



MEETING MINUTES

July 24, 2025

3800 CORNUCOPIA WAY, ROOM H&I, STANISLAUS BUILDING
MODESTO, CA 95358-9494

(Agendas can be found online at <http://www.stancounty.com/parks/fish-wildlife-committee.shtm>)

COUNTY FISH & WILDLIFE MEMBERS PRESENT:

Tom Sexton, D1
Ed Ayers, D2
Tim Fitzgerald, D3
Ken Meidl, D4
Philip McKay, D5
Michael Hart, D4
Jim Atherstone, D3
Vernon Gladney, D1

STATE FISH & WILDLIFE REPRESENTATIVE(S):

Bernard Aguilar, CDFW

PARKS & RECREATION STAFF PRESENT:

Michelle Roberts - Secretary
Diego Casillas – Reservoirs Manager

EXCUSED/ABSENT:

Brian Mollard, D2
Kern Hunewill, D5

GUESTS PRESENT:

Buck Condit – Supervisor D-1
Joe Mello – Retired Game Warden
Chris Diviney - Game Warden
Tim Galas – Retired Game Warden

1. CALL TO ORDER & INTRODUCTIONS

ACTIONS & REPORTER

Phil McKay called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm, and introductions were made of all those in attendance.

All

2. ENFORCEMENT REPORT

ACTIONS & REPORTER

Lt. Justin Gaioaran was unable to attend.

Lt. Justin
Gaioaran

3. ED AYERS – CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

ACTIONS & REPORTER

Ed Ayers was presented with a plaque of appreciation to commemorate his long service and dedication to the Fish and Wildlife Committee. Although he has chosen to step down as a member, he will continue attending meetings as he wishes.

Phil McKay

Ed Ayers has been a member since 1960. He has dedicated 65 years of commitment to the ideals of enhancing the natural places and improving the wild animal populations that are found in Stanislaus County. His time, effort, and commitment as a committee member are sincerely valued and appreciated.

4. BERNARD AGUILAR - COMMITTEE MEMBER APPLICATION	ACTIONS & REPORTER
Vern Gladney made the motion to accept the application of Bernard Aguilar as the next Committee member. Tom Sexton seconded. The motion was unanimously carried.	<i>Phil McKay</i>
5. WOODWARD RESERVOIR FISH HABITAT PROJECT	ACTIONS & REPORTER
The committee reviewed options for materials to build the fish habitat, which can either be purchased preassembled or assemble the habitat internally. The committee will decide on the materials to purchase and determine what is acceptable.	<i>Phil McKay</i>
There was discussion on whether the project is worth the cost, as vessels are currently banned from the waters. However, shoreline fishing remains allowed, and a possible vessel banding program may be in place by next year, which would allow boats back on the water for future boat fishing.	
The committee also discussed possible resolutions to the invasive golden mussel infestation. One option mentioned by the committee members is to establish a statewide program that would allow for a one-time quarantine. Currently, many area lakes are either closed or require inspections. While a regional program will most likely not be develop, each district will continue to run its own program. Some programs implemented by a couple of districts require on-site vessel washing that could include a fee. Modesto Reservoir is using mussel-detection dogs, which would allow vessels to enter the water once they clear inspection. Woodward Reservoir is currently exploring the banding program.	
Since a program is in place to allow fishing, the fish habitat project will proceed. The next step will be to contact SSJID. A material proposal will be sent to Stanislaus County reservoir manager, Diego Casillas, who will then request approval from the SSJID Board. Once approved, materials will be purchased and assembled.	
The tentative timeline for placing the habitat is next winter of 2026, when water levels are the lowest. Proposed materials will be inorganic. Type and cost to be determined. The committee will also decide on the budget for materials. A cost-effective approach would be to purchase materials requiring assembly rather than preassembled units.	
The initial plan is to build a small-scale habitat in one area, monitor whether fish are spawning, and then expand to other areas as needed. The project will focus on supporting bass and crappie populations. Suggested materials include PVC pipe for the frame and black flexible hose woven through an 8' x 8' frame. Reservoir manager offered to assist in placing the habitat in the reservoir with a county vessel.	
Tom Sexton made the motion to spend \$3,000 on fish habitat materials. Ken Meidl seconded. The motion was unanimously carried.	
6. FISHERIES REPORT	ACTIONS & REPORTER
Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tag presentation.	<i>Bernard Aguilar</i>
PIT tags are small devices, about 8 mm long, that can be implanted into fish and other animals. Each tag contains a microchip and coil and has a unique identification code. The tags do not have batteries; instead, they are activated when they pass through an antenna's field. The antenna provides the energy to power the tag, which then transmits its unique ID code to a reader.	
The system is typically solar powered: solar panels charge a battery, which powers the antenna. When a fish carrying a tag swim past the antenna, the reader records its ID, direction of movement, and other valuable data.	

