

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

Thursday, November 14, 2024
DFW Field Headquarters, Southwest Meeting Room #103
1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581
Meeting held virtually via Zoom webinar

MEMBERS:

Present: Kevin Powers, Bill Brumback, Wayne Petersen, Dave Small, Matthew Sisk, Mark Mello, Tim Flanagan

Absent: None

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Russ Hopping

Absent: Andy Finton

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Jesse Leddick, Rebecca Quiñones

OTHERS:

Present: N/A

– The meeting was called to order at 1:43 P.M. –

1. Approval of the July 11, 2024, Minutes

Dave Small motioned that the July minutes be accepted, Kevin Powers seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

2. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

Mark announced that Tim Flanagan was resigning from the Committee and this meeting (11/14/2024) is Tim's last. Mark thanked Tim for his service on the Advisory Committee and noted that he will be missed.

3. Board Member's Comments – Matthew Sisk

Matthew reported that the 2025 Department of Fish and Game budget did very well, especially the Division of Ecological Restoration (DER). Additional comments included:

- The DFG strategic plan is getting good press, especially the plans for blue carbon.
- The listening tour for the Biodiversity Executive Order has received over 500 public comments, a possible record, and comments can be viewed online.
- Interagency fire crews from Massachusetts sent to other states have since returned home where they are needed.

- The annual bear population review was held showing an expansion east through Worcester to Essex Counties and southeastern MA. The DFW Board voted to recommend an expanded hunting season review to public hearing.
- Thermal imagery for hunting was discussed and the Board voted to prohibit the use of thermal imaging for hunting big game during the day.
- The Board and MassWildlife staff are carefully reviewing new firearm safety regulations for any impact on hunters, especially out-of-state hunters.
- Christopher Mason has been appointed as the new Environmental Police Colonel.
- The Division is has received waivers to backfill and hire several key positions.
- The Board held elections.
- Two new regulations that will be going to public hearings include a proposal to prohibit barbed hooks in Catch and Release designated waters; and to designate a new Catch and Release area in a section of the Quinapoxet River in West Boylston.

4. NHESP Report & Assistant Director's Report – Jesse Leddick

Jesse reported that he has officially returned from paternity leave. Additional comments included:

- He thanked Rebecca Quiñones for standing in during his leave.
- Devon Harrington was hired as the new Endangered Species Review Biologist.
- Emily Myron is being hired as the new Assistant Director for Lands and Habitat- a newly created section within MassWildlife.
- The MESA list changes have been published as of 8/16/24 and those newly listed species are now protected under the MESA regulation.
- The MA SWAP is due for updating in 2025. The last update was in 2015. NHESP may be proposing to expand the number of plant species included in the SWAP, and better articulate the role and risks of climate change.
- NHESP is evaluating potential updates to the Massachusetts Piping Plover Habitat Conservation Plan, in collaboration with conservation partners. Any changes would have to be reviewed and approved by USFWS>

5. *Advances in Aquatic Biodiversity Conservation in Massachusetts* – Dr. Rebecca Quiñones, NHESP Conservation Science Program Manager

During this presentation, the meeting was abruptly stopped at approximately 3:05pm when Zoom cut off due to technical difficulties. The meeting was later restarted at 3:45pm, but unfortunately Rebecca and several members of the committee could not rejoin. Rebecca will finish her presentation at a future meeting.

6. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

No comments due to the technical difficulties and the meeting ending.

Dave Small motioned to adjourn the meeting, Kevin Powers seconded, and members who were present at the time voted unanimously to approve.

– The meeting adjourned at 3:55 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Russ Hopping