

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

October 08, 2020

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

MEMBERS:

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

Absent:

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Russ Hopping, Andy Finton

Absent: Bryan Windmiller

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Eve Schlüter

OTHERS:

Present:

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

1. Approval of the September Minutes

Dave Small motioned that the September 2020 minutes be accepted, Joseph Larson seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

2. New Business – Proposal to Modify NHESP Advisory Committee Meeting Schedule

- Eve Schlüter presented a proposal to modify the meeting schedule for the NHESP Advisory Committee. It was proposed to meet quarterly, commencing in 2021, with additional meetings to be scheduled as needed.
- Key discussion points included: The proposal is consistent with statutory meeting requirements, the new schedule is beneficial to staff working on the high priority BioMap3 project, past frequency of meetings was driven in part by a need for reviewing research grants and species listing proposals, Natural Heritage staff and Advisory Committee members and Associate Members can still provide reports, presentations, communication, and feedback electronically.
- Kevin Powers motioned to accept the new meeting proposal as presented, Dave Small seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

3. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

Mark Mello noted that he will be engaging with the Wildlife Management Institute in monitoring xeric habitats as part of the Regional Conservation Needs project in the northeastern states.

4. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

- Joseph Larson reported that MassWildlife will cooperate with the Northeast Association of Fish & Wildlife Agencies in the "R3" program. R3 has a focus on Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation of persons participating in hunting, fishing, and the shooting sports.
- The hunter education programs have been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Joe is monitoring the situation and evaluating progress and will provide updates to NHESP.

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

- Eve Schlüter reported that the MESA 30 special edition of the Massachusetts Wildlife magazine has been sent out for printing. This notable issue commemorates the 30th anniversary of the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act and celebrates the success of MassWildlife's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program. While maintaining the elements of surprise, Eve hinted that content may include historical information, highlights of taxonomic groups, and informs the public about agency activities and the MESA listing process. Publication is eagerly awaited by all present and Eve is looking forward to feedback.
- BioMap3 is officially funded for the 1st year of work, and funding for the 2nd year is anticipated. New information regarding climate change resiliency and habitat restoration potential may be included. Preparations for publication of the next Natural Heritage Atlas of Priority and Estimated Habitat maps are underway with hope of readiness by August 2021. Each included species is mapped according to scientifically informed guidelines. Eve clarified that the Atlas is intended to be used as a regulatory screening tool and does not attempt to fully describe all species occurrences.
- Redesign of the Vernal Pool & Rare Species Information System (VPRS) will improve the user experience and include new capabilities for electronic signature and submittals. Options to integrate with iNaturalist are being explored.
- The MassTrails Team has been working with staff on Natural Heritage and Endangered Species related issues. Work on a guidance document will include promoting awareness of NHESP concerns and identification of best management practices.
- The Mosquito Control Task Force is reviewing the Request for Responses process cost effectiveness and related matters of environmental and public health. A recommendation to the legislature is expected by October 2021.

6. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

Tim Flanagan – A moose has been seen in urban and suburban areas of Pittsfield. At this point no wildlife conflict issue has been reported.

Dave Small – MassWildlife staff member Chris Buelow gave a presentation to the Athol Bird and Nature Club regarding restoration ecology at Muddy Brook and Birch Hill.

Kevin Powers – Summarized the New England Fishery Management Council’s plan to require cod, flounder, and groundfish fishermen to bring monitors (observers) on fishing trips or to install electronic devices to track the catch. It is hoped that compliance with quotas will be improved. See [new-england-fishery-council-adopts-controversial-plan-monitor-all-trips-sea/](#)

Russ Hopping – Commented on the value of grant programs in promoting habitat management for species. Russ is also seeking information about the impact of microplastics on avian life and other organisms in the nearshore environment.

– The meeting adjourned at 2:55 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Tim Flanagan