

**MEETING OF THE MARINE RECREATIONAL
FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PANEL
November 15, 2012
Via Conference Call**

In attendance:

Panel Members: Chuck Casella, Mark Amorello, Mike Moss, Patrick Paquette, Bill Smith

Department of Fish and Game: Commissioner Mary Griffin

Division of Marine Fisheries: Director Paul Diodati, Mike Armstrong, Kevin Creighton, Greg Skomal, Nichola Meserve, Ross Kessler, Elaine Brewer, Paul Caruso

Office of Fishing and Boating Access: Doug Cameron

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Chairman Chuck Casella called the meeting to order at 10:00AM. As a new Panel member, Bill Smith was asked to introduce himself. Bill has been a professional charter boat captain for 25 years, primarily fishing in Boston and the South Shore. He was previously owner to several retail stores, has been an educator for over 40 years, and regularly contributes articles to fishing magazines and other media.

Paul Diodati noted that Jack Sheppard (Office of Fishing and Boating Access) was absent because he has had heart valve replacement surgery since the Panel's last meeting. The timing of his return to work is unknown.

The Panel approved the agenda and draft minutes from the Panel's June 18, 2012 meeting without change.

FY2012 Recreational Fund Close-out

Kevin Creighton provided an overview of the end of fiscal year (FY) 2012 close out for the Marine Recreational Fisheries Development Fund. The Panel last met prior to the end of the fiscal year. Kevin noted that the accidental sweep of money from the Fund had been corrected.

He indicated that the starting balance for FY13 was roughly \$1.496 million, based on \$1.234 million in revenue in FY12, plus \$613 thousand in FY11 roll-over, and minus \$312 thousand in FY12 program expenditures and \$30 thousand in fringe assessment. He reminded the Panel that fringe does not have to be appropriated. Based on current expenditures and revenue, he expected to keep a buffer of \$1.5 to \$2 million in the Fund.

Chuck asked for the trend in license sales in 2012. Kevin replied that issuance had increased by about 30,000 permits this year, bringing the number to about 154,000.

Mary noted that the Panel had discussed adding more donation options, perhaps \$50 (in addition to the \$10 and \$25 options), and asked if that had been done. Kevin indicated that it had not, but

he was working on product rollout with Active Outdoors now and could add other options if the Panel wanted. He noted that the option for customers to fill-in an amount was not available. There was no opposition from the Panel for a \$50 donation option, so that will be added to the calendar year (CY) 2013 permit application.

Chuck asked when CY13 permits would be available. Kevin responded that the permitting staff had just had a planning meeting the prior day and permits are scheduled to be available on December 1. The Division website will soon have a note on this.

Mark asked whether anything needed to be done to discourage accidental purchase of the federal permit. Mike Armstrong indicated that he hadn't heard many complaints about it this year. He had recently looked at the federal angler registry website and it makes it quite clear that people with a Massachusetts permit need not register federally.

Mary suggested that the Division use the email addresses collected during permit issuance to send out a reminder about 2013 permits. Elaine indicated that this was in the works already. Mike Armstrong said the email distribution list includes about 80,000 entries, and that collection of email address is being stressed. Email addresses are captured electronically, same as the required information.

Chuck asked if Kevin expected any obstacles related to the permitting contractor (Active Outdoors), remembering that there were issues on the inland side previously. He replied that there weren't, and that Division staff has a weekly meeting with the vendor. Mary pointed out that the inland permitting problem related to the antler list deer lottery and people getting bumped out of the system. Kevin added that the vendor had done load testing, found one bad line of code and corrected it.

Patrick asked about the accessibility of the recreational permit holder database to the public. He had heard that a lobbyist obtained Connecticut's angler database for political mailings. Paul Diodati indicated that the database is treated the same as the Division's commercial permit holder database, in that it is a public record and the Division provides names and mailing addresses upon a formal, written public records request. No sensitive information is collected (like social security numbers), and released information has been limited to names and addresses so far.

