

**ADVISORY COUNCIL**  
Minutes of August 12, 2009

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Patrick Early, Chair  
AmyMarie Travis Lucas, Vice Chair  
John Bassemier  
Richard Cockrum  
David Lupke  
Ross Williams  
Donald Van Meter

**NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION STAFF PRESENT:**

Steve Lucas  
Sandra Jensen  
Jennifer Kane

**DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES STAFF PRESENT:**

|                   |                            |
|-------------------|----------------------------|
| John Davis        | Executive Office           |
| Chris Smith       | Executive Office           |
| Cheryl Hampton    | Indiana Heritage Trust     |
| Mike Crider       | Law Enforcement            |
| Steve Hunter      | Law Enforcement            |
| Linnea Petercheff | Fish and Wildlife          |
| Gregg McCollam    | Fish and Wildlife          |
| Mitch Marcus      | Fish and Wildlife          |
| Chad Stewart      | Fish and Wildlife          |
| Budd Veverka      | Fish and Wildlife          |
| Steve Backs       | Fish and Wildlife          |
| Mitch Marcus      | Fish and Wildlife          |
| Adam Phelps       | Fish and Wildlife          |
| Mike Mycroft      | State Parks and Reservoirs |
| John Seifert      | Forestry                   |

**GUESTS PRESENT:**

|                 |             |
|-----------------|-------------|
| Randy Showalter | Jack Corpuz |
| Don Gorney      | Dan East    |
| Bill Herring    |             |

**Call to Order by Chairman, Patrick J. Early**

Patrick Early, Chair of the Advisory Council, called the meeting to order at 10:45 a.m., EDT, at The Garrison, Fort Harrison State Park, 6001 North Post Road, Indianapolis, Indiana. With the presence of seven members, the Chair observed a quorum.

John Bassemier moved to approve the meeting minutes of July 14, 2009. Donald Van Meter seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the motion carried.

**Consideration of recommendations to the Natural Resources Commission regarding proposed amendments to 312 IAC 15, which provides minimum standards of good resource management for property that is classified as a forest plantation land, native forest land, or wildland under IC 6-1.1-6; Administrative Cause No. 09-134F**

John Seifert, State Forester and Director of the Division of Forestry, presented this item. He explained that approximately three years ago a change in statute combined the classified forest program and the classified wildland program under the Division of Forestry's administration. He said the Division of Fish and Wildlife previously administered the wildlands program. Seifert said that the classified forest program began in the 1920s. Currently, 8,000 landowners participate in the program totaling approximately 600,000 acres, which includes 12,000 parcels.

Seifert said the proposed rule amendments to 312 IAC 15 incorporate the statutory changes. He said "most of the amendments" were programmatic and definitional. The definition of "wildland" is added, as well as adding the requirement that a wildlife biologist prepare a management plan for a wildland. He said a significant change is to allow "technology to catch up with us." Currently, the rules require a surveyor's description of the parcel to be enrolled classified program. He noted that the technology has advanced to allow on-ground description through Global Positioning System (GPS). "Many of the county assessors have a GPS and [Geographic Information System] GIS system in place." The proposed rule would allow "any of those technologies". Seifert noted that the State's Indiana Office of Technology has established the Environmental Systems Research Institute Inc. (ERSI) software as the sole standard for GIS.

Seifert said the classification program essentially reduced the assessed evaluation of a parcel to a \$1 an acre, which is assessed at the county level for tax purposes.

Richard Cockrum asked whether lands within the classification program are held in perpetuity. Seifert said the statute allows a parcel to be withdrawn voluntarily by the landowner or involuntarily by the Division of Forestry for noncompliance with program requirements. The penalties for withdraw are payment of ten years back taxes with an added interest penalty. Seifert noted that the statute was amended recently to include an additional penalty. "We were seeing that many folks were using the system to avoid taxes, especially as they saw development coming." He said the Division of Forestry had "invested a lot of effort" in developing management plans "so we wanted to make sure the program wasn't being played with too much." He said the intent of the program is to reduce taxes, but it is also to bring landowners into a management plan.

John Davis, Deputy Director for the Bureau of Lands and Cultural Resources, said that the classified forest program is the "oldest tax abatement" state program in existence. The program was created to "encourage good forestry and to encourage private forestry."

