

# SPORTS

## DNR approves major law enforcement change

**AL HACKLE**  
Special to The News

Meeting Tuesday in Statesboro, Georgia Department of Natural Resources' board voted to reorganize the department, creating a Law Enforcement

Division separate from its Wildlife Resources Division.

The vote, with 17 of 19 board members present, was unanimous. But the plan has drawn public opposition from some former DNR officials and allegations that current officials

used state resources to create an exaggerated appearance of public support. The meeting was held at Georgia Southern University's Nessmith-Lane Conference Center.

Beginning Monday, the Wildlife Resources Division's 204 conservation

rangers, popularly known as game wardens, will become part of the new Law Enforcement Division. But DNR also has about 100 additional employees certified as peace officers in four other divisions. Most have other duties besides law enforcement. For these,

the transition to the new division — or a choice to remain in their current divisions and no longer be law enforcement officers — has a five-year phase-in period, ending Aug. 1, 2018.

The scattering among different divisions meant

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## Bradley old hat at Hall speeches

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At 78 years old, 50-year high school coaching veteran Ron Bradley was just inducted into his seventh hall of fame.

While those numbers are impressive, they are by no means tiring for the Newton County coaching icon. When asked about his latest honor in a long line of honors — being named to the Atlanta Sports Hall of Fame — Bradley proceeded to discuss, reminisce and reflect for more than half an hour with the excitement in his voice never fading.

In the time he developed a career as one of the most winningest high school basketball coaches in the country, mainly at Newton High School, he put together memories enough to fill hundreds of hall of fame speeches, something

he looks forward to giving at every event he is invited to. However, when he has been inducted into hall of fames, including the Atlanta Sports Hall of Fame Saturday, Bradley has been limited in the amount of time he gets in front of a microphone.

Such was the case Saturday.

Originally told he would have 10 minutes to thank the crowd, his speaking time was then whittled down to seven before eventually settling at five. That was not enough time to reflect, not only on 1,019 boys' basketball wins, 129 coming consecutively at home for a national record; two national basketball coach of the year awards; 75 varsity basketball championships; and various other accolades, but also the thousands of lives he has touched and been a part of.



submitted photo /The Covington News

Ron Bradley poses with friends and family after being inducted into the Atlanta Sports Hall of Fame Saturday. Pictured are Newton High Class of 2005 graduates Trent Brown, John Monk and Todd Hoskins, along with Jan Bradley, Ron Bradley, Tiffany Rasmussen and Rick Rasmussen.

Bradley has so many memories and the thoughts on the people who have been a big part of his career, he never knows where to go with his speeches, and is always eager to start his trips down memory lane.

"I told my wife I was anxious to hear what I had to say," Bradley said of his most recent hall of fame speech. "In just a few minutes, you can't even touch a portion of your career."

After thanking several people, including those who helped get him into the Atlanta Sports Hall of Fame and his wife Jan, Bradley made sure to share what has been a big part of his career and kept him coaching and involved in the lives of youth for much of his career.

Early in his career, Jan had asked him why he was spending so much time with other peoples' children helping them practice basketball, rather than

with his own children. Two days later, the player he was helping prepare for an All-Star basketball game, Billy Dean, drowned near Factory Shoals. That went on to impact the rest of his career, one that has brought him into the National High School Hall of Fame, Georgia Athletic Coaches Association Hall of Fame, Georgia Sports Hall of Fame, Georgia Independent School Hall of Fame and Newton County Bulldog Club Hall of Fame.

"I knew people were giving up something, the most valuable thing they had, to be with our program — their time," Bradley said.

Each of the halls of fame are special to Bradley, both in being a member and annually getting to be a part of their induction ceremonies. Saturday, he was inducted with NFL Hall of Famer Deion Sanders, Atlanta Crackers Owner and manager Earl Mann, Olym-

pic gold medal swimmer Steve Lundquist and former Georgia Tech Athletic Director Dr. Homer Rice, getting to talk and spend time with each of the living inductees or kin from those who have passed.

He enjoyed meeting with Mann's widow, legendary golfer Bobby Jones' wife and Sanders.

"One of the real personal benefits is it gives you a chance to be around people you've heard about, read about or seen on television," Bradley said. "Who in the world ever would have thought I would get near Deion Sanders, and I got the chance to talk to him, get an autograph and a picture with him."

