

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

June 11, 2020

DFW Field Headquarters, Southwest Meeting Room #103

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581

Meeting held virtually via Zoom

MEMBERS:

Present: Mark Mello, Joe Larson, Tim Flanagan, Kevin Powers, Bill Brumback, Dave Small, Wayne Petersen

Absent: N/A

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Russ Hopping, Andy Finton

Absent: Bryan Windmiller

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Eve Schlüter, Mike Jones, Marion Larson, Caitlin Sawicki

OTHERS:

Present: N/A

– The meeting was called to order at 1:32 P.M. –

1. Approval of the May Minutes

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

2. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

- A Piping Plover nest was found on the beach at Fort Taber in New Bedford. The nest was abandoned, but the eggs were protected. This is the first known nesting in New Bedford by Piping Plovers. Carolyn Mostello (MassWildlife) and Katherine Parsons (MassAudubon) have been notified.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

- Mark Tisa (MassWildlife Director) informed the Board that staff are working well during the COVID-19 shutdown.

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

- Pete Hazelton, Chief of Conservation Science, is leaving MassWildlife at end of June. He is taking a position at the University of Georgia. This is a big loss for the Heritage Program, but a great

opportunity for Pete. Uncertain if or when this position will be refilled, though this is not likely in the immediate future. Eve is reassessing priorities in the context of this capacity loss.

- Staff have been stellar at keeping projects moving forward, working remotely, and doing field work. The silver lining for many has been a reduced commute time.
- Key field work – The Red-bellied Cooter headstart program release at Burrage Pond (Hanson) was well viewed on Facebook.
- Continuing efforts:
 - The new online filing process for MESA reviews is close to being completed following testing
 - New VPRS online reporting system is moving along well
 - Caitlin is developing a donor database with the goal of expanding Heritage’s donor base.
 - May reach out to the Committee to strengthen relationships with conservation partners to cross-pollinate and get information out.
- Marion:
 - Bald Eagle – media advisory – record nine new nests. This is the first eagle nest with eggs on Cape Cod in 115 years. Interest from both inside and outside of MA. Boston Globe, Berkshire Eagle, and many other papers first picked up the story as well as Boston based TV NECN and most Boston stations. NPR and the Associated Press also picked it up, followed by Newsweek, NY Times, US News, and World Report. MA Tourism also put it on their blog. There is also a nest on Martha’s Vineyard with eggs, which would be a first in very long time. However, the eggs failed due to a conflict with an Osprey.

5. ***Spotted Turtle Conservation and Management from Maine to Florida - an update from Massachusetts – Mike Jones, State Herpetologist***

- See handout for more information: “Spotted, Blanding’s, & Wood Turtle: CONSERVATION SYMPOSIUM.”
- Mike has been working on this species since high school, and some turtles have had radios for more than two decades. They live a very long time (Max 70-110 years old)
- Coastal Plain species – emergent swamps and other wetlands
- Symposium: Spotted turtle work is possible through capacity built among states focused on all three turtles (Wood turtle: 11 years, Blanding’s turtle: 16 years, Spotted turtle: 18 years), including state wildlife agencies and many universities. 130 experts. Hosted previously at MassWildlife. <http://www.northeastturtles.org/>
- Standardized Monitoring Protocol
 - MA is the leading state in terms of effort – 2,500 trap nights in one year
 - One trap in one night = 0.1 spotted turtle range wide (i.e. 10 nights for 1 turtle)
 - Erosion along the coast can be a threat
- Previous studies
 - Clark? – Westboro Cedar Swamp
 - Joan Milam and Scott Melvin – CT Valley
 - Animals tagged previously are more likely to be recaptured than those that were not tagged.
 - Patrick Roberts (PhD candidate at UMass Amherst) – tracking turtles studied 20+ years ago to understand habitat use.
- Future Directions:
 - Fine scale analysis of 27 individuals
 - Expanded partner network
 - Refined modeling
 - Conservation Plan complete Dec. 2021

- Genetics assignment for confiscations
- Third symposium 2022? Maybe in Westborough

Questions:

- Illegal Trade? – going off shore for high end pet trade - Fetching thousands of dollars or more per individual turtle overseas (SE Asia, China, and Europe) Google: Worcester Turtle Smuggling
- Impact of delisting?: – don't have the data yet to quantify
- Genetic exchange among sites?
 - Will know more soon as regional study is complete
 - Different evolutionary trajectory for the three species over 20-30 million years
 - High degree of relatedness up to 30-50 km apart (seen for Blanding's and Wood Turtle)

6. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

Wayne Petersen – N/A

Bill Brumback – N/A

Tim Flanagan –

- Great effort going into turtles
- Rain crow in backyard today, calling 90 minutes in advance of rain

Dave Small –

- The Webinar Hosted by Athol Bird and Nature Club was presented by State Herpetologist Mike Jones on Ma Turtles and had 100 participants
- Moth – *Acostis* ?? - poplar carpenter worm – third modern state record (other two in Pittsfield 1983)

Kevin Powers –

- Great Shearwater tagging program at Stellwagen Bank National Marine Sanctuary was iced for the year due to COVID – first interruption since 2013

Andy Finton –

- Three rare orchids at TNC preserve in Central MA. Two of them, the Ram's Head Lady's Slipper and Showy Orchid, were flowering this year. The Yellow Lady's Slipper was not found flowering this year, but has in past years. We had not seen a Ram's Head flowering in several years. The Yellow Lady's Slipper and Ram's Head are inside a deer fence put up in 2003 and the Yellow Lady's Slipper popped up after about 10 years of fencing.

Bryan Windmiller – Absent

Russ Hopping –

- Newbury - Salt marsh sparrow found dead on the road

– The meeting adjourned at 2:31 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Andy Finton