

MEETING OF THE MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PANEL

Via Webinar

Attendance:

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

Department of Fish and Game: Ron Amidon

Division of Marine Fisheries: Daniel McKiernan, Michael Armstrong, Kevin Creighton, Greg Skomal, John Boardman, Matt Ayer, Ross Kessler, Dave Martins, Nichola Meserve, Julia Kaplan, Brad Chase, Ross Kessler, Kim Trull, Jared Silva, Christine Cassidy, Maggie Nazareus

Office of Fishing and Boating Access: Doug Cameron

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Kalil Boghdan called the meeting to order and began by recognizing Commissioner Ron Amidon for some announcements. Ron reported on the pending roll out of the new recreational licensing system, indicating that fee increases were being discussed. Ron also noted that he and the Secretary of the Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs had joined the Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies at sea to observe right whales in Cape Cod Bay.

The draft agenda was approved unanimously without revision (motion by Mike Pierdinock, second by Kevin Blinkoff). The draft minutes from the Panel's December 17, 2020 meeting were approved unanimously without revision (motion by Mike Pierdinock, second by Patrick Paquette).

Fund Accounting

Kevin Creighton provided an accounting summary for the Marine Recreational Fisheries Development Fund (Fund). With regards to revenue, there had been a bump in recreational fishing permit sales in 2020 due to Covid and the resulting interest in outdoor activities for recreation. June is typically the biggest month for sales which falls at the end of the fiscal year, so the full increase for FY 2021 was still to be determined. By permit category, for-hire revenue was steady from year-to-year at about \$60,000, while private angler permit revenue showed slow growth over time, to over \$1.5M for FY2021 thus far. The MRIP reimbursement had been negotiated to \$436,000/year for 2021, up from the prior four years' range of \$250,000–\$350,000. Lastly, donations to the Fund increased in 2020 by about \$25,000 (to roughly \$75,000); a return to about \$50,000 was expected for 2021.

With regards to expenditures from the Fund, Kevin highlighted several changes from FY19 to FY20, including the increase for public access spending (to 63%) as work on the Deer Island pier ramped up; and the decreased spending on MRIP (despite the hiring of a new FTE for telephone effort sampling) due to Covid-based shore/vessel sampling cancellations in 2020. As a result of the public access spending, the FY2020 Fund balance had dipped slightly, although this was expected to rebound. In FY21, expenditures were expected to decrease by about \$1M as Deer

Island pier costs were concluded. Kevin noted that negotiations were being finalized with MWRA for the final cost sharing. With the spending on Deer Island, public access spending in FY2020 was well above the 1/3 requirement, this would decline in FY21, but cumulatively would be close to 1/3.

Kevin concluded with a discussion of spending on large public access projects. About \$300,000 can be allocated annually to this category, meaning it takes about 6–7 years to pay a \$2M pier project. Deer Island is expected to be paid fully and there by about \$40,000 to begin spending/banking for the next project by July 1, 2022 (FY 2023). These projections would change if the permit fee structure were revised, such as by increasing the age at which a permit is free and/or increasing the permit cost, and Kevin provided a few scenarios for these and the resulting change in revenue, noting that changing the age structure would require legislation.

Patrick Paquette questioned if there had been a change in for-hire permit sales, and what the overall permit sales were forecasted to be this year. Kevin indicated that there had not been a change in for-hire permit sales. While he didn't think the 2020 bump in sales would last, Kevin noted the slow but steady increase over the years and hope to retain some of the new anglers through the R3 programming elements. Patrick noted the importance of being able to withstand a decline in permitting from a revenue and spending standpoint.

FY21 Project Review

The meeting moved on to a review of activities under each funded project in FY2021.

Striped Bass Research: Mike Armstrong reviewed the genetic work undertaken by Ben Gahaghan and others to identify stock structure of striped bass; and the acoustic telemetry study undertaken by Bill Hoffman and others to compare the release mortality associated with J hooks versus circle hooks. He noted the importance of both these studies for the assessment and management of striped bass along the Atlantic coast.

Kalil, Patrick, and Mike P. all recognized the overall support among the angling public for these studies. Patrick asked if enough funding was there to do everything the Division wanted to with regards to the hook study. Mike indicated that increasing the sample size would be important and that additional funding was being requested for that this year. Mike P. asked about the potential consequences of recognizing spatial stock structure to Massachusetts anglers. Mike A. surmised that management may become more complicated because of the seasonality of when you fish on different stock components, but that his preference was still for more uniform treatment of states for coastwide management. Mike P. also suggested collaboration with Canada, which Mike A. indicated was occurring with New Brunswick researchers.

