

**South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority
Environmental, Health & Safety Committee**

**December 17, 2020
Meeting Transcription**

A regular meeting of the Environmental, Health & Safety Committee of the South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority took place on Thursday, December 17, 2020, via remote access. Chairman Curseaden presided.

Present: Committee – Messrs. Curseaden, Borowy, Cermola, DiSalvo and Ms. Sack
 Management – Mss. Collins, Kowalski, Nesteriak, Reckdenwald, Vitagliano and Messrs.
 Bingaman, Norris, Singh and Triana
 Staff – Mrs. Slubowski

The Chair called the meeting to order at 3:28 p.m.

Kevin:

Do we have a motion to approve the minutes of September 17th?

Joe:

So moved.

Suzanne:

Second.

Kevin:

Any discussion? All in favor?

Group:

Aye.

Kevin:

Aye. Thank you. We're going to start off today with Lori Vitagliano with the legislative session outlook. Good afternoon, Lori. I think Lori might still be on mute.

Lori:

Until now.

Kevin:

There you go.

Lori:

Good afternoon, everyone. I hope you're all doing well in this interesting afternoon, we're having an interesting day. So getting right into the presentation, we are scheduled to begin a regular session in

January. The session will convene on January 6th. It's a long session adjourning on June 9th. The session format this year will begin, and will take place remotely. That's what we're hearing at least begin that way. Uncertainty as to how long that would last. We're hearing that each committee will have its own YouTube page, and the public hearings will take place over Zoom. That's what we know so far. So at least it's news that a session will happen.

Lori:

Under the general election. There are key leadership changes that happened as a result of the election about the Connecticut legislature, Senator Looney will remain as the Senate president, and the Senate minority leader, Len Fasano, He retired, and the Republicans chose Senator Kevin Kelly to be the senate minority leader, and he represents Shelton, Stratford, and Monroe. The house minority leader, Themis Klarides also retired, and representative Vincent Candelora from North Branford was elected by that caucus to serve as the minority leader. Some other committee membership changes took place.

Lori:

Committee members are changing a little bit. Most notably, representative Dorinda Borer representing West Haven is now chair of the Environment Committee with Senator Christine Cohen from our region in the Guilford, Branford area. So those are interesting, and noteworthy points to make as well as the legislatures landscape. So in the Senate, the Democratic party has 24 seats, and the Republicans will have 12 seats, in the house of representatives, the Democratic party won 97 seats, and the Republicans won 54 seats. In our service area we'll have six new legislators replacing Senator Logan for Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Bethany, Derby, Hamden, and part of Woodbridge.

Lori:

Senator Fasano retired, so we'll have a new senator in East Haven, and North Haven. In Madison representative Kokoruda, there's a new legislator there, as well as representative Kim Rose from Milford, and the seat for representative Klarides, as I mentioned, that's a new spot as well as a new legislator in the Killingworth area. So moving on to the emerging topics, as we all know, session was abruptly adjourned last session. Stopped immediately back in March, in the middle of the public hearings. So as we start and get ready for this session, we're pretty confident that we will expect to see PFAS re-emerging just as we did last year, and we were getting prepared to support the creation of the safe drinking water advisory council.

Lori:

If that group is formed, this group would be charged with addressing PFAS issues. Again, we supported that, it came out of the recommendations from the PFAS task course. We'll be persistent that the practices are established to remediate previously contaminated PFAS areas, as well as decisions based on sound science, and data. Again, we expect that to come forward, the Safe Drinking Water Assessment, that fee sunsets this year on June 30th to 2021, since this is in place, we don't expect it to go away. The best approach as an industry is to work with the DPH, and support current language that's in place capping the fee \$3 per connection. Just as a reminder in 2018, when this particular bill was proposed, DPH was asking for a cap of \$5 per connection. So the fee hasn't come close to that. And again, we don't expect it to go away. So we'll work with the industry on this issue.

Lori:

Virtual Net Metering we'll continue to ask that political subdivisions being allowable Virtual Net Metering host. I know it seems like groundhog day, and we keep trying, and hopefully this is the magic year to position ourselves to be ready to take advantage of that, if the opportunity, if there's a project for us. So we'll work on that as well. Water Treatment Operator Reciprocity. So the RWA along with the CWWA, Connecticut Water Works Association will work toward accomplishing operator reciprocity. This will help the industry have a better pool of applicants for these positions. This came up last year, we were working on it. We were working with the association. CWWA initiated conversations with the education committee of the Connecticut, AWWA, and I understand, we understand that they are currently working on that. So hopefully there won't be a need to propose legislation because we've certainly would like this to move forward, and progress has been made on this issue. So that's on our radar.

