

Minutes for the Mosquito Control Task Force for the Twenty-First Century Meeting

April 5, 2021, 11:00 a.m. via Zoom

The meeting was held remotely under the Governor's Order issued on March 12, 2020, which authorizes a public body to meet remotely and suspends the requirement of a quorum on the body being physically present at the meeting location. All votes were taken as roll call votes.

Members in Attendance: Dan Sieger, Kevin Cranston, Commissioner John Lebeaux, Stephen Doody, Kathy Baskin, Eve Schluter, Anita Deeley, Russell Hopping, Kim LeBeau, Bob Mann, Priscilla Matton, Jennifer Pederson, Rich Pollack, Helen Poynton, Heidi Ricci, Stephen Rich, Richard Robinson, Brad Mitchell, and Sam Telford.

Dan Sieger called the meeting to order at 11:30 a.m. The meeting began 30 minutes after the scheduled start time due to technology issues. Dan Sieger and Caroline Higley explained the Zoom Webinar instructions for engagement by the public.

Dan Sieger began by outlining the meeting agenda. He then asked for questions and comments related to the minutes from the last meeting. Helen Poynton requested a change to reflect that resumes showed risk for human risk assessment and not ecological risk assessment. No objections were made to this amendment. A motion was made and seconded for their approval, and they were approved.

Dan Sieger then introduced Dr. Katie Brown (DPH) to present expectations for the upcoming EEE season. Dr. Brown provided a brief update on the 2020 season. There were both West Nile viruses and EEE cases last year. The case numbers were greatly reduced from 2019 but were nonetheless consistent with an "outbreak" year. A single aerial spray was conducted mostly in Plymouth county last year. Generally, there will be outbreak cycles that last 2-3 years. She then explained the historical indicators of risk based on the long history of EEE in the Commonwealth. These include above-average rainfall in the prior fall and current spring; mild winters with insulating snow cover; EEE activity in the previous year; any EEE virus isolations from mosquitos prior to July 1st; isolation of EEE virus from a mammal-biting species of mosquito; infection of humans prior to late August; and, higher than average summer temperatures, which accelerate mosquito life cycle and thereby shorten the time interval between the mosquito becoming infected with the virus and then becoming capable of transmission.

Currently, we are below average on rainfall, which is not consistent with indicators of increased risk. In terms of temperature, we are average to above average through December and January 2021, but overall temperatures have been in the average range. We had a relatively mild winter in southeastern Massachusetts and did have EEE last year. The remaining indicators will need to be measured by the surveillance system going forward.

Dr. Brown also cautioned that no single indicator perfectly predicts risk, and she discussed long-term changes that likely affect risk. She concluded with recommendations for precautions, including: applying insect repellent when outdoors (repellent with an EPA-registered ingredient like DEET, permethrin, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus); reducing exposed skin (long sleeves,

long pants and socks when outdoors); avoiding peak mosquito hours (dusk to dawn peak biting times); and, reducing mosquito breeding opportunities (dump standing water).

Dan Sieger next opened the floor to questions from task force members.

Richard Robinson noted the periodic peaks are getting higher. He questioned whether this was due to an increase in surveillance or other trends? Dr. Brown said this circumstance was not due entirely to surveillance artifact.

Heidi Ricci asked if there was an increase in perturbans population or an overall trend, and was curious if there's been any work looking at that in relation to perturbans, habitat, or cattails. She explained she was thinking of the detention basins full of cattails and other degraded wetlands, roadside ditches, etc., and asked if anyone had studied this? Dr. Brown said she did not know if she could answer if anyone has studied it, but said she has seen an increase in the proportion of the total mosquito population that is attributable to perturbans. She also said there may be other task force members who can talk about whether there have been any studies or not. The task force then discussed perturbans statistics. Priscilla Matton noted that 48% comes from one site in their county.

Dan Sieger next discussed the PFAS update and whether a container leaked it and what conditions are affecting that leaching. Pesticide testing results are pending.

He then explained that on 3/19/21, EEA announced the spraying opt-out process. EEA worked with divisional services to use its local list serv to make sure all municipalities were reached. An overview of the new web page with all relevant application and materials was also distributed.

Caroline Higley mentioned that EEA has been responding to inquiries as they've come in about this process. Dan Sieger asked Heidi Ricci to pass along email inquiry she had received to them to troubleshoot.

Dan Sieger next explained that Eastern Research Group ("ERG") had attended the last meeting and took a lot of feedback into account. ERG was able to amend its proposal to include an ecotoxicologist and pollinator expert. The contract was signed last week and the study was officially underway. Prior to ERG initiating all the work, Dan Sieger wanted to confirm there were no conflicts of interest based on the list of consultants ERG expects to use for the study. If members have or suspect such conflicts, he asked them to let Caroline Higley know and to reach out to State Ethics Commission.

Dan Sieger then opened the floor for discussion about areas to be investigated by ERG, beginning with the mosquito control structure.

Brad Mitchell asked about having a small work group to guide ERG and thought a more centralized office was needed to oversee mosquito control with regional offices as necessary.

Heidi Ricci next talked about the control structure and overall responsiveness to community interests and needs. She saw mosquitos as part of larger ecosystems upon which we all depend. She hoped more information on relative expenditures and on how much of the existing system is

spent on things like routine spraying versus public education and surveillance, and other things, would be made available.

Russell Hopping agreed that a central oversight and clearing house would be very helpful.