PIT tags have a lifespan of about 10 years. They are a non-lethal and long-term monitoring tool that allows researchers to track individual fish without the need for recapture. This remote detection method reduces stress and harm to fish while providing important data on migration, survival, behavior, and population dynamics.

In the regional rivers, sturgeon have been tagged since 2012, but tags are also used in salmon, steelhead, striped bass, catfish, frogs, and snakes. Applications extend across rivers, dams, spillways, and lakes.

Researchers also use PIT tags to study predation. For example, if a predator such as a striped bass or catfish eats a tagged fish, the predators can be tracked which helps scientists identify predation events. This data may help inform predator management strategies. While reducing predator fish populations could benefit sensitive species, it also has ecological consequences, since predator species play important roles in maintaining ecosystem balance.

The cost of one transponder system is approximately \$20,000. Ongoing efforts aim to expand monitoring coverage and fill research gaps in the region, with a focus on better understanding fish populations and their habitats.

In the past, fish were tagged in hatcheries. They were anesthetized with CO₂, their adipose fin was clipped which identifies that fish has been tagged, and a CWT (Coded Wire Tag) machine was used to implant the tag. After tagging, fish were held for 30 days and released following an approximately four-month tagging process.

Today, fish are typically injected with PIT tags at mobile trailers rather than in hatcheries. Juvenile fish are caught, their adipose fin is clipped, and the tag is inserted. This is a very quick process and does not require the use of CO₂.

Each tag code records the release date and location, which is entered into a database for future tracking. As the fish migrate through rivers and streams, they are monitored on their migration patterns, survival and longevity, population, habitat use and behavioral patterns.

If tagged fish are captured at any point during migration, their heads can be turned in at designated drop-off sites and sent to a lab for analysis. Finding the tag can sometimes be difficult within a carcass head, but recovery provides critical information.

This monitoring is a key tool for studying the life cycle of fish. The process, known as a *carcass survey*, relies on fisher participation. All fishers are encouraged to report catches of fish with clipped adipose fins, as these reports provide valuable data for ongoing research and fish conservation.

7. MINUTES – APRIL 24, 2025 MEETING	ACTIONS & REPORTER
Vern Gladney made the motion to accept the April 25, 2025, minutes. Michael Hart seconded. The motion was unanimously carried.	<i>Phil McKay</i>
8. TREASURER REPORT	ACTIONS & REPORTER
Revenue of \$109.51 has been received this year. Total expenditures of \$1516.37 which include \$1181.29 for last year's Salmon Festival calendars and a total of \$335.08 for Wood Duck box materials and "Take a Kid Fishing Day." Current balance is \$57,798.65.	<i>Phil McKay</i>