Seifert said the classified forest program is growing about 15,000 acres per year. “One of the obstacles that landowners who would like to do this is—other than the fact that we tell them we are from the government and they don’t want to deal with multiple agencies—multiple private sector issues.” He said the statutory change and the proposed rule change would allow the Division of Forestry to provide a “one stop shopping” for landowners. “We can actually do everything for them at one time.... We are trying to remove as many obstacles as we can to streamline the system.”

Donald Van Meter asked whether the classified parcels are equally forests and wildlands. Seifert said that most of the parcels are held in the classified forest program. He noted many parcels that were classified as wildlands have “successionally changed to the point where they are now forested and probably would not qualify under the wildland provision.” He said shallow waterways and prairies are allowed, so “it’s a more holistic program than it has been.” He noted that if the Division of Forestry would not have the internal expertise to develop a certain parcel’s management plan, the Division of Fish and Wildlife would be consulted.

Donald Van Meter inquired concerning the percentage of landowner withdrawal from the program. Seifert said less than one percent of those enrolled withdraw their acreage. He noted, however, that as urbanization increases, the larger parcels are being broken up into smaller pieces as they go from one generation to the next.

Donald Van Meter moved to recommend to the Commission preliminary adoption of the proposed amendments to 312 IAC 15, which provide minimum standards of good resource management for property that is classified as a forest plantation land, native forest land, or wildland under IC 6-1.1-6. AmyMarie Travis Lucas seconded the motion. Upon a voice vote, the motion carried.

**Consideration of suggestions for substantive amendments received from the public through the Fish and Wildlife Comprehensive Rules Enhancement Project regarding rules governing hunting birds; Administrative Cause No. 09-084D**

The Chair briefly explained the process of considering the suggestions received through the Fish and Wildlife Comprehensive Rules Enhancement Project regarding the subject category hunting birds.

Doves/Crows

The Chair said that a few suggestions were received indicating the need to extend the dove season or moving the season to the afternoons. The Chair said that the Advisory Council, in reviewing season lengths and bag limits, would have to rely on “our biologists and how it infringes on other people and other hunting groups”.

The Chair noted that a few suggestions were received regarding moving crow season later into the year to eliminate the conflict of waterfowl hunters and to create more hunting opportunities in March.

Rick Cockrum noted that a federal dove stamp is now required to hunt doves.

Chris Smith, the Department's Legislative Liaison, explained that the 2009 Legislature added a Game Bird Habitat Stamp that is required along with the hunting license in order to hunt dove. He said the Department issued news releases through its Division of Communications, and a new section covering the stamp requirement was added to the 2009-2010 Hunting Guide. He said that as rules and regulations are amended, educating the public is the first part of the enforcement effort.

John Davis noted that the *Indianapolis Star* ran an article covering the new Game Bird Habitat Stamp.

Cockrum suggested that a notice that a new stamp is required should be added to the online license and permit order form. "It might be too late, because the season opens in a couple of weeks. People are probably licensed up."

Smith said that he would contact the Division of Communications to add a notice on the online order form.

The Chair then opened the floor for comment.

No comments were received.

### Waterfowl

The Chair said that the majority of suggestions received were concerning the reservation system for waterfowl hunting. "There seemed to be a lot of people concerned that there are so many no shows, and that if you are drawn but one of your party doesn't show up you can't hunt. Because of that, a lot of people that would like to hunt that didn't get drawn aren't being able to hunt and that there is a lot of opportunity going unused."

Wayne Bivans, Chief of Wildlife for the Division of Fish and Wildlife, explained that the reservation program is run to ensure as many people can hunt as possible and to also ensure that slots are used. He said past registrations for hunting waterfowl on state property were on a first come first serve basis. "There would be far more people than there were hunting slots so many of those people were turned away. Some had camped all night or stood in line half the night." He said the registration system was devised to "do away with that type of activity. On the one hand we solved one problem, but on the other hand with no shows, that's another type of problem". He said hunters will stand in line to register for the "no show" slots. He said that in any reservation system, people

will be turned away. Bivans said the current reservation system has been the “most effective” system.

The Chair asked whether all reserved hunts have “no shows”. Mitch Marcus, Wildlife Specialist with the Division of Fish and Wildlife, said that “no show” drawings are held at the properties on those reserve hunt days. “We allocate all those opportunities.”

