MEETING OF THE MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PANEL
December 18, 2023
Via Zoom

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

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

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

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Chairman Kevin Blinkoff called the meeting to order and welcomed any comments. No comments were made. Kevin Blinkoff asked if there were any additions to the draft agenda. Dan McKiernan noted that under "Other Business" he plans to bring up free fishing days mentioned in the last meeting. The draft agenda for December 18, 2023 was approved unanimously without revision (motion by Kalil Boghdan, second by Patrick Paquette). The draft minutes from the Panel's June 8, 2023 meeting minutes were approved unanimously without revision (motion by Kalil Boghdan, second by Patrick Paquette).

Information & Education Updates

Mike Armstrong stated that Ben Gahagan is now the Recreational Fisheries Program Manager, and he welcomed him to speak to Information and Education updates. Ben Gahagan discussed some upcoming Information and Education outreach plans. He discussed striped bass videos that are aimed at three methods of pursuing striped bass; from shore, kayak, and boat. The videos will be produced by On the Water and the videos will be curated for YouTube and social media. Kevin Blinkoff expressed excitement over the project. Ben Gahagan welcomed questions from Panel members.

Patrick Paquette mentioned that any content meant for TikTok should be on the briefer side. Ben Gahagan stated that shorter videos for social media was part of the plan for the videos.

Research Updates

Ben Gahagan briefly discussed an article regarding DMF's circle hook study that could be accepted for publication as soon as April 2024. Ben then discussed the striped bass citizen science project. He stated that over 3,000 fish were recorded for the cost of sampling kits and raffle prizes totaling $20,000. He then discussed different significant findings that have come as a result of the project. He ended his comments about the striped bass citizen science project by mentioning partnerships that helped increase the reach of the project.

Patrick Paquette asked about external funding sources. Ben stated that DMF has not sought

external funding because the cost is primarily the sampling kit ($30 each). The partnerships formed have been able to help offset any costs that would be associated with raffle prizes. Patrick Paquette asked if staff time is the main cost; Ben confirmed that this is correct.

Kalil Boghdan stated that if people from this year participate next year, it could be a cost savings. Kalil then asked how people can get involved. Ben stated that there has been a lot of online advertising, emails to license holder, and DMF will also feature it in the fishing guide for 2024. Kalil asked how many participants there were, Ben stated there were about 200 individuals and he hopes that next year will expand to different states as these individuals were mostly from Massachusetts.

Fishing Access Updates

Ross Kessler discussed fishing access updates. The first update was regarding the Salem Willows Park Fishing Pier. He stated the engineering phase is complete and the construction package is open on the central register. He then highlighted the Somerset Slade's Ferry project, noting that an RFR was published last fall for the engineering tasks. DMF had only received one bid which was higher than expected; thus a decision was made to rebid the project. Mike Armstrong stated that these projects are becoming prohibitively expensive and funding may need to come from elsewhere in addition to the recreational funds.

Ross highlighted a third project which is the Zero Marion Road property. The property was appraised at $220,000 and has a lot of great fishing opportunities. The property has gained interest from DFW, which offered $150,000 on the land and got approval to pay $85,000 from their board. DMF committed to $50,000 which leaves a shortfall of $15,000. Ross asked for the Panel to consider approving the $15,000.

Patrick Paquette asked clarifying questions about the property and expressed some concerns. Kalil stated that $15,000 should not be a deterrent. Kevin Blinkoff asked if there would be any modifications made to the property. Ross described a small parking lot, and stated that he would like to work with DFW to get ADA approved railings on the bridge. Mike Moss expressed support for this project.

Mike Armstrong stated the worst case scenario would be that DMF needs to commit $110,000 if the original offer is not accepted for the property. Kevin Blinkoff asked for consensus from the Panel to purchase the Zero Marion Road property. There was unanimous consent from the Panel for the purchase of the Zero Marion Road property.

Commissioner O'Shea asked for clarification about which funds DFW is paying for the property. Ross Kessler was unsure and asked the Commissioner to reach out to DFW.

Kalil Boghdan asked for clarification regarding parking access at the Zero Marion Road property. Ross Kessler and Patrick Paquette discussed various parking options and stated that it would be a rare event if all of the spots were taken.

Discussion of Revenue Increases

Mike Armstrong stated that there is a plan in place to increase revenues for the Recreational

Fund. Dan McKiernan stated there were several options to consider which include a higher permitting fee, or a higher age for free permits. Commissioner O'Shea understands the importance of getting ahead of the curve to keep the fund sustainable.

Patrick Paquette asked several questions surrounding different ways and opportunities to increase funding for the recreational fund. Dan McKiernan stated he will stay in touch with Patrick on the subject.

Other Business

Free Fishing Days: Dan McKiernan stated that it is within DMF's purview to determine when the free fishing days occur. Dan mentioned that if Mother's Day and Father's Day weekends were the preferred days, then that could be voted on today. Kalil Boghdan stated that he feels this is a great idea.

Kevin Blinkoff asked for a motion to accept the two free fishing days for Mother's and Father's Day weekend. The motion was approved unanimously (Kalil Boghdan made a motion, Patrick Paquette seconded the motion). Dan asked that Ben Gahagan ensure this goes into the fishing guide for 2024.

Panel Member Comments: Mike Moss brought up potential smaller piers along the canal for disabled people to have easier access. Ross stated he will talk to him about this project offline. Commissioner O'Shea clarified that Mike Moss wants separate smaller piers along the canal. He stated he will get more details from Doug Cameron.

Adjourn

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

Meeting Documents

- December 18, 2023 Draft Meeting Agenda
- June 8, 2023 Draft Meeting Minutes

Meeting Presentations

- 2023 Project Updates