MEETING OF THE MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PANEL
April 28, 2020
Via Webinar

Attendance:
Panel Members: Kalil Boghdan (chair), Kevin Blinkoff, Mike Moss, Patrick Paquette, Mike Pierdinock

Department of Fish and Game: Commissioner Ron Amidon

Division of Marine Fisheries: Director Daniel McKiernan, Assistant Director Mike Armstrong, Chief Fiscal Officer Kevin Creighton, Senior Biologists Greg Skomal and Brad Chase, Biologists Ben Gahagan, John Boardman, Matt Ayer, and Mark Rousseau, Coordinators Christine Cassidy, Kim Fine, Ross Kessler, and Dave Martins, Policy Analyst Nichola Meserve

Office of Fishing and Boating Access: Acting Director Doug Cameron

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Kalil Boghdan called the meeting to order and began by recognizing Department of Fish and Game (DFG) Commissioner Ron Amidon. Commissioner Amidon congratulated Kalil on his appointment as Chair of the Marine Recreation Fisheries Development Panel (Panel) and said he had a few brief comments to share.

Commissioner Amidon noted the long and difficult battle the past few weeks with municipalities closing boat ramps. He said that he had been able to get them to reopen with assistance from Doug Cameron (Public Access), Bob Greco (Commissioner's Office), and DMF Director Dan McKiernan. He noted that the late Jack Sheppard was standing on his shoulder during this trying time, and asked Doug Cameron to speak about Jack Sheppard.

Doug Cameron discussed the history between the two, noting that Jack began his career at the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (DFW) in 1972 in engineering and procurement. Jack went to the Public Access Board in 1985 and became the director in 1988. Doug recalled how he first met Jack when he was an engineering consultant working with Public Access at some boat ramps and ultimately became an employee of Public Access in 1993. Doug discussed how Public Access went from 85 to over 300 access sites and over 185 land management agreements with cities and towns and the remainder being managed by DMF, DFW, DCR, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Martha's Vineyard Land Bank. Doug recalled that Jack loved his family, a good bargain, and a good lunch spot and that he truly cared for everyone. He remarked that Massachusetts sportsmen have a place to fish thanks to Jack Sheppard.

Commissioner Amidon turned the meeting back over to the Chair. Kalil thanked Doug for his tribute to Jack Sheppard, and then asked Nichola Meserve to explain why this meeting was being held on Zoom and to review the guidelines. Nichola explained the remote nature of the meeting due to COVID-19 and apprised the attendees of the procedures for conduct of the meeting.

Kalil returned to the meeting's agenda and asked if there was a motion to approve the Draft Meeting Agenda. Mike Moss so moved and Mike Pierdinock seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Kalil went on to the next agenda item. Patrick Paquette motioned to approve the draft minutes of the Panel's May 8, 2019 meeting. Mike Moss seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Fund Accounting

Kevin Creighton began his overview of the status of the Marine Recreational Fisheries Development Fund (Fund). He reviewed the sources of revenue: permit sales, MRIP reimbursements (beginning in FY14), and donations. Permit revenue has averaged $1.25 million over the past seven years, with FY 2018 peaking at $1.4 million which Kevin attributed to how fair weather timed with the fiscal year. FY2019 came back down slightly to more expected levels. Permit revenue and the observed increase is predominantly from the sale of private angler permits, as opposed to for-hire permits which have stayed very stable at around 60 to 65 per year. Kevin noted the change in the way MRIP reimbursements were calculated beginning in FY2017. The current two-year contract is for $338,000 per year, and also includes accounting for an FTE brought on in 2020 to conduct phone interviews. He stated that donations to the Fund have remained pretty steady; most are coming from anglers that are just past age 60 and get a free permit. Kevin said that 6.8% of donations are made by those under the age of 16 who do not require a permit and concluded that many of those are made in error.

Kevin discussed the expenditures from the Fund next. He contrasted spending in FY18 and FY19. Spending on Public Access increased from the mandated 1/3 (on average) to roughly 45% due to hold-over spending on the Deer Island Project. He noted that early design phase expenditures were much lower than expected and then increased. Spending on MRIP went down from about 1/3 to 20%, and with all expenditures being reimbursed rather than just 2/3. The latter related to DMF transitioning the hiring of field interviewers from a temp agency (AIS) to bringing aboard seasonal employees, saving DMF about $75,000 in expenses. Kevin noted that Ross Kessler would speak more about the Deer Island Project later in the meeting.

Regarding expectations, Kevin stated that he is very confident about expenditures and that if everything stays on track, he expects a balance forward of $3,100,000. In reference to permit sales, Kevin noted how the weather impacts purchasing throughout the year, and that this year, through the end of March, we were trending about 20% higher than a typical year. With the uncertainty surrounding Covid-19, Kevin said April sales had dropped about 9%.

Regarding the overall spending projections and the financial stability of the Fund, Kevin noted how employee turnover in some of the funded positions affected prior spending projections (given new employees generally coming in at lower pay). Kevin provided some examples of how permit revenue would change under various permit restructuring scenarios, such as an increase in the fee for the permit and age when there is no fee for the permit. Kevin stated that the age for no-fee or reduced-fee permits is 65 in Rhode Island, 68 in New Hampshire, and 65 in Connecticut.