The Chair noted that several suggestions received indicated that hunters would like to plan vacations around the reserve hunt days, but because of the reservation system, the persons were not notified sufficiently in advance whether they were drawn.

Marcus said that the suggestions received regarding the reservation system are “typical” of comments received since the DNR instituted the reservation system. “The reservation system is a huge convenience to hunting public en masse. It tends to be some of the locals that are a little more upset about it, because they feel they are competing with folks all over the state instead of just the guy next door.” He said the local hunter has “just as much opportunity” as a hunter across the state.

AmyMarie Travis Lucas asked how far in advance persons are notified whether they have been drawn for a reserved hunt. Marcus said that typically persons are notified within a week of the drawing.

Travis Lucas said, “As far as people complaining about being able to plan vacations, I’m trying to figure out if that’s a valid concern.” She added, “I think it would be instructive for us to know how far in advance people are notified.”

Marcus explained that persons can check online approximately two weeks prior to the scheduled hunt whether they have been drawn for a reserved hunt.

Travis asked what percentage of the persons drawn are “no shows” and how many people show up to be listed as standby.

The Chair asked whether there was a reserve hunt draw for every single day or are “some days open days or some days draw days?” Marcus said that “typically” reserve hunt draws are for opening days and weekends. The Chair then asked, “So week days mostly are just where people can show up for the most part?” Marcus said, “I think that would be a decent generality.” He added that the high competition days are the days included in the reserve hunt draw because “the demand is there... We are trying to give a hunter the best shot at a good hunt on our best places to waterfowl hunt in the state. There are just not a lot of those places”.

Richard Cockrum asked whether a penalty disincentive is associated with a “no show”. Bivans said that he did not believe there was a penalty for not showing for the reserve hunt. Cockrum noted that one of the suggestions received recommended instituting a point system. “There just seems that there ought to be some disincentive if you block the date and kept somebody else from it especially if there is a pattern. What’s the

downside? I log in; I entered; and if I win I might go or I might not go.” He noted that there will be “legitimate excuses” for not showing for the hunt.

Marcus said, “Because we do the ‘no show’ drawings, we are not keeping someone else out of the field.”

Cockrum answered, “Right, it’s somebody that shows up, but you are keeping somebody from planning their hunt because it taken by somebody who may or may not show up.” Cockrum also noted a suggestion was received regarding the rigidity of the reserve hunt draw process and the suggestion recommended allowing the property manager to have more discretion.

John Davis explained that the property manager has some discretion, but “it wouldn’t surprise me if some property managers also use that as a way to respond to ‘Hey, get me in there.’”

Marcus advised that the reservation system for waterfowl has been in place since the early 1980s. He said that suggestions pointed out that a single hunter is not allowed to participate in the hunt. “It used to be we only allowed parties of three in the drawing. There was a lot of father-son pressure shortly after that, so now we are now allowing parties of two and three.” He said that there is “no trouble” filling the ‘no show’ slots “so we haven’t seen that we really need to address singles other than in the ‘no show’ drawings.” Marcus also explained that a party with a ‘no show’ may substitute another person or accept a person into their party that has been selected from the ‘no show’ drawing.

Chris Smith said he hunts waterfowl and has used the reserve hunt draw system. “It is a good system. I have been drawn and I have had one of my three back out at the last minute...What we did was we showed up there; you’ve got this standby pool of people. We said, ‘Hey, we’ll take somebody right now. There’s usually someone who is there by himself...There is flex to the system’”. He concluded, “I don’t know of a system out there that guarantee everybody show up all the time.”

John Davis said that technology may be available to build a credit for “having applied and not been drawn the year before so that perhaps if you apply and don’t get drawn, maybe you get two chances or 1 ½ chances the following year.”

Randy Showalter said that he was a past employee of the Department “many years ago” and worked at Lake Monroe. He said a reservation system was initiated for waterfowl in 1977. “I soon found out very quickly in the Lake Monroe situation—and I think we have statewide—is some of the public areas become very local in use.” He explained that the prior to the reservation system those from Bloomington “always had the jump on everybody because they could show up at a moments notice. If they were not drawn on a particular day, they could go back to work.” He said that a person from Indianapolis or from northern Indiana “didn’t have that luxury if they made that commitment to come to Monroe they were committed for the day.” He said that with the reservation system

those living in the locale were able to take advantage of the “no show” slots. Showalter said it is “important that everybody” in Indiana have access to the reserve hunts. “We just need to be consistent with handling ‘no shows’. The reservation system, as far as I’m concerned, been a very positive thing because it allows every citizen in Indiana to take advantage of it.”

