MEETING OF THE MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PANEL
May 14, 2018
Braintree, MA

Attendance:
Panel Members: Patrick Paquette (chair), Kevin Blinkoff, Kalil Boghdan, Mike Moss, Mike Pierdinock

Department of Fish and Game: Commissioner Ron Amidon

Division of Marine Fisheries: Director David Pierce, Assistant Director Mike Armstrong, Chief Fiscal Officer Kevin Creighton, Senior Biologists Greg Skomal and Brad Chase, Biologists Ben Gahagan, John Boardman, Matt Ayer, and Mark Rousseau, Coordinators Christine Cassidy, Dave Martins, and Samantha Andrews, Policy Analyst Nichola Meserve

Office of Fishing and Boating Access: Director Jack Sheppard, Assistant Director Doug Cameron

Other: Ray Kane (MFAC Chairman)

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Patrick Paquette called the meeting to order at 10:30am, welcoming new Panel member Kevin Blinkoff and new DFG Commissioner Ron Amidon. Introductions were made.

Regarding the agenda, Mike Armstrong requested that item 4b. *Free Fishing Days* be moved to after 5a. *Fund Overview*, and 5b.iv. *Public Access* be moved to after 5b.v. *I & E*. The agenda was approved as amended without opposition.

Kalil Boghdan made, and Mike Pierdinock seconded, a motion to approve the draft minutes from the Panel's previous meeting on June 19, 2017. The motion was approved without opposition.

CY18 Recreational Permitting & FY18 Fund Overview

Kevin Creighton presented. He reminded the Panel that the Department of Fish and Game signed a six-year contract with Active Network, which was renamed Aspira in early 2018, for recreational permitting. Additional competition for the contract was proving to be a benefit in terms of improvements being made to the service. Completed improvements included a lower transaction fee and an effort to reduce duplicates, while transition to a more user-friendly application and the addition of targeted information and education capabilities were ongoing.

Kevin C. reported that the new standardizations to all mass.gov webpages had made buying a permit and looking up regulations more user-friendly. The best way to find information is using the search tool on any mass.gov webpage. On the MassFishHunt webpage, a more official looking login page was implemented that was more cohesive with mass.gov; however, this is temporary because we expect to have a new site in place by fall 2018. Making the login page more official looking was prompted by our learning that internet search engines were directing users to links to purchase phony permits or other materials. Upcoming changes to MassFishHunt would overhaul the website to directly link more information together (e.g., regulations, FAQs, I & E materials) and add email/marketing capabilities. Ongoing improvements to the webpage are important because about 65% of permit sales are through the internet.

Kevin C. explained that Aspira had turned on an e-commerce feature in April 2018, allowing such analytics as the conversion rate for permit sales. In the month of April, about 75% of individuals clicking the recreational permit purchase link completed the transaction. We can also run reports, such as to develop our own lapsed angler campaign (like we piggy-bagged off RBFF before) or other targeted outreach, like to individuals proximate to an upcoming event (e.g., fishing clinic). With regards to permit outreach, Sam Andrews and Christine Cassidy are working on an R3 Plan (recruitment, reactivation, retention), based on the RBFF module, with completion planned for next year. A focal demographic for the R3 campaign will be millennials given that they comprise 65% of families with children under 18.

Kalil suggested that somewhere during the purchase process there be information as to why seniors still need to obtain a (free) permit.

Kevin Blinkoff remarked that RBFF (Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation) is a great program, and that some states had started to add a dedicated position for R3 efforts. He asked if DMF had or would. Kevin C. replied that DMF has one I&E staff member (Christine) with another that is helping (Sam), whereas the Division of Fish & Wildlife (DFW) has many I&E staff members. Consequently, we largely rely on DFW's contributions, which we add to as possible, with an emphasis on not duplicating efforts.

Patrick asked for clarification on how we had heard about the fraudulent permit sites and what he might do about it. Kevin C. replied that several constituents had called the Division to report it. Unfortunately, what the scammers are doing is not likely illegal (even though certainly immoral) but we could have our legal staff look into it. Kevin suggested that fishing clubs be alerted to tell their members. Patrick suggested DMF consider putting out an Advisory.