Patrick Paquette asked if it was possible that the increased permit sales in March were a response to the autorenewal function going online. Kevin replied that DFW has a sizeable outreach staff involved in a marketing campaign and since Samantha Kass was involved in that, she could speak better to this issue. Kevin discussed the great presentation this group had made to the Commissioner and it included DMF permit sales. He said there is a new outreach tool called GovDelivery and reiterated

that Samantha would speak more about this. He pointed out there is an RFR (Request for Response) for a new company to handle permit issuance as the current contract with Aspira is set to expire. One of the functions they are seeking is autorenewal and automatic emails generated for those who had a permit but hadn't renewed by a certain date. DMF has seen a 2-3% increase year after year, and good effort had been made by Christine Cassidy and Samantha using Facebook, which Kevin attributed to the increase in March of this year.

Patrick then asked if the slide that Kevin had presented about the different options to raise prices was just a discussion at this point, and Kevin replied that it was, and that we had been asked to provide this information at last year's meeting. Patrick stated that while he does have comments on this, he will reserve making them until it becomes an action item.

Mike Pierdinock asked if the cost of the Deer Island Project was on target, and Kevin said that Ross Kessler could explain it better, as there were change orders resulting in the overall price being higher. Ross said the project was definitely over budget. The initial estimated cost had been developed from a very similar project by OFB. Ross noted that steel prices had gone through the roof and that although it was re-bid, the same company won it. Ross recalled that earlier this year, if you drove into Boston all you could see were cranes against the skyline everywhere and that everyone was facing incredibly high construction costs due to the strong economy.

FY20 Project Review

Permitting

Kalil then moved to the FY20 Project Review, and Mike Armstrong asked Samantha to address permitting. Samantha reviewed 2019, and said that during last year's presentation, in 2018 we only saw a 1.5% increase while this year we saw a 3.9% increase. Samantha noted the rise in permit holders under the age of 60, that sales locations (internet/phone, vendors and DMF/DFW office locations) were consistent, and that overall the age demographics remained the same; 32% of permit holders receive a free permit and that hasn't fluctuated.

Regarding the *MassFishHunt* database, Samantha stated that since the contract is expiring, the procurement management team formed an RFR committee (which includes Samantha and Story Reed) to update the last RFR from 2015 to better reflect our current needs. Samantha noted that changes in capability and technology have occurred in the past 5 years and that the RFR committee wants to take advantage of these improvements. Currently, the plan is to have the RFR posted by May 2020 and after review, have a new vendor in place by the end of the summer and that vendor's platform in place by November 2020. Samantha discussed the notable changes they were looking for, such as user ease in logging in and once in the site, making it a more seamless experience. Samantha cited improved data access as one of the key points, including increased CRM (Customer Relationship Management) functionality, such as how customers are engaging with the platform and with us as well as tracking purchases from year to year.

Samantha stated that the bulk of this year's R3 effort has been focused on improving communication with our constituents, referencing our dated listserv, which was limited to Outlook email and did not reach many of our recreational anglers. A new cloud-based platform (GovDelivery) will include all listserv users and recreational permit holders who can then customize the content they receive from us. Samantha said this will aid in increased communication and engagement with our constituents.

Regarding the Permit Renewal Campaign, Samantha said that they did a "test drive" around March 6, 2020 and that anyone who selected a recreational topic in GovDelivery received a reminder to renew. About two weeks later, all of those received a second email regarding the Fund and all of the great things being done with the permit fees received. Samantha discussed the campaign results, noting that 110,000 received the first email, 35% opened it and 6.5% clicked through, driving 4,000 unique clicks. She said the second email saw similar open and click-through rates. She noted that by using a unique tracking code in GovDelivery, we can actually see what people are purchasing in *MassFishHunt* and that of the 4,000, there were 500 unique transactions which is very high. Samantha said that this modest effort had resulted in almost $21,000 of revenue from existing customers (although some may have been those who were planning to renew anyhow and it's difficult to say definitely that we shifted their buying behavior).

Samantha concluded by addressing angler retention and that emails make it much easier to retain them than to acquire new customers. She noted that the significant rollout of our plan for R3 for the entire agency is an integral part of the RFR and that the two systems on the back end must communicate. Samantha discussed the 2019 Lapsed Anglers Survey (78,000 did not renew) and that we are working with the UMass/Amherst angler survey and going through the responses now trying to identify what barriers may exist that would cause them to not renew.

Kalil thanked Samantha. Commissioner Amidon highlighted the *MassFishHunt* procurement process and how important it was to DFG. Ron reiterated the great work of the procurement team and the many number of hours spent on the outstanding RFR document they created. He noted that data analytics is going to be greatly enhanced by the new *MassFishHunt* process and that it will be available to all of us.

Kevin Blinkoff remarked that it was great to see so much emphasis on R3 marketing. He asked how many emails would be sent before someone is retained (i.e., renews) and beyond that is there a content email offered in which the opportunity to purchase or renew is offered.

Samantha replied that this R3 campaign is the first time we have emailed permit holders, and that the first outlined the Covid-19 closures and how that impacted things and that later in the spring we should probably do a similar campaign and then we can have certain actions based on their usage. Kevin Blinkoff noted On The Water magazine's emails to subscribe and re-subscribe and suggested that they could include the opportunity to purchase a saltwater fishing license.