John Davis asked whether slots were filled due to “no shows” in reserve hunts on reservoir properties. Mike Mycroft, Resources Management Coordinator with the Division of State Parks and Reservoirs, answered, “I’m fairly certain we do, but I just can’t answer to what conditions of whether or not we let one person in or there has to be two or more.”

The Chair said, “Obviously, we have a system that works. We always try to do what’s right. I do think there is some merit to what John [Davis] is talking about, and what Rick [Cockrum] brought up; if we have people that are abusing the system if there is a way they can be penalized.”

David Lupke noted that a suggestion was received that said the goose reduction hunts were “handled differently” than other reserve hunt drawings. “Is that true?”

Mycroft said that the goose hunts have been handled differently in the past because of the objective to reduce population of geese. “We have required that folks have to have their buddies they intend to bring with them on their application.” He explained that the “current plan is to not do that.” Mycroft said that the first standby drawing was instituted last year, because there were “very high” levels of “no shows”. “In order to maintain some sort of continuity along with our deer reductions as much as we could”. He said that there is an approximate 60% no-show at each reserve hunt.

Davis said that the Department is attempting to shift the population reduction hunts to “more like regular hunt situation, but still try to insure that we have enough people show up with the idea that they are helping us get rid of these geese”.

Lupke said, “It would seem that in those cases of reduction, we might have more liberal policies or looser policies regarding no-shows. We want the geese harvested and it would seem we would want to create more opportunity for people”.

Davis agreed, and added, “More opportunity or at least more assurance that we are going to fill all of our slots.”

Cockrum asked, “Why do we have a draw if they are a nuisance. Is it purely safety?”

Mycroft said that when the goose reduction program was initiated the program was “mirrored” after the deer reduction noncommercial hunts “so as not to confuse the public.” He explained that there is an advantage of knowing how many hunters are participating in the reduction hunt so that local law enforcement or adjacent property owners may have advanced notice of the scheduled reduction hunt. Mycroft also said the

reserve draw hunts also provided a “comfort level” for the property managers, because many of the properties are “not necessarily designed for hunting.” He said that this year goose reduction hunts are being held on Summit Lake State Park and Potato Creek State Park. Mycroft said that the Division of State Parks and Reservoirs is “open to the idea of changing a lot of this around. We felt all along that we are really kind of standing in the way with a lot of these restrictions.”

Davis said that there is a “different” constituent group that “we don’t really deal with in these fish and wildlife regulations that go to state parks that don’t want [the geese] hunted”.

The Chair noted that other waterfowl suggestions received centered around bag limits and hunting seasons. He asked how the Department determines the waterfowl hunting seasons and bag limits

Adam Phelps, Wildlife Biologist with the Division of Fish and Wildlife, explained that for all migratory birds the bag limits are set at the federal level. He said the Mississippi Flyway Council holds meetings twice a year to discuss bag limits. He said there is an “over abundant” locally breeding population of Canada geese combined with “much more problematic” Canadian breeding arctic populations. As the arctic populations fluctuated, bag limits had to be set to protect the population rather than “taking full advantage of the localized breeding population.” Phelps said that “management thoughts” are changing and the Southern St. James Bay (SJB) goose population hunting zone was eliminated a few years ago. Phelps said that a “few” days were added to the hunting season and in the next couple years the Mississippi Flyway Council will be reviewing extending the bag limits for Canada geese in an effort to help states deal with their “over abundant” Canada geese. “Fundamentally, it’s a federal limit that is set on Canada goose bag limit. I would love for it to be higher, but right now we just can’t do that.”

