MEETING OF THE MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PANEL
June 8, 2023
MassWildlife Headquarters
1 Rabbit Hill Road
Westboro, MA

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

Division of Marine Fisheries: Daniel McKiernan, Michael Armstrong, Greg Skomal, John Boardman, Ross Kessler, Stephanie Berkman, Kim Fine, Dave Martins, Mark Rousseau, Matt Ayer, Nichola Meserve, Julia Kaplan, Ben Gahagan, and Neil McCoy.

Department of Fish and Game: Thomas O'Shea, Commissioner

Office of Fishing and Boating Access: Doug Cameron

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Chairman Kalil Boghdan called the meeting to order and welcomed any comments. No comments were made. The draft agenda for June 8, 2023 was approved unanimously without revision (motion by Kevin Blinkoff, second by Patrick Paquette). The draft minutes from the Panel's December 14, 2022 meeting minutes were approved unanimously without revision (motion by Kevin Blinkoff, second by Patrick Paquette).

Fund Accounting

Permitting Updates: Mike Armstrong reviewed the annual saltwater permit sales stating that they are projected to remain similar to last year at about 193,000 permits sold. He mentioned there is reciprocity between several New England states and therefore, those permits are not accounted for within the permit sales.

FY23 Fund Appropriation and Spending: He then moved to discuss revenue that has been added to the Recreational Development Fund and noted that the donations have decreased compared to last year. He stated that DMF is working with the vendor to make sure it is easier for consumers to make donations after purchasing a permit.

Mike Pierdinock asked where the funds from the striped bass plate go, Mike Armstrong stated that the funds are put into an account managed by the Massachusetts Environmental Trust. The funds are only to be used for striped bass research. Ben Gahagan stated that Northwoods Brewery created a striped bass can where a percentage of sales will be donated to the fund as well.

Free Fishing Days for 2023: Mike stated the Free Fishing Days will take place June 17-18, but welcomed suggestions from the Panel. Patrick Paquette stated there was some negative feedback regarding the fishing days falling on Father's Day every year. Kalil suggested having one free

day on Mother's Day weekend and the other on Father's Day weekend. Dan stated that DMF will look into the legislation and come back with an update at the winter meeting.

Project Updates

Mike Armstrong began his review of updates by introducing the new I&E Coordinator, Neil McCoy. He then discussed the reorganization of the Recreational Fisheries Project to a Program. He stated that the new Program is called Recreational Fisheries which will be led by Ben Gahagan effective July 1. Patrick Paquette asked if Ben would continue his striped bass research, Ben stated that is the case and will be presenting new striped bass projects later in the meeting.

Recreational Stock Assessment: Mike Armstrong discussed recreational stock assessment activities led by Sam Truesdell who works within the Cat Cove Laboratory in Salem. He concluded his comments by highlighting the boards that Sam sits on.

Striped Bass Research: Ben Gahagan discussed various studies regarding striped bass. The first study he discussed was the circle hook study which examined post-release mortality rates of striped bass caught with different hooks. He stated that the study results did not show a reduction in mortality from the circle hooks used in the study, but stated he thinks ASMFC did the right thing in being proactive since the circle hooks were successful in other species. Ben then moved on to discuss the striped bass citizen science program and the parameters of the program. He also discussed a survey that will be distributed through an app which asks the citizens participating in the program about lure size, fish size, handling length, and more. Ben added that this data will be made publicly available.

Patrick Paquette asked if the app will cost the public or DMF anything. Ben Gahagan stated the app is free and currently DMF is not paying for the app. Ben stated DMF feels secure in the app remaining free to use as DMF is putting their logo on various materials. He added an MOU is forthcoming.

Mike Pierdinock asked if the app is meant for other species as well, Ben stated that the app developers are working to make the app usable for other species.

MRIP: Dave Martins presented 2022 MRIP data to the Panel. He started by discussing the number of assignments scheduled which totaled 1329 assignments which include assignments covered by NOAA and DMF. Overall, there were 1283 assignments completed of the scheduled 1329 assignments. He then provided the data regarding the number of total interviews as it relates to the type of fishing (recreational, charter, head boat) by month in 2022. He then provided a summary of the for-hire telephone survey for 2022. Dan McKiernan asked about the percentage of latent charter boat permit holders, Dave did not have that number readily available but stated he could get the number.

Patrick Paquette asked for the presentation to be sent to Panel members after the meeting. Patrick Paquette asked about the add-ons for species within the survey. Mike Armstrong explained the rationale behind the add-ons.

Nichola Meserve asked about the angler refusal percentage. Dave stated the refusal rate is 50%

which is consistent with other states as well as year-to-year.

Angler Education Programs: Kim Fine discussed the 2022 saltwater angler education schedule. She discussed various family festivals and camps that were included within the schedule. Kalil Boghdan asked about what the family festivals looked like. Kim described each event and who were in attendance. Kim then presented the upcoming angler education events for 2023. Kim also highlighted various public events that DMF attended in 2022 which included the Topsfield Fair and the Boat Show. She added that DMF will be in attendance to these events in 2023 as well. Additionally, Kim discussed various publications that are typically handed out during the public events. Kim concluded her comments by adding there was a woman angler clinic that was very successful, and she is working to schedule another clinic this year.

Patrick Paquette clarified that DMF will be present at the angler education event in Provincetown. Kim confirmed DMF will be there. Patrick then asked about a program MassWildlife runs where citizens get certified to pick-up gear to bring to events. Kim stated that this is an avenue she can explore as time permits.

Kalil asked if there is a need for volunteers for various education events. Kim stated that volunteers are always welcome and if anyone is interested to send her an email.

