

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes, May 20, 2025

MEMBERS PRESENT

Bryan Poynter, Chair
Alan Morrison, Secretary
Carl Wodrich
Deborah Law
Noelle Szydlyk
Phil French
Bart Herriman
John Wright

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT

Elizabeth Gamboa	Scott Allen
Aaron Bonar	Chloe Perkins

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES STAFF PRESENT

Chris Smith	Executive Office	Sandy Clark-Kolak	Fish and Wildlife
Greg Sorrels	Executive Office	Debbie Walter	Fish and Wildlife
Madalynn Conner	Executive Office	Craig Jansen	Fish and Wildlife
Stephanie Flittner	Executive Office	Trevor Laureys	Fish and Wildlife
Will Haines	Executive Office	Eric Fischer	Fish and Wildlife
Steve Hunter	Law Enforcement	Nate Hunhoff	Fish and Wildlife
Whitney Wampler	Legal	Justin Swafford	Fish and Wildlife
Ron Hellmich	Nature Preserves	Alex Schaeffer	Fish and Wildlife
Amanda Wuestefeld	Fish and Wildlife	Terry Coleman	State Parks
Brad Feaster	Fish and Wildlife	Brandt Baughman	State Parks
Linnea Petercheff	Fish and Wildlife	Anthony Sipes	State Parks
Ginger Murphy	Fish and Wildlife		

GUESTS PRESENT

Phil Smith	Meg Steinbronn	Jeff Steinbronn
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Bryan Poynter, Chair, called to order the regular meeting of the Natural Resources Commission at 9:59 a.m., ET, on May 20, 2025, at Fort Harrison State Park, The Garrison, 6002 North Post Road, Blue Heron Ballroom, Indianapolis. With the presence of eight members, the Chair observed a quorum.

The Chair recognized the new AOPA Committee appointee and Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) proxy Deborah Law. Law stated she has been an attorney for more than 30 years, serves as ethics officer, and has been with INDOT for a year and a half.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The Chair asked for a motion to approve the Commission's March 18, 2025 meeting minutes.

John Wright moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Noelle Szydlyk seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the motion carried.

REPORTS OF THE DNR DIRECTOR, DEPUTY DIRECTORS, AND THE CHAIR OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL

Alan Morrison, Director of the Department of Natural Resources (Department), provided his report, which is summarized as follows:

Recent personnel changes include: Greg Sorrels is Interim Deputy Director of the Administrative Bureau with Mike Smith's departure and Brandt Baughman is Deputy Director of Operations and the Interim Director for the Division of State Parks as Dan Bortner has retired.

The Department worked hard during the challenging legislative session. The State's budget impacts every agency, including the Department. The Department's challenges include figuring out new efficiencies and looking for ways to continue to provide great service to the customers who use the State's properties.

Busseron Creek Fish and Wildlife Area (FWA) is now permanently protected after the Department, in partnership with conservation groups and foundations, purchased the property. Busseron Creek FWA is a 3,950-acre FWA that operated on a lease for several decades until it closed ten years ago.

Morrison and his staff have visited several properties. They visited Potato Creek State Park to see the new lodge under construction. The foundations on both ends of the lodge have been poured. The lodge will be operational and greeting guests in two years.

Morrison and his staff went to Brookville Lake to assist Department staff inseminating fish. The process includes catching fish, squeezing the fish to harvest the eggs, fertilizing the eggs, and inseminating fish with the fertilized eggs. The eggs are so delicate a turkey feather is used to stir them. The fish are taken to a hatchery to grow and then released into Indiana waterways. The Department releases 27 million fish in Indiana waterways annually.

Morrison and staff also visited Redbird and Interlake Off-Road State Recreation Areas (SRA), where they talked with staff and observed the operations. At Mount Tea State Forrest, they observed a controlled burn of 200 acres. The also visited Clifty Falls State Park, a beautiful asset to the state, Mounds State Park, and Summit Lake State Park.

Morrison visited the Horseman's Camp at Brown County State Park to view the recent tornado damage. The Department is still rebuilding from the tornado damage at McCormick's Creek State Park from a couple years ago. To have additional tornado damage is sobering. On a positive note, the Department knows how to move forward and has a team of people putting great plans together to get the campground running again.

The busy season is picking up and there has been a lot of activity across the Department properties.