Patrick asked if any progress had been made towards incorporating information about the Recreational Fund to the permit purchase process. Kevin C. replied that that would be achieved with the future website switches and the addition of email/marketing capabilities. We had hoped to have this in place by now, but it was delayed a year. Patrick reiterated the Panel's interest in this coming to fruition.

Kevin C. continued his presentation with permit issuance trends. Growth has generally been steady at about 3.5% per year, although 2017 bumped up to about 5%. Early 2018 data suggested a similar trend as 2017. Resulting permit revenue averages about $1.24 million per year, approaching $1.3 million for 2017. There are two other sources of revenue to the Fund. Donations in 2017 were about $42,000, similar to prior years. The MRIP Reimbursement (returned to the Fund since 2014) jumped up to about $300,000 in 2017 (roughly double the prior years); 2018 would be similar to 2017.

Kevin displayed the financial summary for the Fund since its inception. For FY18, the starting balance was roughly $3.2M. The revenues noted above in conjunction with projected expenditures of $1.18M (about 90% of the appropriation) and a $0.17M fringe assessment result in an end of FY18 balance of $3.4M to carry into FY19. This is higher than in past years due in part to large access project delays.

Regarding expenditures and the requirement for 1/3 of permit revenue to be spent on public access, Kevin reported that the ratio was 25.5% of permit revenues for FY17 and FY18 would be similarly under the requirement, yet over the life of the Fund it was at 36.15% through FY17. Kevin believed

that the requirement would be judged on the long-term and the temporary dip will be made up for in future years' spending.

Lastly, Kevin provided a 10-yr spending projection, advising that by FY24, costs would surpass revenue assuming flat fixed costs and slowly increasing personnel costs (i.e., mandatory wage increases). Kalil asked how many staff members' salaries were covered by the Fund. Kevin C. replied it was 7.5.

Kevin B. asked why the MRIP Reimbursement had increased. Kevin C. replied that NMFS had changed the formula for reimbursement. More specifically, beginning in 2016, we were able to include two staff at about 40% of their time. Mike A. further explained that administration of the federal program had switched to be through ACCSP in 2016, and they made state coordination of the program a reimbursable expense.

Free Fishing Days

Mike Armstrong stated that the Free Fishing Days had been set as Father's Day weekend in perpetuity subject to annual review. Patrick asked the Panel if there was any desire to make a change for 2019.

Kevin B. asked if any events are included for marketing. Patrick replied that the dates are advertised, but there aren't any specific events because it is essentially a statewide event. Christine Cassidy noted that she plans to highlight public access locations through social media leading up to the Free Fishing Days. Matt Ayer added that advertising would also again include use of Department of Transportation billboards, the Division's Saltwater magazine, and On the Water magazine. Mike P. suggested additional magazines be included (e.g., Coastal Angler, The Fisherman) and a Broadcast be issued. Ron Amidon remarked on the importance of social media and emails to reach our audiences.

There was discussion of how to better reach the non-saltwater fishing public. Kevin B. suggested targeted outreach to freshwater anglers. Patrick noted the importance of also advertising to the non-English speaking public. Kalil asked if the Division has an estimate for participation in the Free Fishing Days. Hearing the answer was "no", he commented that the importance is that they are offered. On this subject, Mike P. suggested that some type of competition during the weekend (e.g., biggest fish) could possibly be used to gauge participation.

The Panel agreed to maintain the default days for 2019.

FY18 Project Achievements

Mike Armstrong indicated that there are seven areas of work supported by the Fund. Five would be subject to presentations today. The two others are the Permitting Project, which principally supports two staff members to issue recreational permits, and Recreational Stock Assessment, which supports a stock assessment specialist position to focus on important recreational species (e.g., black sea bass, fluke, scup, tautog, bluefish). In this role, Tiffany Cunningham has been making a big impact on numerous technical committees conducting assessments and evaluating management measures, and also conducting research like currently on black sea bass spawning locations.

Diadromous Fish Project

Brad Chase provided a presentation on how the six staff of the Diadromous Fish Project fulfill the Division's responsibilities to manage fish populations and harvest, maintain fish passage, and protect and restore fish habitat.

