

NCPARC Meeting Minutes—2/8/06 UNC-Greensboro

Attendees: Dave Davenport, Sarah Cross, Lori Williams, Dennis Herman, Jeff Beane, Ann Somers, John Groves, Tanith Tyrr, David Cooper, Daron Barnes, Grover Barfield, Keith Farmer, Marshall Ellis, Gale Wilson, Phil Bradley, Nick DiLuzio, Rhonda Washington, Andrew Wyatt, Steve Price, Zack Orr, Bob Pendergrass, Kendrick Weeks, Carl Person, Mike Ward, Ed Cory, Steve Kahn, Dave LaPlante, Brent Baker

DD: called the meeting to order ~7:08 pm...sign up sheet going around....went around the room to do introductions....(before Dave spoke, Sarah reminded everyone about the volunteer forms)

Did anyone attend tonight just because the meeting was held at night? (a few hands were raised)

Andrew Wyatt: commented about the night meeting, having to consider an overnight stay

DH: suggested doing the same meeting at several locations across the state...to solicit comments from other stakeholders across the state

DD: something to think about....the 20 voting members would have to commit to attend meetings, no matter where they are???

TT, DH: discussion and comments about multiple meetings.....maybe the meeting that would require voters to attend would be in Greensboro

DD: explanation of voting members....25 total slots...25 members who cast a vote, with 5 spots left open....everyone however is welcome to attend all meetings....idea for the 5 spots, could stay open and they could be awarded to 5 meeting participants, depending on who shows up

AS: how many voting members are here tonight?

DD: how many know they are not voting members? (many hands raised)...

SC: all nonWRC folks not listed as voting members? (6 or 7 hands raised)...so, if a vote were taken tonight, 5 of you at large members could vote

Discussion.....what if more than 5 at large people attend? How decide who gets to vote? First come first serve? (idea from group)

DD: how does everyone feel about that?

AW: Carl and I represent a large group of stakeholders, and we traveled here to participate, so we would like to vote, or at least one of our representatives to be able to vote

CP : how well advertised are these meetings?

SC: explanation of how the word is spread about these meetings and further explanation about 5 at large voting slots

CP: suggestions about posting meeting ads on their website (hobbyists?)

AB: motion that the group (NCARK)—NC Association of Reptile Keepers-- should have a voting member

GB: I second that motion.

DD: all in favor? (unanimous decision) motion passed---makes sense to leave the remaining 4 slots open for future stakeholder groups

JB: what if at a voting meeting, only 5 out of 20 show up? What do then?

DD: we had determined that we would take the vote among the voting members in attendance

SC: if I ask for RSVP, and only a few voting members plan to show up, then we could just postpone the meeting

AS: are all interests represented now in the voting body?

DD: it seems like we do (AS agreed)....we have representation among institutions, special interest groups, etc. (like NCARK)....with the disbanding of NC Herpetoculturists, it's good to know about groups like NCARK

AW: we represent many different stakeholders in our group, not just herpetoculturists

KF: we are still missing someone from the pet industry

AW: we are familiar with many pet store folks...we will be holding a membership drive soon to get these folks involved....we have word that they are interested

AW, DH....discussion about upcoming reptile show...improvement from the past...

DH: it would be nice to get pet stores on board...they need to police themselves with animal welfare conditions, etc.

AW: we want to set husbandry standards and endorse them as a service to pet stores....a matter of personal responsibility...should that be legislated? Or encouraged through education and mentoring?

DD: my suggestion is that if anyone knows anyone who could represent pet shop owners, please work on those contacts

KF: I may be able to get someone interested....

DD: moving to the agenda....first item is to finalize the recommendations from the last meeting....the turtle bill....posted on the website....need to finalize the recommendations before the last step of presenting them to the WRC....(Dave provided quick summary of the turtle rule, what it is now, where it came from, the need for it, etc.)....did we get any comments from the website?

SC: we had finished the actual draft for the turtle rule last time, but we did not finish the possession permit document....I wanted to post them in tandem...after tonight, they will be posted for 30 days for people to comment on them

DH: I have a comment after reading over this....in past NCHS meetings, when the question came up about having turtles in possession, the cutoff has always been 5 reptiles...before the turtle bill came about....that is what we have been telling people for years

AW: that is the way enforcement guys have been interpreting it, too....having 5 is OK

SC: right, we need to clarify the language about 4 vs. 5 turtles....is it consistent through the document?

