

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

November 8, 2018

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

MEMBERS:

Present: Mark Mello, Wayne Petersen, William Brumback

Absent: Joseph Larson, Tim Flanagan

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Dave Small, Kevin Powers

Absent: Andy Finton, Bryan Windmiller, Russ Hopping

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Tom French, Mike Nelson, Jennifer Longsdorf

– The meeting was called to order at 1:36 p.m. –

1. Approval of October Minutes

Due to a lack of a quorum of members, the Advisory Committee was unable to vote on the minutes from the October meeting.

2. Acting Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

Mark had no comments.

3. Board Member's Comments

Since Joe Larson was absent, Tom French provided a summary of the Board meeting held on October 30th at the Lenox Public Library.

The discussion largely centered around the proposed wild turkey hunting regulations. In response to a request submitted by the National Wild Turkey Federation, DFW initiated a review of our wild turkey hunting regulations to enhance turkey hunting opportunities. The proposed changes include the following:

- Youth Day: Expand hunting hours to ½ hour before sunrise until 5pm. Also, allow all permits issued to youths aged 12-14 to be utilized across the entire fall and spring season.
- Spring Season: Increase the daily bag limit to 2 per day

- Fall Season: Expand the fall archery turkey season to overlap the exclusive archery deer season. Also, allow turkey permit buyers/hunters to participate during fall season (remove fall tag conditionally).

These changes will enable the season to be a little longer and will increase bag limits. Currently, turkey hunting is a split season with a 2 turkey annual limit. Turkey hunters who harvest 2 bearded birds in the spring are unable to participate during the fall season. The proposed changes will also allow hunters to harvest 2 bearded birds in the same day during the spring. Turkeys are now common to abundant in every jurisdiction within the state except for Nantucket, and the age structure of the current population can support additional male harvest during the spring and moderate either sex harvest in the fall.

To date, there have been a remarkable number of fatalities from boating and ATV accidents for the year.

Mike Nelson gave a presentation on the proposed MESA list changes. Additionally, there are administrative changes including updating scientific names, common names for which there is a standardized list, and reordering the plant list to be alphabetical instead of phylogenetic. This topic generated a discussion among the Advisory Committee members, which included the following comments:

- The common name changes haven't been addressed in over 10 years. There are currently 102 common name changes. Since the entire document needs to be red lined, we will not be able to go through with all of the common name changes.
- We can't have more than one common name for each species
- For the benefit of the less sophisticated user, could we have a document outside of regulation that lists all synonymous common names? In the NHESP database, we only use scientific names because there are too many different common names.
- For plants, we list subspecies in a variety, but we don't do that with animals, which we list a whole species because there's only one subspecies in the state.
- It would be nice if there was the ability to sort the MESA list by family on the website.
- NOAA divided the humpback whale into multiple discrete populations; the population that occurs in the Northeast has been federally delisted.
- The Red Knot is federally listed. We had already proposed, discussed, and the Board voted on listing this species at the state level, but it was held up in regulatory processing delays. Since the Red Knot never got listed, it will be added in to this round of list changes.
- The law requires reviews every 5 years, but we've typically gone through the process every 3 years.

The Board voted to move forward with the list changes. The next steps are for the list changes to be sent to the Secretary's office and the Office for Administration and Finance before a public hearing can be held.

Former Board member and chairman, George (Gige) Darey, received the Francis W. Sargent Conservation Award for his contributions to the sporting community and to the conservation of

the Commonwealth's natural resources. Fourteen people have received this award, three of which have had ties to the Advisory Committee. Recipients of the award are movers or shakers in sporting, land protection, endangered species, or protecting wildlife in some form.

4. NHESP Report / Assistant Director's Report – Tom French

Personnel update: Mike Jones' last day in the office is Friday, November 9th. Mike will be going to the Appalachian Mountain Club as the Director of Research. Jon Regosin's former Chief of Conservation Science position has been posted and is open to both internal and external candidates. Round two of interviews for the Coastal Waterbird Specialist contract position wrapped up on November 7th.

Commissioner Amidon wants to start building a full Advisory Committee and getting it back on track. The Committee now has 5 full and 5 associate members. Joe Larson is working with Commissioner Amidon to fill the vacancies, so they are requesting suggestions for possible new members. Joe, Mark Tisa, and Tom French will select candidates to recommend to the Commissioner. Once the vacancies are filled, then everyone will be sworn in and new officers will be voted on.

