

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

March 9, 2017

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

MEMBERS:

Present: Mark Mello (acting Chairperson), Joseph Larson

Absent: Kathleen S. Anderson, Tom Rawinski, Wayne Petersen, Gwilym Jones, Jennifer Ryan

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Dave Small, Karen Searcy, Timothy Flanagan, William Brumback, Kevin Powers

Absent: Mark Pokras, Bryan Windmiller, Andy Finton

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Tom French, Jon Regosin, Eve Schluter

– The meeting was called to order at 1:38 p.m. –

1. Approval of January Minutes

Dr. Larson motioned that the January minutes be approved, Kevin Powers seconded the motion and members voted unanimously to approve the motion. Note: the Committee did not meet in February.

2. Chair's Comments

Mark Mello passed around three new field guides for viewing:

- Mosses, Liverworts, and Hornworts by Ralph Pope
(http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/book/?GCOI=80140100960680&fa=author&person_id=5382)
- Lichens of the North Woods by Joe Walewski
(<http://www.kollathstensaas.com/authors.php?authorID=3>)
- Bogs & Fens by Ronald B. Davis (<https://www.amazon.com/Bogs-Fens-Peatland-Northeastern-Adjacent/dp/1611687934>)

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

Dr. Larson summarized the December 2016 and January 2017 meetings of the Fisheries and Wildlife Board, and also gave a complete review of the Timber Rattlesnake Project public meetings.

- Dec 2016
 - Due to the projection of a revenue shortfall, the Governor, removed FY17 funding for Piping Plover HCP implementation. The hope is that this funding will be restored.
 - Steve Sears was introduced as the new board member for the Western District.
 - Record black bear harvest was recorded for this past hunting season. However hunting does not appear to be a factor in controlling population movements.
 - Dave Wattles gave a presentation on radio tracking of moose. He noted that moose avoid highways when trees are not leafed out (i.e. they keep a low profile). He also commented that moose quickly move into second year post cut areas.
 - Law Enforcement – early retirement is preventing achievement of full staff levels.
- Jan 2017
 - The new water intake feed into the McLaughlin Fish Hatchery has been enabled and the cost to maintain the hatchery should be reduced.
 - Presentations were given to the Board including a report on Timber Rattlesnakes.
- Timber Rattlesnake Meetings
 - Dr. Larson, along with two other board members, has been assigned to completely review the restoration project and report results back to the Secretary.
 - Recommendations have been brought to the Board.
 - Four meetings in the Quabbin area have been scheduled for public comment:
 - Athol – held on January 30th with attendance of 30+ people
 - Belchertown – held on February 28th with 60+ in attendance
 - Ware – scheduled for 3/22/17 at 6:30pm at the Knights of Columbus. Attendance by committee members is welcome.
 - Dave Small commented that this meeting process has been arduous and fishermen’s groups have been the most vocal at these meetings.

4. NHESP Report – Eve Schluter and Jon Regosin

- The draft Priority Habitat maps will be made available for public comment in early April for 60 days. Any comments will be reviewed / addressed and maps are to be published some time in the summer.
- Taxonomic and name changes that were agreed upon back in 2014 had been removed from the original order. They will be brought into the next review cycle.
- It is already time to start the next review cycle. Formal kick-off within the NHESP staff will be later this year.
- A Restoration Ecologist position has been posted. A copy of this vacancy was sent out to members of the committee to help with recruitment.
- NHESP has been unsuccessful to date with recruitment for a senior Fire Management Ecologist position. Contracting this position is now being discussed.

5. Assistant Director’s Report

- Of particular note among handouts was a manuscript published in the Journal of Mammalogy on “Long-distance dispersal of a subadult male mountain lion from South

Dakota to Connecticut documented with DNA evidence.” This animal was noted in Dr. French’s recent MassWildlife article on mountain lions.

6. Hunter Education Program Overview – Susan Langlois, Hunter Education Program Administrator

- Hunter Education began in Massachusetts in 1954 and was administered by the Office of Law Enforcement (USFWS). The program administration was transferred to the Mass DFW in 2000 and has been administering it since.
- Mission:
 - Protect lives and promote public safety
 - Promote wise management and ethical use of wildlife resources
 - Encourage greater appreciation of the environment through education
- Training and education programs and courses coordinated with the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA), USFWS, and state agency standards
- Program recruits and trains volunteer instructors, who in turn teach the courses
- Four Hunter Education specialists were hired in FY2015 to meet the increasing demand for courses
- Students have ranged in age from 10-80 years old (average is 30)
- Female participation was 4% in 1994 and has increased to 20% in 2016
- Participation by minors (<18 years old) is about 1,000 persons per year
- Courses taught:
 - Basic Hunter Education (IHEA) – mandatory
 - Trapper Education (Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies) – mandatory
 - Bow Hunter (National Bowhunter Education Foundation) – advanced discipline
 - Black Powder – advanced discipline
 - Waterfowl ID and Hunting – advanced discipline
 - Map, Compass and Survival – advanced discipline
- Up to ~5,000 participants per year in these courses
- Course/Student database was created in 2012 (names and contact information) and allowed automation of course availability and locations to targeted participants
- Hunting and target shooting has been declining since 1980

7. Member’s and Associate Member’s Comments

Kevin Powers – Kevin noted that Right whales arrived early to Cape Cod Bay in December 2016. Up to 60 individuals have been identified to date. However, only 3 calves were born this year off the SE US coast (18 calves per year are needed for recruitment for a growing population). In recent years, female right whales have doubled the interval between pregnancies from 3-4 years to 6-7 years, which lowers the overall birth rate.

Bill Brumback – Bill discussed the **Botanical Sciences and Native Plant Materials Research, Restoration and Promotion Act**, or “Botany Bill.” This bill has several purposes one of which is to increase the training, hiring, and placement of plant scientists in federal agencies (see <https://naturalareas.org/2016/09/25/botany-bill/>).

Karen Searcy – Karen just returned from Costa Rica and was impressed with the efforts of many small groups to purchase parcels of adjacent properties which when combined provide significant land preservation.

Mark Mello – Mark caught moths last February, which was the only month of the year that he previously had not done so.

– The meeting adjourned at 3:47 p.m. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Kevin Powers, Associate Member