Lori:

Other water industry emerging issues that we're hearing about, the Installation of Backflow Prevention Devices. So we are hearing that a certain condo association outside of our region is pushing back on installing backflow preventers for private irrigation well. The industry is hearing churning about that. So it's a topic we'll need to be prepared for, as well as chlorination issues. Another issue outside of our region that we're hearing about, that a group is questioning levels, and every now, and when these types of topics come up, and we're hearing about different groups asking about them in inquiries, we were sometimes surprised that the legislature will take it up in the form of proposed legislation. So those are two things that we were also hearing about, and we'll be prepared as well.

Lori:

The next section is related to the Governor's Council on Climate Change. And this group was charged with figuring out how to turn Connecticut's climate goals into an actionable path. The department of public health has been involved, and participated in a work group. Public Water Supply Resiliency was listed as a priority, calling for the formation of a Commission on Health Equity and Climate Change that would be focusing on drought management, and encouraging interconnection. So seeing that this came out of the governor's council, and it's been hearing a lot about it. It very well might turn up in the agency's package.

Lori:

We haven't seen the packages, or the legislative agendas yet from the agencies, but hearing the discussion about this, it was a worthy to put on this presentation today. So in closing, just look forward to the session beginning as well as it can. In some format on January 6th, I think they've laid out a good plan to try to do that. They held a special session remotely, so the tools are in place, and it's proven to work. So continue to work with the association, look forward to January 6th. That's what I have. Any questions?

Kevin:

Any questions from the board.

Joe:

No.

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Kevin:

Thank you, Lori.

Lori:

Thank you everyone. Stay well, and be safe.

Kevin:

Thanks. Mr. Triana with the Deer Management program update. Thank you, sir. Thanks again, Lori.

John:

All right. Good afternoon, can everyone hear me. All right. I'll try to be brief, and skip over some of these things that you've heard before. First is Reducing Deer Density. I'm going to be giving update of the deer program, and this is all background information about why it's important to manage our deer herd, because it does impact forest regeneration, which impacts water quality in the end game. And when you look at what we have for offerings for deer hunt, we started with 700 acres over in North Branford in 2009. Then we expanded to 3,300 acres there. By 2012, we added another 160 acres on the border between Antonia, and Seymour. Then in 2015, we added 400 acres, approximately both in Prospect in Bethany.

John:

The hunting season for 2020, we had 27 days of hunting from the day before Halloween until the end of the month in November. We issued 180 permits by lottery, and had 10 scouting days in October. Two deer check stations that we operate are in Gaillard at North Branford, and in Bethany, and they're staffed by 53 volunteers. I'm just going through the slides. Is somebody's moving the slides for you?

Jennifer:

Moving them down, John.

John:

Okay, I'm on the fourth slide. There we go. The Doe Incentive is something that we had at the very beginning, where we want to incentivize hunters from removing females from the population that most with deer population control. So this year we had 26 does harvested by 19 hunters. When you look at the harvest totals for this year, our hunters took a total of 45 deer. You see the breakdown here by location, and by gender. So most of our does, which is pretty standard as what we see, because of the incentive. If we did not offer the Doe Incentive, then you would see those numbers flip. Those percentages flip. The incentive is that if you take a female, then you're automatically through next year's lottery. The 45 deer that we've harvested this year are pretty about equal what we've obviously said for about the last seven, or eight years.

John:

Next slide is the number of deer that we harvested in North Branford. The takeaway here is that, the first year we only did the 770 acres. After 2010, we had the 3,300 acres. The takeaway from that is that we saw huge numbers prior to the January 2011 snowstorms. That really did a number on the deer population out there. It has been at a much lower level than what we saw before January, 2011. The

next slide is all the deer that we've harvested at the three other areas, you can see we haven't taken much from Ansonia, and Seymour. This is really indicative of the size of the areas. It's just a much smaller area over on Seymour, and Ansonia, and then a little bit larger at Bethany and Prospect.