Sanders, known for his flamboyant style as "Primetime" and his unique fashion sense, even commented on Bradley's attire of a tuxedo.

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from the sports desk

## Playing through the pain



**BRYAN FAZIO**  
SPORTS EDITOR

I have to admit when I first heard of Byron Johnson's story, I was a little skeptical.

A 6-year-old playing with a broken hand seemed a little too hardcore. After all, he has plenty of time to catch, throw and hit a baseball after his bones healed.

But then I spoke with the Heard-Mixon student, his father and his coach and there's no way that little guy could have been kept off the field. When I was his age, baseball was a good way to get out of the house and throw around the ball.

For Byron, it seems to be more than that.

He practices every day, loves watching the Braves and still wants to see Chipper Jones. That's a lot of baseball for someone who has never seen his team win a championship, knows nothing about sabermetrics and has barely been alive long enough for a player to make it from being drafted to the major leagues.

He just wanted to play the game he loves.

After working out with the doctor that he wouldn't use his left hand, Byron decided to put in the extra time just to be able to continue playing baseball. He didn't stay at home and watch Netflix, play with an Xbox or a Wii and just hang around the house; he added more time playing baseball to his routine.

The injury, a broken thumb, wasn't that serious and no harm would come to him to continue playing.

He was able to

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submitted photo /The Covington News

Ron Bradley (right) poses with fellow Atlanta Sports Hall of Fame 2013 inductee and former NFL great Deion Sanders.

## Post 77 suffers first loss, wins four straight

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The American Legion's Post 77 baseball team suffered its first loss of the season but still managed to come away from a successful AFLAC Classic baseball tournament in Albany this weekend, winning four of five games.

The Rockdale team lost 5-2 in the tournament opener to the North Florida Blacksox Friday, behind five errors.

Eric Smith pitched until the sixth inning, giving up just one earned run before Newton alumnus Trip Loftin came in to finish the game.

Errors continued to plague Post 77 throughout the tournament, as

the Rockdale team totaled 12 in the event's five games.

"That cost us the first game," Rockdale coach Demarco Hamm said. "We were leading all the way until the next-to-last inning and had a couple of errors and mental breakdowns that cost us the game."

Errors continued into Rockdale's second game, with four. But Post 77 managed to avenge its first loss and begin a new winning streak in an 8-7 victory over the North Florida Blacksox.

Rockdale trailed 7-4 heading into the seventh and final inning, before scoring four runs in the bottom half. Rockdale finished with

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submitted photo /The Covington News

The Rockdale Post 77 American Legion baseball team struggled with errors in its first loss of the season, before rebounding to win four straight in the AFLAC Classic this weekend.

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different hiring standards, different procedures and a lack of coordination in how officers were assigned geographically, DNR Deputy Commissioner Homer Bryson said.

"Put all our badges on a map and you can see that we actually have clusters of officers in certain areas and then we have other areas without any officers," he said. "By having all our law enforcement consolidated into one work group, we'll be able to address all those issues and concerns and be a lot more effective and efficient, we believe, and also better-positioned liability-wise."

The issue has been discussed off and on for two decades. Five years ago, the Legislature passed a resolution to create a study committee.

DNR officials then sought to head off legislative action by reorganizing from within. A plan implemented in 2010 restructured law enforcement within the Wildlife Resources Division. The number of fisheries and wildlife technicians with part-time law enforcement duties, originally about 80, was cut in half, Bryson said.

The new plan takes the trend a step further, creating a separate division. Bryson, who before becoming deputy commissioner served as a DNR law enforcement officer, presented the plan at the May 21 board meeting in Atlanta. A hearing for public comment was held on June 4.

Inflated public support?

The department also invited written comments. In all, DNR had received 2,050 comments in favor of the change and 750 "either opposed or concerned with the process" before Tuesday's meeting, according to Bryson.

But the count in favor included form letters sent from the department to select individuals who signed and returned them. Georgia Wildlife Federation CEO Todd Holbrook and others have produced evidence of this. Holbrook, also a former DNR deputy commissioner, spoke to the board Tuesday, alleging that the form letters originated on computers at the DNR law enforcement headquarters and that returned forms constituted 36 percent of the written comments.

