MEETING OF THE MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PANEL
June 7, 2022
Via Webinar

Attendance:

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

Division of Marine Fisheries: Daniel McKiernan, Michael Armstrong, Kevin Creighton, Story Reed, Mark Rousseau, Greg Skomal, John Boardman, Ross Kessler, Dave Martins, Nichola Meserve, Julia Kaplan, Brad Chase, Ben Gahagan, Kim Trull, and Christine Cassidy.

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Chairman Kalil Boghdan called the meeting to order and welcomed any comments. No comments were made, and Kalil then asked for motions to approve the June 7, 2022 draft agenda and December 6, 2021 draft meeting minutes.

The draft agenda was approved unanimously without revision (motion by Mike Pierdinock, second by Patrick Paquette). The draft minutes from the Panel's December 6, 2021 meeting were approved unanimously without revision (motion by Mike Pierdinock, second by Patrick Paquette).

Kalil moved on to gain approval for a letter that will be sent to the EEA Secretary from the Panel regarding a need for an increase in environmental police staff. Kalil welcomed any comments or edits from the Panel. Mike Pierdinock suggested minor changes, and Patrick Paquette agreed with the changes. Nichola Meserve will make the changes and present the Panel with the amended letter by the end of the meeting.

Fund Accounting

Permitting Updates

Kevin Creighton discussed the health of the recreational fund. Kevin discussed the revenue for this year so far, as well as the trends in years past. Kevin moved on to MRIP reimbursements and briefly discussed donations. Patrick Paquette opined that lower donations may be a widespread problem due to the state of the economy and high gas prices.

FY22 Fund Appropriation and Spending

Kevin reviewed fund expenditures for 2020 and compared them to expenditures for 2021. Kevin stated that roughly 33% was spent on public access last year. Kevin predicted that the estimated fund balance by June 30, 2022 would be around $4.45 million. Kevin moved on to discuss the public access spending for large projects. Kevin discussed other funding options DMF is exploring for possible projects. These include ARPA (two projects are still possible), NFWF – America the Beautiful Grant, and Wallop-Breaux. Kevin stated that Ross Kessler will update the Panel further on these grants later in the meeting.

Kevin then moved on to discuss the new permitting system and noted that donations have been down substantially since the launch of the new system. Kevin stated Kalkomey is continuing to work on improvements to the system. Kevin highlighted some of the data Kalkomey provides such as the demographics based on each permit sale.

Free Fishing Days for 2023
Kevin moved on to discuss the 2023 free saltwater fishing weekend which will be the default Father's Day weekend days of June 17 and 18 (unless changed by the Panel). An announcement of the 2022 free fishing days (June 18 and 19) would be sent out on the listserv and social media soon.

Patrick asked if the free fishing weekend would be promoted on billboards as well as social media, as an announcement to current permit holders would not tend to reach the intended audience. Kevin Creighton stated DMF is doing a drip campaign to target those who have not renewed their permit this year. Kevin also added the weekend will be promoted on social media and Christine will be speaking to this later in the meeting.

Kevin Blinkoff stated the small changes to the sign-up process can have big effects. He pointed to some issues with accessing the system on an iPhone. Kevin Creighton stated that these technical difficulties are on the top of the list, and the donation problem will be addressed after the technical difficulties are resolved. Kevin Blinkoff discussed pop-ups that occur on some websites asking for donations. Christine stated that these pop-ups are currently a work-in-progress.

FY22 Project Review

The meeting moved on to a review of the prior year's funded projects.

Striped Bass Research: Ben Gahagan provided the Panel with a summary of telemetry results and what they found. He stated that fish they had four years of data on, 90% of the striped bass stay within the same area. He then moved on to describe the trends they see in regards to where the fish return to spawn. Ben then discussed results from the genomic study. He presented several different graphics to the Panel showing the genomic results for different geographic locations. Ben finished off his presentation by discussing public outreach. Both he and Bill Hoffman have been on different podcasts. He will be at the ASGA/Costa Science Symposium, and an invited speaker at the Falmouth Fisherman's Association. Ben welcomed any comments or questions.

Mike Pierdinock asked about the mixing that occurred in the genomic studies. Ben provided Mike an in-depth answer and Ben stated he hopes to have more of the genomics data finalized for next year, and he would be happy to present to the Stellwagen Charter Boat Association again.

Mike Armstrong provided the Panel with an overview of the striped bass acoustic telemetry study. He gave an overview of data elements and the assigned conditions that are given to each fish that are brought abroad, and discussed the receiver arrays that are set up in Salem Sound. Mike provided the Panel with graphics regarding post-release mortality, and some preliminary results of the study. Mike noted that later this year he should have more information regarding

the study for the Panel. Mike welcomed any questions.