Patrick also commended the program, noting that even the test that was done was helpful, and that he had heard from some people who renewed their permits earlier this year. He discussed visiting fishing clubs and said that a huge issue is retention as well as recruiting both the older and younger demographic into clubs. He cited both the New Jersey and North Carolina Buggy Associations, stating that membership software has assisted in an over 80% retention rate, and that it appears reaching people earlier in the season seems to show promise.

Samantha said that the new *MassFishHunt* autorenewal function will help as well as renewal notifications, and that it is believed those who lapse only fish a few times per year. Patrick said he is interested in what the tourist percentage of permits/renewals will look like and is looking forward to the results of the study.

MRIP Project

Mike Armstrong addressed MRIP, the methodology by which we estimate recreational catch through interviews and effort surveys. Mike noted that DMF was incrementally assuming more of the local administration of this federal program, with the goal of greatly enhancing sampling. Mike said that sampling has been enhanced by 200% and that the program now has us embedded in the operations as opposed to a more bystander approach. Mike stated that while there is presently one full-time employee, he is proposing to add one more and noted that the program is 80% reimbursed by the federal government.

Dave Martins discussed the basics of sampling in 2019 citing the base number of assignments and add-ons. He reviewed the effort done to focus on higher-productivity sites. Dave discussed the average number of interviews by month, as well as fishing mode (shore, private boat, for-hire). He addressed the significant increase in charter boat interviews over the past three years and said that he believed it was due to an increase in awareness among both charter boat captains and their customers as to the importance of participating in the study. Dave attributed this to the outreach both Mike Armstrong and Matt Ayer had achieved by attending charter boat meetings. Dave then summarized head boat sampling, saying that 2019 was very similar to 2018 and that going forward, he wanted add-ons to the base number of trips to get more precise and accurate estimates for this group.

Patrick asked about the refusal rate (to be interviewed). Dave replied that while he didn't have those statistics with him at the time, he could certainly present it in the future, noting that the data would not be by mode as refusals are not recorded that way. Dave explained that refusals are recorded as a total per assignment and that it has been about the same each year,, and remains an ongoing challenge. Dave continued, stating that roughly half of the people encountered refuse, but that also fishermen who leave the dock and do not return to the boat are considered refusals as well. Patrick supported continuing efforts to address this problem.

Mike Armstrong pointed out that while refusals remain a problem, the efficiency of the program has increased especially in terms of interviews per assignment, as Dave had pointed out. Patrick replied that this is what inspired his question, and that he thought perhaps the effort was indeed paying off. Mike noted that they had been working really hard with the charter boat captains, and Patrick said he didn't think it was just the charter boat guys; he has talked to many fisherman at many different clubs trying to convince them of the importance of participating and that he feels many of them simply didn't understand this for a long time. Dave Martin agreed.

Mike Armstrong stated that Patrick had requested an analysis of the relative revenue and spending for MRIP by mode, and the chair asked Mike to proceed with that information now. Mike noted that Kevin had addressed part of Patrick's request earlier (permit revenue by mode). some of it earlier. Mike discussed the revenue brought in by the for-hire permits, noting that (in 2019) about $57,000 in permit fees came from charter boats out of the total income of $63,000, and after reimbursement, about $51,000 was spent on MRIP for-hire sampling costs. Patrick thanked Mike for the information, noting he still had a larger overall concern regarding spending on MRIP from the Fund. Mike responded by reiterating how much of the MRIP expenses are reimbursed, meaning that it does not cost us much considering the "bang" we get for it.

Information and Education Project

Mike began by discussing how, when the recreational license was implemented almost 10 years ago, one of the requests people had was for an Information and Education Program, including angler

education. Prior to funding this project, DMF really didn't have a dedicated outreach person—it was more ad hoc and for the commercial fishery. Now we have one full-time employee for Information and Education (Christine Cassidy), and another employee for angler education (Kim Fine), paid half-time out of the Fund.

Kim noted that the Saltwater Angler Education Program is focused on engaging the public in saltwater fishing through youth anglers and learning-through-fishing activities. She discussed the two types of clinic held: pre-registered and open (you can just show up and fish). Kim said that she was changing the pre-registered clinics from one 3-hour block to two 2-hour blocks and that at these clinics, kids learn casting, knot-tying, fish measuring, fishing regulations and proper handling techniques. Kim noted that she also sets up a tent so promotional material can be distributed to passers-by. These materials include saltwater fishing guides, coloring books, tape measures and stickers. Kim said that for those not pre-registered, they can participate in some of the events but not the catch-and-release component. Kim said that the age range for participants is 7-15 years old and that they encourage kids to bait their own hooks (under the supervision of their parents) and that registered participants are given a "Take Me Fishing" backpack filled with printed materials, sunglasses and a tackle kit in the hope they will go out fishing again.

Kim discussed the co-sponsored events which usually involve 2-3 hours of casting and fishing, depending on what the co-sponsor prefers. She then explained the financial assistance program Why Not Fishing and the $500 award which was used for Elevate Boston Fishing Trip, a non-profit dedicated to children, youth and their families. Kim said she believes an RFR (Request for Response) had been submitted so that groups can bid to be awarded funds on an ongoing basis.

Kim recapped the 2019 schedule of clinics: five pre-registered, several co-sponsored, and two adult fishing clinics and that she had about 300 youth participants. She referred to the chart noting that clinics with asterisks were events that had to be cancelled due to weather or moved to 2020 as funding was granted too late in the season and the locations weren't ideal. She also said that a couple of evening clinics scheduled for later in the summer had to be cancelled due to concerns about Tripe E (eastern equine encephalitis). Kim addressed the clinics planned for 2020 and the uncertainty due to Covid-19 and that her hope was that some of these would be able to take place in the fall.

