



MASSWILDLIFE

DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

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COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
DIVISION OF FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE BOARD
MEETING MINUTES

PRESENT: Dr. Joseph Larson/Chair, Michael Roche/Vice Chair, Bonnie Booth/Secretary, Bob Durand, Ernest W. Foster IV, Stephen Sears, Dr. Brandi Van Roo, Ron Amidon/Commissioner/DFG, Mary-Lee King/Deputy Commissioner/DFG, Mark Tisa/Director, Jon Regosin/Deputy Director, Michael Huguenin/Assistant Director/Wildlife, Jason Zimmer/Southeast District Manager, Jim Pollock/Operations Specialist, Major David Loos/OLE; PUBLIC: Dave Parrish, Essex County League [Secretary's note: After the close of the meeting, the conference-call software reported a total of 43 callers on the line during the meeting.]

DATE: March 31, 2020

LOCATION: Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Field Headquarters
Westborough, Massachusetts

Chair Larson opened the March meeting of the Fisheries and Wildlife Board at 10:05 a.m. Director Tisa reported that, due to the conference-call format of the meeting, all votes would be taken in roll calls.

Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Durand to accept the minutes from the February meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Dr. Van Roo.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: abstained (did not attend the February meeting)

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed with one abstention.

Chair's Comments

Chair Larson reported that he was very impressed with how the staff, from senior staff to everyone out in the field, is working, and expressed his appreciation.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Amidon reported that staff at DER [Division of Ecological Restoration] has been very busy. Based on a DER application, the agency was just given a grant for the Millbrook Bogs WMA, based on \$325,000 in matching funds and \$10,000 from DU [Ducks Unlimited]. The Commissioner reported a total of \$1,335,000 for restoration through a natural coastal restoration program.

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Director's Comments

Director Tisa reported that his staff has come together in a very short amount of time to continue productivity across and between all the sections and that he is very pleased with its performance.

Vice Chair Roche commented that he has never seen a year when the fishermen were more complimentary of the quality of the fish than this year.

Law Enforcement Comments

Major David Loos reported a great showing at the Springfield Sportsmen's Show at the end of February, where the Massachusetts Environmental Police and MassWildlife displays went over very well.

He also reported that the OLE has pivoted in recent weeks toward high visibility at WMAs and stocking areas. He also pointed out that OLE's registration offices are open for mail-in and online registrations, but not in person to the public.

Personnel Report (Mark Tisa)

Director Tisa submitted the following personnel report for the Board's consideration and vote:

Promotion

<u>Employee</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Location</u>
Jennifer Longsdorf	Natural Heritage Program Coordinator Program Coordinator II	Westborough

Dr. Van Roo moved acceptance of the report, Secretary Booth seconded the motion.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The vote in favor was unanimous.

Proposed 2020-2021 Migratory Game Bird Seasons (Michael Huguenin)

Director Tisa explained the regulations process for the attendees: Because of the tight timelines for reporting Massachusetts' migratory bird hunting seasons to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Board had voted at the February meeting to send draft regulations to the Secretary of the Commonwealth that were based on the staff's expectations of what the federal frameworks would be, though the final frameworks had not yet been issued. The Board was being asked at this meeting to approve the actual proposal now that the federal frameworks have been issued, so that staff could post the hearing notice and the proposed regulations on the MassWildlife website, to solicit public comments, announce the public hearing, and conduct the hearing on the same day as the April meeting. He also explained that because of federal requirements for filing before April 30 for publication on June 1 in the *Federal Register*, the Board would be asked to vote on the final regulations at the close of the April hearing and that therefore there would be no written comment period after the hearing. Director Tisa introduced

Assistant Director for Wildlife Michael Huguenin, who was presenting the staff's final recommendations for the 2020-2021 Migratory Bird hunting seasons in Massachusetts.

Assistant Director Huguenin reiterated the Director's praise for the hard work of the staff during the COVID-19 shutdown of state offices and stated that his staff was working remotely, with many biologists in the field. He explained that the presentation he was about to give had been posted on the MassWildlife Public Hearings page, and that he would be identifying the page numbers as he went along so that everyone could follow remotely. He also asked that any questions from the Board be saved until the end of his presentation in the interests of clarity.

Assistant Director Huguenin reported that though they are issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the federal frameworks are not created in a vacuum. He reported that state biologists from the length of the eastern seaboard are heavily involved, from the Canadian Maritimes to Puerto Rico, and that the frameworks are themselves based on harvest data collected and reported by the states.