Diadromous fish monitoring is integral to their management and is conducted for five species: alewife and blueback herring (spawning run counts and biological sampling), American shad (tagging, lift counts, and electrofishing), rainbow smelt (fyke net stations), and American eel (glass eel counts at trap and ramp stations). River herring are the most abundant and demand the most staff attention, given the 100+ runs in the state in 40 coastal towns.

Staff provide oversight for the 30 visual volunteer counts occurring statewide for river herring and manage an additional 8 counting stations. With support from the Fund, the Division has been able to transition from scale aging to otolith aging, advance from single tube to multi-channel counters, add video counters, and establish monitoring in all major coastal drainage areas. Mike A. noted that when the Division enacted the river herring harvest moratorium in 2016, we had two good counts which that was based on, showing how far we've come since then. Brad showed photos of several examples of the counting stations.

Brad displayed the MA river herring index that is developed from the four stations with at least 20 years of data. After an increase during 2012–2016, the index is down in 2017, though not so far as the low in 2005 that spurred the moratorium to be enacted in 2006. Kalil and Brad discussed the reasons for harvest that contributed to the decline: food and lobster bait in the past, and more recently striped bass bait. Kalil inquired whether any runs were being considered for reopening to harvest. Brad responded that the Nemasket River had an ASMFC-approved sustainable management plan, but concern about the recent decline and it being the only run open had led the relevant towns to postpone further action.

Mike Moss asked about RI trucks that had been observed taking river herring from the Nemasket River. Brad Chase replied that that was a DMF-approved activity to take two truck loads for transport and release into two RI coastal systems for restoration. Ben Gahagan added that many of the transported fish swim back into MA waters. Mike M. asked to be provided with documentation on the RI transport program.

Ray Kane asked about the means for monitoring the Nemasket River. Brad replied that it was by visual volunteer count. DMF had tried to utilize a video count a few years ago but the large number of fish had overwhelmed the technology. Ray questioned whether underestimates were likely with visual counts, in part due to daytime visual counting missing night movements. Brad indicated that data from other runs with both counting methods suggest this was the case. There was further discussion about data needs for sustainable harvest plans and the possibility of regional plans.

Ray asked whether additional counts would be added. Brad indicated that it would not be possible at current staffing levels. Each of our eight locations requires daily visits. Patrick expressed an interest in counters on the Charles River.

Mike P. inquired about the cause of the index's dip in 2017. Brad responded that a cold spell in April may have interrupted the run peak in some rivers causing fewer fish to reach counting stations. Otherwise, it is not clear at this time what influenced the lower counts. Age info can be analyzed in the future to get a clearer picture of cohort dynamics related to environmental conditions.

Brad highlighted population trends in four rivers with recent restoration. The Pembroke River count has been increasing steadily since fish passage improved, to the point that a bigger ladder may be needed. The Mystic River surged since a new fish ladder was installed in 2011 to reach over 600,000 fish last year—the largest count in the state. Town Brook in Plymouth was showing modest improvement since dam removals. Stony Brook had gone up, but declined the past two years.

Brad finished up on river herring monitoring with a broader view on restoration. About 100 years ago, there were 20+ runs in MA with harvest near 500,000 fish. Now there are only seven that recently had run counts exceeding 300,000 fish, with another five runs reaching 200,000 fish. This spring has shown improvements with four runs that could exceed 500,000 fish.

With regards to fish passage and habitat restoration, Division activities include direct installation of small fishways; oversight of contractors on large fishway construction projects; collaborations on eel passage, channel improvements, and dam removals; fishway maintenance; issuance of fishway permits and development of operation and maintenance plans; river herring stocking; and habitat assessments.

Fishway projects in 2017 included the following: a new small wooden ladder at Marston mills; redesigns at Parker River in Yarmouth and Town Brook in Plymouth; improvements at South River in Marshfield; improved exit chute at Gorman Mill Pond, Herring Brook in Pembroke; and new steeppass ladders at Little River in Gloucester and Great Pond Reservoir in Braintree. Brad also highlighted a multi-year, multi-agency effort to restore fish passage at the Fore River, the next goal of which is to remove the Armstrong Dam.