Massachusetts Environmental Trust License Plate

Paul Diodati reminded the Panel that he had received informal correspondence from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust about the possibility of a striped bass license plate. The Panel had voiced its apprehension with this idea at its last meeting with the primary concern being that plate fees would not be dedicated to fishing improvements under existing MET practices, something plate purchasers would likely assume.

Mary stated that she had spoken with Bill Hinkley, Director of MET. He had said the idea had come from interactions with members of the public when selling other license plates. Mary had told him about the Panel members' concerns, and that they would want some other option for funneling the money towards fisheries. He had indicated that he wouldn't pursue the plate if the

Department and Panel were not interested. Mary had not been given any indication if there was potential to split money generated from sale of a striped bass license plate.

Recreational Permit Compliance

In response to the Panel's request for a report on compliance with the recreational permit, Paul Diodati indicated he'd asked Major Len Roberts of the Environmental Police, Coastal Bureau, for an estimate. Len reported that there had been nearly 5,000 inspections for a recreational permit in 2012, from which 80 citations had been issued for no permit, suggesting a very high compliance rate. However, this did not factor in verbal warning, so officers were asked for their "feel" about compliance. They thought it to be closer to 75% for 2012.

Paul Diodati remarked that 75% was pretty good for a program in its second year. Issuance increased from about 130,000 last year to 154,000 this year, suggesting that issuance might level off just over 200,000 permits with full compliance. Non-compliance leaves some money on the table; factoring in those permits that would be issued free, there's potential for about \$250,000 more in revenue. This informs any discussion about how much to invest in increasing the compliance rate. Paul said he'd thought about using Department of Transportation road signs for public messaging.

Mike Armstrong pointed out that it's actually not DOT but another agency that coordinates those road signs, and that this agency is interested to work with other agencies. Mary added that she'd worked with them to post a message about invasive species and the need to wash boats, and it had been free. Paul Diodati said we ought to definitely pursue it then. He suggested waiting another year before investing heavily in improving compliance to see if the rate increases in 2013.

Mike Armstrong commented that he thought 75% might be optimistic. Bill related that he'd seen an increase in enforcement this year compared to last, including being stopped multiple times himself.

Mary suggested placing permit reminder signs at tourist information booths on Cape Cod. Paul Diodati said he'd been considering kiosks at access points that would have such a sign as well as other pertinent fishing information. Ross Kessler noted that about 125 of the multi-language permit signs have been posted at access points thus far, and the Division's saltwater fishing guide is distributed to commerce chambers.

Revised FY2013 Spending Plan

Mike Armstrong provided an update on the FY13 spending plan. Several revisions were made based on the difference between the Governor's proposed Fund appropriation on which the spending plan had been based (~\$800,000) and the appropriation approved by the Legislature (~\$767,000), as well as better cost estimates and programmatic revisions.

The budget for the Permitting Project was revised down \$3,600 based on better cost estimates for postage and supplies.

The budget for the MRIP Project was revised down over \$21,000 to pro-rate the salary for its coordinator who did not come on to the Division's payroll until about November 26. Mike explained that he'd recently had a call with NOAA Fisheries to discuss contract payments for the Division carrying out the sampling at access points. Chuck had asked how this would be handled at the Panel's last meeting. Mike said he anticipated about \$50,000 in repayment from NOAA Fisheries for the March to June sampling included in the spending plan. The reimbursement won't occur until July, and at that point it will be returned to the Fund. Mike indicated that he had considered other options, but determined that return to the Fund was the fiscally shrewd way to handle it because the Fund's appropriation need not account for fringe. Mike added that the \$50,000 contract payment was still a rough estimate, because alterations to the sampling method makes the expenses uncertain (such as switching from a per interview fee to a daily wage). Paul Caruso added that the amount is also influenced by contract negotiations.

