

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

September 10, 2020

DFW Field Headquarters, Southwest Meeting Room #103

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581

Meeting held virtually via Zoom

MEMBERS:

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

Absent:

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Russ Hopping

Absent: Andy Finton, Bryan Windmiller

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Eve Schlüter, Marion Larson, Bob Wernerehl

OTHERS:

Present:

– The meeting was called to order at 1:37 P.M. –

1. Approval of the July Minutes

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

2. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

The Chair noted:

- Recent online discussion on MA moths by Steven Whitebread. Our state moth list has >2,800+ species listed.
- Light pollution in Europe is having a dramatic effect on moth populations. Use of mercury vapor lights have been banned. See <https://faunalytics.org/light-pollution-and-moth-behavior/>

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

No new comments.

Dr. Larson however noted how much good work is on-going at the Agency despite the constraints imposed by the COVID pandemic.

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

- Staff is undertaking 3rd iteration of BioMap.
 - Funding has been approved
 - Large effort with The Nature Conservancy (TNC)
 - 10 years since last update
 - Adding new aspects which include climate change and habitat resiliency
 - To be completed and released in 2022 (summer)
 - EEA funding for 1 year, but it is a 2-year study
 - To be web-based with user-friendly interface
- Revision to Natural Heritage Atlas to be started
 - Expected completion in 2021 (August)
 - Last update was 4 years ago
 - Public comment period will be included
 - This update will be included in next BioMap
- 30th anniversary of Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA) is this year
 - Events have been scaled back due to COVID
 - The October 2020 Massachusetts Wildlife magazine issue will be a special issue dedicated to MESA
- NHESP's online rare species reporting system (VPRS) upgrade is in progress
 - Many improvements planned with final release by end of 2020
 - Should streamline workflow in Agency
- New online permitting portal be released concurrently with VPRS upgrade by early 2021
 - Should streamline MESA review process and reduce paper
 - Release is on schedule and budget
- Mosquito control impacts (EEE target) are under examination by Governor's new task force
 - MESA regulations do have oversight with MA Dept. of Agricultural Resources and MA Dept. of Public Health
 - Division has seat on task force (Eve Schlüter)
 - Broader community is involved (public)
 - Study to be performed, but no funding has been designated yet
 - To evaluate effectiveness of aerial spraying including whether chemicals being used have other environmental affects
 - Report due by end of 2021
- Bill Brumback asked why Heritage donations are up by 30%. Division is trying to figure that out. Mass Audubon bird-a-thon contributions are also up this year (Wayne Petersen). Expect that ramifications from COVID are involved.
- Status of Recovering America's Wildlife Act (HR 3742). Bill has only been approved by US Congress in Oct 2019. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/3742>

5. ***Re-discovery of Crested Fringed Orchid with notes on the orchid family in Massachusetts* – Bob Wernerehl, State Botanist**

- Crested Fringed Orchid was rediscovered by Bob this year in Bristol County.
(<https://www.mass.gov/news/endangered-orchid-rediscovered-in-bristol-county>)
- Bob discussed this excellent finding and presented several aspects of this species and other orchids found in MA.

- This finding received widespread news coverage including 76 reporting news agencies that spanned across the county and Europe as well as social media.
- Orchid seeds are “dust-like” without any carbohydrates and need to wait for appropriate fungal hyphae to germinate. Thus, their ability to spread is limited.
- Orchids are monocots.
- Resupination is a unique evolutionary feature in orchids where the labellum grows in twisted fashion to become situated at the bottom of the flower to better allure pollinators.
- Crested Fringed Orchid distribution is widespread across eastern US to the southeast and west to Texas, but is critically imperiled in many states, such as NH and CT.
- This new finding was in a single location in Bristol County when it typically blooms (August) in areas with other notable wetland species (*i.e.*, Swamp rose mallow *Hibiscus moscheutos* and Turk’s-cap lily *Lilium superbum*).
- The state’s status is listed as S1 (state endangered) since its distribution in MA is based on a single location.
- Many facts about this orchid can be found at:
<https://gobotany.nativeplanttrust.org/species/platanthera/cristata/>
- Bob discussed past searches for this species within the state as far back as 1987 by Bruce Sorrie (MA’s first state botanist) when he found a single plant. Another finding of 2 plants was made in 2001, which was the last until Bob’s discovery of 8 plants this year. Many searches were made by notable botanists within this time without finding any specimens.
- MA has 55 orchid taxa with 5 added in the last 20 years. *Platanthera* has 16 species. The Agency tracks 34 of these taxa (14 endangered, 5 threatened, 1 special concern, 3 historic, and 12 watch-listed).

6. Member’s and Associate Member’s Comments

Wayne Petersen – No comment

Bill Brumback – Discussed Native Plant Trust and TNC plant diversity report, which is online. Sites and habitats are noted and current status of plant diversity conservation in New England are compared by Global Strategy for Plant Conservation and Global Deal for Nature.

Tim Flanagan – Noted wildlife has returned to his neighborhood (black bear, skunks, red fox, pileated woodpeckers) since traffic has been reduced by COVID.

Dave Small – Noted recent virtual presentation by Agency’s Chris Buelow to the Athol Bird and Nature Club concerning fire and habitat restoration as conducted by Natural Heritage.

Kevin Powers – Noted (1) that 34 pairs of Piping Plovers nested at Plymouth Beach this past summer, which is a new record (+4 from old record in 2019), and (2) a joint effort with the Town of Plymouth and Mass Audubon to restore an abandoned cranberry bog (41A) at Foothills Reserve. This area is adjacent to Mass Audubon’s Tidmarsh Wildlife Sanctuary. Water flow between both areas has been re-established for these recovering wetlands, which had been cranberry bogs for the past 100 years.

Andy Finton – Absent

Bryan Windmiller – Absent

Russ Hopping – Noted The Trustees’ “State of the Coast” report was released (see <https://www.onthecoast.thetrustees.org/download-a-copy> for a copy)

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

Drafted & Submitted by: Kevin Powers