

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

April 13, 2023

DFW Field Headquarters, Southwest Meeting Room #103

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581

Meeting held virtually via Zoom

MEMBERS:

Present: Wayne Peterson, Tim Flanagan, Bill Brumback, Matthew Sisk, Kevin Powers, David Small

Absent: Mark Mello

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Russ Hopping, Andy Finton

Absent: None

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Eve Schluter, Mike Nelson, Rebecca Quinones, Sue Sacco

OTHERS:

Present: Brett Hoffmeister, Marjorie Bercier, Vivian Kimball (VHB), Peter Severance

– The meeting was called to order at 1:32 P.M. –

1. Approval of the January Minutes

Bill Brumback motioned that the January minutes be accepted, Matt Sisk seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

2. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

Mark was absent and no report was given to the committee. Tim Flanagan chaired the meeting.

3. Board Member's Comments – Matthew Sisk

The Fisheries and Wildlife Board sent a letter of support to the secretary of EEA with attention to Wildlife, Ecosystems, and Climate.

DCR will hold its June 8th stewardship council meeting at the MassWildlife headquarters in Westborough.

Eve did a great job presenting to the Fisheries and Wildlife Board on the work of the NHESP. It was well received. Matt hopes that NHESP gets more public recognition for their great work with BioMap. He noted that it is a wonderful product and outreach has been great. The Board is pleased with the quality

of the land acquisitions over the past year and with the new hires, which were reported at the last NHESAC meeting.

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

Eve provided the following link to a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) document describing the **Southeastern Massachusetts Pine Barrens Landscape Restoration and Community Engagement Initiative** grant announcement to MassWildlife: <https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2022-11/NFWF-ATBC-20221108-GS.pdf>

Eve suggested a schedule change for the next meeting from July 13th to July 27th at 1:30 in Westborough. This will be an in-person meeting. Proposed changes to the MESA list will be presented. A motion to make the schedule change was proposed and adopted by the committee.

She reminded members of the committee that compliance with the Conflict of Interest training is required and needs to be completed by April 27th.

She gave an update on her work on the NEAFWA Landscape Conservation Working Group and noted that two priority themes have been identified to further regional conservation efforts: (1) Appalachian and Stream Corridor theme which involves aquatic connectivity and habitat work, and (2) Coastal Resiliency and Restoration. MassWildlife hopes to apply for another round of funding with the America the Beautiful Grant soon.

The rollout of BioMap is going strong across the state. Outreach by staff has been great and they are connecting with municipal and regional groups including many open space committees, conservation commissions, and land trusts. Andy Finton also praised the outreach by staff.

The renewal of the hydro licensing of two dams on the Connecticut River in Northfield and in Turners Falls is under way. The proposals are positive outcomes for wildlife by improving fish passage and reestablishing more normal flow regimes on the river. Kevin Powers asked if there have been flow changes in the Connecticut River or other major streams in Massachusetts in recent time. Given current concerns of the Colorado River out west and other hydrologic changes across the country, Kevin wanted to know how we stood in Massachusetts. Eve and Rebecca Quiñones stated that rainfall in the northeast has increased versus what is happening out west, and we don't have the same pressures on use of the water found there.

The Northern Long-eared Bat federal ESA status has changed from Threatened to Endangered as of March 31st. Heritage staff are working with the USFWS to determine effects to state management and regulations.

Several grant opportunities are being explored including the America the Beautiful Act, state wildlife grants (for turtles), and federal endangered species grants.

Governor Healey has pledged a change in the state budget to move 1% from each department to environmental and energy issues in the state. The Heritage line item is proposed to go from \$1.0 to \$1.3 million. This budget is still in discussion but is a positive note. Federally, the Recovering America's Wildlife Act has been reintroduced to the US Senate with hope for passage in the next session.

Natural Heritage is releasing a new portal for MESA filings. Filings will soon be completed online which will streamline the workflow for staff.

The MESA species list of proposed changes and its scheduled review in 2023 was presented to the committee. Details will be sent to NHESAC members for discussion at the next NHESAC meeting.

5. *Bridging Climate Change Research and Agency Priorities at MassWildlife* – Rebecca Quiñones, Stream Biologist Project Leader

Rebecca presented an interesting overview of the state's program to assess climate changes in Massachusetts. Some of the projects include the Massachusetts climate change assessment. Areas that are being examined include hazard mitigation and climate adaptation. We are pleased to see that the inclusion of natural environments and adaptability of state wildlife species are part of the assessment. There are many collaborators on this project and it's a welcome addition to our understanding of climate and the environment.



6. *Member's and Associate Member's Comments*

Wayne Petersen – Wayne has expressed his interest and support for Burrage Pond WMA in Hanson. There are many listed species using this habitat including Northern Red-bellied Cooter, herons, and bitterns. A new addition to the breeding fauna is a pair of Pied-billed Grebes which have recently taken up residence.

Bill Brumback – No comment

Tim Flanagan – No comment

Dave Small – The Athol group hosted Christina Kwapich Ph.D. from UMass Lowell with a presentation on "Guest of Ants". It is great to have so many scientists in Massachusetts willing to present their research to local groups. It was an amazing talk and Dave learned a lot.

Kevin Powers – North Atlantic Right Whales – ~340 is the North Atlantic population estimate of which 70 individuals (20%) were identified in Cape Cod Bay on a single day in April 2023, signaling the importance of Massachusetts coastal waters for these endangered mammals. Kevin also noted the arrival (April 8) of five Piping Plovers on Plymouth Beach which might be nearly a month early.

Andy Finton – No comment

Russ Hopping – No comment – Discussed Right Whales in Cape Cod Canal

Motion to adjourn by Kevin Powers, seconded by Bill Brumback
– The meeting adjourned at 3:04 P.M. –

Drafted by: Dave Small
Submitted by: Kevin Powers