

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

May 14, 2020

DFW Field Headquarters, Southwest Meeting Room #103

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581

Meeting held virtually via Zoom

MEMBERS:

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

Absent:

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Russ Hopping, Andy Finton (partial)

Absent: Bryan Windmiller

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Eve Schlüter, Drew Vitz, Marion Larson

OTHERS:

Present: N/A

– The meeting was called to order at 1:33 P.M. –

1. Approval of the April 2020 Minutes

Mark Mello motioned that the April minutes be accepted, Kevin Powers seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

2. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

- It was noted that there have been recent records of Five-lined Skinks found in Rhode Island, which prompted a discussion of the historical status of this species in Berkshire County where it is now believed to be extirpated with no recent records.
- It was also noted that Rhode Island has blocked the creation of at least two solar farm proposals in habitat locations where existing habitat would need to be destroyed in order to create new solar farms.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

- It was reported that in spite of the COVID-19 virus restrictions, most of the Division's staff have been able to successfully maintain their regular outdoor field work responsibilities. This is very good news.

- At a recent meeting of both Federal and State waterfowl biologists, a cooperative agreement was reached concerning current regional waterfowl hunting bag limits – a circumstance that isn't always a harmonious event.

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

- It was reported that staff have adapted quickly and very well to non-face-to-face meetings and Zoom-type communication, as well being able to effectively accomplish their field work.
- An announcement was made that an evening Facebook live event was going to be broadcast tonight that would feature information about the anniversary of the Endangered Species Program in honor of Endangered Species Day.
- It was announced that all of the Red-bellied Cooters that were being head-started in local schools that have been closed due to COVID-19 were safely able to be transferred to other cooperators to continue to be raised or released.
- A video camera has been placed adjacent to a Peregrine Falcon nest on the Gillis Bridge in Newburyport.

5. Presentation: *Non-breeding Movements and Habitat Selection by the Eastern Whip-poor-Will* – Andrew Vitz, Massachusetts State Ornithologist

- The presentation provided basic natural history information about this mysterious species, with information gathered both on the breeding grounds in Massachusetts, and also in wintering areas in Central America.
- Study areas in MA focused on Montague Sand Plains, Bolton Flats WMA, and areas in the Cape Cod pine barrens.
- Tagging included banding and also applying data logger GPS devices. The data loggers require recapture to download location information. Whips are most vocal on nights with a full moon, but are more successfully netted on darker evenings.
- Whips seem to have territory sizes from 2-5 km in extent, and on the wintering grounds seem to prefer forested landscapes with agricultural fragmentation (i.e., a habitat mix).
- Sample size included 27 in 2018 and 31 in 2019, with the majority being males in both years.
- In 2018, 57% of captured males returned, and preliminary results suggest that older males have a fairly high survival rate.
- Preliminary capture/recapture data suggest that declines in this species may be due as much to changes on the winter range as in breeding areas.
- Good questions and lots of discussion followed this interesting presentation.

6. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

Wayne Petersen –

- Reported a probable sighting of a Ringed Boghaunter (*Williamsonia lintneri*) dragonfly at the Eagle Reserve in Royalston.
- Also mentioned having had the opportunity to judge the National Junior Duck Stamp Contest for the USFWS.

Bill Brumback – N/A

Tim Flanagan – N/A

Dave Small – N/A

Kevin Powers –

- Mentioned a recent sighting of a Blue Whale 13 miles off Truro on Cape Cod.
- Reported that recent research suggests that North Atlantic Right Whales are notably smaller than Southern Right Whales, raising the question whether climate change affecting NA Right Whale food supply could possibly be a factor.
- Referenced an important recent paper on Sand Lance as a significant forage fish for seabirds and cetaceans and the implications of population changes in this species.
- Described the recent removal of a dam leading to Plymouth's Billington Sea and the fact that Herring almost immediately started to successfully run to their old spawning grounds in the Billington Sea.

Andy Finton – Absent

Bryan Windmiller – Absent

Russ Hopping –

- Reported that East Coast Piping Plovers have now reached 2000+ pairs which is a landmark tally.

– The meeting adjourned at 3:11 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Wayne R. Petersen