

**Wisconsin Conservation Congress  
Migratory Committee Meeting Minutes  
Ramada Inn  
1501 North Point Drive  
Stevens Point, WI  
December 12, 2008**

Meeting called to order at 7:00 PM by Chairman Richard Koerner.

The roll call was taken and the following committee members were present: Richard Koerner, John Edelblute, Mitchell Fisher, Richard Becker, Chuck Boley, Craig Conroy, Todd Cook, James Daily, Ronald Earnest, Paul Gettelman, Martin Haas, Roger Hanson, Ray Heidel, Rick Koenig, Jo Ann Kuharske, Al Marotz, Guy McFarren, Tim Morgan, David Nowak, Jerry Rowland, Jeff Scott, Allen Shook, Kurt Staab, Alan Suchla, Herbert Theisen, Brad Wagner.

Committee member Sandy Naas was excused.

DNR staff present included Migratory biologist Kent Van Horn with his assistant James Christopoulos, and Todd Schaller, WDNR warden liaison.

Guests in attendance included WCC Chairman Ed Harvey.

**ORDER OF BUSINESS:**

**Department Informational Items and Updates**

**Mission Statement Discussion**

Chairman Koerner read the mission statement\* that he wrote. Discussion followed. Motion by Paul Gettelman to approve, no second

Alan Shook offered that the statement be changed to say "stake holders of the State" and not hunters.

Motion Al Shook, second by Dave Nowak to accept statement as amended by committee various members. Motion carried by voice vote.

*\*The revised mission statement is attached at the end of this report.*

**Department Informational Items**

Kent Van Horn, DNR migratory Game Bird Ecologist, began his presentation of the 2008 Season Review. Once again, Kent reiterated that Wisconsin has the second highest total of waterfowl hunters; second only behind Texas. They rank in order: Texas, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Louisiana, Arkansas, and California for 2007 - Texas with 94,000 hunters Wisconsin with 83,300.

This was the second year of the 5 year stable Canada goose season length and bag limit. Wisconsin is on top for opportunity for goose hunting.

Major changes included a closed season for canvasbacks, reduced bag limit for scaup, and three wood duck limit. The feds will look at the woody count for 3 years and consider any changes at that time.

Kent continued with a review of the 2008 season and including highlights of the 2007 Wisconsin Waterfowlers survey; much of what the committee heard at the August 2008 meeting.

Scaup and Canvasback issues: After spring survey the Feds stated the canvasback population was down 44% than the previous years. Despite the stable population of Scaup at about 3.5 million the feds still cut the limit.

Duck season South Zone. Good duck numbers. Season time frames were just about right for the dates selected.

Duck surveys from the Upper Mississippi River this fall showed peak numbers in late October/early November for divers; very typical for the river. Still looking for the rest of the data from bag checks and waiting for data.

Early goose season 2008 saw about 25,000 bagged; the trend shows the annual kill continues to rise. However, the Wisconsin's population of Canada geese seems to be stabilizing. The population is somewhat stable but the distribution is shifting to other areas of the state. Horicon zone permits went up a little this year. Exterior permit levels are down slightly; most likely because there are fewer hunters buying the Conservation Patron license.

At this time, the 2008 exterior harvest is on track for a typical kill of about 45,000. The peaks of the hunts were typical with early to mid October topping the kill chart. Goose kill reports show peak activity over the weekends. The hunting falls off to nothing during the deer season. A good time to close the goose season for another split would be to close during the deer gun season.

More hunter survey data:

99% white, 97% male

Equally split between rural 52% rural and 48% urban/suburban.

Age distribution:

18-29 – 15%

30-39% - 17%

40-49 - 26%

50-59 - 24%

60 and up – 18%

What do hunters want?

- Not losing a crippled or downed bird
- Not having any conflicts with other hunters
- Being with family and friends
- Seeing ducks and geese
- Not feeling crowded by other hunters
- Passing on tradition to a new hunter

A lot of these main points deal with social issues rather than ducks.

