

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

Monday, November 10, 2025
Meeting held virtually via a Zoom webinar

MEMBERS:

Present: Bill Brumback, Wayne Petersen, Matt Sisk, Dave Small, Kevin Powers, Mark Mello
Absent: N/A

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Russ Hopping, Andy Finton
Absent: N/A

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Jesse Leddick, Mike Jones

OTHERS:

Present: N/A

– The meeting was called to order at 1:32 P.M. –

1. Acceptance of the Minutes of the April and July Quarterly Meetings

- Motion to accept the draft minutes of the April 2025 meeting was made by Dave Small, seconded by Bill Brumback, and was adopted unanimously.
- Motion to accept the draft minutes of the July 2025 meeting was made by Dave Small, seconded by Bill Brumback, and was adopted unanimously.

2. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

- Mark commented on a recent river trip from Paris to Prague in Europe where he noted that all banks of all the rivers traversed were rip-rapped, and he did not see any wetlands.

3. Board Member's Comments – Matthew Sisk

- MDFW Board Director Mark Tisa is retiring in early Jan 2026. The Board is working with the Commissioner to initiate a nationwide search for his replacement.
- Board Chair Steve Sears has retired and that seat is vacant.
- Board member John Organ retired and was replaced by Kyla Hastie.
- Board member Bob Duran retired and was replaced by Malcom Haith.

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

- NHESAC Officers:

- Mark Mello nominated for Chairman
- Dave Small nominated for Vice Chairman
- Kevin Powers nominated for Secretary
- NHESAC voted to approve officer nominations for one-year terms
- Discussion on the existing vacant NHESAC member seat. Members suggested that the vacant seat should be filled primarily by a person from western MA, and secondarily with a background in freshwater biology.
- Personnel Discussion:
 - Acting Director of MDFW (to be named) will likely be appointed for any period between Director Tisa's retirement and the hiring of a new Director.
 - MA State Botanist, Robert Wernerehl, has retired. Request to hire a replacement has been submitted, but the process has been paused due to the state's hiring freeze. Earliest replacement anticipated to be summer of 2026. Karro Frost will be MDFW's sole botanist during this time, but she needs assistance (i.e., intern).
 - Due to hiring freeze, Jesse's former regulatory review position has yet to be filled, and he continues to provide oversight in that capacity along with his duties as Assistant Director.
 - Permitting Specialist for all MDFW has retired. Heritage Project Coordinator Amanda Veinotte is helping to coordinate and facilitate continued review and permitting until MDFW can hire a replacement, but this is also paused due to the state's hiring freeze.
- Heritage Projects:
 - SWAP Action Plan was submitted in September. Some USFWS questions and comments have already been received – primarily asking for more information on MDFW's process – and we are working on this now.
 - MDFW's Annual Report (FY2025) is being compiled now. In the past, it typically has been a comprehensive report (~100p), but that format may be changing to a shorter topical format (15-20p) that is more accessible and digestible by a general audience. The format is preliminary but will focus more on accomplishments, agency/section highlights, etc. Natural Heritage may continue to prepare a more detailed annual report for internal use and tracking.
 - The next annual DCR Research Symposium will be joint with MA Dept. of Fish & Game (including MDFW, Div. of Marine Resources, and Div. of Ecological Restoration). Scheduled for 3-4 Feb 2026. This is a great opportunity to share knowledge and builds on our collective efforts to collaborate.
 - Meg Sheehan (from Community Land and Water Coalition) has requested a pause in pine barrens restoration work in Myles Standish State Forest and nearby MDFW Wildlife Management Areas. She was scheduled to speak before the MDFW Board at the Nov 12th meeting, but she sent notification on Friday afternoon that she would not be attending. Jesse sent her request to the NHESAC last week and wanted to answer any questions and get feedback on whether the NHESAC would like to invite Ms. Sheehan to provide comments at a future NHESAC meeting.
 - This led to a full participatory discussion by NHESAC members on how to address public requests to provide input to or comment at NHESAC meetings, which does not often happen. The result of the discussion reached a unanimous agreement by NHESAC members to send any public input/requests to the Natural Heritage Assistant Director (Jesse) and NHESAC Chair (Mark) for review

as to whether the input/request is an appropriate topic to be brought before the NHESAC during a regularly scheduled meeting. The NHESAC indicated that it welcomed public input regarding state-listed species.

5. *Update on Diamondback Terrapin Projects* – Mike Jones, State Herpetologist

Mike's presentation was designed to make the Committee more familiar with Diamondback Terrapins (*Malaclemys terrapin*), provide details on how serious MDFW considers the status of this species, and to show us that its research can be fun and interesting. It was meant to provide an overview of recent *de novo* inventory and survey work in Buzzards Bay.

- Diamondback Terrapins have been MESA-listed as Threatened (T) since 1990. The state has formed a recent partnership between the Sarah K. de Coizart Perpetual Trust, U of South Florida, and MDFW SE District to conduct research geared towards conservation of the species.
- Terrapin 101
 - Terrapins are the only turtle in salt and brackish marshes.
 - Their range is entirely in the U.S. (Texas to Massachusetts (Wellfleet)), although they have been noted in Essex County.
 - They occur in MA from Apr – Oct and nest from Jun – Jul.
 - They are sexually dimorphic (females are considerably larger than males).
 - The presented research focused on Buzzard's Bay using methods to support their conservation (status, visual surveys from boats, defining focal sites using PIT tags, population estimates, and standard head counts).
 - Population abstracts include nesting management, illegal traps (mortality), population fragmentation, roadway mitigation, and priority restrictions.
 - Focus on Wareham River sites included sampling effort, population composition (age/sex), and sexual size divergence.
 - Mass / length (BCI) is used as a health proxy (mass relative to length) to examine conditions relative to detection.
 - Species discovery curves suggest more effort finds more turtles in the Upper Wareham R, where the population is estimated at 2,292 +/- 329.
 - Discussion on acoustic telemetry using battery-powered tags attached to the carapace and deployed underwater receiver arrays. Tracked 54 females. Noted more movement in June. These results are comparable to a similar study in Wellfleet.
 - Drone surveys were done with machine learning by UMass Air, U Oregon, and MDFW.
 - Future work is planned for Barnstable and Taunton.
 - Many threats exist in many areas, complicating conservation of terrapins in MA.

6. Member's Comments:

- Kevin Powers: None
- Wayne Petersen: None
- Bill Brumback: None

- Dave Small: Noted that members should put forth comments to Jesse for 2026 goals, and we should seek to fill the open Committee Member seat with someone from western MA.

7. Associate Member's Comments:

- Andy Finton: None
- Russ Hopping: None

8. Confirmed next meeting date as Thursday, January 8, 2026, at 1:30 p.m. via a Zoom webinar.

– The meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m. –
Dave Small motioned, Bill Brumback seconded, all in favor

Drafted & submitted by: Kevin Powers