The budget for the Public Access Project was revised down so that its expenses still equal 1/3 of the appropriated amount. This meant reducing the infrastructure line item as the other costs are fixed. Mike also revealed that a source of funding to pay the remaining \$600,000 for the Oak Bluffs pier (a roughly \$800,000 project) may have been identified. Paul Diodati informed everyone that, having already discussed it with Doug and Mary, he was planning to pay the full amount using surplus federal grant money that was nearing its expiration date. Mary said that given this agreement, some bond cap money (about \$40,000) that had been destined for the Office of Fishing and Boating Access would instead be directed to *Marine Fisheries*. Mark suggested that the Division negotiate a berth for one of its boats in the contract with the town. Patrick asked if the usual town contract about public access would be established. Doug replied that this had already been done. Chuck asked about the construction timeline. Doug said the schedule has it ready for use in July, and that he'd go into more detail under the next agenda item.

The budget for the analysis of striped bass acoustic data under the Recreational Fisheries Research Project had been reduced to pro-rate the researcher's salary from one year down to seven months, and by the removal of indirect costs to UMass-Amherst because he's decided to use an in-house post doctoral researcher (who will be located in New Bedford). With the savings there, funding for the genetic analysis of striped bass was increased from partial to full.

Overall, the revised revenue spending plan totals \$763,299, leaving a few thousand dollars in reserve funding.

Mark asked for clarification if using the federal funds for the Oak Bluffs pier freed up part of the Fund for other uses. Paul Diodati explained that it does not, but frees up some OFB money for other projects.

Mike Moss asked to discuss selection of future year's infrastructure projects at some point. Mike Armstrong said the public access update agenda item would be appropriate.

Oak Bluffs Project Update

Doug Cameron provided the timeline for construction: advertising the project in December, awarding contracts in January, and starting construction shortly thereafter with completion slated for June 30. All necessary permits have already been obtained.

He noted there had been a few changes to the construction plans. The pile system was switched from Grenheart timber to round steel piles because of a delay in getting the timber. This allowed for a reduction in the number of pilings due to the greater strength of steel, which will also lessen wave load impact during storms.

Paul asked whether the steel piles would be susceptible to rusting, to which Doug replied they have a special coating. In response to a question from Chuck about the structure's longevity, he specified that it is about 50 years for the main structure. The decking is subject to more wear and tear though. A dense hard wood will be used which is resistant to such stress, and requires low maintenance. Mary noted that climate change and sea level rise had been taken into consideration in the construction planning, in determining the elevation level of the pier.

Chuck stated that the project will be well received by the community. Doug and Mary thanked *Marine Fisheries* for the additional funding assistance.

Public Access Update

Mike Armstrong introduced Ross Kessler as the Division's fulltime employee on public access. His responsibilities in general include both working with OFB to locate access project sites and being a primary contact for the angling public about accessibility issues. Mary acknowledged Ross for his recent visit with the MA Beach Buggy Association.

Ross provided more specifics on his current work priorities. He stated he'd been working on developing a database of access intercept site locations and their characteristics (parking, type of access, etc.) There are about 600 sites in the state, a mix of public and private. He thought this was the most in the United States, except for Florida and maybe California. Mary indicated that OFB manages about 275 access sites, which is a subset of the larger number. Ross said he's working with a Google product to map the locations and make a searchable database for public use in the short-term, and intends to make a more comprehensive database and mapping application as a long-term project. He said he hopes to also have a mobile application for smart phones.

Ross indicated he'd also been attending many meetings with angler groups. Paul Diodati commented that it's important for the Panel to know that Ross is available to come to any club meetings to describe the Public Access Project and discuss any access issues. Patrick noted that he'd already given Ross' contact information to 17 area clubs. He reported that he'd also called Ross up for an access issue on the south coast for which they'd come to a satisfactory resolution.

Paul Diodati suggested this might be a good time to address Mike Moss' request to discuss future access projects. Mike wanted to stress that the Panel seek out diverse locations for access projects, both large and small, and put emphasis on areas of lower socio-economic status than

Martha's Vineyard. Paul stated that working on small projects (like improving lighting or parking at access sites) was a goal moving forward.