DH: no, someone needs to read through and make sure the language is consistent

(agreement from group)

JG: why are we interested in regulating non-native turtles?

SC: we talked about this last time; it's mainly an enforcement issue

AS: agreed

DH: yes, what about red-eared sliders? (brought up example with invasive plants)

SC: it's an ID problem for enforcement...so we are trying to simplify things for LE officers

JG: I just want to be able to give people the right information

SC: it seems like it would be easier to go with the rule as-is and then write a separate permit addendum or something in the future if need be

DD: our problem is that if we give people a blank check to target a species, even an exotic one, people will go crazy and start killing everything out there...could be a big problem

Officer GW: same problem with coyote/deer hunters.....

DC: I have a comment on the possession permit.....the text does not provide for the sale of captive bred offspring...in the interpretations part maybe?

DH: it's in section B

SC: I'll read back through over this and make sure the permit includes that

DH: will the person getting the possession permit, will that person have to get a permit from the health department, too---as of now, it is illegal to sell turtles in NC because of the health issues...how can a person be permitted from one agency and not be legal with another agency?

DD: it refers to commercial industry only....group discussion....I don't think the health law would get the non-commercial person in trouble...the health law refers to commercial enterprises only

PB: so individuals could sell a turtle, but a pet store could not

DD: right

DH: they can sell out of state, but not within NC

CP: so people with 10 Asian box turtles are currently illegal?

SC: yes, right now they are; although that is not the intention of the rule; that is why we are trying to do this quickly to make these changes

DC: how different are turtles in their difficulty to ID from snakes? (discussion about other reptiles....exotics....all reptiles...----lots of paperwork potential)

DD: they are not; right now turtles are a subset in and among themselves; so it was easier to take the rule and manipulate it in place since the rule was already a done deal

GB: so this possession permit we are looking at is for turtles only?

KF: at this point, the extension is to native and non-natives, right?

DD: right

GB: is this possession permit going to include all reptiles or just turtles?

Group: good question!

DB: the rules in place relate to natives only; doesn't specify one or the other; there are no state rules on the books that deal with non-native animals at this time, but I will tell you that it is coming! There was a senate bill introduced last session (dangerous animal bill), so it is on the radar with the legislature, so keep it in mind; no state rule currently about non-natives, only city or county rules at this point

SC: if this goes ahead as proposed, this reg will be one of the first state laws dealing with non-natives (turtles); back to what you said Grover, that is something we'll have to look into with the collection and possession permits; currently if this just deals with turtles, what about other reptiles?

DD: the license will be different, that's all

KF: comment about needing multiple permits for separate groups of reptiles....a few snakes, a few turtles, etc.

DD: original text says "5 or more reptiles" and doesn't specify non-native or native; we are going to have to figure this conundrum out; we are asking for non-natives to be enforced now for the first time

GW: officer made comment about already some exotics are banned....African clawed frog, snakehead fish, etc.

DB: one way to write it is to say "any combination of reptiles"

DD: what about keeping it as is, but just mention that turtles are excluded and refer to turtle rule; Daron will not want to write permits for all the people who have geckos in the state!

Comment about snapping turtles....they were excluded in original text...

DD: from last meeting, we simplified things and just said all turtles...including mud and snappers; we didn't want people to target certain unprotected species once all others were banned; those remaining unprotected species would get hammered; remember this is for the large-scale commercial collection, not the individual who wants to go out and harvest a turtle to eat

DC: I'd like clarification on the collection license....

SC: currently, you can't get a collection license for turtles; we can't issue one for anything but snappers or mud or musk; what we are proposing, will be the same; we won't issue a permit for commercial collection for 5 or more

DC: so the collection license doesn't exist anymore?

DD: technically you could apply to Daron on a case-by-case basis for collecting more than 4

DC: so a kid could collect 4 painted turtles?

DD: yes; in a year

KF: what if those 4 had eggs?

Discussion about possession permit required.....annual reporting required....etc.

PB: how can we expect anyone else to understand these rules if we in this room don't?

SC: comments about what we are doing and one goal of the education working group

CP: until tonight, I had no idea NC had any rules or laws about turtles or collection or possession...I don't want to know any more!

DD: it's going to be up to all of us to get the word out, not just the education working group..NCARK....NCHS.....all the resources and venues we have to get the word out to the public

DH: once this becomes a done deal, there needs to be a media blitz, a press release

AS: make it clear that nothing that would be proposed regarding any herp species is going to prevent children from collecting less than 5 reptiles; no one would support that!