Chris Smith, Deputy Director of the Land Management Bureau, provided the following report on behalf of Ryan Mueller, Deputy Director of the Regulatory Bureau, which is summarized as follows:

Since January, the Division of Entomology and Plant Pathology staff removed over 20,000 spotted lantern fly egg masses in several counties statewide. Each egg mass contains approximately 40 eggs, meaning over 800,000 spotted lantern fly eggs have been destroyed. The spotted lantern fly is detrimental to vineyards, orchards, and hardwood forests.

On April 21, 2025, Governor Braun signed Executive Order 25-63 directing the completion of a statewide water inventory and management plan. The plan builds on the regional studies conducted by the Indiana Finance Authority and includes the development of a statewide plan, framework, recommendations for expanding Indiana's water monitoring network, and development of an online water hub. Input from all water users, sectors, and the public will be sought with a final report due at the end of 2026. The Department's Division of Communication has developed a web portal to sign up for updates to follow the water inventory and management plan process.

Chris Smith, Deputy Director of the Land Management Bureau, provided his report, which is summarized as follows:

Department Staff is taking final steps to prepare properties for Memorial Day weekend, the unofficial kickoff to the recreation season. Swimming pools will open and most campgrounds will be at or near capacity.

The Lincoln Amphitheatre at Lincoln State Park kicked off its 38th season with several upgrades including: expanded seating from 1,500 to 2,200 seats; a new entrance for patrons; a renovated parking lot with 300 new spaces; new viewing platforms, and new open air seating areas.

The Ford Motor Company announced the release of the newest version of the Ford Expedition at Interlake SRA. Ford hosted press from around the country and put the Ford vehicle through a workout on the off-road trails.

The Indiana Natural Resources Foundation received a ten thousand dollar grant from Star Financial Bank for the Discover the Outdoors field trip program. The program is offered in partnership with the Division of State Parks to underwrite field trips for students in kindergarten through twelfth grades to an Indiana State Parks property. Since 2013, 287 grants have been awarded, with more than 25,000 students participating in field trips to Indiana State Parks. The subgrants cover the costs associated with the school's transportation, program fees, and other applicable materials.

There are more than 12,000 volunteers who put in countless hours annually on Department properties across the state. During National Volunteer Week, which was April 20 through April 26, the Department recognized several volunteers to show appreciation for the work they do.

Greg Sorrels, Interim Deputy Director of the Bureau of Administration, provided his report which is summarized as follows:

The Governor signed the 2026 to 2027 budget passed by the General Assembly. The budget includes a 5% reduction in the general fund, which is about 3.2 million dollars annually. The Department is waiting to see what reserve and preventative maintenance plan money will be made available. During a financial town hall meeting, the Director of Office of Management and Budget announced the 2025 revenue forecast will be down by about 400 million dollars. The Department is looking at a new spending plan for the remainder of 2025.

The Department is hopeful its proposed capital projects will move forward at the June budget committee meeting. The proposed projects include: finishing Ferdinand State Forest campground phase two; the District Six Law Enforcement Headquarters project, a joint project with the Department of Corrections (DOC); the Clifty Inn pool and HVAC renovation; and improvements to the campgrounds at Yellowwood, Clark, and Greene-Sullivan State Forests.

The Divisions of Asset Management, Finance, Purchasing, and Accounting is working to close fiscal year 2025 and have started to assemble documentation for the 2025 Annual Comprehensive Financial Report.

The Department has a 9% vacancy rate with 146 full time staff positions available. Of approximately 1,700 intermittent positions available, 740 have been filled.

The Chair noted the Advisory Council has not met since the last Commission meeting.

CHAIR AND VICE CHAIR

Information: Consideration of 2025 meeting dates:

The remaining 2025 Commission meeting dates are July 15, September 16, and November 18. All meetings, except the July 15 meeting, are scheduled to be held at Fort Harrison State Park, The Garrison. The July 15 meeting is scheduled to be held at Spring Mill State Park.

Updates on Commission and AOPA Committee

Bart Herriman, Vice Chair of the AOPA Committee, reported the AOPA Committee met on May 12, 2025 to adjudicate two matters and received an update on HB 1466. Herriman said HB 1466 repealed the statute that created the Division of Hearings and after July 1, 2025 all Department administrative cases will be filed with the Office of Administrative Law Proceedings (OALP), who will be the ultimate authority. Cases filed before July 1, 2025 will be transferred to OALP, but the Commission will remain the ultimate authority on those cases. Elizabeth Gamboa, Chief Admirative Law Judge for the Division of Hearings, added that the AOPA committee would remain involved in cases filed with the Commission before July 1, 2025.