Patrick expressed concern that there would be many events postponed until the fall and that it's certain to create a number of conflicts, and not just with fishing. Kim acknowledged that this is indeed a concern and that a lot of these may not happen but that any of the events that are co-sponsored will be decided by those entities. Kim said that while she is willing to work with them it is going to be difficult for a while given the situation.

Christine Cassidy began her presentation by discussing social media, noting that DMF's Facebook grew by almost 30% with almost 2,000 new followers and Instagram grew almost 60% with over 1,700 new followers. Christine said she was hoping to use Instagram to attract more photographs, especially of the species being landed. Christine noted that Kim and Samantha are responsible for handling these accounts over the summer and expressed her gratitude to them. She continued with top posts and engagements, with the most popular including white shark tagging, the striped bass license plate, molted horseshoe crab information, and seafood marketing amidst Covid-19. She went on to the "What is it? Wednesday" promotion in which a photo is posted on Wednesday and the solution is posted on Thursday and winners receive a rod and reel combo package and stated that these trend very well with lots of engagement.

Christine then discussed the Take Me Saltwater Fishing initiative, preparing adults in the community to engage youth in saltwater fishing. She explained that the first program had been scheduled for the previous Saturday and that we have gear available to lend to participants, along with information on how to run their own clinics. Christine said she has drafted a new saltwater fishing handbook, written at a youth level (logbook included) with an adult companion guide and hopes to have this finalized in the next few weeks. Christine continued by explaining the Free to Fish Program, which involves 60 rods and tackle boxes available for loan in the summer months with priority given to those who participate in Take Me Fishing.

Patrick asked if the statistics regarding the Facebook seafood post had anything to do with the seafood marketing program. Samantha responded that while these are separate, Wendy Mainardi has been working with the industry and the Seafood Marketing Steering Committee to support the seafood industry during this difficult time. Samantha said there is information on DMF's website directing people to seafood markets that are open and that this initiative is being led by Wendy.

Diadromous Fish Project

Mike Armstrong introduced Brad Chase, who runs DMF's Diadromous Program. Mike noted that while the program has existed for a long time, it was much smaller and the introduction of the saltwater permit in 2011 allowed for expansion. Mike said that there are currently two full-time employees and the focus is on expanded counting, fishway maintenance/construction, and sampling.

Brad began by citing the two responsibilities of the diadromous program: monitoring of sea migration of spawning fish and fish passage improvements. He said the species they monitor are river herring, shad, rainbow smelt and American eel and that his presentation would focus on river herring, as it is the most important species in terms of both public interest and as a forage species. Brad referred to the chart which showed over 20 years of spawning run counts and noted that the red line refers to the closure of the fishery in 2005 and the subsequent modest increases after that. Brad said that 2017 was way down due to the Nemasket River, which is a big run. He noted that the other rivers included in these counts are the Mattapoisett, the Back River in Weymouth and the river at the Cape Cod Canal. He said that 2019 was one of the highest years in over 15 years and that a number of these runs looked really good last year as well.

Brad moved onto the spawning run counts in the Nemasket River and explained that the blue line at the bottom of the graph is the target for sustainable harvest; the metrics of the harvest in the plan, devised by DMF in conjunction with ASMFC, would contribute to a ban on harvesting should it fall below the blue line. Brad again noted the improvements after the implementation of the 2005 ban, despite the low numbers in 2017. He also said they have had two requests for new harvest plans this year and will be working on these in the coming months.

Brad then addressed two runs showing remarkable improvement since the fish runs went in in 2011: the Mystic River in Medford and Herring Brook in Pembroke, a fishway that was washed out completely and rebuilt by DMF. He said that the Mystic River was a Department of Conservation (DCR) project that DMF participated in and both are examples of stewardship and cooperative work that have had good results.

Brad moved on to 2019 highlights of fish passage improvements: Forge Pond Dam on the Jones River in Kingston, which they investigated for three years with local partners and discovered a lot of debris clogging passages. Brad said that in May 2018 the herring did show up there. He then

discussed Silver Lake in the City of Brockton in which a custom-fabricated fishway, designed by our fishway crew, was installed in 2019 and had fish passing through that year. Brad noted that an eel ramp had been installed at Silver Lake as well. Brad then discussed the Herring Brook in Pembroke, where one channel had an elevation issue which led to mortality, so they teamed up with the Town of Pembroke, who wanted to put in a water wheel while DMF did the fishway work.

Brad moved on to the Draka Dam at the Three Mile River in Taunton, which was a dam that had no fishway. Brad said that it was a 20-year project which had a lot of issues including property ownership and resulted in taking a long time to reach agreements. Brad noted the partners involved in this project: the Public Access Board, Save the Bay, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Mass Environmental Trust. Brad explained the details of the Alaskan steep pass ladder built by Ed Clark installed there, noting that three sections had to be cut in half and modify the ladder. Brad said the installation had occurred during six weeks last fall, involving many different facets to allow for fish passage but that the project was completed in late October. He said they planned to stock this run with fish from the Nemasket River on Thursday, and cited this project as a good example of a long-term project that involved a lot of partners.

