

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

July 11, 2019

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

MEMBERS:

Present: Mark Mello (Vice-Chair), Joseph Larson (Ex-Officio F&W, Board Member), Wayne Petersen, Tim Flanagan

Absent: William Brumback

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Dave Small, Kevin Powers

Absent: Andy Finton, Russ Hopping, Bryan Windmiller

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Eve Schlüter (Assistant Director), Brian Hawthorne (Habitat Planning Coordinator)

– Mark Mello (Vice Chair), called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. –

1. Approval of the June Minutes

Joseph Larson moved that the June minutes be accepted, Tim Flanagan seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

2. Acting Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

- The Acting Chair provided a brief summary of a BioBlitz event held in Concord on July 6 to recognize the 90th birthday of Dr. E. O. Wilson. He mentioned that Dr. Wilson specifically noted in an address that the greatest threats facing the Earth's biodiversity in the future are 1) a depletion of freshwater, 2) a loss of habitat, and 3) climate change.
- The Acting Chair also described recent concerns expressed by the scientific community about the global decline in insect abundance, which lead to a brief discussion about local declines in certain local insect populations (e.g., lepidopterans and fireflies), and some of the possible reasons.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

- Dr. Larson offered a brief overview of some of the changes taking place in the Office of Law Enforcement, some of which are thought to eventually cause some internal problems within the Agency.
- The Board reviewed Wild Turkey hunting regulations without incident.

- A Board discussion about the merits and feasibility of a statewide Coyote Killing Contest met with considerable controversy. A public hearing to vote on the feasibility of having a Coyote Killing Contest is planned for the future.

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

- Eve reported that Associate Members Kevin Powers and David Small are currently in line for full membership in the Advisory Committee, leaving potentially 4 associate member openings to be filled. There will be a discussion at the September meeting to discuss nominations for possible new associate membership.
- Eve reported that high priority interviews are being scheduled to hire a new Aquatic Ecologist.
- Additional updates were provided on restoration efforts for Frosted Elfins at the Montague Plains W.M.A., and the effects of recent water drawdown impacts on freshwater mussels.
- As also noted last month, donations to the NHESP will shortly be able to be made online this summer, the next priority habitat atlas will be started later this year, and work is in progress on making the online permitting for MESA more streamlined.

5. Carbon Budgeting on MassWildlife Forests – Brian Hawthorne, Habitat Planning Coordinator

The agency's Habitat Planning Coordinator, Brian Hawthorne, explained that overall goals in Massachusetts forestry were to maintain current ecosystems and wildlife populations, but also to prioritize carbon sequestration. He explained that these goals pertained to forest reserves that ranged from full canopy reserves to grasslands, shrublands, and young forest preserves. With the understanding that Massachusetts is a densely populated, but heavily forested state, a lively discussion followed about the pros and cons of carbon sequestration as a hedge against the possible pernicious effects of climate change.

6. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

Wayne Petersen – none

Tim Flanagan – Tim brought up the question of the use of drones for biological research activities and suggested that at some point the Committee have a presentation on the subject to keep everyone informed about this developing issue.

David Small – none

Kevin Powers – Kevin described the recent discovery of new Black-capped Petrel nesting areas on Hispaniola and their significance to this declining species overall well-being.

– The meeting adjourned at 3:45 p.m. –
Drafted by Wayne R. Petersen, Acting Secretary