



Newsletter From Rep. Matthew J. Shepherd District 97

January 23, 2026

ALC - Game & Fish/State Police Updates

Members of the Game and Fish/State Police Subcommittee of the Arkansas Legislative Council met this week to receive updates spanning wildlife management, public safety, and law enforcement coordination, offering a wide-ranging look at issues affecting Arkansas outdoors and communities.

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission Director Doug Schoenrock briefed legislators on an unusually dry waterfowl season. The state experienced one of its driest Novembers and Decembers on record, significantly limiting water availability and altering duck movement across traditional hunting areas. Even so, late December surveys recorded approximately 1.4 million ducks in Arkansas—roughly double last year’s count—before unseasonably warm January temperatures pushed many birds north. Despite challenging conditions, Arkansas continues to lead the nation in duck harvest.

The committee also received an update on boating laws and a fatal boating accident that occurred on December 19 at a wildlife management area. Officials outlined the circumstances surrounding the tragedy, noting the vessel involved was legal under Arkansas law. The discussion broadened to address boating safety concerns, particularly high-speed boating through flooded timber, a practice increasingly showcased on social media.

Colonel Mike Hager, Director of the Arkansas State Police, addressed questions regarding the agency’s role in immigration enforcement. He clarified that state troopers are not conducting stops or arrests based on immigration status or appearance. Instead, their involvement is limited to coordination under the federal 287(g) program during lawful stops or arrests for other criminal violations. Nearly all troopers have completed required training. Since September, approximately 48 cases statewide have resulted in referrals to federal authorities. Committee members discussed discretion, oversight, and civil liberties, with state police leadership emphasizing accountability and common-sense enforcement.

Together, the updates reflected ongoing efforts to balance public safety, conservation, and responsible law enforcement across Arkansas.