Patrick then asked if it was the right time to ask budget questions and Mike Armstrong said that it would be better to discuss during the spending plan portion of the meeting. Patrick agreed.

Kalil remarked that Brad's presentation contained excellent information, and Mike noted that Brad's group actually does a lot more work than was indicated in his talk.

Striped Bass Research Project

Mike then asked Kalil to jump ahead on the agenda to the striped bass research project, because Ben Gahagan was calling in from the field for it, and he had to move gear shortly. Kalil agreed. Mike said that while Ben does a lot of work on river herring and is paid under the Diadromous Fish Project line item, he is also focusing on striped bass and doing some truly ground-breaking work that Mike wants to present to the panel as he will be requesting funding approval for this project later.

Ben began by discussing his research that the panel had contributed to in the past. Ben said they have shifted gears a bit so that a lot of time has been spent in the field the past few years working with Bill Hoffman and the rest of the Fisheries Dependent Investigations (FDI) staff on the acoustic array. Ben said that he will now be focusing more on lab work and data analysis as well increasing public awareness; he noted his appearances at the Stellwagen Bank Charter Boat Association and at a Land Trust meeting and said it was very well received.

Regarding data analysis (see slide), Ben discussed the aggregation fidelity of striped bass tagged in the last four years in four different areas: Cape Ann and north, Massachusetts Bay, Cape Cod and Buzzards Bay/Vineyard Sound. He then moved on to the 60+ striped bass they tagged in 2015 and noted that over 90% returned to the same area and the remaining 10% bounced between. Ben said that the rudimentary examination of the data shows the high degree of fidelity to the areas of the Massachusetts coastline which provides advantages for both anglers and management and that the basic premise of the research project is holding true. Ben said he has received great feedback from anglers who say they are seeing the same thing.

Ben noted that the panel has provided funding to work on the genomics research as well and that his research paper regarding evolutionary genomics would be published in the next few days. He went

on to address the baseline of striped bass along the east coast and the genomics work with six groups being the most identified: Nova Scotia, Bay of Fundy, Hudson Bay, Chesapeake Bay/Delaware and North Carolina. Ben said that multiple acoustic telemetry projects (including our current one) show a high degree of activity in the Chesapeake Bay/Delaware area and that he is working with collaborators who are genomic specialists to develop technology that will be more cost-efficient. He noted that from 2015–2019 we have collected over 5,000 samples from the commercial and recreational fisheries in Massachusetts and said in order to achieve a better understanding of their behavior we need a greater number of samples than is economically feasible. Ben said that new tagging methodology would require $20-$30 per fish and that he is hoping other states would join the program as well.

Mike Pierdinock thanked Ben for his presentation and referred to the Stellwagen Bank Charter Boat meeting Ben had attended, noting how great it is when studies and science correspond to what they observe as well. Mike P. asked Ben to provide a copy of his article when it was ready. Patrick asked if Ben's position is one of the ones under the Diadromous Fish Project and Mike A. replied that it is. Mike A. said that while Ben spends most of his time on the river herring project, he is working on his dissertation on striped bass and that two years ago, the Panel had funded a portion of the genetic work. Mike A. noted Ben had referred to requesting additional funding at the end of his presentation and reiterated that this would be brought up later in the meeting. Ben stated that the funding he had received made this research possible and that the people he is working with are looking at high-level evolutionary questions which require more information from the genes. He noted that all the testing and sampling that has been done is all in an effort to better manage the species and thanked the Panel for their support and the opportunity to pursue his PhD while working.

Mike A. moved on to the Terminal Tackle Mortality study, which the Panel funded the previous year. Mike stated that 50% of mortality for striped bass is from bycatch, and he wanted his staff to do studies that looked at mortality especially since there hadn't been a great study done of circle hooks vs. J hooks on the east coast. Mike said this study was supposed to be conducted in the next few weeks but he wasn't sure if they would be able to do it because of Covid-19 related limitations on boat use. If it doesn't happen this year it will be put off until next year. He said that all of the supplies had been purchased, which include 180 tags at $700 each as they have an accelerometer which transmits to a buoy indicating any movement. Mike discussed the plan in Beverly/Salem Harbor to place all of the acoustic buoys and to place them at the entrance of the harbor so that once a fish is caught it cannot leave without being detected. Mike said this is based on studies we have done with cod and haddock

Mike P. asked if there would be a representative number of circle hook vs J hook caught bass that are released to assess mortality and Mike A replied that there would be and that in addition to that information they would record air exposure and fight time as well. Mike A. said he thought Mike P was going to ask if we needed any help catching fish and the answer was "yes!". Mike P. asked how long it would take to deploy all the tags and Mike A. responded that the plan is to have it completed in 2–4 weeks. The tags will be programmed to last two years to capture the fidelity information Ben had referenced. Mike said that we will also be able to see the fish disperse all over the east coast as we have thousands of receivers now (some for other purposes, i.e. white sharks) so that we would be getting a lot of information, not just mortality. Mike A. stated that his goal is for DMF to become the release mortality experts on the east coast. Patrick asked if there is a time-of-year component in the study and whether anything would be done in regard to the handling of fish, and Mike replied that there is trade-off between the number of variables included and sample size, and he had decided to limit it to circle hook vs J hook only. Mike discussed the temperature factor between Salem Harbor

and Plum Island Sound which is much warmer and that a future model would compare mortality rates between the two as well as a continuous variable which would record the handling time, injury angler experience and fight time. Mike noted that a researcher at UMass wants to work with DMF and that in his study he releases the fish with a very thin wire hanging to observe their behavior for the following 2 hours.