Commissioner Tom O'Shea asked if there are ways to involve groups who may not always be in attendance such as environmental justice groups. Ross Kessler stated that this has been done in the past in Salem Willows. Kim Fine added DMF is looking for ways to expand this aspect of angler education.

Kevin Blinkoff asked if there is a way to track the success of the events. Kim stated attendance and a follow-up survey asking if they would go fishing again are the primary ways that anglers are tracked. She stated there is room for improvement regarding tracking.

Information and Education: Neil McCoy discussed social media, websites, digital outreach, publications and design, and visual libraries. Neil discussed social media and his plans to grow the audience and sharing engaging content. He added that tracking and analytics will be critical going forward as well. Neil then discussed the Mass.gov webpage and how he plans to make the recreational content easier to find for constituents. He moved on to discuss digital outreach and stated that DMF has been using more online forms and surveys as well as GovDelivery. Neil also discussed publications and design as well as his plans to expand DMF's visual assets such as photo and video that focus on research, field work, people, events, and storytelling into an overarching library.

Kalil Boghdan clarified that Neil is responsible for the billboards that have gone up regarding the free fishing days. Neil stated he coordinated with Matt Ayer on advertising the days through billboards.

Patrick Paquette commended Neil for his work on social media.

Commissioner O'Shea stated this what is needed not only for DMF but for the Department. He

asked if there is a strategy for growing audiences. Neil provided insight into some of his ideas for growing a social media audience and expressed the important of analytics. Dan McKiernan added that one of the goals he has for Neil is to double the number of striped bass plate sales.

Diadromous Fish: Stephanie Berkman provided the Panel with a Diadromous Fish Project restoration update. She highlighted large watershed restoration projects which are advancing to completion in 2022-2023. She added that the Fishway crew completed 6 jobs in 2022 and are planning 5 jobs for 2023. Herring stocking increased during the 2022-2023 season. Stephanie stated the five-year agreement with USFWS stocked over 5 million shad in 2022 and are aiming for 8 million in 2023. DMF and DFW are collaborating on monitoring efforts.

Stephanie then moved on to discuss Diadromous Fish Management update. She stated the stream maintenance policy is in the works as a collaborative effort between DMF/DEP. She stated that there is growing passage concern with declining local interest to address increasing problem of low-flow plant encroachment in addition to natural debris jams. She stated that 12 town maintenance plans have been approved thus far. DMF also published a GIS datalayer which will continue to be updated.

Kalil Boghdan expressed concern over the lack of passage in some areas which would prevent shad from returning to the ocean. Ben Gahagan clarified DMF's role in working with towns on restoring flows. Kalil then asked how long a young-of-year can survive in a freshwater system. Ben stated they can live in freshwater systems but in less dense populations.

Artificial Reef: Mark Rousseau provided the Panel with an update on artificial reef deployments in 2022. He stated that DMF contracted Robert Ours Co. to deploy material to Nantucket Sound Reef Sites. He stated there were two barge loads deployed to Yarmouth Reef Site and one barge load deployed to the Harwich reef site which marked the first deployment since 2016. Mark stated DMF is looking into potential new sites and plan to submit permit applications later this year. There was discussion amongst Mark, Dan McKiernan, and the Commissioner regarding the issues faced when trying to develop artificial reefs. The three main issues identified were permitting, acquisition of materials, and funding.

Fishing Access: Ross Kessler discussed upcoming public access projects which include Salem Willows Park Pier. Construction is anticipated to begin during the Fall providing the remaining permits go through. Ross hopes that the pier would be completed by September 2024. Ross then described the costs that are going along with the construction of Salem Willows. Ross then highlighted the recipients of small grants which included: Barnstable, Cohasset, and the City of Newburyport. Ross concluded his presentation by highlighting the next large project which is a pier in Somerset. He anticipates that construction would be completed in 2026, provided everything goes well.

Mike Moss then asked about access on the Cape Cod Canal. Doug Cameron spoke to the issue and explained the processes that need to be completed for access to be constructed. Patrick Paquette asked if a letter from DMF or the Panel expressing support would help the process. Doug Cameron stated a letter could be useful.

Patrick Paquette commended Ross for his work on advocating for public access.

FY 2024 Recreational Permit Revenue Spending Plan

Mike Armstrong discussed the recreational permit revenue spending plan for 2024. He highlighted that it remains similar to this years' spending plan. Mike clarified that the funding for the Somerset pier will not be coming out of the permit revenue fund, but there may be a need for a match and therefore, Mike may be asking for approval to match funds at the next meeting. Mike welcomed questions.

Patrick Paquette asked for clarification regarding the overall budget that will be approved today. Mike provided clarification and Kalil Boghdan asked for a motion to approve the 2024 spending plan. The plan was approved unanimously (motion by Mike Pierdinock, seconded by Patrick Paquette). Dan McKiernan stated DMF will discuss fee increases with the Commissioner in the upcoming weeks.

Other Business

New Chairman: Chairman Kalil Boghdan stated his three-year term has come to an end and asked for a nomination for a new chairman. Patrick Paquette recommended Kevin Blinkoff as the new Chairman. Kalil Boghdan asked for a motion to approve Kevin as the new Chairman. The motion passed unanimously (motion by Patrick Paquette, seconded by Mike Pierdinock).

Panel Member Comments: Patrick Paquette expressed concern over beach closures due to piping plover populations and advocated for staff time being used to improving access during beach closures. There was discussion amongst Patrick Paquette, Commissioner O'Shea, and Mike Armstrong regarding the processes behind discouraging nesting in certain areas.

Adjourn

Kalil asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mike Pierdinock made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Kevin Blinkoff, there was no opposition.

Meeting Documents

- June 8, 2023 Draft Meeting Agenda
- December 14, 2022 Draft Meeting Minutes

Meeting Presentations

- 2023 Project Updates