Patrick Paquette asked if the study team has been taking photos of the fish as might occur during recreational fishing, as there has been concern expressed about the time between when the fish is caught and when it's put back in the water. Mike stated that they do not take pictures of the fish, but next year there may be elements added to the study such as intentional mishandling, longer times out of the water before release, or dry hands. The time out of water is recorded.

Mike Pierdinock asked if the tackle was consistent; Ben Gahagan confirmed this.

Recreational Stock Assessment: Mike Armstrong moved on to discuss stock assessment staff which is funded by the recreational fund. Mike stated Sam Truesdell has been with DMF a few years, and went on to discuss some internal projects he's in charge of such as: black sea bass rod & reel spawning survey, continued use of automatic, computer program-based audits of MA MRIP samples, and ongoing examination of the value of recreational release data to stock assessment. Mike closed his comments by highlighting the different collaborations Sam contributes to for ASMFC, NEFMC, MAFMC, and more.

MRIP: Dave Martins provided the Panel with a brief presentation on MRIP. He provided the number of assignments by month in 2021, how many were NOAA base assignments versus DMF add on assignments, how many were completed versus cancelled, and assignment numbers by fishing mode. Dave also provided a head boat sampling summary, and reviewed the data taken from the for-hire telephone survey by Kristen Thiebault in the Gloucester office. Dave welcomed any questions.

Dan McKiernan stated in the past there has been an issue with the interview refusal rate by for-hire fishermen, and asked Dave if this had improved. Dave stated it had improved slightly, but there is still an ongoing struggle to gain data from the for-hire fleet. Dan asked about for-hire trips focused on squid and stated there may be an issue in the future due to the lack of data on squid landings in the for-hire fleet where this seemed to be growing in importance.

Patrick Paquette asked if there is indication of any port-specific issues or geographic areas that seem to have more issues. He then stated he agrees with Dan that MRIP should be taking data on the squid fishery. Pat asked if DMF has the ability to add squid to the species that information is collected on in MRIP. Dave Martins stated that there is a rule in the MRIP sampling protocol that states it has to be a finfish, not an invertebrate. Dave stated that this would be an issue to bring up with NMFS. In regards to a pattern, Dave stated they struggle in Green Harbor, Truro, and Hyannis sometimes. Some of the reasons for refusals include that the for-hire vessels are submitting eVTRs and they find speaking to the MRIP sampler redundant.

Mike Pierdinock stated he agrees with the request for squid to be included in the MRIP data. Mike highlighted issues with the privatization of marinas and drew a possible connection to the reduction in interviews conducted in Green Harbor.

Information & Education: Kim Trull gave an overview of the Saltwater Angler Education Program. Kim discussed different fishing education events that took place in 2021. There were

three primary events: two Fort Taber Youth Fishing Clinics, Hispanic Access Foundation, and the Deer Island Pier event.

Christine Cassidy then discussed public outreach events. Christine stated the 2021 schedule was closed to in-person trade events early in the year. During the fall of 2021, staff attended and tabled at the Topsfield Fair which was attended by about 500,000 people. Christine highlighted some materials that were given out at events such as gunnel stickers, circle hooks, coloring books, and FishMA stickers.

Christine moved on to discuss publications and design. She noted that the pilot year of "Take Me Saltwater Fishing" initiative was moved to spring of 2022 due to the pandemic. Christine highlighted updated outreach materials as well as videos and DMF websites. She then focused on social media, discussing the various platforms in which DMF has an account and described how DMF is working to keep followers engaged. Christine welcomed any questions.

Patrick Paquette asked about DMF's social media pages and asked if DMF is satisfied with frequency of postings and numbers of followers. Christine stated that this was an area for improvement and that DMF is working with Shields Design Studios to see if there is a way DMF can increase its engagement. Christine noted the difficulty trying to keep up with different programs during the pandemic, but this year there is a concerted effort to jump start social media. Patrick Paquette expressed the need for more dedication to social media. Patrick also brought up an issue with the circle hook card, and Kalil suggested that he and Christine discuss this separately to avoid going off schedule.

Kevin Blinkoff stated frequency of posts is usually the most important thing when it comes to social media. He offered to have a meeting with DMF and his team to assist with social media.

Diadromous Fish: Brad Chase discussed a new hire for the diadromous team. Brad then discussed some 2021 highlights. He stated that it was a slow year for the fishway crew with high summer water flows. Only one job was completed. There were several long-developing projects that were advanced in 2021–2022. He stated there was a large effort during the pandemic with a DEP/DMF stream maintenance policy agreement finalized. He highlighted herring and shad stocking, and then provided the Panel with a graph showing the MA river herring 20-year count index. Brad then discussed the Jones River Watershed restoration, and the Stump Brook Bog Reservoir Dam in East Bridgewater. Brad welcomed any questions from the Panel.