Patrick stated that in his experience of attending both state and federal meetings over the past 20 years, DMF does some of the best work he has seen and that the only other state which comes close is Florida. Patrick said that when looking at the 2020–2021 spending plan, this study is both a priority and money well spent as it affects the highest number of anglers in Massachusetts and is also important to the health of the striped bass fishing economy; he could even envision the license plate money being spent on this study. Mike A. replied that the study was supplemented with other sources as well and that the striped bass license plate funds could equal close to $50,000 in research. Mike P. asked whether the tagged fish were going to be a particular size and Mike A. said that while some in each size group is ideal, an adaptive approach would be necessary, noting the 2015 year class abundance.

Artificial Reefs

Mike A. began by stating that the Fund is used to cover of small portion of the Division's overall work on artificial reefs; about $15,000 for monitoring.

Mark Rousseau stated that the Yarmouth Reef had its first deployment in over 25 years back in January and that it was funded by DFG's In-Lieu-Fee Program (ILF); the cost of the deployment was over $255,000. Mark said that three barge loads were deployed over two days by the Robert Our Co. and covered about four acres of bottom. Mark said that in addition, they collaborated with the USCG out of Newport, RI as they had a stockpile of expired navigation aid moorings they wanted to donate. He noted that they made deployments in October 2019 and January 2020 and dropped over 200 tons of retired concrete moorings just south and west of the ILF-funded material and that he expects this to occur in the future as the USCG is using this as a training exercise. Mark displayed pre-and post-deployment images and noted the sizeable area of structured material which was over 3 feet high.

Mark continued, addressing the partnerships he has established over the past year with both Mass Clean Energy and the Mass DOT to procure granite and concrete as they complete projects, which translates into material ready for the next deployment. He then discussed the monitoring research in Nantucket Sound utilizing graduate student interns from Northeastern, one of whom collected over 100 hours of underwater videos. This allowed for examination of both species composition and abundance of fish. Mark noted the black sea bass population and the number of undersized and legal sized fish increased with the age of the reef and a peer-reviewed paper on this will be published soon in *Estuaries and Coasts*. Mark stated that current effort on this project includes permitting for 4-5 Cape Cod Bay sites, acquiring additional free materials and securing funding for future deployments as well as additional directed research of the connectivity of reefs to natural sites. Mark said the big question they are facing now is how far apart to place new structures.

Mike A. said that Mark has done a remarkable job and that the Commissioner, who has experience in construction, suggested going after these materials—granite and good concrete—for free. Mike noted the bottleneck is the expense of putting these materials out and that the Panel funded some of that two years ago at the Harwich site. The Commissioner noted that his coming up with the idea for materials was the easy part and that Mark actually dealt with all of the processing and red tape; at one

point they wanted to charge us until Mark pointed out that it was cheaper for them to donate to us than to further reduce and dispose of it.

Recreational Stock Assessment

Mike A. reminded the Panel how, about 10 years ago, it was determined that DMF had a critical need for a stock assessment scientist dedicated to recreational species—although many of these species are fished commercially as well, they make up a large component of the recreational fishery. Based on how many of these species are managed (in conjunction with ASMFC of the Mid-Atlantic Council, for example) Mike noted the need to send really good people to these committees as it benefits Massachusetts fishermen. Mike reported that Tiffany Vidal had left the position last spring for a new job in New Caledonia and Dr. Sam Truesdell was hired to replace her.

Mike stated that Sam has a great deal of expertise in modeling and stock assessment and began working for DMF in June 2019. Mike described Sam's job duties, noting that he'd already been named vice-chair of the ASMFC bluefish technical committee. Mike emphasized Sam's role with the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council and said that for each of the species they manage, Sam will be contributing our data, coming back to us with ways we can collect our data and make the assessments better. Mike noted that tautog is the next meeting scheduled.

Mike also said that Sam is helping develop programs to better analyze the MRIP data to optimize sampling for key species. Mike said that MRIP has a very complicated survey design and Sam has been assigned the task of becoming an experts on it, which will help DMF fisheries managers. Mike noted that Sam is also developing biological studies on black sea bass and tautog as well as sitting on many other ad-hoc committees. Mike concluded by stating that Sam is a true asset and his work is extremely helpful in fisheries management.

Kalil said he never ceases to be amazed by the talent of the DMF employees engaged in analytics and science, and that Dr. Sam Truesdell is just another example of the excellence that DMF is employing. He said that everyone should be commended. Mike A replied that DMF is a well-respected agency because of funding positions like these, more so than other states.

Public Access Project

Mike A reiterated that when the Recreational Fund was created, one-third was required to be appropriated to public access due in part to the efforts of Mike Moss.