Brad also noted three 2016 fishway projects in places with no prior passage: Center Falls Dam, Aberjona River, Winchester; Bourne Pond, Falmouth; and Looks Pond Dam, West Tisbury. The Bourne Pond project was a great example of the work that DMF's fish crew can do, on the cheap and quickly. In 2018, three projects were happening on Martha's Vineyard at James Pond in West Tisbury, Lagoon Pond in Oak Bluffs, and Looks Pond Dam in West Tisbury. Several recent projects had resulted in fish being seen in new places thanks to the restoration activities: Mill River in Taunton, Bourne Pond in Falmouth, Forge Pond Dam in Kingston, and Cold Brook in Harwich.

Looking ahead, Brad's goals for the Project include improved biological reference points for diadromous fish, improved restoration coordination, and increased river herring abundances.

Mike P. and Brad discussed the type of counters at the larger run locations, and whether seals and cormorants may interfere. Brad noted they are natural predators, though Mike P. thought the system out of balance and noted that Canada allows harvest of both. Brad suggested the best answer was to continue restoration so that there would be enough forage for all predators.

Patrick expressed his thanks for the incredible and valuable work conducted under the Diadromous Fish Project, but also suggested that its funding at current levels from the Fund requires additional scrutiny, particularly because of the 10-year projection for the Fund, the inability to reopen any runs to river herring harvest yet while commercial bycatch continues, and the myriad other activities that the Fund could support. He had been feeling similarly about the Recreational Stock Assessment position but saw that paying off with regards to the successful black sea bass appeal. He asked for clarification on how much of the Division's diadromous work is supported by the Fund, whether any towns contribute to expenses, and what the chances are for runs to reopen. Brad responded that two positions are funded, along with some supplies, which enables adequate coverage of the whole coast. Towns chip in in numerous ways, such as supporting herring wardens, buying materials for fishways,

conducting local maintenance, and coordinating volunteer counts. There are a few good candidates for reopening, but issues like infrastructure and enforcement to enable limited reopening will be the challenge.

Kalil stated that he thought the project extremely important to promoting forage fish abundance, which has major importance for recreational fisheries even if anglers can't fish on them directly. He opposed any reduction in funding.

Mike P. agreed with Kalil. He noted that the Middleborough-Lakeville Commission's decision to not open the Nemasket River is out of the Panel's hands, but he did share the concern about commercial harvest when improvements to the stock are based on recreational permit dollars. Mike A. noted that the Project's two staff members are also conducting work concerning the commercial catch. Sara Turner is contributing to improvements to the river herring bycatch avoidance program, and Ben Gahagan is conducting genetic work to link at-sea bycatch to their river system. He then invited Ben Gahagan to give a short presentation on his PhD research involving striped bass stock structure, migration, and movement, with a genetic stock ID component.

Ben described his work to research striped bass connectivity to spawning grounds. Methods include analysis of tagging data for migration and movement, and will use fin clip genetic identification to look at stock structure that could potentially lead to population-level management. His work has indicated that most of the fish in MA waters recently are Hudson River fish, whereas in the past the Chesapeake Bay was the major source. Ben and Kalil discussed the various strengths of recent year classes and how that is influencing these results. Ben also noted a finding from some previous work that showed striped bass tend to go through the Cape Cod Canal on their migration north, but primarily go down the backside of the Cape when migrating south; except for Boston harbor fish which go through the canal in both directions. Ben and Mike P. further discussed migration routes and links to presence of forage fish.

MRIP Project

Dave Martins provided a 2017 year-end summary for the state's conduct of the MRIP Access Point Angler Intercept Program (APAIS). Within MA there are 518 sample sites, covering all parts of the coast and islands. Assignments (each being a 6-hour sampling shift) totaled 1,242, of which 807 was the base assigned by NMFS and 435 were MA add-ons. The add-ons were dedicated to waves 3–5 to improve precision of estimates. The state is divided into three regions, each with a lead biologist for APAIS coordination (Dave, John Boardman, Matt Ayer). Dave showed an example assignment schedule, which can include one or two sites.