CP: I think the limit of 4 reptiles is good; no reasonable person will need to collect more than those; I think it's fair

EC: Part c, section 3...question...what about govt. agencies?

GW: from enforcement standpoint, we need to get this in the NCAC...we don't have a lot of training....it needs to go through the legislation...it needs to be clear and the public needs to be able to see it....get it in regs digest....herps need to be considered "wildlife"

SC: getting herps classified as anything but "wildlife resources" will be difficult

GW: officers that will enforce this will need something to take to the courtroom to show the judge; so it needs to be printed in the regs and law books; a jury would probably not convict anyone unless it's in the books

JB: does this include pieces or parts of turtles?

SC: yes, 3 lines down on possession permit

SC: remember what this group is providing is recommendations to the WRC; our people within WRC will still have to sign off on this and go through public hearings, etc.; this is a recommendation, and it may not remain exactly as we have it here; hopefully the only changes will be more efficiency and enforceability

DD: if we can come up with something with a broad spectrum that deals with the issue at hand, it will have a better chance of being passed

SC: I'll make sure the wording is consistent throughout....other specific questions or scenarios that people have raised....ex: talk to health dept. about sale of turtles.....once I get these answers, I'll send it to the members here...e-mail vote....solicit comments among ourselves, then post at large on the web

JB: are there age limits on the permits? So if a family of 4...each family member could 4 turtles for a total of 16?

SC: that's the way I interpret it...

GW: supposed to keep bag limits separate...

SC: they would be in the same home....

DB: I'd get a permit in that case.

Adjourn for break at 8:25 pm.....

Start again at 8:38 pm....

DD: we have a lot to get done and not much time left tonight.....most of you know that there was proposed an inherently dangerous animal bill....not on the table now with the legislature, but rest assured it will come up again, as it's come up several times in the past....we of course are interested in herps with this, not lions and tigers and bears...we need to get involved with this.....if we don't we will regret it....the legislature will come up with some knee-jerk reactionary sweeping rule....we need to do the hard work for the legislature and put something in their hands...this topic WILL come up again....we need to be prepared from a herp point of view or be proactive and have something in writing to give to the lawmakers, something we can live with; we don't want some sweeping legislation that will negatively affect responsible herp owners, etc.; I see 4 main groups with this....this is in addition to the turtle bill and regs that exist already; these are discrete taxonomic units; not an umbrella approach; the 4 things: 1) crocodylians 2) large constrictors 3) venomous 4) large lizards, monitors, etc. We don't want a situation in NC that exists in FL; the Everglades is a nightmare now because people have released exotics and pets that became too large or dangerous; there is a need to stop impulse purchases of reptiles; animal health issue; human health issue; issue of what to do with the animals...illegal release...; permit vs. license—permit doesn't cost anything, license

is purchased from Daron's office and is renewed each year with an annual report; in the time remaining, we need to discuss these 4 groups

KF: what defines "venomous"?

JG: I came up with the original list; venomous is anything that could kill a person

DD: there are several approaches...what has venom and what doesn't have venom is a contested issue; we can define it more clearly...with constrictors, what constitutes them? We should all come up with a list of what should be considered a large constrictor.

TT: I would add iguanas to the list if you are concerned with health issues and impulse purchases

DD: I had iguanas under large lizards; I think we all know that there needs to be lots more education out there in general but specifically with the issues this bill brings up

DB: it is very important also to remember that what you will prepare is a recommendation to the legislative branch of our state govt.; the WRC could not make a rule on this because there is no law on the books already; make it user-friendly for the legislators....they have to understand it....they need to be educated too

AW: that's a good point; you are talking about a whole new set of laws; it's easy for a lot of people to assume that because we are talking about reptiles (creatures we've always been taught to fear), and yes we know they can be dangerous in some cases, but is there truly a public safety issue? What do the statistics say? Is there any proof that this is needed and all the time and money spent on it to study it?

TT: I think most of these taxa can be kept without a concern for public safety; I don't want to see any more iguanas dumped on museums, etc. ; the public safety threat needs to be addressed as well as the animal's health and welfare

DD: when this group is done with whatever it is we will do, we may want to sit on it for a while until this comes up again; we should have something in place and waiting there when the next bill comes up; things will move quickly when that happens; we need to have something in place that is acceptable to our stakeholders; we don't want the legislature to say "no venomous"; our job is to come up with something that still meets the needs of the public who keeps reptiles that others deem "inherently dangerous"

AW: we need to educate people on specific issues and problems that are out there; Senator Garwood sponsored the bill because of big cat maulings in his county; where did the bill come from?