John:

So final thoughts, the deer hunt... So we have seen fewer deer sightings since 2009, which is in large part to our efforts, and the big impact of the winter of January 2011. Excuse me. We have seen anecdotally that there's been additional brush, and understory vegetation by our hunters, and from our staff. We've seen a decrease annual harvest, most evident in North Branford again, after the 2011 snowstorms. After 11 years, we have plots out there from our forestry department, and also there is Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station. The Ag. Station in fact, is right now conducting a feeder, and camera's study, putting out, I think it was nine different feeders out there with cameras to try to get an estimate of the population, and also ratios of males to females, and phones as well.

John:

Our current DPH permit expired at the end of this hunting season. So we need to renew the permit once we get all our data back from our hunters post. On survey we will have data to fill in the rest of the story for our annual report that goes up to Hartford. Then at that same time, or right after that, is when we would apply for the next year's permit. So in the feedback that we've gotten from hunters, everyone's very grateful for the opportunity, and they appreciate our efforts towards conservation stewardship of the land. We did not receive any negative publicity this year, nor did we have to kick out, or revoke anyone's permit. I think that's it. If anyone has any questions on the deer hunt, I can answer them.

Kevin:

Thank you, John. Any questions for John? John, you're up again with the update on the Recreation Permit program.

John:

Sure. Preface on this is that, it is just incredible, and couldn't have imagined what the pandemic would do to our Recreation Permit program. So what you see before you is a line graph showing the permit holders by month at the end of each month for the last four years. And the typical pattern is that we see, because of the way our system works is that the permits are actually a 13 month permit. So we always see a bump in April, and May, which is the beginning of the fishing season, and then a gradual decline for the rest of the year. What you see for 2017, and 2019, those three years in between, there are all indicative of what's been for the last 20 years, where it's had that same pattern.

John:

Well, this year you can see the purple line with the dots is what we encountered due to COVID this year, which is really incredible. We start to see the impacts immediately in March, once we started the stay at home order from the state, and the closure of bars, and et cetera, and restaurants, and all that stuff. It just got more intensified through the spring, and we are still seeing the positive. It's a sort of oxymoronic to say that, but the positive effects of the pandemic to our recreation permit program.

John:

So I'm going to do the March, and the May numbers. I'm going to skip November for the sake of time for you guys. In March, remember that we started having the COVID impacts. By the second week of March, restaurants, and bars that had closed, the CIAC stopped all winter, sports for high schools, NBA, NHL, NCAA, all stopped their stuff. We went into our stay-at-home orders. At that time, we started to see increase in permits being sold. What you see in this graph are the permit holders in March of the last four years. So we're averaging about 3,800 per month per March, and then it bumped up about 200 for March of 2020.

John:

So how it's broken down is that it wasn't just a lot of people renewing their permits. Those are in the middle of they're all been about a hundred, or a little bit over that. What we really saw was an influx of new permit holders that were driven to us by the pandemic. I should also note that we started a coupon program just before the pandemic hit, which helped our numbers, but what really started to intensify the permit sales in March was when the governor moved up the start of the fishing season. Normally that's the second Saturday of April, but by the 25th, he said he's going to move it up, and allow fishermen to get out there, and start fishing. So once we saw that, all of a sudden we started selling permits like crazy. You could see what's at the top of the slide here, we sold the 153 permits with the coupon, but two thirds of those only happened in the last week of the month after the governor opened fishing season early.

John:

So selling the permits also of course, helped our revenue. You see the bar graph here shows the revenue for the last four Marches where we were averaging about 6,000. We doubled that in March of 2020. That was only with really a fraction of March being impacted by COVID. Things got better in April, but the real boom came in May. What you see here are the permit holders for the last four Mays, where we were averaging around 4,000. By May of 2020, we were now over a thousand higher than what we were in an average May.

John:

This again is the breakdown of the permits that we sold both by straight new purchases, and by renewals. Again, you see that we had a little bump for renewals over the average of the last three Mays, but what really came in were new permit holders, where we had an average of new permit holders in May of around 180, or so, now we had almost 750. So selling nearly a thousand permits in May was way off the charts. People use the coupon on every day, overall of the 950 people were permits, or about half of them use the coupon. So that helped as well. One third of them were two year family permits.

John:

I you can imagine then, that also helped out with the revenue side of it, where we averaged about 10,000, or 11,000 per May. In May of 2020, we're up to over 35,000. By the way, should say that all this is, is... at this time we did not start the boating program yet because we were figuring out how we're going to do it with COVID restrictions. This is only showing the gross revenue from permits view sold. You can skip this one, Jen, skip the next one, skip that one.

