

## FINAL MINUTES

### **Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)**

November 12, 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, Dave Small, Kevin Powers, Tim Flanagan

Absent:

#### **ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:**

Present: Russ Hopping, Andy Finton

Absent: Bryan Windmiller

#### **AGENCY STAFF:**

Present: Eve Schlüter, Marion Larson

#### **OTHERS:**

Present:

– The meeting was called to order at 1:35 P.M. –

#### **1. Approval of the October Minutes**

Dave Small motioned that the October 2020 minutes be accepted, Tim Flanagan seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

#### **2. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello**

- Mark Mello noted that he has been doing “bug work” on Horseneck beach which appears to be a hotbed for rare species in the state. Listed on this beach are two birds, one reptile, and five moths considered rare in MA.
- He also gave kudos to the recent issue of the Massachusetts Wildlife magazine which featured the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the MA Endangered Species Act.

#### **3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson**

- Joseph Larson reported that they are attempting to obtain the zip codes of people who donated on their taxes to the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Fund in order to understand which communities are supportive; Bob Durand has offered to help in this effort.
- He also commented favorably on the latest issue of the Massachusetts Wildlife magazine.

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

- Eve Schlüter asked if all members have received the latest issue of the magazine. If members need more copies for distribution, they are available. Marion Larson reported that the Division is working to put the issue on-line.
- Eve will provide members with emails containing template language that they can send to contacts publicizing the magazine and the program – separate email questions.
- BioMap3 is moving forward with TNC. The Agency has posted a Request for Responses to hire technical assistance for the Project. Andy Finton of TNC compared the creation of the new version of BioMap to renovation of a beautiful Victorian house – what do you keep, what do you lose, and what do you add?
- MassWildlife held an employee conference in October via Zoom with external speaker Matt Dunfee of the Wildlife Management Institute. He gave an excellent presentation on R3 (recruitment, retention, and reactivation). Eve will send a link to the recording of the presentation and follow up with questions. The presentation meshed well with the Division's 5-year plan for R3 which focuses on gaining acceptance of traditional wildlife activities (hunting, fishing, and shooting sports) with the public. The goal is greater cultural acceptance of these activities by the public. She said that although this effort does not address non-game biodiversity conservation directly, it dovetails with the current increased interest in general biodiversity conservation.
- Lynn Harper retired at the end of October. This is a significant loss for the Division, and they are scrambling to cover her work activities. There is no current replacement.
- After December's meeting, NHESAC meetings will be held quarterly starting in 2021. The Committee will vote on the best meeting schedule at the December meeting. Meetings will be held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Thursday of the month at 1:30pm (as currently) in one of two options: either February, May, August, and November, or March, June, September, and December. Eve will send out an email on these options for the Committee to consider.

#### 5. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

**Andy Finton** – TNC has been holding weekly Zoom conferences. Mike Jones lectured on bog turtle restoration, and they are working with Dave Wattles in the wildlife section to talk about moose. Marion Larson asked about attendee numbers at these conferences. Andy will provide numbers. Andy also mentioned the recent conference with Native Plant Trust on Conserving Plant Diversity in New England.

**Bill Brumback** – Talked briefly about the plant diversity conference held on 29 October. The conference was a prelude to the Plant Diversity Report that is due to be published on-line in December. This report analyzes over 50 habitats for resilient sites, protection status, rare species, and important plant areas. It compares New England's conservation efforts with two international yardsticks. Bill will check if the recording of the conference is available online.

**Wayne Petersen** – Says a new book, Birds of Maine, with lead author the late Peter Vickery, is one of the most spectacular state bird books in the country.

In the *Rara aves* department:

1. An ancient murrelet, a Pacific coast alcid, showed up in MA, VT, and Maine. It is a small seabird the size of a dovekie and was seen off Race Point.
2. A grey heron, a European analog to the great blue heron, was seen on Tuckernuck and Muskeget Islands. This individual is probably the same one now reported in Virginia.
3. Snowy owls have been sighted at Logan Airport.

**Dave Small** – Says birds are busy in his region. He has seen winter finches and red polls in Orange, MA. He has also seen pine siskins, crossbills, and red-breasted nuthatches. There were snowy owls at Quabbin this week and he is still seeing moth species.

**Tim Flanagan** – Mentioned that he saw a flock of about 200 crows along the Housatonic. He has also heard of people becoming nervous about flocks of turkey vultures (mixed with black vultures) moving close to residences, probably looking for food in the trash. Wayne Petersen mentioned that in other places black vultures have developed an affinity for rubber windshield wiper blades.

**Russ Hopping** – Saw a flock of about 1,000 crows eating bittersweet on trees in West Boxford. They were probably on their way to the Lawrence roost. The crows are apparently a significant vector for dispersal of the invasive bittersweet.

**Kevin Powers** – Added a depressing note on right whales. The National Fisheries Service in January 2019 listed the number of extant individuals at 366. Their numbers had been as high as 481 as recently as 2011. There has been a roughly 25% reduction in population due mainly to fishing gear. One animal in an area south of Nantucket had its upper jaw tightly wound with fishing gear. An attempt was made to untangle it, but some remains. North Atlantic right whales are on a steady decline and may be the most endangered animal in Massachusetts and North America.

Marion Larson mentioned a kid's book of interest on peregrine falcons by John Harrison and Kim Nagy entitled, "Wally and Wind of the Woburn Cliffs." The agency is heavily featured in this book.

Joe Larson noted that he will miss the monthly updates from Committee members when the Committee meets less frequently.

Motion to adjourn was made by Dave Small – seconded by Joe Larson.

– The meeting adjourned at 2:30 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Bill Brumback