from a background from wildlife rehab and wildlife education. I have held the same license that Ms. Tranchita has. It's not easy to get and sustain, it's costly, invasive and there are standards you must meet. One of the most challenges for captive wildlife is the huge commitment you must make to be responsible for the entire lifetime of that animal. It's something you don't step into lightly. The coyote needs to be returned where she was allowed to be for 13 years of her life. I don't advocate for public possession of wildlife but adamant that equal opportunity be afforded to those that

are proven qualified and eligible. I've never heard an agency being this aggressive. Ms. Tranchita is willing to work with you if you meet her half way.

Peter Kroner – Mr. Kroner addressed the board and stated that he was put back with what the director said about communication. That is what this whole issue is about, communication. This lady has tried to communicate to the officer that took the coyotes. She immediately applied for the license/permit that had expired. She has the USDA permit and the other permits she was told that she needed by IDNR and the veterinarians. If you are serious about communication, you would agree that it's not acceptable to answer. We ask that you respond to her. It seems personal. From an outsider looking in, there is something that is not adding up. She's offered to do whatever IDNR wants her to do. She was asked by other agencies within the municipality to take them because they couldn't be released in the wild. 6 armed officers aggressively took the coyotes away, and now they won't even give her the decency of a reply. Please communicate to the IDNR and ask them to respond to her.

Pam Sundeen – Ms. Sundeen thanked everyone for the opportunity to speak. Ms. Sundeen stated that 16 years ago she was a volunteer for a wildlife rehabilitator who allowed her to take home a litter of racoons and foster them. A CPO showed up at her door and told her that she could not have the racoons and gave her a few hours to get them back to the rehabber. When he came back, he sat down and told her how much wildlife rehabilitators were needed and walked her through every step of what she needed to do. I have a wonderful relationship with my local CPO and IDNR in general. What happened to Ms. Tranchita has floored me. For 13 years, Ms. Tranchita followed the rules and she thought she was above board. She wasn't trying to hide anything. For myself, I took it upon myself to learn all the rules and regulations and now volunteer for a wildlife hotline where we provide information to rehabbers and the general public. I feel confident when I tell them what the state does and does not allow. This case has thrown me for a loop. This needs to end and be resolved to everyone's satisfaction and there's no reason why Ms. Tranchita cannot be offered a correct permit and have her coyote back.

