

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

July 9, 2020

DFW Field Headquarters, Southwest Meeting Room #103

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581

Meeting held virtually via Zoom

MEMBERS:

Present: Joe Larson, Tim Flanagan, Kevin Powers, Bill Brumback, Dave Small, Wayne Petersen

Absent: Mark Mello

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Russ Hopping, Andy Finton

Absent: Bryan Windmiller

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Eve Schlüter

OTHERS:

Present:

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

1. Approval of the June Minutes

Joe Larson motioned that the June minutes be accepted, Kevin Powers seconded. One clarification to Dave Small's comment in those draft minutes was amended as follows: "The Webinar Hosted by Athol Bird and Nature Club was presented by State Herpetologist Mike Jones on MA Turtles and had 100 participants". The committee members voted unanimously to approve minutes as amended.

2. Vice Chair's Comments – Tim Flanagan

Mark Mello was absent. Tim had no comments.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

- Historic hatch of a loon in Southeastern MA, which was a cooperative effort between Maine, NH, and New York partners. MassWildlife press release: <https://www.mass.gov/news/historic-loon-hatch-marks-a-milestone>
- A recent new agreement to clean up the Housatonic River has been proposed by GE and the US EPA. This agreement is bringing a new less intensive approach. Includes the removal of the most hazardous material to an out-of-state dump site and also includes the removal of the Eagle Mill and Columbia Mill dams. Details at: <https://www.epa.gov/ge-housatonic>

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

Peter Hazelton has left NHESP. Peter will be missed as he accepted a position at the University of Georgia in Athens. We all wish him well. His position is not going to be backfilled in the near term.

Staff have been productive and efficient during the pandemic. Work continues on the online permit filing system and an updated version of VPRS with integration and a new name on track for an end-of-year rollout.

A grant proposal was submitted by a consortium of states for the research on Wood Turtles. Mike Jones was a lead author of the grant representing Massachusetts.

Progress on the Recovering America's Wildlife Act has been made as it has been included in a transportation bill passed by the house. These funds would be used for implementation of the MA State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP), which includes plants. Links to the bill are below:

<https://rules.house.gov/bill/116/hr-2>

<https://transportation.house.gov/news/press-releases/house-democrats-release-text-of-hr-2-a-transformational-infrastructure-bill-to-create-jobs-and-rebuild-america>

5. *The Great Marsh Resiliency Project* – Russ Hopping, Lead Ecologist, Coastal Ecology, The Trustees

The 16000 acre Great Marsh reaches from Gloucester to Salisbury. A 2017 report from Woods Hole on vulnerability of the Massachusetts coastline to sea level rise emphasized the role of the Great Marsh in mitigating changes. The marsh is critical habitat for the listed Salt Marsh Sparrow and is an important feeding area for breeding terns.

The Trustees have embarked on an innovative restoration project to restore the hydrologic integrity of the marsh. A pilot project started in 2019 took into account the historic infrastructure of the marsh. The ditches and banks (some dating back to the 1600's) were being utilized in the restoration. Russ explained the use of salt hay in filling the ditches from the bottom and slowly mitigating the draining of the marsh. Russ went into detail on the methodology and the hopes of changing the marsh structure to avoid the degradation projected by the SLAMM Model from 2030 – 2070 which would eliminate Salt Marsh Sparrow habitat.

The permitting process is very slow and some improvements will need to be made to get the restoration to a 1,000 acre/year model that would be vital for the recovery of the habitat.

6. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

Wayne Petersen – New Book by artist Barry Van Dusen "Finding Sanctuary: An Artist Explores the Nature of Mass Audubon"

"Over four and a half years, internationally recognized nature artist Barry Van Dusen visited all of Mass Audubon's 61 wildlife sanctuaries, nature centers and museums, creating drawings and paintings at each location. The new book, Finding Sanctuary, celebrates the richness, beauty and ecological diversity of Massachusetts and the Mass Audubon sanctuary system and provides fascinating insights into his artistic process." From: <https://blogs.massaudubon.org/takingflight/finding-sanctuary-an-artist-explores-the-nature-of-mass-audubon-virtual-book-launch/>

Bill Brumback – No Comment – Great talk by Russ

Tim Flanagan – No Comment

Dave Small – No Comment – Great talk by Russ

Kevin Powers – Right Whales: one young whale was beached, a victim of a boat strike. 22 young have been born since 2017 while 30 have succumbed to deaths. Not faring well. Overall population in North Atlantic may drop below 400 in the near future.

From NOAA/NMFS: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/feature-story/dead-north-atlantic-right-whale-sighted-new-jersey>

From Boston Globe:

http://epaper.bostonglobe.com/infinity/article_popover_share.aspx?guid=80945240-35a3-4def-9634-22309969c322

Andy Finton – No Comment

Bryan Windmiller – Absent

Russ Hopping – No Comment

– The meeting adjourned at 3:30 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: David H Small