He also reported that MassWildlife had already solicited comments from the migratory-bird hunters in the state, including through its annual survey of waterfowl hunters, to incorporate the preferences of active hunters in the staff recommendations. He then went through the staff's recommendations for each migratory species.

The Assistant Director also reported on an aspect of the federal frameworks that had not been known at the time of the February meeting when staff reported its initial recommendations. The federal frameworks now allow for 2 additional days to hunt duck, merganser, and coot specifically for veterans of the U.S. military and active-duty military personnel. There are a number of conditions in the frameworks, including that the dates must not fall within the regular season, that they are not more than 14 days before or after the season, and they can be concurrent with Youth Hunt days. He reported that staff recommended adopting the Veteran Hunt days as this would be agreeable to most hunters in the state, and that the Massachusetts days be October 3, 2020, and January 30, 2021.

At the close of the Assistant Director's remarks, Vice Chair Roche stated that he wanted to make a suggestion regarding the woodcock season, adding that November is the new October with the changing climate, so he proposed that the season begin as late as possible, on October 7, and continue for the maximum duration, including allowed compensatory days, instead of October 1—November 21, as staff had recommended. Mr. Durand stated that he agreed with need for an adjustment to the woodcock season. After a brief discussion, Vice Chair Roche moved to approve the staff's recommendations for the 2020-2021 Migratory Bird hunting seasons, except to amend the staff proposal by beginning the woodcock season on October 7 and closing it on November 28, 2020, including all possible dates and the compensatory days.

Mr. Durand seconded the motion.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The vote in favor was unanimous. [Secretary's note: Subsequent to the meeting, MassWildlife staff clarified that the draft regulations as submitted to the EEA Secretary and the ANF were the ones that must be brought to the public hearing, so the proposed woodcock season dates were unchanged pending a final vote of the Board at the close of the public hearing.]

After the vote, Mr. Foster asked, with regard to the proposed Veterans Waterfowl Hunt days, whether staff has reached out to the bases for comment or participation. Assistant Director Huguenin reported that his staff had not, but that it was a good idea, to gain support and publicity for the hunt and potentially provide additional space for vets to hunt. When asked how veterans would identify themselves, Assistant Director Huguenin stated that he had checked with Major Loos and, if needed, they would find a way to validate hunters' veteran status.

Mr. Foster asked for confirmation that there was no south coast late goose season; Mr. Huguenin said that was true. In answer to a follow-up questions from Mr. Durand, the Assistant Director explained that hunters would be taking more migrants in that zone than in the northern coastal area, and biologists want to avoid that. When asked about the low mallard production, Mr. Huguenin reported that staff still doesn't have answers, and this was the reason for ramping up regional research to find out. He also explained that major research projects are decided on at the Flyway meetings among all the states, so the research is very heavily coordinated with other states for maximum benefit.

Mr. Sears stated that it has been brought up in years past and he was bringing it up again, that Massachusetts should remove the state migratory-bird-stamp requirement for 15-year-olds, because we shouldn't be more restrictive than the federal government. He stated that it was a discussion for another year; Mr. Foster added that he seconded the opinion that the requirement should be changed.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee Report

Dr. Larson reported that the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee's March meeting was not held so there was no report.

Set Meeting Date

Members confirmed the April Fisheries and Wildlife Board meeting on Thursday, April 23, 2020, at 10:00 a.m., with the 11:00 a.m. public hearing. The Director anticipated that the meeting and hearing would be held via conference call and reported that the call-in information would be included in the meeting notice.

Member's Comments

Vice Chair Roche stated that everyone should be safe until the members meet again.

Secretary Booth reported no comments.

Dr. Van Roo reported no comments, but be well, everyone.

Mr. Foster reported no comments, and offered his thanks to MassWildlife staff.

Mr. Sears reported his thanks to the staff who are doing such great work, and asked everyone to stay safe.

Mr. Durand reported that he could second Vice Chair Roche compliments on the quality of the fish and that he hopes more people will go outdoors and enjoy the season. Mr. Durand then moved to dedicate the meeting to former OFBA [Fishing and Boating Access] Director Jack Shepherd, who had passed away recently, shortly after his retirement from state service; Secretary Booth seconded the motion.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Durand to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Dr. Van Roo.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonnie Booth

Secretary

List of documents presented to the Board in its March meeting packets

March Agenda

Draft February meeting minutes for review

Personnel Report

Spreadsheet of Natural Heritage Fund Taxpayer Donations (1992 to 2018)

Paper copy of the presentation on the proposed regulations for the 2020-2021 Migratory Game Bird hunting seasons

Draft regulations for the 2020-2021 Migratory Game Bird hunting seasons, clean and red-lined versions