

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

April 13, 2017

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

MEMBERS:

Present: Mark Mello, Thomas Rawinski, Joseph Larson, Jennifer Ryan

Absent: Wayne Petersen, Kathleen Anderson, Gwilym Jones

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

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

Absent: Karen Searcy, Bryan Windmiller, Andy Finton, Mark Pokras

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Tom French, Eve Schluter, Brent Powers

OTHERS: Frederick Errington

– The meeting was called to order at 1:40 p.m. –

1. Approval of March Minutes

Joe Larson motioned that the March minutes be accepted, Kevin Powers seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve. Tom Rawinski commented that the March minutes were particularly detailed and very well done in his absence.

2. Chair's Comments

Kathleen Anderson was absent from the meeting, but serving in her stead, Mark Mello commented that a new book, *Amphibians and Reptiles of Sonora, Mexico*, was excellent and described phenomenal biodiversity. Director Buckley, at this point of the meeting, stopped in briefly to announce that MassWildlife will be holding its Open House on June 10. He anticipates a very large turnout from the public, surpassing perhaps last year's excellent turnout.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

Dr. Larson reported on the March 22nd meeting of the Fisheries and Wildlife Board. This has been a busy time for Division staff, being invited to sportsman's group banquets. The North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association expressed concern that their access to parts of Quabbin Reservoir could be restricted due to the proposed rattlesnake introduction at Quabbin.

The Rattlesnake Working Group held a public meeting in Ware, which attracted about 80 people, 27 of whom actually spoke.

The budget for the Division appears to be in good shape. Three of the six Martha's Vineyard towns wrote to the Division Director for assistance in reducing deer populations on the island.

As the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service moves forward with its New England Cottontail habitat conservation plans, the Division wants to make sure that state-listed species occurring in proposed areas are considered and not harmed.

A new draft policy on the Division's use of prescribed fire will be presented to the Board at its April meeting. Also being developed is a policy statement for invasive species, to accompany trails and dog policy statements.

Eve Schluter updated the Board on the 14th edition of the Priority Habitat Atlas, which is currently out for public comment.

4. NHESP Report – Eve Schluter

Eve mentioned that the 14th edition of the Priority Habitat Atlas was currently out for public comment. Online use of the 'viewer' feature will allow the public to comment on specific sites of interest.

Interviews were conducted for the Restoration Ecologist position.

A contractor was hired to assist with public outreach of Division programs and activities.

5. Assistant Director's Report – Tom French

Tom called attention to press releases and other materials in member's packets:

- Bald Eagles nesting in Shrewsbury
- Right Whales being seen in large numbers off Cape Cod
- A ruling that the government could not prohibit shipments of injurious snakes within the conterminous States,
- Information about the now federally listed Rusty Patched Bumble Bee
- Concerns about EPA's decision to allow for more liberal use of chlorpyrifos pesticide

Tom discussed the importance of various policy statements being developed by the Division, the Piping Plover Conservation Plan, and the recommended flow chart of actions regarding Rusty Patched Bumble Bee. He mentioned that a Northern Long-eared Bat tested positive for White-nose Syndrome on Martha's Vineyard, and that a Bald Eagle killed in a vehicle strike was a Massachusetts bird known to be 28 years old.

Jennifer Ryan commented to Tom that she had collected a Rusty Patched Bumble Bee specimen on Cape Cod in 1998, representing one of the last known collection records of this species in Massachusetts.

6. *Recent Federal Listing Decisions and Implications for States* – Brent Powers, NRCS Review Biologist

Brent shared with the Committee his considerable knowledge of the federal listing process for threatened and endangered species, and the implications of those listings. The Northern Long-eared Bat served as an example. A petition to list it was received in 2010, and the final rule to list it as threatened occurred in 2015. The process involved an Interim 4D Rule, which was quite restrictive in terms of habitat protection, but restrictions were relaxed in the Final 4D Rule, restricting activity only within one quarter mile of a known hibernaculum and 150 feet from a maternity roost tree.

A new petition has been submitted for the listing of the Little Brown Bat. The Division is expanding its bat survey work in the Commonwealth. Brent was encouraged that bat conservation was advancing under a coalition of state wildlife agencies.

Brent then described implications regarding the listing of the Rusty Patched Bumble Bee. Areas of the State mapped as “High Potential Zones” would require more Section 7 & 10 permitting than areas identified as “Low Potential Zones”. It was Brent’s opinion, however, that these kinds of traditional habitat conservation measures may not be as relevant if the bee’s decline is being caused by a disease and not by habitat loss.

Brent walked the Committee through the flow chart of actions one should take under different scenarios. The goal would be to prevent incidental take of the bee, or to allow for such via an approved permit application.

The Committee appreciated the presentation, asked questions, and felt good knowing that Brent and the Division had a very good grasp of the process.

7. *Member’s and Associate Member’s Comments*

Tom Rawinski – Tom mentioned that the Blue Hills Reservation had been in the National spotlight recently in a PBS news story about ticks, tick-borne diseases, and the role that deer play in exacerbating the problem.

Dave Small – Various bird clubs held a successful meeting here in Westborough. Dave documented one of the earliest records ever for the Common Green Darner dragonfly. UMASS’s Keystone Cooperators enjoyed a tour of Muddy Brook WMA, led by Chris Buelow. Lastly, Dave observed unusually large numbers of Red Crossbills at the Montague Pine Barrens.

Kevin Powers – Kevin reported on a recent trip to Stellwagen Bank where an abundance of sand lance and copepods seemed responsible for a truly remarkable concentration of marine

mammals and birds. To date, 112 Right Whales have been identified off the Massachusetts coast.

Tim Flanagan – Tim reported that salamander breeding activity in Berkshire vernal pools has been less than normal, perhaps due to weather patterns that have not been conducive for such. Measured oxygen levels in the pools have fluctuated greatly.

– The meeting adjourned at 3:35 p.m. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Thomas J. Rawinski, Secretary