

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

December 10, 2020

DFW Field Headquarters, Southwest Meeting Room #103
1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581
Meeting held virtually via Zoom

MEMBERS:

Present: Joseph Larson, Mark Mello, Wayne Petersen, Bill Brumback, David Small, Kevin Powers, Tim Flanagan

Absent: N/A

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Russ Hopping, Andy Finton

Absent: Bryan Windmiller

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Eve Schlüter, Marion Larson, Chris Buelow

OTHERS:

Present: N/A

– The meeting was called to order at 1:34 P.M.

1. Approval of the November Minutes

David Small motioned that the November minutes be accepted, Joe Larson seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

2. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

Mark suggested the Advisory Committee would benefit from an overview of the new “Heritage Hub” that is replacing VPRS after the New Year.

Mark also announced he was retiring from the Lloyd Center on 12/31/2020. He will maintain a connection with the Lloyd Center and will remain very busy.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

Joe deferred to Eve. Eve mentioned the line item increase for the NHESP budget with help from the Green Budget Coalition. While the budget still needs the Governor's approval, the budget would increase from approximately \$154,000 to \$500,000.

4. NHESP Report & Assistant Director's Report – Eve Schlüter

Eve reported the following:

- Reiterated the exciting news regarding the Green Budget.
- The program is in the final days of testing the Heritage Hub, the new VPRS system. The goal is to have the new system go live in January 2021. The system will include rare species reporting and MESA permitting. The new system was created internally, allowing more control and flexibility with future updates and modifications.
- BioMap3 is proceeding. A RFR was posted and Heritage is currently working with a potential contractor to start in January 2021.
- Robert (Bob) Jenkins died. Bob helped found the Natural Heritage network and his biography is currently posted on NatureServe.
- Turners Falls Licensing status update: The final application has been submitted through the FERC relicensing process. Heritage has received the application and is in the process of reviewing and will provide comments related to waterflow management having an impact on many rare species downstream.
- Heritage received a larger than usual donation from someone who enjoyed the MESA 30 issue of the Massachusetts Wildlife magazine.
- Eve reminded the Committee that it had agreed on a quarterly meeting schedule starting in 2021 and the committee needed to vote on a schedule. After some options were presented the Committee agreed that a January, April, July, and October schedule was best. Dave Small made a motion for these dates, Bill Brumback seconded, and the committee voted unanimously to approve. The motion included keeping the second Thursday of the month at 1:30 P.M. as the meeting time.

5. *A Recap of Major Restoration Projects in 2020* – Chris Buelow, Senior Restoration Ecologist

Chris presented an overview of how Heritage defines habitat restoration and some of the current major projects. Science staff typically take the lead in one of five categories: Biodiversity initiative, projects with dedicated funding, partnerships, NHESP operating budget, and conservation permits/mitigation. Chris focused mostly on the first three categories.

The Biodiversity Initiative is a joint effort between Heritage and MassWildlife's Habitat program that focuses on landscape scale restoration. Highlighted projects included:

- a. Myles Standish Complex in Plymouth – 16,000 acres of barrens habitat, largest and premier example in MA. Lack of disturbance is reducing the quality of the habitat and increasing public safety concerns as fuel builds up. Restoration is mechanically thinning and mowing hundreds of acres with the goal of thousands of acres restored.
- b. Muddy Brook Complex in Hardwick – the focus here is the mechanical treatment of hundreds of acres of "riparian barrens," a recently understood barrens setting.
- c. Birch Hill Complex in Royalston – similar restoration of riparian barrens in partnership with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- d. Swift River WMA in Belchertown – riparian barrens restoration
- e. Squannacook WMA in Groton – riparian barrens restoration

Projects with dedicated funding highlighted included:

- a. Calcareous Fens of Western MA – Jug End, Schenob Brook, Agawam Lake, Kampoose Bog, and Fairfield Brook WMA. Restoration is funded by the Housatonic Natural Resources Damages Fund as mitigation for GE polluting the Housatonic River with PCBs.
- b. Linking Landscapes (MassDOT program) – Funds from this program are supporting efforts at Agawam Lake, Kampoose Bog, Quaboag Marshes, and barrens habitat at Mashpee and Frances Crane WMA.
- c. USFWS – funds from the USFWS are assisting with frosted elfin habitat restoration at Noquochoke WMA.

Partnerships:

- a. DCR watershed land at Quabbin and Ware River to restore the Blackinton Barrens and Barre Heathland.
- b. Katama Plains, Edgartown – TNC and DCR
- c. Nantucket Conservation Foundation focusing on outwash grasslands and heathlands
- d. Massachusetts Audubon Society at Flat Rock in Fitchburg
- e. Salt marsh restoration in the Great Marsh. MassWildlife is the second largest marsh owner in the Great Marsh and is collaborating with other landowners and conservation groups.

Chris ended by mentioning the NHESP does work on small scale projects in-house using operating monies and projects that are driven by environmental permitting and mitigation requirements. The grassland management at Westover Air Reserve Base was an example.

6. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

Wayne Petersen – Mentioned there has been a large alcid flight along the coast in the last couple of weeks with thousands of razorbills and dovekeys being observed inside Cape Cod Bay. These large numbers are unusual, and speculation remains on where these birds were, so they were blown into the coast. Wayne also reported the winter finch flight continues and at least two boreal chickadees have been reported.

Bill Brumback – no comments

Tim Flanagan – no comments, but the committee enjoyed discussing Tim's picture of a slot canyon in Utah used for his background

Dave Small – noted the winter finch flight is still happening and that the Christmas Bird Counts are proceeding.

Kevin Powers – left early

Andy Finton – left early

Bryan Windmiller – N/A

Russ Hopping – Russ highlighted the recent success to implement a controlled deer hunt at Worlds End in Hingham and thanked staff from MassWildlife for their help with community meetings and the

Environmental Police for being present and assisting with hunter education. Fourteen deer were removed over the two days the property was closed.

– The meeting adjourned at 3:17 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Russ Hopping