Phelps said that Indiana has three duck hunting zones—north, south, and the Ohio River zone. He said the Department has been tracking duck migration since 1985, and the Department will “count ducks” every week from the last week of August through January on many state and federal properties to index migration. “What we are seeing is that there actually isn’t a change over time in terms of when the ducks are coming down.” He said that hunters in southern Indiana may be seeing ducks “go down as they traditionally have...but they are coming back maybe a little earlier. So we see a lot, especially pin tails and mallards, coming back north in the tail end of January...So it’s a completely different phenomenon that appears that the birds are arriving later...So what you have when you start shooting at northbound birds, it’s sort of a double jeopardy on the part of the bird. You are shooting at birds that have been through the gauntlet once and are coming back. In a biological perspective, that’s what we call ‘additive mortality’; you are killing birds that are almost certainly likely to breed that year and so it’s much harder on a population to hunt really late than it is to hunt during the southbound migration”.



Phelps explained that the south duck hunting zone covers north of Lafayette to south of Sullivan on the western part of Indiana. “So, when we open at Thanksgiving time for the second split of duck season, Lafayette, Muncie, and Kokomo are frozen. And so, pushing that season even later or shortening that early split eliminates even more hunting days for duck hunters in the northern part of the south zone.” He said that setting duck seasons is a “balancing act” to try to give hunters in the zones an opportunity to hunt.

The Chair said, “So you do have discretion over setting seasons, but you are trying to control the mortality and deal with our climate.”

Adams said the Department’s primary goal is protecting the duck population and the secondary goal is to provide as much hunting opportunity as possible. He said the season dates have not changed “a whole lot,” because the southbound migration has not changed “a whole lot.”

The Chair asked whether the Department is considering “special seasons” and increasing the bag limit in February due to the goose population.

Phelps said that the Department has established a 3-year “experimental season” from February 1<sup>st</sup> through the 15<sup>th</sup> in 30 Indiana counties, and this is the last year for the experiment. He said the Department will ask the federal government to “go operational” with the season in those 30 counties. “The problem we run into is according to the Migratory Bird Treaty Act you can only hunt any given species of bird 107 days. In those 30 counties, we are at 106 right now.” He said if the hunting season is lengthened at a statewide level, “then we have to start playing with special seasons, which would be September and February in those counties to try to keep it under 107 days”.

Lupke asked whether the Department is considering expanding to include more than the current 30 counties. Phelps said, “It depends primarily on how fast the Flyway moves in expanding our bag limits and season days for the regular season in general.” He said that if the seasons are lengthened, then counties would not be added; however, several additional counties are currently being considered for initiating a 3-year experimental season.

Donald Van Meter asked whether Indiana has “about the same” goose population problem as the surrounding states.

Phelps explained that the goose population is “about the same” throughout the Flyway. He said Manitoba has indicated that its localized goose populations are “exploding. They want us to kill more migrant geese, because in the southern parts of those provinces, they’ve got a lot of giant locally breeding maximas that we have here...[Manitoba] would like to see our bag limits go up”. He said that some of the southern states’ goose populations are “lagging” behind Indiana’s population, but Alabama and Louisiana are “starting to have serious problems now as well”.

Phelps explained that Indiana sets its duck season and bag limits within a framework, which is based on the mallard duck population and number of ponds in Canada in May. There is a 60-day duck hunting season that runs from Saturday closest to September 24<sup>th</sup> to the last Sunday in January established by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The Department “can pick 60 days within that span per zone...and each zone is allowed two splits or two time periods in which hunting is legal”.

Ross Williams asked whether there were “a lot of bagged geese” during the February extended season. Phelps said that it is estimated that approximately 13,000 have been taken over the last two years. He noted that birds banded in Indiana have been taken in 31 states and provinces. “These [geese] spread out a lot more than people give them credit. A lot of the birds we shoot in February are mostly giant geese, a lot of them are Ontario, Michigan, and Wisconsin giant geese, but the vast majority is Indiana giants”.

Cockrum said that the “biggest” complaints he receives are associated with the goose population and the “problems of hygiene...I think this bureaucracy is going to be pressed when and if this Country ever has a bird flu outbreak...I think the public will just demand something be done for these retention pond geese”. He suggested Indiana broach this issue with the Mississippi Flyway Council.

Davis asked Department staff to explain Department efforts in combating nuisance waterfowl.

Phelps said that he is not really involved in the nuisance goose population. He explained that “a lot” of geese are relocated and banded every year.

Davis said that the Department can issue a permit to band geese, egg oiling, and lethal ways to deal with the goose population.