The resulting number of interviews of shore-based, private/rental vessel, and charter vessel anglers was 3,501, an increase of 385 from 2016. Most occurred in the private/rental vessel mode (n=2,460), followed by shore mode (n=588) and charter vessel (n=453). Headboat sampling is conducted separately, onboard the vessels. 76 trips were sampled, resulting in 1,105 interviews (down from 1,298 in 2016).

The goal of our add-on assignments is to improve the PSE of catch estimates. Dave compared catch estimates and their PSE over time for several species and states, suggesting that there had been an improvement after 2012 when we began to supplement sampling levels.

Ray Kane inquired about sampling site selection. Dave responded that a spreadsheet populated by staff with expected activity levels is used to draw site assignments from with the goal of getting more

sampling activity. Mike A. added that if a particular angler doesn't get sampled it is not indicative of a flaw in the system because the ratio of interviews to anglers, while statistically significant, is low. Ray further inquired about corruption by commercial activity, to which Dave responded one of the first questions asked is the type of trip (recreational vs. commercial). Lastly, Ray asked why a permit number isn't linked to each interview. Mike A. responded that the interviews are not about enforcement and we want to get better data by having non-confrontational interactions. The Division had, however, added a question about permitting one year and was admonished by NMFS for not getting pre-approval because every interview in every state needs to be standardized.

Mike P. asked about delineating state vs federal waters. Dave answered that fishing location is featured in the interview, and consequently MRIP catch estimates can be queried by state or federal area.

Kevin B. asked whether other states are doing add-ons, whether they are reimbursed, and how we decide how many add-ons to conduct. Dave indicated that many other states do supplement the base sampling, including a few at higher rates than us (e.g., NC, DE, RI), even though reimbursement does not extend to add-ons. The number we select is based on the available budget and staffing levels. Mike A. added that DMF conducted an analysis a few years ago to see what level of add-ons was having an impact on PSE, so as to tailor sampling to target certain areas or species. Ray commented that more tailoring was needed for certain species.

David Pierce asked Mike A. to comment on the level of PSE needed to use catch estimates. Mike replied that ACCSP had had a workshop on that exact question. One result indicated that PSEs of 50 or 60 didn't always effect stock assessments much, but it depends on the species and what component the recreational harvest is to mortality. In general, we like to see a PSE of 25 or less. Mike added that stock assessment models are designed to handle some uncertainty, but management of harvest to the RHL with no regard to the PSE is flawed.

Patrick wondered whether the federally-mandated base number of assignments is inadequate for management use, because if so, DMF should be fighting for NMFS-funding of a higher level. Mike A. indicated that the base number can be inadequate for less frequently caught species, but not something like striped bass.

Mike P. praised DMF for implementing the add-ons, as he was seeing the successes of doing so. He noted that Louisiana had implemented its own program and was getting even better and more timely data. He added that DMF should have been invited to present at the NMFS's recreational fishing summit, as our data and programs would have been relevant and informative to others.

Kevin B. questioned if we could leverage our contributions to better recreational harvest data, either to pressure other states into doing more sampling or to get an upper hand in management negotiations. David P. suggested this was already occurring; for example, we're in a better position to support our conservation equivalency proposals for implementation of regulations. Kevin B. added that another way to improve the data would be to reduce the number of interview refusals, such as through more outreach about the benefits, that it's not for enforcement, etc. Patrick opined that NY and NJ seem to outcompete us at the management table when it comes to not taking reductions, so he wasn't convinced of the payback for better sampling. He stated that he would not be supportive of using Fund money for MRIP outreach as NMFS should be paying for that. Mike A. agreed this was a good point, pointing out that NMFS spends a lot of money on outreach but it's not entirely effective.

Artificial Reef Project

Mark Rousseau gave a progress report on 2017–2018 artificial reef activities. Monitoring of the Harwich reef continued, including by attaching a GoPro to a screw anchor on the bottom and leaving it for an hour. Video showed the first weakfish ever documented there as well as huge stacks of scup which would normally be dispersed by diver-based footage.

