



MASSWILDLIFE

DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

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

PRESENT: Steve Sears/Chair, Bob Durand/Vice Chair, Ernie Foster/Secretary, Sasha Dyer, Emma Ellsworth, John Organ, Matthew Sisk, Mark S. Tisa/Director, Tom O'Shea/Commissioner/DFG, Eve Schlüter/Deputy Director, Mike Huguenin/Assistant Director/Wildlife, Jesse Leddick/Assistant Director/NHESP, Nicole McSweeney/Assistant Director/Outreach and Education, Trina Moruzzi/Assistant Director/Operations, Todd Richards/Assistant Director/Fisheries, Pat Huckery/Northeast Wildlife District Manager, Andrew Madden/Western Wildlife District Manager, Todd Olanyk/Central Wildlife District Manager, Joe Rogers/Connecticut Valley Wildlife District Manager; Jason Zimmer/Southeast Wildlife District Manager, Leanda Fontaine/Western Wildlife District Aquatic Biologist, Rebecca Quiñones/NHESP Conservation Science Program Manager, Jim Pollock/Operations Specialist, Sgt. Bill Woytek/OLE

DATE: April 17, 2024

LOCATION: MassWildlife Field Headquarters, Westborough, Massachusetts, and on Zoom

Director Tisa announced at 12:30 p.m. that Chair Sears was delayed on the road and the meeting would be started 10-15 minutes late. Chair Sears opened the April business meeting at 12:40 p.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Ms. Dyer to approve the minutes from the February business meeting and those from the March business meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Dr. Organ; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Chair's Comments

Chair Sears recognized Western Wildlife District Aquatic Biologist Leanda Fontaine, who was awarded the Silvio O. Conte award as sportsperson of the year at the Berkshire County League banquet the previous week. He reported that Ms. Fontaine gave a great acceptance speech, and that many of her colleagues were there to help her celebrate. Director Tisa reported that Ms. Fontaine had a conflict the day of the April meeting and will be present at the following meeting so that all the Board members can meet her.

The Chair noted that a lot of things are being prepared for the coming meetings, including intensive deer and bear program reviews. He reported that the topic of guiding in Massachusetts has come up with various members over the past year and stated that MassWildlife has no regulations in that regard. The Chair stated that the Board is looking at the question initially, then will ask the Office of Law Enforcement and the staff to weigh in.

Director's Comments

Director Tisa reported that he had a wonderful time at the Berkshire County League banquet, adding that the league always does a great job and the attendees are a great group of people. He stated that he and Deputy Director Schlüter attended. They both are very proud of Ms. Fontaine and the award reflects very well on the District and the agency.

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Commissioner's Comments

There was an error in the agenda; the Commissioner was not present due to an unavoidable conflict.

Law Enforcement Comments

Sgt. Bill Woytek attended and reported on behalf of the Office of Law Enforcement. He reported that OLE has been following MassWildlife's trout stocking and that it has been a quiet year so far. The Wachusett Reservoir stocking will begin shortly, and Quabbin will open the following week. Sgt. Woytek reported that five new officers are currently riding with seasoned officers, and four more will enter the OLE academy in the fall, so there will be nine new officers in the field by the end of the year. The uppermost issue in the previous month has been bears; they are active and OLE is receiving a lot of bear calls from the public.

Personnel Report

Assistant Director Jesse Leddick presented the following report. He briefly reported on the candidate's past experience and professional attainments.

Promotion

<i>Employee</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Location</i>
Rebecca Quiñones	NHESP Conservation Science Program Manager Environmental Analyst V	Westborough

After a brief discussion, Mr. Sisk moved that the personnel report be accepted as presented; Dr. Organ seconded the motion; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Assistant Director Trina Moruzzi introduced a member of her staff who was approved for promotion at a recent board meeting.

Introduction

<i>Employee</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Location</i>
Eli Pease	Western District Technician Wildlife Technician III	Dalton

Mr. Pease stated that he appreciated the promotion and

Public Comment Response: Trout Stocking in the Deerfield River (Andrew Madden)

Chair Sears explained that a comment had been received at the previous meeting from Mr. Kevin Parsons, requesting that stocking of rainbow trout be stopped in a reach of the Deerfield River, and that Western District Manager Andrew Madden was present to provide a report to the Board in response. Chair Sears stressed that there had been a lot of consideration of Mr. Parsons' comments, and that public comments are always considered and taken seriously, though sometimes the commenter may not like the decisions that follow.

Mr. Madden stated that he wanted to acknowledge Mr. Parsons' genuine passion and concern for the resource and his own appreciation for it. He reported that MassWildlife also feels strongly about the importance of the Deerfield River, including District staff, Fisheries Section scientists, Coldwater Project Leader Dr. Adam Kautza, and angler and advocacy groups, who have all done a lot of work in the river, including confirming the presence of the naturalized, wild brown trout population in that reach.