Linnea Petercheff, Staff Specialist with the Division of Fish and Wildlife, explained that the Department can issue a permit for goose egg and nest destruction. “But to actually trap, re-locate, or euthanize Canada geese, the person has had to have gone through our training...because [the Department] gets a permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that allows us to take “X” number of geese and mallard ducks. These people who get this training become authorized agents under [the Department’s] permit to either trap and re-locate or euthanize Canada geese. Under the federal law provisions, it allows the euthanasia of adult Canada geese if there is a public health problem.” She said that several permits have been issued under the public health provision in situations where the county public health officer declares a public health problem. “The door has opened a little in the past few years to allow for some more control.”

Travis Lucas noted that the City of Martinsville sent three of its officers through the training program, and Martinsville has applied for a permit.

Lupke asked whether persons are trained to recognize the different subspecies of geese “so they know they are shooting the resident giant Canada and not something coming through?”

Phelps explained, “It’s not an issue during the time period when it is legal; all those interior birds are well north of us by then.” He also explained that banding and relocating birds has impacted the harvest of those relocated adults. The only way really to control a population of long-lived birds like this is to kill adults, and the harvest rate of those birds that we move is about 30%, which is something like three times the regular harvest rate of Canada geese. So, moving these geese does work to reduce the adult population.”

The Chair opened the floor for additional comment.

No further comments were received.

### Pheasant and Quail

The Chair explained that the suggestions associated with pheasant center primarily on the reserve draw hunts.

Budd Veverka, Wildlife Research Biologist with the Division of Fish and Wildlife, provided an overview of Indiana’s pheasant and quail populations. He said the pheasant and quail seasons have begun “pretty much the same day” since about the mid ‘70s, which is the first Friday after November 3<sup>rd</sup>. Depending on populations, pheasant and northern quail seasons run for 45 days, with southern quail hunting season running longer until January 15<sup>th</sup>, because the population “is better in that area.”

Veverka said that the pheasant and quail populations are “not in great shape” due to change in habitat. “We’ve lost a lot of the upland habitat in Indiana. We have a lot more forests now. Some of the areas that were upland are now forests, a lot of farms are now subdivisions” and with current farming practices “we are losing fence rows, which are key winter habitat. We don’t have as many grain crops in the state anymore, which was major to those species and we have more corn and soybeans. It’s just a lot of factors for small game.” He said that quail bag limits are reduced on the DNR properties located in the northern part of the state.

Veverka said that most game birds spend most of their time on the ground. “They are very susceptible to severe weather, ice storms, and heavy snow.” He said an exact number of pheasant cannot be provided, but an index shows whether the population has increased or decreased since 1966. The quail population index goes back to the 1940s. Veverka said that the population of both quail and pheasant “really got hurt in the late 70s when we had the severe storms. Since then we haven’t really rebounded well.” He said that the Department has ceased the pheasant propagation program, “putting more birds out, because of the sheer cost of that program and it was fairly ineffective”. He said there was a “significant” decrease in the southern Indiana quail population due to the

significant ice storms along the Ohio River this past winter, with some counts as much as 50% decline. Veverka said quail populations are “very weather affected.”

Veverka said that as hunting occurs later in the season there is more additive mortality. “So, keeping the season earlier in the year and not in that late time where they are more susceptible is usually what we try to concentrate on.”

Cockrum asked whether the hunting season should be shortened on the tail end for both quail and pheasant.

Veverka said the Department is reviewing data accumulated from other states’ shortened seasons. He noted that Ohio has reduced its quail season to mid November. He said that the quail seasons “lengthwise are good...but reducing bag limits really doesn’t make much change or difference” to the population. He said currently hunters do not harvest the bag limit, and “severely” reducing the bag limit “you a lot of times discourage hunting”.

Cockrum asked whether the increased turkey population has an impact on pheasant and quail populations.

Veverka said the birds use different habitats, and turkeys “really have no effect” on quail and pheasant populations. However, explained that coyotes and small mammals, such as skunks, opossums, and raccoons, attack nests and kill adult birds. Raccoons are “probably the largest predator” in the state for these game birds. He reiterated that the “major factor” impacting quail and pheasant population is the loss of habitat.

### Ruffed Grouse

The Chair noted that the suggestions received centered around populations of ruffed grouse and habitat improvement.

John Davis noted that a secondary goal of the Division of Forestry is to manage state forests in a way to increase ruffed grouse habitat.