How far will we go to get what we want?

- 88% of duck hunters and 84% of goose hunters hunted the same location year to year.
- Duck hunters traveled an average of 39 miles to duck hunt but would be willing to travel 89 miles to recommended location
- Goose hunters traveled an average of 34 miles to hunt but would be willing to travel 68 miles to recommended place

Van Horn continued with the hunter survey that was taken in 2007. Much of which is a review of things that were presented in our August Meeting.

There was some discussion about season length vs. bag limit as which has the greatest influence on bird populations. Again, we saw the banding surveys show that the major amount of Mallards banded in Wisconsin are bagged in WI.

Wisconsin sampled about 1200 birds for avian flu.

We are seeing 20 to 30 percent nesting success rate in Wisconsin CRP grass lands. National average for grassland nation wide is 18 percent. Owls are the number one predator of ducks off the nest. The WDNR have accidentally trapped a Great Horned owl in teal traps that are used for nesting surveys. As woods/trees encroach around a grassland area, it provides habitat for owls to nest and prey on nesting ducks may increase.

#### **Todd Schaller, WDNR Law Enforcement LE Updates.**

Todd Schaller, WDNR warden briefed the committee on proposed changes to the language of the open water laws and concealment requirements. The new language would give a more clear definition. The current regulation reads as follows:

*Wisconsin open water law – Open water means any water beyond a natural growth of vegetation rooted to the bottom and extending above the water surface of such height as to offer whole or partial concealment for the hunter and the blind if one is used. Dead trees, or vegetation placed in the bottom by a hunter, do not constitute a natural growth of vegetation.*

**Proposed additions:**

The purpose of the law was to keep the hunters near the edge and the ducks in the open water so they can rest on the same water body. The rule is written as to define where we want the hunter to sit.

However, the language proposed was confusing to most of the committee, to say the least.

Lively discussion continued with no clear consensus of the proposed rule definition. The definition is too confusing, the size of the boat makes a big difference, and the vegetation changes during the season.

The spirit of the new rule definition seems to be acceptable and that it is more liberal than the existing law. But as the change is written with its current language it is too confusing.

Motion by John Edelblute: for the committee to advance to the executive counsel to consider the proposal to the DNR, second by Al Shook. Motion carries by voice vote.

**Local rule proposals by the WDNR for the 2009 Spring Hearings:**

1) Lively discussion of closing Big Lake on Pool 4 closure. Feds will close big lake and open the wooded swamp that is presently closed. The DNR proposal is designed to bring the State in compliance with the Federal law. The area is below and above highway 25 on the map handout. Ray Heidel, La Crosse County delegate, and the river rats he represents want the committee and State to stand firm and oppose this proposal by the DNR. It appears there is no chance now that this will go on.

Motion by Heidel: to reject the proposed rule change by the DNR to come into compliance with the feds changes in the closed area vs. the open area in pool 4. Second by Gettelman

Motion by: Jerry Roland, Motion, Second by Jeff Scott, to amend the rejection by Heidel to the executive counsel. Motion to amend passes

2) Discussion but no action on reducing the size of the refuge of Dike 17. The proposal will increase the amount of area open for bow hunting while still allowing trapping.

3) Increase the size of the refuge area at Mead WMA, Marathon/Wood/Portage Co. No discussion

4) Migratory bird hunting closure – 1pm. Mead and Lake Mills Wildlife Areas (three year sunset). This proposal is to allow the birds to rest during the afternoon during the early part of the season. This will help to hold the ducks in -

the area. The closure does not affect deer hunting. Ray Heidel opposes the idea because it would be a lose of opportunity. Jerry Rowland favors the idea because it works in other areas that he hunts. This is a local issue that came from the local hunters. Many committee members agree that if the locals want it should happen. Ray reminded the committee should keep in mind that we should look for greater opportunities to offset any loss in opportunity.

