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Minutes, Business Meeting

Southeastern Fishes Council

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Minutes, Business Meeting

MINUTES

Business Meeting 22nd Annual Meeting Southeastern Fishes Council

The 22nd annual meeting of the Southeastern Fishes Council was held at the Intercontinental Hotel in New Orleans on 14 June 1996, site of the 1996 meeting of the American Society of Ichthyologists and Herpetologists. Executive Committee members attending were Steve Walsh (President), Mary Freeman (Treasurer), and Gerry Dinkins (Secretary). Steve Walsh called the meeting to order at 5:10 PM. Steve introduced Mary Freeman and Gerry Dinkins as the newly elected treasurer and secretary, respectively. Steve explained that the offices of treasurer and secretary were formerly combined, but had been split into separate positions following the recent constitutional revision. Copies of the 1995 SFC meeting minutes were then distributed, and Steve noted that in previous years the minutes were traditionally read by the secretary and then accepted by voice vote into the record. In the interest of time, Steve suggested that it would be a better use of the brief annual meeting to forego with the reading of the minutes since they were published in the last Proceedings. The meeting attendees were given an opportunity to review the 1995 SFC meeting minutes, then, following motions and a voice vote, the 1995 SFC meeting minutes were approved.

The Treasurer's Report was read by Mary Freeman and approved (see below). Mary concluded by summarizing total assets of the SFC and urged attending members to pay their annual dues quickly or risk sending their checks to a recently renamed road in rural Georgia.

The meeting moved on to the Executive Committee report. Steve Walsh discussed the Fish and Wildlife Diversity Funding Initiative, a program being promoted to add a tax to certain outdoor recreational merchandise with resulting revenues intended to fund fish and wildlife protection and habitat enhancement. Discussion of the initiative occurred at the 1995 meeting and SFC members present in Knoxville voted to support it. Steve stated that he had received several newsletters and other correspondence, and that proponents of the initiative (International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies) were still lobbying for congressional approval. The next item discussed was a resolution that was drafted and approved by the Executive Committee, opposing plans by the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) for major road construction along the Little Tennessee River. The resolution was sent to the NCDOT, but no response was received. All other SFC committees were inactive in the last year.

The meeting then moved on to old business. Steve noted that Hank Bart (former Secretary/Treasurer) was absent, and had planned to present a report on the ongoing issue of tax exemption status for the SFC. Hank remained dedicated to resolving the problem with the Internal Revenue Service. No additional old business was discussed.

Continuing on to regional reports, Steve asked that each

regional reporter give a brief synopsis of their report and other recent news, since the regional reports had been published in their entirety in the recent Proceedings. Fritz Rohde began by summarizing his report for Region 1 (Northeast Region), and noting that Bob Jenkins of Roanoke College was continuing his work with redhorses. Fritz discussed Mary Moser's work with carpsuckers and with blue and flathead catfish in the Cape Fear River, and congratulated Wayne Starnes (formerly of the National Museum of Natural History) on his recent appointment at the North Carolina Museum of Natural History and welcomed Wayne back to the southeast.

Noel Burkhead reported for the Southeast Region (Region 2). Noel's main points were that the federal moratorium on listing threatened and endangered species had been lifted, and that the SFC should draw its attention to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife's decision to drop Category 1 and 2 (C1/C2) species from the Federal Notices of Review process. Noel discussed the political implications of dropping C1/C2 species, suggesting that the USFWS was orphaning from federal stewardship many species that are becoming rare.

For Region 3 (North-Central Region), Dave Etnier reported that the Tennessee Valley Authority put lake sturgeon in the Clinch River three years ago, and that Charlie Saylor of TVA had recently collected one from the upper Norris Reservoir. Dave also reported that the Tennessee Aquarium in Chattanooga had expressed an interest in raising lake sturgeon to the 7-10 inch range to further ensure stocking success, and that snail darters were becoming more widespread, apparently due to recent improvements in discharge schedules below several TVA dams.

For Region 4 (South-Central Region), Bernard Kuhajda discussed the status of *Scaphirhynchus suttkusi* in the Mobile basin, and passed around pictures of an Alabama sturgeon captured in April 1996 by a paper mill employee in a hoop net 50 ft below a buoy in the Claiborne Pool downstream of Millers Ferry Dam, 0.25 mi N of Dixon Creek. The fish was released alive, but no tissue was taken for DNA analysis. Previously, three Alabama sturgeon have been captured this decade (one in 1993, and two in 1995, all below Claiborne Lock and Dam in the Alabama River). Tissues for DNA analyses were taken from all three. The 1993 specimen died at the Marion Fish Hatchery, and the second sturgeon captured in 1995 was released and subsequently died following entrapment in a gill net. Both of these specimens are in the University of Alabama Ichthyological Collection. The first Alabama Sturgeon collected in 1995 was released and, presumably, is still swimming around. Bernie also reported that Mel Warren and Wendell Haag had finished a manuscript on freshwater mussel community structure in the upper Sipsey River, and that Mel and Brooks Burr's palezone recovery plan was out. Scott

Mettee of the Alabama Geological Survey discussed blue suckers below Millers Ferry in the Alabama River by noting that he had captured and tagged several hundred fish, one of which was recaptured 103 miles downstream. Bob Jenkins added that he recently examined several dozen *Moxostoma* in the Auburn Fish Collection. All previously identified *M. erythrurum* turned out to be *M. carinatum*, and he requested that anyone having collection data or specimens of *Moxostoma* from the Tombigbee River please see him after the meeting.