JG: it came through the zoo

CP: the director was a sponsor

JG: the zoo's take on this is that they want it to pass; I personally don't support all parts of the bill

DH: from my Zoo Atlanta experience, believe me, if you don't have something ready to go, they will pass something reactionary in the middle of the night; that happened in GA and is why so many of their wildlife laws are less than acceptable

CP: we need to separate herps from big cats; we need to educate the legislature

DD: it's just like the helmet or seatbelt law, it doesn't matter if it's for the individual or the public at large; the legislature doesn't distinguish between the two; we aren't trying to feed the fire; we want education to move forward; at the least, we need something in place even if we don't present it at this time

TT: if we have a rational permit system in place that protects the animals and the owners, then the legislature can't touch that

CP: we need language in the permit system that the applicant WILL get the permit, not may or might or could.....private liaisons with enforcement and regulatory agencies?

DD: the idea of liaisons will come up again...

JG: the way I understand it is that the bill has been sent to a study committee, so it WILL come up again; the committee is made of agency folks and stakeholders like us (we don't know who?)

AW: According to Congressman Basnight, it did not go anywhere; no study bill; it could be reintroduced in the future, but Basnight has no intention of submitting it; DNR was going to take recommendations if it had passed as a study bill, but it didn't pass

CP: if NCARK endorses it, and are wise to the pulse of the public, then they will want to join us and our agenda; the situation is still hypothetical of someone in the public being bitten by someone's venomous snake?

JG: not true; I know of a case of a neighbor being killed by someone else's venomous snake getting loose and biting her in the 80s

CP: I will e-mail Sarah what I had already started writing on this topic, based so far on FL law

TT: if we don't have a permit system in place, if someone got bitten, where will the antivenom come from? Our personal supplies? We don't want to be stuck in that position. It's really cheap for exotics; hospitals stock native species venom; owners need to be financially responsible for stocking venom; protocol submitted on antivenom?

DH: another topic for discussion? PETA and Humane Society is talking about banning all herps because of salmonella.....

AW: can I read a statement from our group?

SC: can you e-mail it to us all?

AW: yes

TT: I'd also like to propose an online chat room discussion on kingsnake.com

CP: good idea; how often do we meet?

DD: once we get through some of these initial issues, our meetings should decrease to a couple a year

AW: we definitely need to come up with something on this issue

DD: we will need to hash this out face to face; in other cases in the future, the chat room meeting might be good; for the next meeting, think about the constrictor issue I brought up and whether the breakdown of the 4 categories makes sense; bring comments about this

SC: as a reminder, the 4 groups are crocodylians, venomous, large constrictors, large lizards

Discussion.....how large is large? That is what we need to think about this....we don't want large black rat snakes in there....

DD: there is precedence for this in other states

DH: several states have the breaking point of 9 feet and above

DD: you guys can come up with length and weight or come up with a species list

EC: same thing for large lizards.....what are we referring to?

DD: this is where this group may decide not to include lizards...we know there is a surplus of large lizards out there....if we finally have people within the state who have a permit or license then we have the means to handle the confiscation issue; we have no means for dealing with this now; if there's a license, then we can deposit confiscated reptiles with licensed people; a relief for the museum and other repositories; lots of animals getting put down because no mechanism in place now to deal with these animals

DB: I would also ask you to think about the inexperienced person who wants to have a large reptile or venomous animal...

DD: we might think about recommending an apprenticeship for beginners who want to get started with these animals (similar to liaison idea mentioned earlier)

GW: disposition of confiscated reptiles; what do we do with them? Euthanize them? With turtles? That is a huge issue. With deer, we have to euthanize them.

SC: that issue may not have been left in the changes to the turtle bill we have written..I'll check into that.

DD: date for the next meeting? April 5th? 12th?

Discussion from group.....April dates? Not good for some....another night meeting? Mixed opinions.....

SC: what if we swap days and nights? Show of hands?
Tuesday the 11th? 1-4 pm?

Most of group agrees.....

SC: be sure you have the annual meeting on your calendars.....March 15-16th...at the Summit....look online....registration fee

AS: April 11th is not available for this room.....

SC: the other room across campus? Bigger rooms? Enough for 30 people at least?

AS: room for 40 people?

SC: I'll send an e-mail if this date changes.

GW: may be tough to have LE person here that time because of turkey season

adjournment at 9:25 pm