

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

9 January 2020

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

MEMBERS:

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

Absent: Joseph Larson

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Bryan Windmiller, Russ Hopping

Absent: Andy Finton

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Eve Schlüter, Jake Kubel

OTHERS:

Present: N/A

– The meeting was called to order at 1:34P.M. –

1. Approval of the December 2019 Minutes

Dave Small motioned that the December 2019 minutes be accepted, Kevin Powers seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

2. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

Mark distributed Chris Raithel's new book, *Amphibians of Rhode Island*, an authoritative book spotlighting the 18 species of amphibians that are native to Rhode Island. Chris is a longtime natural heritage biologist with Rhode Island DEM's Division of Fish and Wildlife.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

Joe Larson was absent, but Eve noted that the Fisheries and Wildlife Board meeting on 12/18/2019 approved new regulations banning wildlife killing contests in MA.

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

- Distributed several articles in member's packet and described some of them.
- Encouraged members to forward articles of interest to others on the Committee.

- Noted that the beginning of the year is a good opportunity to suggest agenda items for discussion by the Committee in 2020. If you have topics you'd like to see on the agenda, including presentation ideas, please let Eve and Jennifer know.
- Proposed MESA listing changes will be promulgated this Friday (1/10/20) and will be immediately effective.
- 2020 is the 30th anniversary of the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA), and MassWildlife is developing a "MESA 30" program to celebrate the anniversary. Specific components of the program include:
 - A 5K run at the Westborough WMA on 5/17/20.
 - A new way to make online donations in support of rare species conservation in MA.
 - A website that notes conservation success stories and tells the stories of some of the rare animals and plants on the MESA list:
<https://www.mass.gov/2020-marks-30-years-of-the-massachusetts-endangered-species-act>

5. **"Spring Salamander Assessment in Massachusetts"** – Jake Kubel, Conservation Scientist

In the presentation, Jake noted the following:

- Spring salamanders (*Gyrinophilus porphyriticus*, GYPO) were proposed for delisting in MA in 2004 and delisted in 2006.
- NHESP did a small abundance assessment for this species in 2005 during discussion of delisting and detected GYPO on 10/24 in western MA sub-basins in which suitable habitat existed. They did not collect relative abundance data.
- Although NHESP still collected reports of this species after 2006, only 5 new occurrence records were filed between 2006 and 2018.
- MassWildlife is participating in a multi-state Competitive State Wildlife Grant funded project to determine the potential vulnerability of northeastern US salamanders to the emerging chytrid fungal threat, *Batrachochytrium salamandrivorans* (BSal). As part of this study, MassWildlife was requested to provide individual GYPO for susceptibility testing to this disease.
- Jake noted that MassWildlife took this as an opportunity to gather data on the status of GYPO in MA.
- Specific study objectives included:
 - Determine current distribution of GYPO in MA.
 - Assess relative abundance at some sites for use as baseline data.
 - Develop standardized protocol for determining presence/absence and relative abundance.
 - Determine whether or not GYPO individuals from MA could responsibly be given to the researchers who wish to test the species' vulnerability to BSal.
- Jake did most of the surveys himself, but also recruited volunteers. Jake mapped potentially suitable stream segments and developed a simple protocol to measure catch per unit effort, including noting coordinates of starting and ending points on each stream, time spent on

each survey, and number (and size classes) of rocks flipped. Jake and volunteers collected length data on each captured GYPO and determined whether each individual was a larva or post-metamorphic.

- In 2019, Jake and volunteers completed 76 surveys in 27 towns with known GYPO records from the past. These included 21/48 towns with known past records and 6 towns with no past records.
- Jake and volunteers found GYPO in 18 towns, 3 of which were new town records. Thus, GYPO were found in 15/21 towns with past records of the species.
- Mean detection rates were 1 GYPO/214 rocks flipped. At sites where the species was found, 1 GYPO was detected per 90 rocks flipped.
- The survey identified several “hot spots” where 7-18 individual GYPO were found within several hours of effort.
- Jake will conduct further similar studies in 2020. He has determined that MA can responsibly provide 5-10 total GYPO individuals for use in the BSal susceptibility study in 2020.
- Jake found no immediate “red flags” that would cause him to consider the possibility of re-listing GYPO on the MESA list.

6. Member’s and Associate Member’s Comments

Wayne Petersen – Brought in a large “mystery” leaf that he found on a recent trip to the Hockomock WMA. Bill Brumback identified it as *Magnolia tripetala* and noted its horticultural background in MA.

Kevin Powers – Noted that 3 newborn North Atlantic right whales were found off the coast of GA last December. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/22/science/right-whales-calves-endangered-species.html>

He also noted that the New England Aquarium is conducting aerial surveys of sections of the relatively newly declared Northeastern Canyons and Seamounts National Monument. Among the findings from the October 2019 flight was 3 species of rare beaked whales (Cuvier’s, Sowersby’s, True’s) and 2 Chilean devil rays. <https://www.ecori.org/narragansett-bay/2019/12/23/aerial-survey-of-marine-monument-documents-rare-unusual-species>

Russ Hopping – Mentioned that he had recently attended a meeting of the Sandplain Grassland Network and encouraged fellow Advisory Committee members to familiarize themselves with the organization.

– The meeting adjourned at 3:24 P.M. –

Drafted by: Bryan Windmiller
Submitted by: Kevin Powers