

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

January 14, 2021

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

MEMBERS:

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

Absent: None

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Russ Hopping, Andy Finton

Absent: Bryan Windmiller

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Eve Schlüter, Sarah Maier

OTHERS:

Present: None

– The meeting was called to order at 1:37 P.M. –

1. Approval of the December Minutes

Dave Small motioned that the December minutes be accepted with one spelling revision. Kevin has since made the correction on the final and approved minutes.

Joe Larson seconded the motion for acceptance of the minutes with the requested revision and members voted unanimously to approve.

2. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

Mark questioned the acceptance of the Trump revised Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA). Eve indicated that the revised MBTA was codified on Jan 7, 2021 and will go into effect on Feb 8, 2021. The state has submitted comments to modify the "incidental take" change. Hopefully, the new administration will remove or replace the Trump version.

- Some info on the MBTA Act from the American Bird Conservancy, sent by Russ during the meeting: <https://abcbirds.org/article/last-gasp-assault-on-migratory-bird-protections/>

3. **Board Member's Comments** – Joseph Larson

- Mark Tisa analyzed the Division's financial situation from a diverse set of funding sources (e.g. Pittman Robinson, licenses, fees, etc.). The analysis identified potential financial instability for the Division over the coming years. The Division hasn't raised fees since 1996, so revenue is not matching expenses. MA has very low fees compared to ME, NH, and other states. The Director proposes increases to hunting and fishing license fees. Three listening sessions with constituents are scheduled for February.
- Requested clarification about the dates for NHESP Advisory Committee meetings in 2021. Answer: January 14, April 8, July 8, October 14. Second Tuesday in each of these four months at 1:30 P.M.
- Analysis of contributions to NHESP Fund. Can't access individual's names, but the Board is seeking zip code information to identify areas of focus. Bob Durand will pursue this.
- Joe and Mark sent a letter to the Green Budget Coalition NGOs who helped increase the state operating funding for the NHESP Program. Eve will send copy of the letter to Committee members.

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

- Donations: clarifications – pleased to see the increase, but the Dept. of Revenue made an error, so the increase was not as great as originally thought.
- Section 6 funding for *Schwalbea americana* (American Chaffseed) and *Alasmidonta heterodon* (Dwarf Wedgemussel) for surveys
- Going to get two competitive State Wildlife Grants:
 - Wood turtle: Follow up from a few years ago. Continue conservation efforts across the region (several states) – just under \$1,000,000 to multiple partners.
 - Salt marsh sparrow: We are a partner state, not the lead. Funds to The Trustees for work in the Great Marsh.
- BioMap3 contractor hired: LandVest, with James DeNormandie as the Project Manager.

5. **Brief Introduction to the Heritage Hub** – Sarah Maier (NHESP Information Manager) and Amanda Veinotte (NHESP Project Coordinator – not present)

- Sarah and Amanda have put countless hours into this online filing and permitting system. EEA-IT was critical with no cost to the Division.
- Vernal Pool and Rare Species Reporting System (VPRS) had to evolve because it was flash dependent, static, inefficient workflows, etc.
- Unified System – MESA filings and observation reporting with a single login
- Living system that will continue to be improved
- What's New: Application Name = "Heritage Hub", natural community form, mobile responsive, enhanced user interface, organization account management
- Sarah ran through a live demo of the Heritage Hub
 - Users can manage their dashboards to follow progress on their input and reports
 - Drag and drop document upload, can copy information between reports for multiple observations.
 - Abbreviated input versions, E-signature, etc.
- Collection permits/Research permits remain with the Boston Office

- Rollout plan coming, including links through MassWildlife website, and eventually a press release
- Hopefully a useful tool for other MassWildlife sections. Not just a rare species tool. Populated with 4,400 species.

6. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

Wayne Petersen – None

Bill Brumback – None

Tim Flanagan – None

Dave Small – Harlequin Duck in Millers River in Irving. Finches still here – Pine Grosbeaks

Kevin Powers – (1) Right Whales – 9 calves born, first born died. Nearly 100% of the population has been identified through images of the callosities on the rostrum. Mothers range from 13 to 40 years old. 13 – first calf. 40-year-old – 7th known calf. Estimated 3-4 years between calves. Coastal GA and FL are the calving areas. (2) Attended virtual automated telemetry workshops concerning placement of antenna for MOTUS bird tracking on wind turbines in offshore wind farms. Main purpose is to help determine if endangered birds (i.e., roseate tern, piping plover and red knot) are using these offshore areas as migration or foraging routes. Project is sponsored by NYSEDA (NY State Energy Research and Development Authority) and is being implemented by USFWS, BRI (Biodiversity Research Institute), URI and Birds of Canada.

Andy Finton – Our TNC Webinar with Dave Wattles, MassWildlife Black Bear and Furbearer Project Leader, was the most successful to date (~20 webinars over the past year). Over 350 registrants, over 225 participants, and for the first time we extended the Q & A time. Thanks to Marion Larson's marketing efforts.

Russ Hopping – None

– The meeting adjourned at 2:50 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Andy Finton