In terms of large projects, Patrick offered suggestions for new infrastructure locations based on discussions he'd had with members of the public: near the JFK Library and UMass Boston, and on Deer Island. Paul Diodati indicated that Division staff had talked about potential locations internally, including the Charles River Bridge, Salisbury Beach, Black Rock Creek, Essex Bridge, and Danvers School. Mike Moss suggested the Charles River Bridge have a lane dedicated to anglers. Ross said that the Division was considering a north of Boston location for the next big capital project. Paul reiterated that Panel members should let Ross know of any potential project locations that they see or hear about. Mike Armstrong added that Division area biologists had also been tasked with looking for potential sites when in the field and getting input from area associations. He thought it likely that many existing areas could be improved greatly with small investments.

On the subject of small projects, Patrick asked if the Division had the capability to carry them out. Ross replied that that was the idea behind developing a proposal for a competitive micro-grants program, one of his shorter-term priorities moving forward. The Division does not have the structure yet. Mary added that setting up such a program would necessitate legal consultation. Doug pointed out that there is a need for caution when working with towns on projects to ensure that access is not restricted just to residents after state money is used.

Information & Education Update

Mike Armstrong introduced Elaine Brewer, who started in April as the Division's Information & Education Coordinator. He noted that she was quickly brought on to many projects, and now they'd been working to prioritize them.

Elaine stated that her plan moving forward includes engaging not just anglers, but also youths and other underrepresented groups (e.g., women). She's been developing materials for kids, starting with coloring books. The first, which was very popular at the fall fairs, was on sharks; the next two will focus on finfish and a "my first fishing trip" theme. She's also been active as an editor on the Division's newsletter.

Elaine introduced a plan for a Youtube "channel" as the Division's biggest new initiative in I&E. The online site will host short educational videos, the first series of which will focus on the Division's activities in research (e.g., fish tagging, trawl survey). Several small video cameras were bought for staff to take into the field to film their operations. They are capable of underwater filming. She's started to get footage back now, and will be working on editing – a time-intensive job – with the goal of having one or two videos posted to the channel in the next six months. Mary asked where the footage was being stored, to which Elaine replied on her computer's hard drive due to the file sizes, but she's also been talking with IT about acquiring server space on the state system.

Elaine informed the Panel about a proposal for fishing clinics she's been working on. The clinics would have different target audiences including youth and women. Mary suggested that Elaine meet with Marion Larson, who coordinates the Division of Fish and Wildlife's Becoming an

Outdoors-Woman program. Mike said Elaine was planning to do so, as well as talking to Jim Legacy, DFW's angler education program coordinator. Elaine added that she's also in contact with a Florida-based group called Ladies, Let's Go Fishing that is interested to expand northward. Mary noted that DFW also has an Archery in the Schools program, and suggested fishing lessons could potentially be another element to explore.

Elaine told the Panel about the ongoing overhaul of state agency websites for increased standardization. She'll be involved in updating the content for the Division's re-designed website. She indicated plans to add a resource page for kids and teachers which would include games, class lessons, the coloring books, and more.

Paul noted that Elaine had developed a junior fishing license, based on an idea Ross had, that will be given out to kids, such as at shows and fairs when their parents are registering for their real fishing license. Elaine noted that no information is collected from the kids; it's just another way to engage youth.

Elaine said her short term goals also include developing a circle hook campaign for next summer. She's hoping to work with hook manufacturers to get some free (or cheap) hooks to give away to anglers with instructions about how to use them, so as to encourage circle hook use and reduce discard mortality. Mike Armstrong said that they'd likely use the MRIP surveyors to help hand out the hooks; he pointed this out as one example of cross fertilization between the projects financed by the Fund.

Mike Armstrong concluded the discussion of public access and information and outreach priorities by re-iterating his support for using Fund money to finance these two coordinator positions, and indicating his pleasure at having filled them with Ross and Elaine specifically.

Other Business/Adjourn

As there was no other business before the Panel, the meeting was adjourned.

Meeting Documents

- ❖ November 15, 2012 Draft Meeting Agenda
- ❖ June 18, 2012 Draft Meeting Minutes
- ❖ Memo: "Marine Recreational Development Fund, FY 2012 Closeout", dated 10/15/12
- ❖ Document: "FY 2013 Recreational Permit Revenue Spending Plan (as revised 11/8/12)"
- ❖ Memo: "Public Access and Information & Education Goals", dated 11/6/12