MRIP: Dave Martins reviewed the operations and output of the MRIP project. Notably, the conduct of APAIS sampling had been delayed until May 20 (normally starts in April) and head boat sampling had only occurred during July due to Covid protocols. Despite the cancellation of 15% of APAIS assignments for the year, the total number of interviews increased in 2020 (n=5,403) under safe sampling guidelines developed collaboratively along the coast through ACCSP. DMF funded an additional 400 assignments on top of the NOAA baseline of 795 assignments. Dave noted a change in strategy as to how additional assignments are made, adding

more to the shoulder seasons. By mode, the interviews included 920 shore-side, 3895 private/rental vessel, and 588 charter boat. Headboat sampling took the biggest hit, and only 11 of a planned 88 scheduled trips were completed for the year, although MA had been the only state to even attempt sampling during the year. Dave noted that NOAA Fisheries had already developed a method to deal with the gaps, using imputed data from 2018 and 2019 that match the time, place and fishing mode. The MRIP query tool provides what percent of the estimate is based on such imputed data.

I&E: Christine Cassidy reviewed the I&E project's activities from the prior year. Much of the hands-on/in-person program elements had to be canceled due to Covid including the planned launch of adult education training; the 11 youth angler education events that were scheduled; and an anticipated series of "meet a biologist in the field" virtual events. More focus was placed on completing the design for the adult education training ("Take Me Saltwater Fishing" in which adults learn through workshops how to implement youth angling clinics in their community); finishing writing the Youth Saltwater Fishing Guide; redesigning the youth saltwater education programming for a 2021 launch; and planning angler engagement and retention strategies (R3 goals, redesign of licensing system, etc.).

Mike A. added that education on the use of circle hooks would be a big component of outreach this year. He noted an event at Cashman Park on Memorial Day weekend that may serve as the template for more pop-up type events at busy ramps throughout the season. Christine made note of the striped bass-specific posters on the rules and circle hooks that were developed.

Patrick recognized that 2020 had been a challenging year for all organizations planning public events. He asked about any plans for targeting foreign language speaking communities and the inner city.

Christine replied that the Youth Fishing Guide would be translated into Spanish for starters, and that Portuguese and Mandarin were the next languages planned. Kim was also working with the Hispanic Foundation to try to develop an angler education event. More focus on metro-region areas was planned, trying to target certain communities via contact with the Boys and Girls Club and municipal libraries for example. Patrick heavily recommended that a fishing clinic be planned for Deer Island, and that Castle Island pier be considered as well, as components to put a serious effort into foreign language communities for education regarding regulatory literacy and handling practices.

Mike P. complimented the new outreach materials and asked for online availability. Christine indicated that the book should be physically printed next week (n=4000), and that a PDF would be made available online at the Take Me Saltwater Fishing webpage.

Kevin Blinkoff asked about the videos Christine mentioned and how they would be accessed. Christine responded that seven videos total were in the works (covering a variety of angler ed and best handling practices), with release planned for this year. The videos would be embedded in the online book pages, and the print version will have links to them and a QR code for quick access once prepared.

Diadromous Fish: Brad Chase summarized the state of Massachusetts river herring runs and the fish passage improvement projects undertaken during 2020. The overall river herring index was down a little in 2020 from 2019's favorable run; 2021 was expected to be similar to 2020 although the run counts were still underway. Five fishway jobs were completed, each taking a couple days to a week-long effort by the fishway crew, among them at Herring Brook Park in Pembroke; Indian Head River fishway in Hanover; and Borne Pond, Falmouth. Efforts for stream maintenance had been increased during the year, including 18 rivers with large efforts launched in the Fore, Jones, and Acushnet River watersheds. Several large cooperative projects had been completed, including the Weymouth herring passage and smelt habitat restoration, a 20-year project, and the Baxter Mill Pond fishway in Yarmouth. Good progress had been made on several additional cooperative restoration projects (Fore and Jones River).

Mike P. asked if any runs were down significantly. Brad indicated that Herring Brook in Pembroke had improved since some restoration work was done in 2011, but the count had dropped way off in 2019 with only modest improvement in 2020. He noted how at the Jones River in Kingston, where a fishway had been installed and fish passed in prior years, a single fish hadn't been counted yet this year. Mike P. commented on both the osprey picking off herring and potentially some unauthorized stream work near where he lives at White Island Pond.

Patrick asked if there was any update on potential dam removal on the Neponset. Brad stated how past feasibility studies had found issues with sediment for dam removal, but that the area remains a high priority for progress in the next 5 years, whether restarting the dam removal discussion or looking to alternatives for a fishway.

Brad also reported that Pembroke and Harwich had both sent requests for sustainable fishery plans to be developed under which limited harvest of the runs could be opened. The Harwich plan was nearing completion for public review, while the Pembroke plan had been put on pause.