This, Holbrook said, amounted to the DNR serving as its own advocacy group and using money from taxes and hunting and

fishing licenses to make public support of its proposal look greater than it was. He asked the board what would happen if other DNR agencies, such as the Environmental Protection Division, followed this example.

"Ask yourselves, how would the board react to the EPD loading public responses on a controversial water issue in a similar fashion and then presenting the weighted data to you," Holbrook said.

Bryson responded after the meeting, calling Holbrook's interpretation false but saying the substance of it would be investigated.

"We have employees of the department that were advocating the position of the commissioner's office, Bryson said. "We haven't manipulated anything. If anything was done improperly by any of our employees regarding this, we'll investigate that and we'll handle it accordingly."

The Georgia Wildlife Federation had not taken a stance opposing the reorganization but had concerns and wanted more opportunity for input from hunters, anglers and state park users than the DNR had provided, Holbrook said in a Monday interview.

He noted that the public hearing was held in downtown Atlanta on a weekday

and said DNR had not listed hunters and anglers as stakeholders for input.

As for the substance of the change, the Wildlife Federation is concerned that duties for patrolling state parks will be shifted to conservation rangers without an increase in funding. If that happens, he said, money will be pulled away from game management work.

"If they do that, hunting and fishing lose," he said.

Other critics have voiced the flipside of that concern — that parks will go unpatrolled. The Parks Division's 79 officers will need to decide before August 2018 whether to remain in parks or transfer to law enforcement. Eventually, under the new system, rangers who patrol counties to enforce hunting and fishing laws will also patrol parks in their area.

To beef up the law enforcement presence at state parks, more officers from the new division may become park residents, Bryson said. He named nine state parks and historic sites that have resident officers or where officers are planning to move. The nearest to Statesboro is Fort McAllister State Park near Richmond Hill.

The five-year phase-in, Bryson said, will give the department and employees

time to adjust.

"July 1 is the start of a gradual transition which will involve stakeholder input beginning now until Aug. 1, 2018," he said.

Lobbyist Neill Herring also spoke to the board to condemn the use of the form letters as manipulation of public input, and leveled other criticism at Bryson.

Law enforcement endorsement

But eight other people who spoke to the board Tuesday supported the change. These included Georgia Hunting and Fishing Federation President Reggie Dickey, two sheriffs, Statesboro police Maj. Scott Brunson, two retired law enforcement chiefs, a former magistrate court judge and an Atlanta lawyer who often represents law enforcement agencies and officers.

The attorney, Lance LoRusso, said the old DNR law enforcement structure with its differing division policies and "essentially creates a roadmap for liability."

Ben Hill County Sheriff Bobby McLemore, the incoming president of the Georgia Sheriffs' Association, also cited liability concerns in asking the board to vote for the change.

"Law enforcement

should be directed and commanded by law enforcement," he said. "It is your duty to reduce the liability on your department throughout this state, and the way to do this is have law enforcement officers who are trained in law enforcement, who have that mission, to run law enforcement."

The controversy helped fill a banquet hall at Georgia Southern University where board members sat at a U-shaped arrangement of tables in the middle. Scheduled long in advance, the Statesboro meeting was one of two times this year the board meets away from Atlanta, as it typically does every year in different cities. Capt. Scott Klingel, a Metter-based DNR law enforcement regional supervisor, said he believes the restructuring will be a positive move within the department. It won't result in any loss of officers in his area, he said.

"I don't anticipate that our rangers will feel any effects one way or the other, and I don't anticipate the sportsmen will notice any difference," Klingel said. "The only change that the public will maybe even notice will be that our patches, instead of saying Wildlife Resources, hopefully will say Law Enforcement Division."

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continue doing what he loves, and also wanted to.

Kudos to that at such a young age.

Then once he got back on the field, he wasn't a detriment to his team. He excelled.

The 6-year-old slugger

put four home runs over the fence in five All-Star games with one-hand. He held the bat in his right hand, while his left hand, in a cast, stayed down by his hip.

As the ball came in, he would swing one handed, like you would after tossing up a Whiffle ball to yourself. With just one hand, balls would sail over the fence.

Parents saw it and became amazed. His parents were proud he continued to play. And Byron was just happy to play baseball.