Mr. Madden affirmed that science informs MassWildlife's management of the Deerfield. He explained that MassWildlife had been adipose-clipping stocked brown trout to differentiate between hatchery and wild fish. Fish population surveys found that the hatchery brown trout were only a small component of the fishery, so it made sense to stop stock stocking brown trout in the upper river, and staff implemented that change.

Mr. Madden stated that the Deerfield is a beautiful river but that it is not undisturbed. The upper river has been impacted for years by variable flows – low and high – from the upstream hydroelectric facility. This facility is currently under a FERC [Federal Energy Regulatory Commission] relicensing process, and Mr. Madden noted that advocates like Mr. Parsons will be vital in the effort to change those flow regimes to benefit the fishery, and that the relicensing process will be the key to allowing the full potential for wild brown trout in the river.

MassWildlife's stocking program on the Deerfield has been extremely successful and creates excellent fishing opportunities in the river. Mr. Madden stated that the upper Deerfield is a beautiful place to fish and that stocking provides opportunities for all anglers to experience that area. Traditionally, it is one of the river reaches where the District receives the most calls about and interest in stocking timing and quantity, and people plan fishing outings around the stocking schedule. Staff understands and hears the voices of those anglers that would like to see MassWildlife discontinue stocking entirely in that reach, but staff believes that to be a minority opinion. Mr. Madden noted that the local Trout Unlimited Chapter had sent a letter to the Board supporting the continuation of stocking at this time as staff further studies the river.

Mr. Madden explained that MassWildlife staff don't see evidence to suggest that either predation or interspecific competition is limiting brown trout populations. He reported that this is because hatchery fish generally are not immediately piscivorous and tend to quickly leave the immediate area once stocked. Noting that Mr. Parsons had mentioned evidence of consumption of eggs by hatchery fish, Mr. Madden reported that any eggs consumed as they drift down below the redds are not viable, anyway. Interspecific competition occurs when resources are limited, and MassWildlife's fisheries surveys show an abundance of small fish representing prey for wild browns or any hatchery fish that move towards a piscivorous diet, and those prey fish are found at very high numbers relative the number of trout present.

Mr. Madden affirmed that the wild brown trout fishery in the upper Deerfield is a great development. MassWildlife is hopeful that there will be improvements to the flow regime and staff believes that will address the factors that limit recruitment and survival of browns and further enhance the fishery. However, stopping stocking of rainbows at this time would only decrease the quality of the fishing in the upper river and limit opportunity for anglers. He explained that this is because the wild browns in the river can be challenging to access and catch, while MassWildlife wants as many anglers as possible to have the opportunity to experience success on the upper Deerfield.

Mr. Madden reported that, at the same time, MassWildlife's stocking program is not static, and that staff makes decisions each year on the distribution of allocated trout to provide the best possible fishing for Massachusetts' anglers. Staff is fully committed to continuing its scientific investigations on the upper Deerfield, and the District operations staff will be working closely with the Fisheries section to inform management decisions on the river. For now, Mr. Madden reported, staff's best judgement is to continue to work on flow conditions, let the science develop, and continue to provide excellent recreational fishing in the upper Deerfield.

On the request of the Chair, Assistant Director Leddick gave a brief review of the FERC relicensing process. After a brief discussion, the Chair thanked Mr. Madden for his report.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee Report (Matthew Sisk)

Mr. Sisk reported that he had not been able to attend the advisory committee meeting, so he had asked Ms. Ellsworth, who was present, to give a brief report. Ms. Ellsworth reported that there was a presentation on the Prescribed Fire program from program manager Caren Caljouw, which was very similar to the presentation given to the Board itself earlier in the year. She shared some details from the presentation and stated that she really enjoyed attending the meeting. Dr. Organ observed that MassWildlife's former Forestry Project Leader John Scanlon used to say that oaks are becoming an endangered species because of the lack of fire on the landscape.

Confirm the May Meeting Date

Members confirmed May 15, 2024, at 1:00 p.m., at the Field Headquarters for the next monthly business meeting. Director Tisa reminded the members of an earlier cooter return event that will begin at 10:00 a.m. that day.

Members' Comments

Chair Sears reported he had attended the UMass Cooperative Research Unit annual meeting at the Field Headquarters and was very impressed with the presentations, some of which were only 8 minutes long but clearly entailed a lot of work and provided a lot of research information.

Mr. Sisk thanked Director Tisa for following up on the Director's request to stock quail at the Cape Cod National Seashore and he complimented Assistant Director Leddick on his handling of the recent public hearing on proposed MESA List changes when a sudden computer problem prevented Dr. Michael Nelson from being able to present the staff's proposals.

Ms. Dyer expressed her regrets that she had not been able to attend the MESA List public hearing. She reported that she had attended a BOW [Becoming an Outdoors Woman] training in Shirley, noting that it was not a nice day, but that staff did a great job. Mr. Sypek took over the training when Ms. Huseby had to leave, and the entire event went very smoothly. She also commented on the inefficiency of requiring staff to drive to get trucks and then drive to the hatchery for trout stocking and expressed her regret that it had to be that way. Director Tisa reported that it was a state policy and out of his hands.

