

# **INTERIM JOINT COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENERGY**

## **Minutes of the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the 2024 Interim**

**November 7, 2024**

### **Call to Order and Roll Call**

The sixth meeting of the Interim Joint Committee on Natural Resources and Energy was held on November 7, 2024, at 1:00 PM in Room 154 of the Capitol Annex. Senator Brandon Smith, Chair, called the meeting to order, and the secretary called the roll.

### **Present were:**

Members: Senator Brandon Smith, Co-Chair; Representative Jim Gooch Jr., Co-Chair; Senators Cassie Chambers Armstrong, Robby Mills, Robin L. Webb, Whitney Westerfield, Phillip Wheeler, and Gex Williams; Representatives Jared Bauman, John Blanton, Adam Bowling, Randy Bridges, Lindsey Burke, Beverly Chester-Burton, Myron Dossett, Ryan Dotson, Patrick Flannery, Chris Fugate, Al Gentry, DJ Johnson, Bobby McCool, Suzanne Miles, Tom Smith, Bill Wesley, and Richard White.

Guests: Representative John Blanton; Representative Bobby McCool; Steven Bardin, Owner/Fisheries Biologist, Texas Pro Lake; Jason Kinner, Owner, Jason Kinner Fishing; Chuck Meade, Commissioner for the 7th District, Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Resources Commission.

LRC Staff: Stefan Kasacavage, Kayla Carroway, Tanya Monsanto, and Rachel Hartley.

### **Approval of Minutes**

A motion to approve the October minutes was made by Representative Johnson and seconded by Representative Blanton. The minutes were approved by voice vote.

### **Discussion of the Proposed Stocking of F1 Hybrid Largemouth Bass in Kentucky Waters**

Representative Blanton discussed the benefits of stocking Paintsville Lake with F1 hybrid largemouth bass, which are first-generation intergrades of northern largemouth bass and Florida largemouth bass. F1 hybrids are desirable because they grow quickly and achieve sizes large enough to be considered trophy fish, which attracts fishing tourism and related economic growth.

Jason Kinner, Owner, Jason Kinner Fishing, emphasized the increasing popularity of high school fishing teams and the positive community impact it can foster. Casting with Kids is the largest kids fishing tournament in the United States, and it is held in Paintsville, Kentucky. Mr. Kinner stated the initiative to stock Paintsville Lake with F1 hybrid largemouth bass has been in development for three years. A DNA study was conducted on largemouth bass to better understand the genetics of local fish populations.

Steven Bardin, Owner/Fisheries Biologist, Texas Pro Lake, stated fish growth is not solely determined by age, but rather by the concept of indeterminate growth. The size of the fish depends on food availability over time, and the management of fisheries is at the population level rather than focusing on individual fish. The carrying capacity, which refers to the total maximum weight of fish that a body of water can support, is influenced by several factors including: forage availability, habitat conditions, water quality, weather patterns, and interspecies competition. The relative weight of a fish, calculated by comparing the weight of a fish to a standard weight based on its length, serves as an indicator for assessing the health and growth of the fish.

Fisheries managers utilize various tools to enhance fish populations including: fish assessments, regulation changes, habitat alterations, and stocking programs. Recent assessments of Paintsville Lake indicated many fish were underweight and not growing, which prompted measures to correct this through habitat management and fertilization. Forage species have been introduced into the ecosystem as a means of improving the food supply for largemouth bass. The remaining strategy involves stocking largemouth bass to improve growth rates, following a thorough application of other management techniques to maximize the carrying capacity of the lake. The aim of stocking programs is to significantly improve three key traits in the fish population: aggression, size, and growth rate.

The Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources Commission had previously been reluctant to allow the stocking of F1 hybrids in public waters due to concerns that the introduction of nonnative species could negatively impact growth, survival, and reproductive ability of native bass populations. However, the commission plans to consider allowing the limited stocking of F1 hybrids in Paintsville Lake in the near future.

In response to Senator Smith, Mr. Kinner stated Paintsville Lake is approximately 1,100 acres and was created by damming Paint Creek in 1979. Representative Blanton stated it is managed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) as a flood control reservoir. USACE has been collaborative in allowing limited tree management to promote fishing habitats.

Representative Gentry commended the initiative to draw fishing enthusiasts to eastern Kentucky, which could lead to significant tourism revenue.

In response to Representative Gentry, Mr. Bardin stated there are concerns about how the introduction of F1 largemouth bass could affect existing ecosystems, however, the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources (KDFWR) has already found Florida genetics in some Kentucky waters. Tennessee stocks F1 largemouth bass into Kentucky Lake from the Tennessee side, but they can appear on the Kentucky side of the lake.

In response to Representative Smith, Mr. Bardin stated fingerlings are used for stocking, which will produce a mixed-sex population.

In response to Representative Johnson, Mr. Kinner stated the initiative does not seek financial assistance from KDFWR. It relies on community support and fundraising efforts. Chuck Meade, Commissioner for the 7th District, Kentucky Fish and Wildlife Resources Commission, stated the proposed plan involves stocking 5,000 fish per year for five years.

In response to Senator Smith, Mr. Bardin stated the estimated cost for stocking F1 largemouth bass in Paintsville Lake ranges from \$15,000 to \$30,000 a year depending on fish size.

In response to Senator Webb, Mr. Bardin stated the F1 largemouth bass is considered an intergrade. The breeding of northern bass and Florida bass aims to develop fish that can survive in Kentucky's colder winter temperatures. The Florida bass should be introduced at low rates to minimize the risk of cold intolerance to ensure long-term sustainability. The current fish populations in Kentucky show significant genetic diversity, which reduces the risk of inbreeding depression.

In response to Senator Wheeler, Mr. Kinner commended KDFWR for their support and does not foresee any issues with USACE.

### **Adjournment**

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.