5) Close Mead to goose hunting prior to the opening or duck season. The theory is to hold ducks that migrate in early or start to congregate on the lake in September. No discussion on the rule proposal.

6) Reduce the size of Vernon Marsh Refuge by 395 acres. The area in question is really upland habitat; it was originally closed to protect geese. The geese do not use the area and better to open it up for upland hunting.

### **Legislative requests**

1) Permanent duck blinds on DNR lands and waters of the state: 2005 state hearings the people voted with an 82% margin to ban blinds on state lands or waters. This would be a legislative rule change and the State legislature has not acted on the issue. The DNR is asking the committee members to help them find a WI legislator to write legislation to make this State Law Change.

2) Create limited access hunting authority for certain DNR properties. The DNR will be shopping for a legislator to introduce a bill to give the authority to make changes to restrict access. As of now, the law does not allow the DNR to make proposals to restrict access. This law change will only give the DNR authority to begin exploring opportunities to restrict overcrowded areas of waterfowl hunting. Members of the Migratory committee cautioned Van Horn that they would strongly appose any idea of restricted access if this idea is not approached with extreme caution.

### **Resolutions:**

500508 & 720208- Designated Duck Season Dates with Change in Highway 10

Kent Van Horn assured the committee that even if they change the name of the road, it does not mean that the boundary would change. It's the physical landmark that is in the Federal Rule. It does not change the zone line. We are locked into the zone for 5 years before it can change. Changing the name of the zone line is an administration house keeping rule.

Motion to reject by Brad Wagner and second by Dave Nowak the motion both 720208 and 500508 because there will be no change in the boundary. Motion passed.

521008 – Late Opening for Duck Hunting Season in the Southern Zone  
Committee members from Racine spoke in favor of this idea and asked the committee to consider the resolution so the rest of the state has a chance to vote on it. Ray wants the committee to look at a third zone. Lots of discussion either direction continued; the committee has kicked this dog around for years.

Motion to reject by Jim Daley second by Rick Koenig: Motion passes by a voice vote with a smattering of no's.

Resolution 300308 – Protecting Mute Swans  
Todd Cook motion to reject, second by Craig Conroy

Committee members commented there is no reason to protect an invasive species. However, Al Shook recommends that we put this resolution on the spring ballot and allow the people to reject this Resolution State wide. "Once and for all, tell these people that this is a State issue to protect an exotic species and that the stakeholders of this state should reject this resolution." Shook said.

Kent filled in the committee on the recent history of this issue, especially the killing of a mute swan on private property. The DNR is continuing their efforts to eradicate mute swans on State properties, but only on private property if asked by a lake association member.

Al Shook read a story written in the Wisconsin State Journal, a communist newspaper from Madison. The article condemns the DNR and their action and in response the DNR suspended their policy of shooting the swans. Shook warned the committee that unless the entire State has a chance to defeat this proposal, the swan lovers will find some bleeding heart liberal State legislator that will pass a law to protect these non-native mute swans.

Motion to reject carried with one no vote.

### **Other Business**

The Open Water Ad-hoc Committee will meet on Saturday following this meeting.

Waterfowl Hunters conference March 6 and 7<sup>th</sup> at the Ramada Inn, Stevens Point

Kurt Staab asked Kent if he would consider going with only one hen Wood Duck of the three allowed; similar to the mallard one hen rule. Kent said it would be too difficult.

Motion to adjourn by Ray Heidel, Second John Edelblute: motion passed  
The meeting adjourned at 10:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Mitchell J Fisher  
Attachments: Migratory Committee Mission Statement

## **Wisconsin Conservation Congress Migratory Committee Mission Statement**

The mission of the Wisconsin Conservation Congress Migratory Committee is to represent the Stake Holders of Wisconsin by working with the Natural Resources Board and the Department of Natural Resources to effectively manage Wisconsin's local ducks and geese, as well as migrating ducks, geese, swans, and other migratory birds for present and future generations to enjoy.