Ross Kessler began by addressing the projects Public Access has been working on: Deer Island, Small Grants projects funded in FY 20, and looking forward to projects in FY 21. He said that the Deer Island construction began in July and the crew had been fantastic; any time there has been a problem everyone worked together to resolve any issues. He addressed the change orders that Kevin had mentioned earlier in the meeting, noting that two of those had actually resulted in lowering the cost as either things didn't need to be done or could be done in other ways that lowered costs. Ross said that the Office of Fishing and Boating Access had been really helpful—both Doug Cameron and Jack (while he was still with us). Ross said the project would be completed this summer with the last contracted details of the parking being finalized; the parking lot should take about two months to complete. Ross stated that the pier is complete and while there are no fillet stations, bait-cutting stations are there, similar to what was installed at the Bass River fishing pier, which alleviates people cutting bait on the beautiful (and expensive) Ipe wood. Ross noted that while there was time lost due to Covid, the plan was for a ribbon-cutting ceremony at some point before the end of FY 20.

Ross then addressed the Small Grants projects, which numbered three, each funded at $15,000. The first was with the Buzzards Bay Coalition at the Horseshoe Mill Pond Dam on the Weweantic River in Wareham. Ross said the Buzzards Bay Coalition bought the Horseshoe Mill Pond Dam where two of Brad Chase's smelt nets are located and they are very happy with the way the channel is settling. Ross said that in Sandwich, they are installing solar lights and security cameras at The Boardwalk on Sandwich Creek, a popular fishing spot for those who prefer light tackle. He then discussed the pay kiosks which had been installed in Fall River at the Bicentennial State Park Boat Ramp which are both more convenient for users and help to prevent theft.

Ross noted that the two project that weren't funded were in Weymouth and Aquinnah which both involved ramp work but that neither had begun the permitting process so there was no way work could be initiated in time.

Ross continued, stating that for FY21, the Narrows Fishing Pier on the Wareham River in Wareham is an existing fishing site that needs updated decking and rails. He noted that this site is owned jointly by the Town of Wareham, the Office of Fishing and Boating Access, and DMF and that DMF's contribution would be $75,700 and that it is a great fishing spot as there are striped bass there now. Ross said that since Deer Island is nearing completion, they are thinking about moving ahead with the Salem Willows Pier. Ross noted the engineering work on this project had been started a number of years ago and that the cost has been re-estimated at $3,100,000 but that the agreement with the City of Salem caps DMF's costs at $1,500,000. Ross said that he will be meeting with the City of Salem in the next few weeks to confirm budget and timing issues.

Ross said there a few additional smaller projects to explore (Slade's Ferry and the Padanaram Bridge Fishing Pier in South Dartmouth) for possible future spending.

Patrick asked about the pay kiosk in Fall River and where the money collected goes, and Ross replied that the money that goes into any state facility like that boat ramp can be spent on any costs associated with managing that facility. Ross noted that if there is a profit, those funds cannot go into the town's General Fund but can be used towards expenses like a new float for that boat ramp. Ross noted how the kiosks provide helpful information in terms of usage and reiterated that they prevent theft. Doug Cameron added that any fee that is collected at their sites must go back into the Office of Fishing and Boating Access to cover costs such as trash pick-up, grass-cutting, and minor maintenance. Doug said that the kiosk feature will be a cost-savings in the future as some of their busier facilities must be staffed and not having to do so will be beneficial in the long run. He also said that they can request an accounting of the revenues collected and at times they receive requests for an increase in fees to cover the cost of the facility and having the information provided by the kiosks is critical to evaluate and assess whether such increases are justifiable. Patrick said he was just trying to determine how this particular project fits in, and Mike A. acknowledged that DMF hadn't "loved" this project either.

Mike A. then proceeded to discuss the Salem Willows project which the Panel had signed off on a couple of years ago, stating that we don't know what will happen as the cost of the project had increased substantially and Deer Island wound up costing a lot more than anticipated. Mike said the next step is meeting with the City of Salem to make sure that they are still interested. Mike Moss thanked everyone for getting the work done so far. Patrick asked whether the details of the agreement with Salem have been defined especially in terms of vendors and boat rentals. Mike A. replied that they haven't had those for a long time and thought that perhaps Ross or Doug could discuss what was

in the agreement. Ross stated that there are cost-share agreements at other locations and that the Salem Willows Pier is long enough to accommodate boats or an auxiliary float but that he wasn't sure about vendors. Ross also said the preliminary design has a T-section at the end which is where a majority of the fishing would occur; the cost-share enables the town to utilize the other space. Patrick said this his concern was based on what occurs at the Oak Bluffs Fishing Pier—yoga, wedding pictures, strollers—and that he just wants to make sure that if the Panel pays for a large part of this project that fishermen will have the right to use it. Ross replied that he had developed signage for Craven's Landing in an attempt to be very specific as to what activities are allowed there and that it's probably a good idea to have such signage at all of our projects going forward.

FY21 Division Spending Proposal

Mike A. began by stating that while most proposed expenses are remaining the same for FY21, any changes are highlighted in yellow on the slide. He began with permitting, noting that two full-time employees are paid by the Fund (one at each facility) and their duties include recreational permitting as well as some assistance to MRIP and other projects and that it remains essentially the same for FY21.

Mike moved on to MRIP, noting the funds allocated for contract seasonal employees had been drastically reduced by moving away from using a sub-contractor; while the employee would be paid $15 per hour, we were being charged $23/hour for administrative costs. Mike noted that this change has saved $70,000–$80,000 per year and that even though it was a lot more work—especially for Matt Ayer, John Boardman and Dave Martins—the savings were worth it. Additionally, the plan was to hire an entry-level position to assist with MRIP and assume responsibility for the effort estimation for the charter fleet. Mike noted that it will cost the fund $53,000 but is 100% reimbursable as is nearly the entire project, other than the $30,000–$40,000 cost of add-ons.