Herriman thanked the Division of Hearings staff members for their hard work over the years.

DNR, EXECUTIVE OFFICE

Consideration and identification of any topic appropriate for referral to the Advisory Council

None

Legislative Update

Will Haines, Legislative Director, presented his summary as follows:

The Department monitored approximately 110 bills from the beginning of the last legislative session, 65 of which made it halfway through the session and 50 of which were enacted into law. There are a wide variety of bills the Department is involved with, ranging from bills related to water, prescribed burns, the agency bill, administrative matters, and criminal law.

Key provisions in the state budget were the transfer of the Indiana Semiquincentennial Commission from the Department of Veterans Affairs to the Department of Natural

Resources. A 250,000 dollar line item and language related to operation of the Department's carbon sequestration administration was included, which includes trust fund language. Another provision in the state budget was the local government and finance bill, an omnibus bill encompassing public works projects, property tax exemptions, and property tax credit. A provision in the bill increased the in-house project cap from 300,000 dollars to 600,000 dollars, which will allow the Department to work on projects in house as apposed to using an outside contractor.

The Department's agency bill , HB 1616 included provisions establishing a procedure for unpaid mineral interest, adding a 10,000 dollar cap on a 20% historic property tax credit, and establishing submerged lands preserve on Lake Michigan and the Ohio River where there are fourteen shipwrecks and one submerged plane wreck. Also included in HB 1616 was an interim study committee on the economic value of public recreational lands.

The Chair noted the Commission meeting is being live streamed and there is information on the Commission's website for people who wish to make comments related to an agenda item.

DNR, DIVISION OF NATURE PRESERVES

Consideration of the dedication of the Crooked Lake Addition Nature Preserve in Noble County

Ron Hellmich, Division of Nature Preserves, presented this item and a summary of his report follows:

The proposed Nature Preserve is located approximately 6.5 miles north of Columbia City in Noble County. The preserve will protect 21.69 acres and is located within the Northern Lakes Natural Region.

The preserve adds to the current protection of the undeveloped shoreline at one of Indiana's cleanest and deepest lakes, and adds to the forested slopes dominated by beech, sugar maple, shagbark hickory, red oak, sassafras and white oak. The understory consists of sugar maple, ironwood, beech, flowering dogwood. The site has an abundance of spring ephemeral wildflowers.

Birds and waterfowl common to the area are great blue herons, green herons, wood ducks, kingfishers, owls, and hawks. White-tailed deer, squirrels and racoons take refuge in the woods. Muskrats and beaver are found along the shore. This Nature Preserve is an important addition to the Crooked Lake Nature Preserve and to the watershed and water quality of Crooked Lake. This lake is one of a few in Indiana that still supports populations of the "cisco," a fish species of special concern.

The property is owned by the Department and the Division of Nature Preserves recommends dedication of the site as a nature preserve.

Phil French moved to approve the dedication of the Crooked Lake Addition Nature Preserve as presented. Alan Morrison seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the motion carried.

DNR, DIVISION OF STATE PARKS

Request for preliminary adoption to add 312 IAC 9-1-8.5 defining the term “harvest per effort” and to add rules at 312 IAC 9-2-18 regarding scheduled deer hunting in designated areas for population management; Administrative Cause No. 24-SP-002

Anthony Sipes, Division of State Parks, presented this item. A summary of his report as follows:

Prior to the 1990’s, hunting was not allowed in state parks. Because of damage to plants and ecology, deer management hunts began in 1993 as authorized through emergency rules. With the passage of House Enrolled Act 1623, emergency rules can no longer be used to authorize the hunts. Last year, the Department used the interim rule process to authorize the hunts. This year the Department is requesting a permanent rule that would authorize the population management hunts.

The proposed rule describes who can participate in hunts by listing age requirements, license requirements, and establishing that not more than three individuals in a unit may submit more than one application for the random drawing to hunt. The rule describes how many hunters can participate in a hunt based on the size of the property and the type of equipment being used. The rule describes how the Department will add parks for hunting by looking at plant species, composition, and impacts on the ecology. The rule describes the rules of the hunt, what equipment can be used, required safety equipment, and establishes a bag limit of three deer for each hunt, one of which may be antlered. The rule describes the criteria the Department will use in determining what properties will be included in subsequent years of hunting by the “harvest per effort” – the ratio of the total number of deer harvested divided by the hunter effort recorded.