Work to select new reef sites in Cape Cod Bay was ongoing. Four areas that DMF surveyed last summer with side scan sonar will be further characterized this summer. The intent is to identify featureless bottom to permit about five sites, all of which will be in state waters.

Mark reported that DMF had submitted a project proposal to the In Lieu Fee Grant Program administered by DFG. It seeks $225,000 for deployment of 2,000 yd^3 to the Yarmouth reef site. A decision is expected in mid-to-late July. If funded, the reef could be deployed late this year. The Division partnered with the Cape Cod Salties for the reef materials.

For new deployments, over 90,000 yd^3 of material can be deployed on Nantucket Sound reef sites. One barge load comprises 2,000 yd^3. The Harwich site can take up to four more deployments, while Yarmouth can take up to 45 more.

Mark concluded with two additional activities for the year: recent meetings with DEP to see if debris from a decommissioned power plant would be suitable for reef material, and discussions with the MA Clean Energy Center about securing space at the New Bedford energy terminal for reef material storage. Talks for both are ongoing.

Mike A. noted that the artificial reef budget proposal for FY19 was not asking for any money for material or deployment, just for monitoring.

Mike P. asked for clarity on what the ILF grant would cover at the Yarmouth reef site. Mark replied that all deployment and monitoring would be supported. Patrick asked if there was a contingency plan for use or storage of the material should the funding not come through. Mark felt it likely the town could find a temporary storage location, and noted that there was not another reef site in Nantucket Sound currently permitted for a deployment. Mike Moss suggested that the Panel should be reconvened to discuss providing funding for storage and/or deployment should the ILF funding fall through.

Mike P. thanked Mark for his efforts towards a new Cape Cod Bay reef, which would make many anglers happy. Ray Kane added that certain residents of Nantucket would like to see a reef on the north side of the island. Instruction was given for them to contact Mark. Mark stated that he had spoken to someone from the island a while back and had advised them that he'd need specific guidance (i.e., 7–8 potential locations) to make any headway.

Information & Education Project

Christine Cassidy began with a discussion of the target audience for I & E efforts: millennials aged 25–45, many of whom live in urban and suburban areas and experienced fishing as a child. 60% of parents with children under the age of 18 fall into this category. She spoke to the importance of how you talk to this group, given some common traits like a desire for unique activities, eagerness to share experiences on social media, and a focus on relationships with family and friends.

Christine reviewed the Project's activities in four focal areas. First was angler education, which included six youth clinics in 2017 (each with about 30 pre-registered children), and would include three new events for 2018. Christine summarized how the events are run, including the distribution of a goody bag to participants at the end with a mini tackle kit. Future plans include expanding to adult clinics and engaging with schools, and establishing events in new areas like Plum Island, Scituate, and Onset Beach.

Patrick expressed disappointment that there wasn't an event in the inner city given the many parks and places to fish and large population. Christine noted that an event had been held in 2016 at Castle Island, but the site had presented some problems (no catches and fouled gear). Mike A. added that one would certainly be added for Deer Island when the pier is built. Ron Amidon advised Christine that Mass Maritime had expressed interest in hosting an event as well, and could provide staff assistance.

Mike P. asked if any thought had been given to holding events on vessels. Christine replied that it could be considered but expressed concern about additional logistics, liability, and costs. She added that she planned to initiate pre- and post-event surveys to learn what could be done better. Patrick, Mike P. and Mike M. reminded her of the Panel's past suggestions to work with fishing clubs, and thereby do more with limited staff. She agreed that more work was needed on developing a framework for DMF-supported events as opposed to DMF-hosted events. Kevin B. suggested additional engagement with high schools.

Up next was the "Free to Fish" gear loan initiative, which Christine advised is a tentative name for a developing program. The idea is to loan up to 10 rods/person for a week out of DMF's offices, just like getting books from the library. This would provide a mechanism for someone to try out the sport without a big investment. Her goal is to have a pilot program up and running for 2019, with about 30 setups per office.

Patrick asked about gear maintenance, which Christine replied would be undertaken by staff in the field offices. The loan program would include a 20-minute introduction to fishing when someone gets the gear to reduce the likelihood of damage.