The injury wasn't something to keep Byron off the field, and protect.

But it was something that he can use as a definition of his character and reflect on as school gets harder, jobs get difficult and life becomes more in-

tense.

Hopefully, one day, Byron will look back on something as simple as pushing an injury aside to do what he loves as an example that he can achieve harder things.

Who knows? Maybe one day he can even tell ESPN how he played with a broken hand, so the cheers from Turner Field won't be that intimidating.

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"He said to me, he was embarrassed because I out-dressed him," Bradley said. "He said, 'I'll tell you one thing, you'll never out-dress me again.'"

Bradley also gets to meet coaches and athletes he's competed with or against along the way to his hall

of fame legacy at many of his annual induction visits, something he will continue to do for as long as he can.

The opportunity to continue learning, meeting his favorite athletes, and sharing his favorite stories is a golden one for Bradley.

"They never get old," Bradley said.

"The recognition is nice, especially when you know you're representing thousands of people."



submitted photo /The Covington News

Post 77 Rockdale travels to Tuscaloosa, Ala., today after playing five games in Albany over the weekend.

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16 hits, including two doubles from Keith Buckhault, who finished with six total bases.

David Mayo drove in Cole Hamilton for the winning run as Rockdale got its bats going and began settling down in the field. Post 77 struggled with its defense as several players were out of position due to the lack of starters able to attend the

weekend tournament.

"We definitely should have won all our ball games, but we had some guys who were out due to sickness and vacations," Hamm said. "We didn't go there at full strength, but even at full strength, we should have won all our ball games."

Post 77 won its next game 7-0 over the Georgia Blacksox, followed by a 5-4 victory over Leesburg and a 4-1 win over the Georgia Blacksox.

Rockdale scored 26 runs throughout the tournament, overcoming the

change to wooden bats.

It is the first and only wooden bat tournament the team will participate in this season, something that didn't alter Post 77's approach.

The players welcomed the change rather than begrudging the loss of power from the standard composite bats they're more familiar with.

"They wanted to use the wood bats," Hamm said. "It's something different. To be honest with you, we struck the ball pretty good with the wood bat, you couldn't tell the dif-

ference."

Rockdale travels to Tuscaloosa, Ala., for a doubleheader today, before returning to regular season action at Dawsonville Saturday.

Advertisement for Peaches and CJ Orchards. It features the text "Peaches Are Ready, Come and Get Um!!!!", "CJ Orchards 1251 Old Mill Road Rutledge, GA 30663", "I-20 Exit 105 South on Newborn Rd. to first right. Look for our signs.", "Open 9-4 Mon.-Sat. Closed Sunday", "706-557-2635 or visit us on the web at www.cjorchards.com", and "Buy Local. It's Good For You!". There is an image of a plate of sliced peaches.

Publix Mystery Coupon advertisement. It says "See What 1¢ Gets!" and "Bring this coupon to Publix on June 26, 2013, and find out what one penny gets you! Good with your purchase of \$10 or more. Limit one coupon per customer per day. Excluding all alcohol, tobacco, lottery items, money services, postage stamps, gift cards, fuel, and prescriptions. Customer is responsible for all applicable taxes. Reproduction or transfer of this coupon constitutes fraud. Effective June 26, 2013 at participating stores in Ga., Ala., S.C., and Tenn." It includes the Publix logo and "WHERE SHOPPING IS A PLEASURE" and "LU# 15345".

Advertisement for Hammock Beach resort. It features the text "When only the beach will do" and "Our spectacular oceanfront playground makes family vacations truly grand. Build sandcastles on our 2.5 miles of private beach or cool off in the water park. Play a round of championship golf. Unwind at the luxurious spa. Recharge for more activities at our six family-friendly restaurants that satisfy any appetite." It also says "Weekly rates and spacious home rentals also available. Visit us just south of St. Augustine!" and "SUITES FROM \$220 PER NIGHT". There are images of a beach scene and a resort building. At the bottom, it lists locations: "Salamander Hotels & Resorts", "Salamander Resort & Spa Middleburg, VA", "Innisbrook Tampa Bay, FL", "Reunion Orlando, FL", "Hammock Beach Palm Coast, FL", and "888-974-5102 hammockbeach.com".