Phil French moved for preliminary adoption to add 312 IAC 9-1-8.5 and add rules at 312 IAC 9-2-18 as presented. Bart Herriman seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the motion carried.

DNR, DIVISION OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Request for preliminary adoption to add rules at 312 IAC 9-10-28 to establish the invasive carp harvest permit to allow a person to harvest invasive carp on waters of the state using gear not currently allowed in waters of the state for commercial fishing; Administrative Cause No. 23-FW-032

Linnea Petercheff, Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), presented this item and summarized it as follows:

An invasive carp permit interim rule went into effect last year and the Department is requesting preliminary adoption for a permanent rule.

The invasive carp species include black, grass, silver, and bighead carp which have become an issue in the Midwest, threatening native fish populations and aquatic ecosystems. The silver carp can jump into boats, causing safety issues.

The invasive carp harvest permit allows the use of seines or gill nets to capture invasive carp that would otherwise be closed to those gear types where commercial fishing is not allowed. The permit is free and invasive carp captured under the permit can be sold. Approval by DFW is needed before a carp fishing event. Other requirements include fishing at approved locations during approved times, and visibly marking and actively attending to nets. Bycatch must be released immediately and reported.

Herriman asked who the invasive carp would be sold to or if they could be released back into the water. Petercheff said that invasive carp cannot be released back into public waters and there are some facilities that process the carp.

Petercheff introduced Craig Jansen, Carp Program Biologist with DFW.

Jansen said most of the invasive carp are sold to fish processors in Illinois and Kentucky and are hauled in a truck or crate. Much of the lower Wabash River harvest is used for non-human consumption products.

Smith added eleven fishers are currently licensed to harvest invasive carp. On questioning from Smith, Jansen replied that just under 800,000 pounds of invasive carp have been harvested since the interim rule went into effect in August 2024.

On questioning from the Chair, Jansen stated the Department is hopeful it will receive more invasive carp permit requests. Invasive carp fishing is seasonal. When there is high water, the fish can spread out more, but drought makes it hard to fish.

Bart Herriman moved to give preliminary adoption to add rules at 312 IAC 9-10-28 as presented. John Wright seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the motion carried.

Report to the Natural Resources Commission on Citizen Petition to Allow the Use of Firearms such as the NitroFire during Muzzleloader Hunting Season; Administrative Cause No. 25-FW-020

Brad Feaster, Director of Division of Fish and Wildlife, presented this item, and his report is summarized as follows:

A citizen petition was submitted to allow a firestick to be used in a breech loaded muzzleloader. A committee was formed including staff from the Division of Fish and Wildlife, Division of Law Enforcement, and Legal Division. The information was

reviewed by the committee. The equipment would allow the charge and the primer to be loaded in the breech end of a muzzleloader but the bullet is still loaded from the muzzle.

The Department was able to include questions related to how hunters' opinions on using breech loading muzzleloaders in the Indiana Deer Management Survey distributed to hunters earlier in 2025. There were approximately 16,000 responses, with 44% neutral on allowing the equipment, 33% in favor of allowing the equipment, and 19% expressing varying degrees of opposition.

The Department does not see any safety issues related to breech loading muzzleloaders. The equipment may be considered safer during loading and unloading and the powder stays dry. The Department does not see any issues with the overharvest of deer with the use of breech loading muzzleloaders. The breech loading muzzleloaders are already legal during youth and firearms seasons and a rule amendment would allow them to be used during muzzleloader season.

The Department supports the citizen petition and requests approval to submit a proposal for rule amendment.

On questioning from the Chair, Feaster said he has never shot a breech loaded gun, but that Jet Quillen from the Division of Law Enforcement, has.

John Wright moved to accept the Citizen Petition Report as presented. Alan Morrison seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the motion carried.

The Chair recognized Dan Carnahan, Assistant Director of Division of Fish and Wildlife in charge of the Fish Management and Aquatic Invasive Species Program, for staff introductions.

Carnahan introduced the Aquatic Invasive Species team as follows:

Eric Fischer – Program Supervisor
Craig Jansen – Invasive Carp Biologist
Debbie Walter – Carp Harvest Program Director
Sandy Clark-Kolak – Fish Research Biologist and supervises District 5 and 6 Fish Management Districts
Nate Hunhoff – Assistant Biologist
Justin Swafford – Assistant Biologist

Smith noted the Department will reach out to Commission members regarding staying at the lodge for the July Commission meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 10:43 a.m., ET.