Jack Corpuz, representing the Ruffed Grouse Society, noted that the approximate take of ruffed grouse in 1981 in Indiana was about 25,000 birds. He also noted that on the Department’s last game bird survey the number was “so small that it was not statistically significant. They could only estimate that it was 600 or less...It took us 25 years to get to this particular position that we are in now; it will probably take 25 years of [the Division of Forestry’s] efforts or efforts along those lines to bring the birds back”.

Corpuz said that Indiana’s population of woodcock, pheasant, bobwhite quail, and ruffed grouse are “all in decline, and I mean really in bad decline.” He noted that Illinois has reported a 100,000 pheasant harvest, Ohio reporting 100,000 pheasant harvest, and Indiana reporting 10,000 pheasant harvest. “We are the whole in the donut...It is the

citizens of the state that have to become aware of habitat, habitat, habitat. That's the whole thing right there. If we don't have the habitat; we won't have the game".

Corpuz said that the Ruffed Grouse Society hosted a Ruffed Grouse Summit in which Department staff from the Divisions of Fish and Wildlife and Forestry participated. "We have to get people on private lands to buy in, and they are doing that right now, to establish habitat". He asked the Department to participate in future summits centered on pheasant and quail.

John Davis said, "We would be happy to take part in that kind of program. It would be good to include other agencies, farm agencies particularly."

Don Gorney, from Indianapolis and representing Amos W. Butler Audubon Society, said he "largely echoes" the comments made by Corpuz regarding ruffed grouse. "We, at Audubon, are very concerned about the ruffed grouse population in Indiana; it's on a steep decline and has been for awhile...We question why the hunting season is not closed to ruffed grouse". He said the ruffed grouse is "pretty much" on its way to being extirpated in Indiana. Gorney said the hunting season should be closed until the population rebounds.

Cockrum said, "I think that there is a logical point there in that, if neighboring states have a tenfold harvest and we are in the process of improving habitat and the count is down to 600, what the Ruffed Grouse Society thinks about a two year moratorium on grouse hunting in Indiana."

Corpuz noted that the "tenfold harvest" he spoke of applied only to pheasant. Corpuz added that he would have to present the moratorium to the Ruffed Grouse Society. "The first response I can think of is that if we close the season we will never get it back."

Steve Backs, Wildlife Research Biologist for the Division of Fish and Wildlife, said his primary responsibility was ruffed grouse and wild turkey. He said a moratorium on ruffed grouse hunting "is not going to stockpile more grouse." He said hunting small game is based on concepts of law of diminishing return. "If populations are down, fewer people hunt." He said the grouse populations would continue to decline even if the hunting were closed. "We need to create the habitat. Hunting the ruffed grouse is not the issue. The issue is habitat." He said, however, the Department is looking at reducing the hunting season to the early part of the season "where the tendency of any birds taken at that point is called compensatory mortality versus later in the season where it's considered additive mortality. In the end, it's going to be habitat."

Backs said that Northeastern part of the United States have classified ruffed grouse as a species of concern; however, these states continue to have a hunting season. "Part of the reason for that is to provide incentives for the public." He said that some Indiana landowners are conducting "intensive management" on their woodlands in order to produce ruffed grouse populations "so they can also enjoy the opportunity to hunt those

birds. Taking the season away you take away their incentive to that management on their private land.”

### Turkey

The Chair asked Steve Backs to provide an overview of Indiana’s turkey population.

Steve Backs said the Department is reviewing increasing turkey hunting opportunities both in the fall and spring. He said that addressing increasing bag limits is a “pretty complicated” answer for the spring season more so than the fall season for reasons of gobbler mortality in the spring is basically considered additive mortality. He said a recent 10-year Kentucky study showed that 60% of the standing adult gobblers in the spring season alone are mortality related. “You could get several years of low production and you are going to start depending more and more on jakes, the juvenile gobblers, to support your harvest.” He also noted that the success rate for a hunter’s first bird is 22% to 25%, “so that means 75% of hunters are not getting their first bird.” He said the Department has an open permit system that is based on the attrition of hunters as a hunter kills out then the woods becomes more open, less pressure, and less competition. “You start adding multiple birds, you start stacking up hunters against [turkeys], which in some areas we are starting to see an increase in hunter densities.”