John:

And there. So these three are all for November. I'm going to skip the other two. What's important for this one, that you see in November, while normally in our year for selling permits, we go down month to month, each month, as we go through the year, then we continue to go up, bless you. We continue to go up in all the months in the summer, all the months in the fall, now as we enter the winter. You see here that for the last three March... three Novembers, excuse me, we were averaging about 3,500 permits. We're at eight... I'm sorry, this is revenue. We're now up to 8,100. What I want you to see is the text box at the top. Notice that from June 2016 to the present time, that five top months with revenue, we've all had during the COVID period.

John:

So the events that have occurred since March, want to summarize this stuff, we stopped all special events in March, and that continued through July. We delayed the start of boats. We did not put out the fishing dock at all, and so on. So we only put out the boat dock, excuse me. Once we got our act together in July, we were figuring out how we're going to do it with COVID protocols, and we continued with the boats through October, and even then it was restricted, because we had shorter hours, and we only rented boats. We did not run batteries, or motors this year. Special events, we restarted in August, figuring that, the risk of transmission of the disease is not really acute outside.

John:

So we started doing things again in August. I led a botany walk of nine people in Madison. Then we had a butterfly walk in North Branford. October, Josh did an invasive species walk over in Bethany. November, I did another bird walk at Hammonasset, we had 25 people there, that was a co-sponsored walk with the New Haven bird club. Then this month we had our Christmas Tree Cutting, where we sold 91 trees. I will not parenthetically also forget, that's an increase of about, excuse me, 20% over what we've seen the last few years, that was really pushed by the number of new people who came in.

John:

We have many new people who drove up to Gaillard, and said, "What's the deal." We had to explain to them where to go, what to do, et cetera. Finally, one additional thing that we did this fall, because a lot of the other activities that families had were gone, whether it was high school football games, tailgating, going out to restaurants was tough, though not prohibited, all your fall fairs were gone, the biggie, the Durham Fair, et cetera. So we made this scavenger hunt where we put signs, one at each one of the recreation areas, said if you...

John:

Put signs at each one of the recreation areas said, if you take pictures of six of them and send it to us, we'll put you into a drawing for a gift certificate and we had seven entrants do that. Next slide. At this point, I'll take any questions. I should also mention after I did this PowerPoint, two other things I thought of was that we definitely saw an increase in the number of people trespassing once COVID restrictions went into place. We employed extra patrols at the three busiest recreation areas, those being Saltonstall, Maltby, and Chamberlain. Having those extra patrols definitely helped us control the amount of people out there, because we interacted with many people who came without permits, many people who came with dogs, many people who were riding bikes in the wrong location, and that helped.

John:

I also helped us in the eyes of our permit holders that were out there really enforcing the rules, were putting some teeth to it, that they see the value that they're putting in for their permit. The last point about all this is that because of our new technology and smartphones, the ubiquitousness of cell phones and the ability for people to buy a permit online. When we would intercept somebody who didn't have a permit and just thought that they could walk there, but they were willing and able to buy a permit, we said "Go on your smartphone, go to this website and put in your information." They did that. They showed us, they showed the recreation staff member the receipt on their phone, then they were good to go. We had many, I would say hundreds of point of sales that were in the woods at Saltonstall, Maltby, or Chamberlain, then probably a few more other places as the guys just to trail inspections and ran into people who didn't have permits at the time.

John:

With that, here's some photographs from some of the events today, or that we did this year. The top left is the bird walk at Hammonasset. Bottom left is the butterfly event that Alex did at North Brantford and the one on the right is one of the submissions from the winner of the scavenger hunt with his son pointing to the sign at Sugarloaf. I'll take any questions you have.

Kevin:

Thank you, John. It's really good stuff. Anybody have any questions?

Anthony:

Nope, thank you.

Kevin:

One last thing I would point out is that Ted and I, we've been talking about trying to figure out a virtual tabletop exercise and continuing to work on business continuity plans or exercises for those. We're going to meet in mid-January. Other than that, that concludes this committee. Thank you.

Tony:

Thank you.

Anthony:

I'm sorry. I move that we adjourn.

Suzanne:

Thanks John.

David:

I second.

[ENVIRONMENTAL, HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITTEE MEETING ADJOURNS AT 3:50 P.M.]