Tom then went through the Advisory Committee packet contents, which included the following articles:

- Another Atlantic Right Whale confirmed dead making it the third local mortality for 2018
- Greg Skomal tagged the last shark in his 5-year population study using a mark/recapture technique
- A Bald Eagle in Barnstable was reported to have possibly died from rat poison, which would be the first eagle to die from rodenticide in Massachusetts. However, test results from a live sample have not been received yet. A study by Dr. Maureen Murray at Tufts Wildlife Clinic revealed that 83% of 70, or so, common hawks and owls treated at the clinic had anticoagulants, while the results of a second study showed 100% of 40, or so, birds had anticoagulants. Rodenticides hinder the activation of vitamin K, which is needed to form clots.

5. Discussion of Solar Farms and Wildlife

The UMass Clean Energy Extension is in the process of developing a LEED-style framework for the development of a wildlife-friendly/pollinator-friendly certification program for solar photovoltaic facilities in Massachusetts. Vermont, Maryland, and Minnesota already have similar programs. Included in members' packets were a collection of documents and webpage printouts discussing UMass's program, as well as the comparable programs in the other three aforementioned states. This generated a lengthy discussion among the Advisory Committee, which included the following points:

- This pollinator move is partly feel-good, but is not biologically on the mark. Calling it wildlife-friendly is taking a big leap.

- Does it make biological sense to clear huge swaths of wildlife land for solar development, and then simply plant a butterfly garden? Is there any benefit in planting wildflowers when clearing large areas of land which would have much larger impacts on the wildlife? Need to consider the scale of harm on wildlife and the environment.
- What concerns do we have about the placement of solar farms? We're not trying to dissuade solar development, but what criteria should be used to determine the placement of solar farms?

1. Siting: What's being removed, and what will it be replaced with?

2. Scale: Solar farms take up so much space.

- It seems like simply using the term "pollinator" has become an effective way to secure funding even if it does not make biological sense. On paper, this sounds great, but in reality, it may be misguided.
- People aren't differentiating between non-native honey bees and native bees
- We don't understand how to offset pollinator declines, largely due to insufficient data. Many, if not most, pollinator declines may be the result of introduced, non-native pathogens.
- People think it's a conservation achievement if they just go out and plant wildflowers, but is that effective? How do you measure success and whether you've accomplished what you set out to do?
- The only true wildlife-friendly locations for solar farms would be on roofs, parking lots, or capped landfills, not in the middle of a forest.
- There is no shortage of good places to put solar farms, which is why we push back when solar projects are proposed in priority habitat or on forested landscapes.
- Solar farms in forests are incentivized. People follow the money.
- If there's going to be a solar farm, then flowers is certainly better than asphalt or gravel, but is this really helping pollinators? No doubt pollinators will use these areas, but do they need it and will this help pollinator diversity?
- If a space isn't going to be developed as a solar farm, then it'll likely be a housing development. Also, solar farms aren't permanent, as they're typically 20 year leases with a 10 year extension possible. Will housing developments go in after solar leases expire?
- The best thing for native pollinators is native healthy habitat. What is native? Native to MA or native to the northeast? Are companies even consulting with biologists or botanists to look at seed mixes before planting in areas cleared for solar development?
- There is no harm in planting wildflower gardens, but they won't necessarily help with sustaining diverse pollinator populations or specialist pollinator species.
- The criteria used for the certification program through UMass are all about pollinators, yet they're calling it wildlife-friendly and not including species that don't fly.
- The certification is misleading because a solar farm could receive a gold rating just for planting a butterfly garden, but that ignores the impact of clearing the land. If an area started as a forest, then a solar farm in that area should never be able to receive a gold rating. Currently, a gold rating seems to be based on cosmetics.
- There needs to be regulatory siting and scaling guidelines with best management practices for solar farms.

At the end of the discussion, Tom suggested a few options on how to proceed:

1. Respond to UMass now with a letter stating our combined opinion and concerns, mentioning that this is only a small piece of a much larger issue.
2. Discuss further at subsequent meetings, and draft a collaborative position statement on the siting of solar farms.
3. Inviting a UMass Clean Energy Extension representative to give a presentation at one of our meetings.

6. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

Mark Mello – There will likely be another Concord BioBlitz as the 10 year anniversary is approaching, and E.O. Wilson will be there. There are over 2,700 species of moths now documented in Massachusetts.

Wayne Petersen – Noted that E.O Wilson will be speaking at the next Nuttall meeting on December 3rd.

Kevin Powers – The Town of Plymouth has money to dredge Plymouth harbor. Dredging will occur along the western edge of the harbor and the sand will be brought to Green Harbor Beach in Marshfield for shoreline revetment or re-nourishment of beaches. The mud and silt will be brought to a dump site in the middle of Cape Cod Bay. Material from the inner harbor near the pier is often more contaminant ridden, so the town still needs to decide on whether to dredge the inner harbor.

– The meeting adjourned at 4:15 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Jennifer Longsdorf, NHESP Program Coordinator