John Harris and Frank Pezold were not present to give summaries of the northwest or southwest regional reports.

Following regional reports, Steve Walsh initiated a discussion of new business by announcing the upcoming (1997) meeting to be held at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina, in conjunction with the Association of Southeastern Biologists (ASB). Steve asked that anyone with suggestions for ASB field trips to please contact Dennis Haney. Steve then informed the group that he had received a letter from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) requesting comments on their draft Vision Statement for fisheries in the southeast region. The document emphasized the future directions of the USFWS river protection and fisheries programs in the Southeast. After highlighting the key points of the document, Steve opened the floor for discussion. Noel Burkhead responded by emphasizing his opinion that it was important for the SFC to reply to the USFWS letter. Noel volunteered to help draft a response on behalf of the SFC. Steve asked if it would be better to respond individually or as a group. Mary Freeman supported a group response from the SFC, but she also encouraged everyone to read the Vision Statement and to respond individually in support of the document. Royal Suttikus of Tulane University wanted to know how the document would be used. Steve directed the question to Jim Williams, who responded by saying that he thought the regional office of the USFWS had undergone reorganization and was seeking to redefine its mission and focus for southeastern fisheries issues. Royal expressed his concern over U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) plans for water usage. Steve asked for further comments regarding the USFWS Vision Statement. After none were offered, the discussion moved on to a proposed dam on the Alabama River at Choctaw Bluffs. Steve acknowledged Bernie Kuhajda's knowledge of the project and requested that he give the group a summary. Bernie began by saying that the proposed dam will be below Claiborne Lock and Dam, which presently is the most downstream impoundment on the Alabama River. Other than the Alabama sturgeon collected this year, the last three sturgeon have all been collected downstream of Claiborne Lock and Dam. Mary Freeman stated that it was her understanding that the project had been unofficially killed. Someone expressed the sentiment that USACE projects are never "officially" dead, and that the main reason the project seems to have been terminated is because of objections from local landowners. Royal gave a brief history of the area around where the lake will be built, and talked about visiting a local landowner in 1964 who was very willing to allow aquatic biological research conducted on his property.

Royal also suggested that, instead of building another dam on the lower Alabama, the USACE should consider removing Claiborne and Millers Ferry Lock and Dams, thereby restoring continuity upstream past the mouth of the Cahaba. Steve Walsh then spoke about SFC's options for responding to the Choctaw Bluffs dam project. These options included sending a letter to the USACE stating opposition to the project, or preparing the SFC to quickly respond in the event of future reactivation of the project. Noel Burkhead urged the group to respond with a letter. Steve asked for a motion to refer this subject to the Resolution Committee, and asked David Etnier if he would be responsible for coordinating the issue with the committee. Dave agreed, a motion was provided and seconded, and passed on a voice vote. Royal Suttikus asked if perhaps the SFC should request a five-year moratorium on any activity related to the proposed Choctaw Bluffs dam. Jim Williams stated that in his opinion the SFC should unequivocally express opposition to the project. Steve asked Jim to draft a resolution for review by the Executive Committee. Steve Layman commented that it was an appropriate linkage with the USFWS Vision Statement to protect riverine habitats.

Steve Walsh then read a letter given to him by Noel Burkhead regarding plans by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) to stock redeye bass (*Micropterus coosae*) from headwater sources in the Coosa drainage to streams in the Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forest (upper Savannah drainage). Several undesirable aspects of this project were then discussed by meeting participants, such as disregard for the possible implications of mixing unique genetic or chromatic forms of *M. coosae*. Bob Jenkins compared the situation to the Roanoke River where the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries and the USFWS stocked *Ambloplites rupestris* in the range of *A. cavifrons*, resulting in the eventual elimination of *A. cavifrons* from the upper Roanoke River. A general discussion about how to respond to the USFS plan ensued. Bud Freeman gave a history of how the USFS came to decide upon stocking non-indigenous stocks of Coosa bass in the upper Savannah drainage. Jim Williams volunteered to assist Bud in drafting a letter to the USFS stating the SFC's opposition to the project. Dave Etnier moved that, as a group, the SFC oppose the stocking. A motion was called for and was carried by voice vote.

Steve asked for any other new business. Jim Williams gave a summary of Cindy William's current employment situation, and asked that the SFC send Cindy's supervisor in the USFS a letter stating our appreciation for her efforts to preserve and protect southeastern rivers. Herb Boschung made a motion for someone in the SFC to write the letter, and Noel Burkhead volunteered.

Steve Walsh asked for any other items of interest to the SFC. A motion for adjournment was made, seconded, and approved by voice vote.