Backs said that the turkey population is “generally” leveling off as the population matures. “The only real growth we are seeing is in the more recently established populations in the northern part of the state.” He noted that the hunter demand and number of hunters is increasing.

Backs said the Department is looking to expand the number of counties for the fall archery season and firearms season as the turkey population expands for both. He noted that over harvest can occur during firearm season if “you get too liberal in the fall season, but at the same time if you are harvesting juvenile birds prior to the winter bottleneck and the winter stress period, part of that is considered compensatory loss, which means that you are taking away some of the birds that would have been lost naturally”. He said that by reducing population in the fall the survival of turkeys into spring is increased due to reducing the flock size before the population goes into the winter stress period.

Backs said Indiana has experienced four years of below production. “We’ve managed to coast through that with a conservative one bird bag in the springtime. I think we are under estimating the value of what occurred in 2004 when we had extremely high production.” He explained that an adult “cohort of hens” has carried Indiana’s turkey population. However, the hens are reaching “their old age, pathological age, and they are dying off...We may be setting up for seeing some pretty lean times”.

Backs said Indiana is the smallest Midwestern state, and “we have the highest dispersed human population across the state, which has negative impacts on our [turkey] populations, but also dispersed hunter pressure”.

Donald Van Meter noted that several suggestions recommended one license to cover a bag limit of one bird taken in the spring or fall. "Is that simply an economic issue for us?"

Backs explained that licenses are a combination of finances and management of two separate hunting seasons with two different dynamic turkey populations." He said that the participation in the fall hunting season participation is controlled by those buying a license. "If 75% to 80% of hunters aren't killing a bird in the spring, you just shift those to the fall so what happens is liberalizations that you were looking at based under the current license structure for the fall season, you will have to go back to the drawing board because now you've got an unpredictable untenable number of people that are shifting that extra license without an additional thing." Backs also noted that Indiana differs from other surrounding states in that Indiana has 40,000 lifetime license holders, with approximately 24,000 lifetime license holders hunting in the spring season. He said that there are approximately 9,000 to 10,000 landowners who hunt turkey without a license. He said harvest of turkey under a youth comprehensive license has increased. He summarized that 65% of the hunters a field "aren't having to buy an extra license; they are taking 70% of the birds in the springtime."

The Chair asked, "Why have our hatches been so bad the last four years?"

Backs answered, "Just go to the crop and weather reports, and you will see. I mean, the spring planting dates, and everything else, and cold wet weather." He explained that a key period for wild turkeys is from about Memorial Day to July 4<sup>th</sup>. He said that in a "normal year, everything being ideal" 50% to 60% of the turkey polts will be lost in the first week of June. He said the inclement weather affects the invertebrate food supply, which, in turn, retards the growth and the thermal dynamics of the birds to survive. Backs said the weather has been the "biggest" contributing factor on the survival rate of the turkeys.

Bill Herring, from Morgan County, noted that the effort of "a lot of people" and the Department has contributed to the "tremendous" turkey population in Indiana. He requested that the spring season begin earlier, "leaving the end the same but just adding a few days or even a week on the front end". He noted that Kentucky's spring season begins two weeks earlier than Indiana's spring season, pointing out that southern Indiana's topography is similar to Kentucky's topography.

Herring said that last year he requested the firearm season for hunting turkey during the fall be extended. "As it is right now you can only hunt for five days, which is only one weekend, and that doesn't give too many people an opportunity to hunt for a very long period of time." He said that the fall season harvest has declined since 2005. "How many shotgun hunters will plunk down \$25 for a license that they have very little chance at filling?" He said the turkey population is "large enough" to support more hunter interest in the fall. "Then why can't we very easily and very conservatively increase the shotgun portion of the fall turkey season at least an additional week." Herring provided a

hardcopy of the 2008 letter requesting an extension of the fall turkey hunting season using a shotgun.

### Miscellaneous Suggestions

Don Gorney said that the Amos W. Butler Audubon Society would “vociferously oppose” a federally approved hunting season for the greater Sandhill Cranes in Indiana. “Other states are pushing for sandhill crane hunts, and that’s likely to be approved in the next two years. With Indiana’s strong ties to the migratory population of greater Sandhills Cranes through Jasper-Pulaski, that Audubon and a lot of other groups would have a lot of comments and oppose that in Indiana.”

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 14:42 p.m., EDT.