Mike state that the Information and Education program did not include any major changes other than the equipment that Christine had purchased and that while printing costs were the same he added an additional $10,000 for GovDelivery. Mike said that while the Fund would pay $10,000, the balance would be paid by DMF as it is used for commercial fishermen. Mike noted that the Diadromous Program funding remained the same other than union raises being incorporated for the FTEs.

Under Fishing Access, the supplies included the $78,000 for the decking at the Wareham Pier discussed earlier. Mike also noted the importance of the Craven's Landing seasonal employees as that property is dedicated to fishing. Mike discussed the Selected Large Project and said that it was increased based on the Governor's budget while the Small Grants Project remains the same. Mike said the Artificial Reefs project includes dive pay, maintenance of in-house use of boats and air tank fills and that we are required by the Army Corps of Engineers to monitor the sites in place as well as survey the new sites. He discussed the Stock Assessment budget which covers salary and a small amount to cover travel to conferences.

Mike went on to the Striped Bass Research Project for which he is requesting additional funding. He stated that this acoustic mortality study is being proposed to extend this year's work to examine the mortality effects of other hook types as well as other parameters and that he is requesting funding for a contract seasonal employee for 8 months to assist in the study as it is difficult getting enough staff rounded up to do it. Mike discussed the Genetics request, noting that the $60,000 will result in an additional 2,000–2,500 fish on top of the 5,000 from 2015 that will be tested to determine the stock from which they came. Mike stated that the ultimate goal is a striped bass stock assessment that

reflects the distinct sub-stocks and that this proposed project will answer many of the questions to get there. He said that if we can get other states to do this we can then go to a 3-stock model and the explicit dynamics of each stock which will vastly improve the management of the stock in both the commercial and recreational fisheries. Mike said that this study will be supplemented by other sources as well. Mike said that the Genetics/Acoustic Study could begin at the start of FY21 but that the mortality study would most likely be delayed until the following spring. Mike concluded by explaining the Commonwealth's budget process and how Covid was impacting it, resulting in a lot of uncertainty.

Patrick said he had questions about some of the increases in certain projects as the Information and Education budget from 2015 compared to 2021 has remained approximately the same but the Diadromous project had increased by about $30,000 while the Stock Assessment position has increased by about $10,000. Mike replied that Kevin has alluded to this in his presentation and noted that Kim Trull's position in Information and Education is half-time and that Christine has only been employed for two years; the employee prior to Christine had been in the position for a lot longer and therefore was paid more. Mike noted that the budget has been pretty consistent from year to year and that another cost to the Diadromous Program is seasonal employees.

Patrick said that he is looking at the future and that for the second year there has been talk of an increase in permit prices and that he just wants to make sure he understands the budget. Kevin Creighton noted the employee turnover savings as well as the new Stock Assessment position and the addition of the Angler Education Program.

Patrick Paquette made a motion to accept the spending plan as proposed, which was seconded by Kevin Blinkoff. The motion passed unanimously.

Free Fishing Days

Nichola discussed the free fishing days for 2021, which were being proposed as the default option previously supported by the Panel, that is the Saturday and Sunday of Father's Day Weekend. The Panel agreed to continue with these days (6/19 and 6/20) for 2021.

Other Business

Mike Moss expressed his appreciation for how well everything was presented and that he thought Patrick's comments were very well-received. Mike Pierdinock addressed the recent order by the Governor to prohibit the for-hire fleet from fishing and that they look forward to hearing details about how the fleet can open up safely in the future. He noted the significant financial hardship on the fleet but also on the marinas, restaurants, tackle shops, and recreational anglers. Patrick said he is concerned about the sector separation in the recreational community and that any discussion in the future regarding permit cost increases must include the for-hire fleet as well; he is reluctant to take money out of citizen's pockets without looking at both decreasing spending and the for-hire fleet.

Regarding old business, Mike A. wanted the panel to know that 50 signs have been installed on the Cape Cod Canal which means there is no excuse for not following fishing regulations. He said that regarding deliverables from this meeting, he didn't think there were any. Patrick asked whether DMF could look into the possibility of opening runs on the Charles River, especially as it is so close to the City. Mike A. agreed. Everyone agreed to the next meeting being scheduled through a Doodle Poll.

Mike P. asked about herring runs that were supposed to be open but prohibited by towns (Lakeville, for example) and Mike A. said that in some cases there was a count downturn after the approval and the towns closed the runs and that DMF was not prepared to fight it. He also referenced Patrick's question regarding the Charles River and noted that the Charles and the Mystic Rivers don't have towns managing their runs. Mike said in order for them to be opened DMF would have to assign staff.

Patrick Paquette made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mike Pierdinock and passed unanimously.

Meeting Documents

- April 28, 2020 Draft Meeting Agenda
- May 8, 2019 Draft Meeting Minutes
- FY21 Recreational Permit Revenue Spending Plan

Meeting Presentations

- Update on Marine Recreational Development Fund: Revenue & Spending Summary
- FY20 Project Reports: Permitting & R3 Update, MRIP, Information & Education Programs, Diadromous Fish, Artificial Reefs, Recreational Stock Assessment, Striped Bass Research Project, and Public Access
- Fiscal Analysis of For-Hire Sampling
- Free Fishing Days