Mike P. wondered whether a temporary free permit could be offered with the gear rental. Christine noted that youths would be the initial target of the loan program, meaning they wouldn't need a permit (if under 16 years old), but the concept should be reviewed again after we see who is participating.

The third area of focus for I & E is on social media. This past year, DMF added an Instagram account to its platforms which also include Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. Christine had launched a highly successful Facebook post series called "What is it? Wednesday" that offered a prize package and linked to particular DMF programs/places/research. Our Facebook posts had been averaging less than two comments prior to this series starting up, and had grown to about 40, with many new followers as well. A saltwater fishing bracket during March Madness was also used to highlight species and fishing locations, but it required some tweaking to be more successful. Future planned promotions would feature hashtags (e.g., for the catch and release derby) and have a focus on family.

Christine finished with her efforts on print media to inform and educate the recreational fishing community. This had included: a re-order of the Fish MA stickers; an updated circle hook brochure; a saltwater derby handout; an improved river herring viewing guide; reprint of the very popular

coloring books; and inclusion of recreational saltwater fishing techniques in the Saltwater Guide. She hoped to develop a saltwater angling beginners' guide in the near future.

Mike M. suggested that participation in the saltwater derby be further incentivized, perhaps with a free license for the next year. Ron Amidon noted that the derby entry photos were used for social media (when authorized).

Patrick requested that more emphasis be given to fishing locations and techniques in print materials (like in some other states' documents he'd previously shared with staff). He expressed discomfort with recreational permit fees being used to print the river herring viewing guide. Kevin B. agreed with Patrick on both fronts, and noted that the number one question he heard from constituents was where to go fishing. Mike P. and Kalil commented that they saw value in the river herring viewing guide.

Kevin B. appreciated the improvements to the circle hook guide, but cautioned that the target audience be remembered (e.g., needs to be more engaging for new participants).

Public Access Project

Mike Armstrong presented on the Public Access Project in Ross Kessler's stead. Mike began with a map of all past funded projects, noting the goal to distribute them throughout the coastline.

In FY2018, four small grants had been awarded to: Fall River to increase dock space at the State Bicentennial Park boat ramp ($15,000); Truro to increase dock space in Pamet Harbor ($15,000), which required additional funds from DMF ($2,200) and OFBA ($7,500) to cover shortfalls; Sandwich to repair the boat ramp surface and install overhead lighting at Sandwich Marina ($6,920); and Marblehead to install fillet tables, safety ladders, and information kiosks at six shore fishing locations ($10,796).

Mike also reviewed the four small grant proposals from Marshfield, Lynn, Duxbury, and New Bedford that were not funded generally because the access they would have provided wasn't as broad or there was potential for another funding source. The towns can reapply. He also highlighted a recent small grants project to improve shore access at Obear Park in Beverly and the sign that was erected to credit the Fund, with an emphasis on getting this type of signage at all small grant locations.

Moving on to large scale projects, Mike reported on the challenging path to build the Deer Island Pier, with its current status being nearly ready for bidding. The hope is to have it finished by this time next year, with actual construction work beginning possibly in September. A groundbreaking event would be planned. He remarked that one good thing about the delay was that nearly enough money had been saved for the full price tag.

Mike provided updates on two potential large projects previously endorsed by the Panel for future spending. Given the anticipated cost of roughly $2 million to rebuild the Salem Willows Park Pier, DMF and OFBA had had discussions with the city about contributing to the project and had gotten a verbal commitment of $500,000 from Salem's mayor. Mike felt the cost too great if Salem could not follow through. The Wareham Weweantic Property was back on the table after the underground tank issue had been addressed by the property owner. The appraised price for the land was $100,000, and the site would need about $100,000–$150,000 for further improvements over time.

Mike also listed several other potential projects that would be several years in the making. Two were at sites already under Land Management Agreements (LMAs): in Fall River, a small pier upriver from Bicentennial Park with a possible cost of $300,000; and in Dighton, a small fishing pier at an existing launch location with a possible cost of $200,000. Other sites of interest without LMAs were in Dartmouth, Beverly, and Fairhaven.