Mr. Foster reported that he had arrived early for the day's meeting and was able to observe staff in various training and certification programs that he had no idea were being offered. He requested a presentation on all the trainings staff are given.

Mr. Durand reported that he had spent a lot of time at the statehouse recently and has heard good support for an amendment to codify the reimbursements for free and half-priced licenses in statute. He reported that Rep. Vieira filed Amendment 1103 to make the reimbursements permanent and that the representative had also filed another annual bill for this year. Mr. Durand stated that he was impressed by the many environmental nonprofit organizations also taking the initiative to help in this effort.

After a brief discussion, Mr. Sisk moved that Mr. Durand draft a letter in support of the amendment and that it be signed by Mr. Durand on behalf of the Board, with the names and signatures of the other Board members included; Mr. Foster seconded the motion; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Ms. Ellsworth reported that she also had attended the Coop Unit annual meeting and was very impressed by discussions of the state Conservation Land Tax Credit program, which offers a tax credit to landowners when they donate a conservation restriction. Mr. Ellsworth reported that the credit is currently capped at \$75,000 and is supported by a very limited fund, so there is currently a 4—5-year

waitlist to get a project through to completion. As a result, she is working on an effort to increase funding for the program.

Dr. Organ gave his thanks to Central Wildlife District Manager Todd Olanyk, whose involvement in the Hunter Education program didn't stop with his promotion to district manager. Mr. Olanyk ran a Basic Hunter Education class that Dr. Organ helped with at Westfield State University, and Dr. Organ reported that it was very well attended, and Mr. Olanyk's team did a very good job. He reported that AFWA also recently held a Trapping Matters course, at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Region 5 office in Hadley; he expressed thanks to Hunter Education Program Administrator Susan Langlois and Outdoor Education Specialist Ian Sypek for participating. Dr. Organ also offered his admiration to Mr. Leddick for his handling of the MESA hearing. He thanked Mr. Sears and Ms. Ellsworth for participating in the Coop Unit meeting, and stated that we are fortunate in Massachusetts, with help from MassWildlife as a cooperator, to have three research scientists that are excellent and doing great work. He noted that two recently recruited scientists had been up for promotion, and both were promoted early, one by two levels, thanks to the high quality of their work. He reiterated his thanks to MassWildlife for being such a great partner to the Coop Unit.

There being no further business before the public hearing at 2:30 p.m., a motion was made by Mr. Durand to adjourn the meeting and go into executive session for the purpose of discussing proposed land acquisitions whose negotiations would be compromised by discussion in open session, and to not return to open session until after the public hearing, when the board will reconvene. The motion was seconded by Ms. Dyer. The vote in favor was unanimous, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:13 p.m.

Executive Session

There were six parcels presented to the Board for consideration. All six parcels were accepted in roll call votes of the Board members.

At 2:30 p.m., the public hearing was opened by Director Tisa.

The hearing closed at 3:19 p.m. and Chair Sears stated that the Board would come back into open session at 3:30 p.m. When the meeting was back in session, Mr. Huguenin reported on the public comments received in writing before the hearing and orally during the public-comment portion of the hearing. He then presented the staff's final recommendations, noting one change from the original proposals, which was to extend the brant season 2 weeks later.

After some discussion of the proposals and the comments received, Mr. Durand made a motion to eliminate eider hen harvest; Mr. Sisk seconded the motion and a discussion ensued. Dr. Organ stated that he was reluctant to proceed without consultation with Law Enforcement, because the measure is enforcement-dependent. Ms. Dyer stated that she was reluctant to support the change without corroborating research. Ms. Ellsworth advised taking a closer look at the evidence before proceeding. Chair Sears recommended that the Board consult with staff and discuss the matter for the future. Mr. Durand withdrew the motion.

After another extended discussion, Mr. Sisk moved shifting the brant season as recommended by staff; Mr. Durand seconded the motion, and the vote in favor was unanimous. Mr. Sisk moved shifting the coastal duck and goose season to November 28—January 28; Mr. Durand seconded; the vote in favor was unanimous. Mr. Sisk moved to accept all other seasons as proposed; Mr. Foster seconded the motion; the vote was unanimously in favor.

There being no further business, Mr. Sisk moved to adjourn; Mr. Durand seconded; the vote in favor was unanimous and the meeting was adjourned at 4:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernie Foster
Secretary

List of documents presented to the Board in its April business meeting packets:

April agenda

February business meeting minutes

March business meeting minutes

Copy of a letter from Director Mark Tisa to Superintendent Jennifer Flynn of the Cape Cod National Seashore RE the stocking of Northern bobwhite on the national seashore

April personnel report

Department of Fish and Game's April 17, 2024, Budget for Land Acquisition and Due Diligence Costs

Written comments received prior to the migratory bird hunting public hearing

Factsheet created by The Nature Conservancy on House Budget Amendment 1103, the George L. Darey Inland Fish and Game Fund Annual Reimbursement

Documentation for the executive session