9. CORRESPONDENCE REPORT	ACTIONS & REPORTER
<p>An endangered species emergency response to add the Golden Mussel to the list of restricted animals. This notice authorizes action to prevent the infestation of the golden mussel in Stanislaus County and surrounding regions around California.</p>	<p><i>Jim Atherstone</i></p>
10. WOOD DUCK PROJECT	ACTIONS & REPORTER
<p>This year, only 96 wood duck eggs were counted—about half the total from last year. In total, 33 nest boxes were in use: 27 at the Dos Rios Park and 6 at the police range. Several factors contributed to the reduced egg count. At the Dos Rios Park, red tree squirrels have invaded the boxes, removed birds, and occupied the boxes themselves, which significantly reduced nesting success. The opening of the park to the public increased human activity, which benefits red tree squirrels because of their tolerance to human disturbance. At the police range, the nest boxes are located near a slough. This last nesting year, the slough was dry. It is suspected that the wood ducks nested closer to the river.</p> <p>To improve nesting success for next season, it may be beneficial to relocate boxes at the police range to the Tuolumne River below Mitchell Road or to Oakdale. Installing deterrents for red tree squirrels at Dos Rios could help increase the number of eggs, and additional research on methods to keep squirrels out of wood duck boxes will be explored. With breeding season not beginning until January, there is time to implement these changes and address the current challenges.</p>	<p><i>Phil McKay</i></p>
11. ENVIRONMENTAL AWARD 2024	ACTIONS & REPORTER
<p>Last year marked the introductory presentation of the Environmental Award, which recognizes outstanding contributions to conservation and habitat restoration in our region. This year, it is recommended that the award be given to River Partners for their efforts over the past decade to develop Dos Rios Park and their many other environmental efforts. River Partners coordinated with multiple agencies to make the park accessible to the public, which is promoting education on wildlife conservation. Their work successfully united various efforts and participants to create a public space that both preserves and showcases natural habitats. Additionally, 1,600 acres of Dos Rios Park has been transferred to state park status, further highlighting the impact of these long-term conservation efforts.</p> <p>Vern Gladney made the motion to present River Partners with the Environmental Award 2024. Tom Sexton seconded. The motion was unanimously carried.</p> <p>A plaque may be presented to recognize River Partners at a upcoming Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors meeting. If the presentation is possible, coordination with the Clerk of the Board will be needed to add the presentation to the agenda.</p>	<p><i>Ken Meidl</i></p>
12. KID FISHING AT 2025 SALMON FESTIVAL, KNIGHTS FERRY	ACTIONS & REPORTER
<p>The recent Kid Fishing Day at RecFest in Modesto was a big success. Fish were provided by the hatchery, and equipment was donated by Army Corps of Engineers. Based on this success, a Kid Fishing Day is being proposed for this year's Knights Ferry Salmon Festival on November 8.</p> <p>To prepare for the event, a list of necessary materials was compiled. Many of the items on the list are one-time purchases, and they can be reused for future events. For example, while there is already one fishing platform, additional platforms are proposed to increase the number of children who can participate at one time.</p>	<p><i>Phil McKay</i></p>

One of the biggest challenges at RecFest was maintaining dechlorinated water at a temperature suitable for the fish. While ice and 40-degree hatchery water brought in were used successfully, a more permanent solution is sought. Options include a small freezer with coils to cool the water or drawing water directly from the river at Knights Ferry. At the previous event, water temperatures of 65–70°F were ideal, keeping the fish alive but not lethargic. This temperature would be the goal for the event in November.

The total cost of materials for the Knight Ferry Festival event is estimated at approximately \$2,000. While this requires a substantial upfront expense, most of the materials can be reused, making it a worthwhile investment for future events. These resources will provide lasting value for youth engagement. Additionally, with the hatchery donating trout, overall costs are kept significantly lower. A proposed expenditure increase to \$2,500 is suggested to provide a buffer if needed. Army Corps of Engineers volunteers will continue to provide equipment, and additional volunteers will be required to help clean the fish during the event.

Tom Sexton made the motion to spend up to \$2500 to purchase materials for Kid Fishing Day events. Jim Atherstone seconded. The motion was unanimously carried.

13. OTHER BUSINESS

ACTIONS & REPORTER

As of May, there are 10 wolf packs in California. These packs are primarily located in Yosemite, as well as in the eastern and northern regions of the state. A typical pack consists of 6–12 wolves, although any group with more than two wolves is considered a pack. Historically, California only had 1–2 wolf packs.

Ed Ayers thanked the committee for the award and committee thanked him for his years of dedicated service.

Phil McKay

14. ADJOURNMENT & NEXT MEETING

ACTIONS & REPORTER

There being no further business, Tim Fitzgerald motioned to adjourn the meeting and Vernon Gladney seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously carried. The meeting was adjourned at 5:21 p.m. The next regular meeting of the Fish and Wildlife Committee will be held on:

Next Meeting: October 23, 2025, at 4 PM
Rooms H&I, Stanislaus Building
3800 Cornucopia Way, Modesto, CA 95358

Phil McKay

Prepared by: Michelle Roberts, Secretary

Agendas can also be found online at subject to staff's ability to post prior to the meeting. Materials related to an item on this agenda submitted to the Commission after distribution of the agenda packet are available for public inspection during normal business hours at the main office of the Department of Parks and Recreation, 3800 Cornucopia Way, Suite D, Modesto, CA 95358



STANISLAUS COUNTY
PARKS & RECREATION

Tera Chumley, Director
Phil McKay, Chair