Mike queried the Panel for interest in if and how to continue moving forward with the Salem Willows and Weweantic projects. Doug Cameron noted optimism about a city contribution to the Salem Willows pier because it's integral to the area, which is very popular. He added that an LMA would be established so that angler access could not be prevented by other uses of the pier. A preliminary design for the pier included a 16' wide T on the end.

Mike P. and Patrick asked for clarification on whether spending on Salem Willows and Weweantic was mutually exclusive. Mike A. indicated it would be to a degree; spending plans would be needed to properly stagger their development so both could be built with available funds. Kevin C. agreed. Patrick opined that the Weweantic property should be the higher priority, noting an interest to establish access at a site across from it since the permit's inception. Greg Skomal added that the Weweantic property owner feels the site has been undervalued and may seek to have the property reappraised.

The Panel reached agreement that both the Salem Willows pier and the Weweantic property should be pursued. Mike A. committed to developing a spending schedule for review at the Panel's next meeting. Patrick suggested that the Panel's meetings be structured to have the first of the year focus on the coming year's spending, and the second of the year focus on long-term planning. Mike P. agreed with the importance of discussing long-term planning.

FY19 Fund Appropriation and Division Spending Proposal

Mike Armstrong summarized the Division's spending plan for the expected FY19 Fund appropriation of roughly $1.4 million. Proposed spending for all continuing projects is basically unchanged from FY18, with the exception of salary increases. Mike A. noted that the Panel's discussion earlier in the meeting about wanting more angler education events would require additional funding than what was proposed (i.e., half-time staff moving to full-time).

This left about $50,000 on the table, which Mike was proposing be used to run genetic analysis on striped bass samples. Mike reminded the Panel that prior Panel-approved budgets had included funding of some research activities. Genetic analysis would benefit the stock assessment for striped bass, moving it towards a more fine scale approach. The proposed funds for the Striped Bass Research Project would be used to contract a researcher in Canada to conduct the analysis. There was no opposition from the Panel, and Mike P. added that he'd like to see this kind of work for cod as well.

Kalil Boghdan made, and Mike P. seconded, a motion to approve the FY 2019 Recreational Permit Revenue Spending Plan as presented.

Mike M. asked if the budget presented for I & E represents the full sum of what DMF will spend on informational and educational programing. Mike A. replied that some additional DMF funds will be spent on I & E, often in the form of staff salaries (e.g., Sam Andrews work on the R3 Plan), and clarified that Christine's activities are dedicated to recreational fishing I & E.

Kevin B. asked whether it was appropriate to continue all ongoing projects at status quo levels given the 10-year projected spending vs. revenue. Patrick moved the topic to Other Business, and called the question. The motion carried unanimously.

Other Business

Kevin B. reiterated his question about reducing spending, specifically on the Diadromous Fish Project, either to reallocate funds to other priorities or simply not to exceed revenue down the road. Patrick gauged the Panel's interest and determined that this would be a topic for the next meeting, along with the multi-year spending plan.

Regarding the Division's diadromous fisheries work, David Pierce noted that DMF and DFW had initiated conversations about better partnering on diadromous fish and ecological restoration activities, which might be relevant to the discussion for the next meeting

Mike A. reminded the Panel that it had supported the Diadromous Fish Project years ago, rejecting other Division spending ideas at the same time, because of the direct link between river herring and popular recreational fishing targets that forage on them (e.g., striped bass). He argued that diadromous fish are even more important now with the recent decline in sea herring. He did not see the rationale for the Panel to change its position.

On a separate topic, Mike P. asked whether charter boats are allowed to deploy from publically funded boat ramps because they represent a commercial enterprise. Mike A. replied that we look the other way.

Seeing as there was no additional business, the Panel adjourned at approximately 3:30pm.

Meeting Documents

- May 14, 2018 Draft Meeting Agenda
- June 19, 2017 Draft Meeting Minutes
- FY19 Recreational Permit Revenue Spending Plan

Meeting Presentations

- Update on Recreational Permitting & Fund Overview
- FY18 Project Reports: Diadromous Fish, MRIP, Artificial Reefs, I & E, and Public Access