Patrick asked about a specific run and a body of fish that may have not made it to the run. Ben elaborated and provided some detail on the specific run Patrick mentioned.

Artificial Reefs: Mark Rousseau provided the Panel with an update regarding the artificial reef program for the state. He highlighted 2022 reef deployments, in which DMF is expecting to deploy a 1-acre lease site with over 2,000 cubic yards of granite. Mark stated that DMF received $500,000 in state funds for deploying materials. DMF contracted Robert Our Co. to deploy materials to Nantucket Sound reef sites. He then stated that 5+ barge deployments are expected, and work will begin next week and is expected to be completed before the end of July.

Mark then discussed monitoring that takes places at the sites. He added that an NEU grad student looked at 15 years of monitoring data at the BH Hubline reef looking at temporal changes in species composition. Mark then closed his comments by discussing reef siting and welcomed any questions from the Panel.

Dan McKiernan commended the Commissioner and DFG staff for helping DMF staff secure funds to move the material to the reef sites.

Fishing Access: Ross Kessler gave a public access update to the Panel. He stated a lot of progress has been made at Salem Willows Park. The old pier was removed and if things move according to schedule, the new pier will go to construction in the fall of 2023. Ross then moved on to discuss three small grants that were awarded, as well as the progress made on each of the projects.

Ross asked the Panel for approval to go forward with the Somerset project. Most funding would not be coming from the Recreational Fund with the exception of $100,000. Patrick Paquette stated he supports the project. There was no opposition from other Panel members; this project will move forward. Mike Armstrong stated there are subsequent projects in the pipeline that are still being developed. Ross concluded his presentation by discussing some breakthroughs with funding for different projects across the coast.

Ross then discussed challenges with the small grants program, including the increased costs of projects for towns and the one-year grant timeline. He suggested making changes that could result in a two-year completion timeline for either a single grant award for $50,000 or two $25,000 grant awards.

Patrick Paquette stated he would not want to eliminate the access to small amounts of money for maintenance of certain access points. He was concerned that there would be a need for smaller amounts of money if they were to only make one or two awards. Mike Pierdinock agreed with Patrick Paquette to maintain flexibility. Chairman Kalil Boghdan suggested one award for $25,000, and have the remaining $25,000 as flex funding for different grants.

After some discussion, consensus was reached that DMF will be moving the maximum amount for one project to $25,000 with a two-year timeline. DMF will also update the RFR to reflect that the applicant does not need to apply for the full $25,000. Mike Armstrong stated that DMF will finalize the approach and follow up with the Panel next meeting.

FY23 Fund Appropriation & Division Spending Proposal

Mike Armstrong then provided the Panel with the FY23 budget proposal. Mike presented the proposed budgets for the Permitting, MRIP, Information and Education, Diadromous Fish, Fishing Access, Artificial Reef, Recreational Stock Assessment, and Striped Bass Research projects.

Patrick Paquette asked various questions regarding staffing for various projects. He also added he would like to see the striped bass catch and release study budget increased in future years as needed. Mike stated that it could be possible to move money into the study as the year goes on.

Kevin Blinkoff stated the bold numbers don't seem to add up to the total listed on the sheet. Mike Armstrong stated he will look into the numbers offline. Mike stated he will send out an email to everyone with the updated numbers, but the total should be the same.

Kalil asked for a motion to approve the budget. Kevin Blinkoff made a motion, and Patrick Paquette seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Other Business

Kalil thanked the DMF staff for their hard work and informative presentations, and invited any other business for the panel's review.

Nichola Meserve presented the letter to EEA from the Panel with the suggested changes made earlier in the meeting from Mike Pierdinock. Patrick Paquette made a motion to approve the amended letter to EEA, which Mike Pierdinock seconded. The motion passed unanimously, and the letter will be sent to EEA.

Dan McKiernan stated that the striped bass conservation license plate would provide additional monies to the fund, anywhere from $20,000–60,000 likely. He stated he does not have the exact number of issued plates yet, but likely will by the next meeting. Dan remarked how Massachusetts is in a great place with this panel and he thanked the Panel for all their dedication.

Patrick Paquette stated the only reason this Panel works is because there is a partnership between the state, recreational groups, and Panel members. He stated MA is the leader in recreational programs.

Adjourn

Kalil asked for a motion to adjourn the June 7, 2022 recreational panel development meeting. Patrick Paquette made a motion to adjourn. Kevin Blinkoff seconded the motion.

Meeting Documents

- December 6, 2021 Draft Meeting Minutes
- June 7, 2022 Draft Meeting Agenda
- Draft Panel Letter to EEA
- Draft FY23 Recreational Fund Spending Plan

Meeting Presentations

- Recreational Fund Overview
- FY22 Project Overviews