Mike A. remarked on how much the funding of additional staff hires for the diadromous project had increased the qualitative output of the project.

Artificial Reefs: Mike Armstrong provided Mark Rousseau's update on the status of artificial reef work. Ongoing efforts included the acquisition of materials for use on reefs; monitoring the reefs and directed research (e.g., recolonization); and siting/permitting for new sites. Regarding material acquisition, a 1-acre site in New Bedford has been filled with over 2000 cubic yards of material, and DMF is hoping to renew the lease for another year although there is potential for conflict with energy development in future. DMF was working with USCG to deploy additional material (navigational aid sinkers) to the Yarmouth Reef. Mike noted interest to know how the panel felt about using Fund money for deployment under the category of public access. Several publications based on the reef monitoring had been published. Regarding siting/permitting work, the focus was on the lower Cape Cod Bay area, and progress, while slow, was also steady. Mike noted the need to consider the new dissolved oxygen issue.

Patrick stated his support for continuation of the reef project and possibly funding more deployment, with proper attention paid to the possible conflict with lobster pot buoy lines. He had observed some territorial behavior at Yarmouth Reef with one or two aggressive commercial

lobstermen, which raised concerns for him that the areas being considered in the lower bay were currently peppered with lobster pots. He noted a potential spot for future reef work between Yarmouth and the Canal where there is a growing population of tautog and winter flounder, provided it can be regulated correctly.

Mike P. sought clarity on the permitting status of the Cape Cod Bay sites. Mike A. indicated he'd need to check in with Mark for the latest because there are a number of permits required and they are at different statuses. Mike P. added his general support for the development of artificial reefs for recreational anglers.

Recreational Stock Assessment: Mike A. gave a quick summary of the recreational stock assessment position covered under the Fund, and the contributions made by Sam Truesdell through that position.

Public Access: Ross Kessler summarized efforts for public access since the last meeting. Chief among them was that work on the Deer Island pier was nearly complete with just a few small tasks remaining (e.g., signage), with a June 24 ribbon cutting ceremony being planned pending EEA approval. At Salem Willows, engineering was ongoing, demolition was expected this summer, and a cost-sharing agreement in the works to potentially start construction as soon as next summer. Three small grants had been awarded to Beverly, Danvers, and Chilmark. A Buzzard Bay Coalition project had been bumped into the following year. The improvement project at Wareham Narrows had finished early and on budget. Overall, 39 public access projects have been completed. Looking at a map of these, Ross highlighted several spatial gaps for the location of projects, including the Mount Hope Bay area, which potential projects in Somerset and Fall River would help fill. Other potential future project sites include the Lynn waterfront. Ross noted that Mike Moss had brought forward the idea of numerous small ADA piers along the Cape Cod Canal. Overall, Ross has a list of about 10 future potential projects. Ross also gave a post-humous remembrance to John DeCosta, the former Park Supervisor at DCR's Scusset Beach State reservation.

Mike Moss spoke to the need for more access for all people at the Canal, and inquired about the potential site for improvement at the Weweantic River. Ron Amidon indicated that it may hinge on DOT's plans for the bridge.

Patrick thanked Ross for the DeCosta remembrance and asked that the date for the Deer Island event be relayed to the Panel as soon as possible.

FY22 Division Spending Proposal

Mike Armstrong reviewed the spending plan for FY22, noting that there were not a lot of changes from FY21. The expected appropriation was similar (if not increased), and that changes to salaries reflected step increases. He noted that he had made an error in leaving \$75,000 in the Public Access line-item for "supplies" which was for last year's decking; that would move to the "selected large project" budget line.

Patrick made a motion to approve the budget as presented, which was seconded by Mike P. The motion passed unanimously.

Free Fishing Days

Nichola discussed the free fishing days for 2022, 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 (6/18 and 6/19) for 2021.

Other Business

Kalil thanked the DMF staff for their informative presentations, also noting the DMF Tuesday seminar series that he had been finding great valuing in participating in.

Patrick suggested that former Panel members be invited to the Deer Island pier ribbon cutting.

Regarding deliverables from the meeting, Mike Armstrong summarized these to include further work on the fee increase proposal and firming up/announcing the date of the Deer Island ribbon-cutting event. A second meeting of the Panel would be planned for late in the year.

Seeing as there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

Meeting Documents

- ❖ May 21, 2021 Draft Meeting Agenda
- ❖ December 17, 2020 Draft Meeting Minutes
- ❖ FY22 Recreational Permit Revenue Spending Plan

Meeting Presentations

- ❖ Update on Marine Recreational Development Fund: Revenue & Spending Summary
- ❖ FY20 Project Reports: Striped Bass Research, MRIP, Information & Education, Diadromous Fish, Artificial Reefs, Recreational Stock Assessment, Public Access