

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

April 8, 2021

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

MEMBERS:

Present: Mark Mello, Wayne Petersen, Joseph Larson, Kevin Powers, Dave Small, Bill Brumback, Tim Flanagan

Absent: None

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Russ Hopping, Andy Finton

Absent: Bryan Windmiller

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Eve Schlüter, Jennifer Longsdorf

OTHERS:

Present: Rane Duncan

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

1. Approval of the January Minutes

Dave Small motioned that the January minutes be accepted, Joe Larson seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

2. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

Mark asked Eve when meetings will become live again. Eve indicated that the MassWildlife Field Headquarters facility is still closed. There are no current plans on when it will reopen to the public. Thus, the next meeting will be virtual via Zoom. The Committee agreed that whenever the Westborough office reopens, the following Advisory Committee meeting will remain virtual.

Next meeting will be held on 8 July 2021.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

Joe Larson summarized the progress of recent efforts to increase Massachusetts hunting and fishing license fees described at the January meeting, underscoring the fact that Massachusetts fees are notably

lower than many other states. Among suggestions and discussion topics generated from the public comment periods held in February and March on this subject were:

- A discussion about the pros and cons of having a fee system for the public not holding sporting licenses.
- A discussion about why the NHESP lives where it does and not elsewhere within the agency.
- Joe also offered an explanation about the problems and difficulty associated with obtaining an accurate list of zip codes for taxpayers contributing to the conservation tax check-off on their income tax forms.

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

- Eve gave a general update on progress being made on the new Natural Heritage Priority Habitat Atlas. The Atlas is scheduled to go out for public comment from May 3-July 3 and is set to be published on August 1. The new Atlas will cover the period from August 2017 to August 2021 and will not include many major changes since the last Atlas.
- Early responses to the new Heritage Hub online reporting and filing system described in detail at the January meeting have been very positive, and the system appears to be working nearly seamlessly since being introduced to the public more than a month and a half ago.
- A revision of the existing BioMap2 project will be once again headed by James DeNormandie of LandVest as part of a two-year project. The new BioMap3 will include all its past data information in addition to new habitat resilience maps and recent information on habitation restoration efforts. The new BioMap3 will also be available in both digital and paper formats.

5. *Wildlife Rehabilitation Program Overview* – Jennifer Longsdorf, Natural Heritage Program Coordinator

- MassWildlife's Wildlife Rehabilitation Program provides necessary care of sick, injured, debilitated, and orphaned wildlife so that the animal may be returned to live in the wild independent of human aid and sustenance.
- The program works in cooperation with trained rehabilitators and veterinarians on most birds, reptiles, and mammals excluding species protected under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, venomous snakes, black bears, and moose. Special authorizations are required for the rehabilitation of coyote, bobcat, fisher, river otter, white-tailed deer, and migratory birds protected under the federal Endangered Species Act. Jen provided a thorough and useful overview of the program's guidelines, history, and the specific roles played by consulting veterinarians. Jen also outlined the ongoing efforts to examine and strengthen the program through the implementation of changes over time.

6. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

Wayne Petersen – Wayne reported on the recent death of an incubating female Bald Eagle that died on its nest in Waltham as the result of poisoning from a rodenticide. This topic resulted in discussion of other recent articles pertaining to similar rodenticide-caused deaths. It was suggested that rodenticide poisoning might profitably be a topic for a presentation to the Committee in the future.

Bill Brumback – None

Tim Flanagan – Tim described a recent article explaining that many students are increasingly focused on GIS and management training degrees, rather than pursuing careers that would lead to wildlife agency work or state work connected to careers related to wildlife. This was especially true during the pandemic.

Dave Small – Dave suggested that with the next heavy rain there could be major amphibian movements to vernal pools. He further pointed out that due to the recent sustained drought, the success of many such amphibian breeding efforts this spring could result in failure.

Kevin Powers – Kevin provided an update on North Atlantic Right Whale breeding success this winter with 17 new births recorded, the highest since 2015. Additionally, he noted that a maximum of 89 different individuals including 3 mother/calf pairs were tallied on a single day (Mar 29th) off Sandy Neck in Cape Cod Bay, a total that is close to a quarter of the known population of this highly endangered cetacean.

Andy Finton – None

Bryan Windmiller – Absent

Russ Hopping – Russ informed the Committee that coastal kite boarding is becoming a potential disruptive concern at certain nesting Piping Plover sites.

– The meeting adjourned at 3:35 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Wayne Petersen