Heidi Ricci noted the current opt-out process has been very difficult for some parties. Dan Sieger noted the opt-out process is coming up in a couple of items and thanked Heidi for her comment.

Dan Sieger and Caroline Higley then asked about public engagement issues and asked about experiences, perspectives, and opinions on how public participation works now, e.g., are there better ways to proceed, and should there be more public participation.

Brad Mitchell said there is a range of expertise and consistency on the boards but not a lot of interaction between projects and towns.

Rich Pollock talked about efforts to reach out to the municipalities and noted a good give and take. He said there were people who show up to the publicized meetings. He agreed there were certainly opportunities to weigh in and ask questions but said perhaps this could be done in a better fashion and would listen to ideas. Dan Sieger suggested having a best practices kind of thing to determine whether public engagement was occurring as best it could.

Priscilla Matton noted some towns were very receptive and others less so, with reach-out efforts made to the less communicative towns for assistance.

Heidi Ricci thought more emphasis should be made on resources for public education about risk reduction.

Brad Mitchell discussed the two types of opting out relative to spraying for clarity and expressed concerns about how individuals will opt their property out of being sprayed by trucks.

Priscilla Matton outlined the additional information they would like to receive regarding property location in order to better serve members of the public and their properties.

Jessica Burgess explained the legal options for opt out. She noted a couple of different ways and explained the differences for public and private property owners. She distinguished between opt out and exclusion, which mean either a statutory or regulatory opportunity to do one or the other. Under 333 CMR 13.00, there is an opportunity for a private property owner to exclude the property from wide-area pesticide application. She noted the process was streamlined a couple of years back, and owners can do paper or electronic applications at any point during the year, with a short waiting period for legal operation. Traditionally, MDAR maintains a database of individuals requesting an exclusion, and if there is going to be a wide-area application, the property owner would come to MDAR and get information about it. Another situation is if the owner made a request for information through the automated system or in paper format, and are located within the mosquito control district. In that scenario, notice is automatically sent to the district where the property requesting the exclusion is located. Under M.G.L. c. 252, § 2A, private property owners have an opt out, which also gets submitted to the department through the same system. The property owner could request just a Section 2A opt out from SRB spraying or a Section 13.00 exclusion from the mosquito control district or other wide-area application, or

both. The third opt out is for municipalities and that is what the task force has generally been discussing here. This is the only chance for municipalities to opt out of SRB activity, and this option does not extend to private property spraying opt out. The municipal opt-out is the one that just went out and has been the subject of discussion.

Heidi Ricci raised numerous concerns about organic and smaller farms who have no way of protecting production operations from aerial spraying.

Anita Deeley spoke to her experience of opt out as a beekeeper on smaller properties that are closer to the road. She noted a problem with communication from the local board of health notifying residents about spraying; sometimes she receives 24 hours' notice, but sometimes only a few hours' notice, and that it can be difficult to move or cover her hives and protect the bees.

Richard Robinson reiterated the points as to organic farms and suggested the creation of an FAQ to outline the various rights and aspects of spraying.

Anita Deeley wondered if a different opt-out process could be implemented because doing it every year is burdensome.

Brad Mitchell discussed the public health benefit of spraying, and noted that if you are non-certified organic, it is less of an issue for marketing and advertising. He also emphasized the need to balance opting out against the public health risks of not spraying.

Dan Sieger noted an issue of controlling mosquitos on state and federal private land. He then opened the discussion to any other comments.

Helen Poynton noted that mosquitos develop resistance to sprays being used and the context of her research into same.

Jennifer Pederson discussed wanting consultants to look at notification to water systems and whether boundaries are correct.

Stephen Doody discussed staging for properties controlled by DCR.

Dan Sieger noted aiming to keep to original meeting time despite the delay. He thanked everyone for their contributions and the work to be done.

Richard Robinson thought it would be helpful if consultants could ask if health were protected successfully with only personal protection, with no widespread spraying. He did not know if such a study had ever been done but reiterated that the beginning and end of safety is personal behavior.

Brad Mitchell noted military studies have been conducted around efficacy and that they have a ton of information on PPE and repellants.

Stephen Doody noted he voted "aye" on last month's minutes.

Dan Sieger said the next meeting would be used for a public listening session. The purpose will be to accept comments and concerns on mosquito issues and control structure. He will provide an overall review and have an open-ended session for comments with speaking time at the end for

members of the public. He encouraged task force members to be present if they can make it. He said the task force will then look to future meetings relating to a draft study and other actions. The listening session will be conducted 5/3/21.

Jennifer Pederson asked about the next meeting's logistics given the Zoom bombing problems in the past. Caroline Higley said she was hopeful the webinar structure can be used going forward but requested that people identify themselves and said they would have quick reflexes as need be. Dan Sieger advised everyone just trying their best but was open to other ideas and suggestions and asked that such ideas be sent to Caroline Higley. Richard Robinson was concerned about there being adequate introduction time at the next meeting; he said he would spend at least double that time to explain what the task force is before opening the floor to questions. Dan Sieger said the introduction will be a balance of how the task force gets information out there without getting too deep in the weeds and said he would be trying to work out specific logistics during meeting preparation.

No other questions were raised. Dan Sieger then sought a motion to adjourn. Commissioner John Lebeaux so moved, and Richard Robinson seconded. A roll call vote was taken and the meeting adjourned at 1:07 p.m.