



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, Mike Huguenin/Assistant Director/Wildlife, Nicole McSweeney/Assistant Director/Outreach and Education, Trina Moruzzi/Assistant Director/Operations, Todd Richards/Assistant Director/Fisheries, Todd Olanyk/Central Wildlife District Manager, Pat Huckery/Northeast Wildlife District Manager, Andrew Madden/Western Wildlife District Manager, Joe Rogers/Connecticut Valley Wildlife District Manager, Jennifer Sulla/General Counsel/DFG, Major Kevin Clayton/OLE; PUBLIC: Steve LaRivee, Jim Cardoza, Madison Ambrugi

DATE: August 15, 2023

LOCATION: MassWildlife Field Headquarters, Westborough, Massachusetts

Chair Sears opened the August meeting at 10:00 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Vice Chair Durand to approve the minutes from the July business meetings. The motion was seconded by Ms. Dyer; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Chair's Comments

Chair Sears reported that the August meeting was the first to be held both in person and on Zoom. He also reported that Coldwater Fisheries Project Leader Adam Kautza had given a presentation for the Berkshire County environmental group BEAT and that it was very well-received.

Director's Comments

Director Tisa reported briefly on the agency's first in-person employees' conference since 2019, held earlier in the month at the Connecticut Valley District Office and Herm Covey WMA. He reported that everyone present was able to meet new employees and staff provided each other with a number of speed presentations on recent work and projects. Director Tisa stated that it was a great day and great to get everyone together again face-to-face. He reported that there were also remarks from the Commissioner, which were appreciated and well-received by the staff.

Director Tisa also reported on several competitive grants staff had recently been awarded, noting a Competitive State Wildlife Grant for \$250,000 for regional work on rare turtles. Deer and Moose Project Leader Martin Feehan received a \$750,000 grant for regional study and monitoring of zoonotic diseases, as well as a Wild Cervid CWD grant from the USDA for \$250,000, which will be used in part for educational programming. The Director reported that there were also a number of smaller grants, including two related to climate adaptation and freshwater mussels.

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Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Tom O'Shea reported a very active summer, even since the Board's last meeting. He had enjoyed the wonderful opportunity to attend the MassWildlife employee conference. On the way, he passed the WMA that was his first day's assignment many years previously as a young forester where he first met now-retired Habitat Project Leader John Scanlon. He thought the conference was a great way to reconnect with staff he had previously worked with and to express his support for the agency and share his vision for the Department.

Commissioner O'Shea reported that there is currently a lot of work being done around securing funding, especially federal funding. He stated that he wouldn't be attending the afternoon's hearing because he was participating in a meeting with EEA on land acquisition and habitat restoration on the coast, including possibly a blue carbon program.

He also reported that he had joined Commissioner Arrigo of the Department of Conservation and Recreation and both their sons to attend a fishing clinic with Aquatic Resources Education Coordinator Jim Lagacy, a longtime MassWildlife professional, and said it was a great day. He reported that he had worked with OFBA Director Doug Cameron and his staff to open all the Connecticut River boat ramp sites. They still have some testing of sediments to do, but the access has been restored, and he acknowledged the valuable coordination provided throughout by the OLE. He attended a ceremony at the State House for the Division of Marine Fisheries honoring a program to protect right whales in collaboration with the fishing community. The Commissioner reported that he has been going around the state meeting staff at the different Department installations and cited a recent DER grant as one example of that division's impressive work across the state.

Law Enforcement Comments

Major Kevin Clayton of the Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) brought greetings from Colonel Shawn Santos. He reported that 6 new recruits had started the previous day at the police academy in Plymouth, and that 5 officers were starting the day of the meeting on their field training. He noted that those recruits had previously been police officers, so they did not need to attend the academy. The OLE is currently at 101 officers and the Major expects the number should go up to 107, noting that he does expect losses through retirements within the next 18 months.

Major Clayton reported that bears have been at the top of OLE's list with at least one ongoing investigation. Regarding legislative issues, he reported that OLE has met with MassWildlife staff and federal Wildlife Compact staff to work on identifying cases that might apply.

Major Clayton then provided the Board with a brief overview of other actions connected to the current hunting and other recreational seasons and activities; a detailed report of recent OLE activities, including fish-and-wildlife-related examples of calls for service that Environmental Police officers had responded to in the previous month; and the outlines of ongoing and recently completed investigations.

Personnel Report (Mark S. Tisa and Kris McCarthy)

Director Tisa reported a promotion recommended by himself and the hiring team of Dr. Eve Schlüter as the Deputy Director of MassWildlife. The Director highlighted Dr. Schlüter's many accomplishments and qualifications, both for MassWildlife as a Senior Environmental Review Biologist, then as Chief of Regulatory Review, and as the Assistant Director of the Office of the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act, before she returned to MassWildlife as the current Assistant Director of the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program.

Promotion

<u>Employee</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Location</u>
Everose Schlüter	Deputy Director Program Manager VIII	Westborough

CFO Kris McCarthy reported a new hire recommended by Dr. Schlüter, who was not able to attend the meeting. She reported that Mr. Gaulco has many qualifications that suit him for the position, and he gave an excellent interview.

New Hire

<u>Employee</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Location</u>
Nikolis Gaulco	Endangered Species Review Biologist Conservation Biologist III	Westborough

Mr. Durand made a motion to accept the Personnel Report as presented; Dr. Organ seconded the motion; the vote in favor was unanimous.

After the Board's vote, Director Tisa reported that Dr. Schlüter is a dedicated professional with whom he has worked very closely over the years. Director Tisa reported that he had an excellent working relationship with Dr. Schlüter and that he believed their skills and personalities were highly complementary. He also reported that she is interested in hunting issues and participated in the Conservation Leaders for Tomorrow (CLfT) program. Director Tisa was proud to point out that Dr. Schlüter is also the first woman Deputy Director in the history of the agency.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee Report

Mr. Sisk began by wishing Dr. Schlüter the best in her new role. He has worked with her for the past year and finds her a fantastic person and a consummate professional.

He reported that the Advisory Committee has begun the work of reviewing proposed changes to the MESA list, noting that the MESA proposals can be viewed online on the NHESP web page. There are 27 different species proposed for status changes. The Advisory Committee has set a rigorous schedule to meet and get the work done. Mr. Sisk briefly reviewed the process, stating that the members will vote and make recommendations to the Director, then he will bring them to the Board for approval to go to a public hearing and comment period.

Hunter Education Working Group Update

Mr. Foster reported a 64% response rate to the Hunter Education Program volunteer survey, which is an impressive percentage. He reported that the vast majority of instructors indicated that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the performance and activities of the staff. He reported that the final step will be on October 1, when the instructors meet for their annual workshop. The working group will come back to the Board after that with its final recommendations.

Confirm September Meeting Date

The members confirmed the date and time of the September business meeting, which is September 13, 2023, at 1:00 p.m., at the MassWildlife Field Headquarters in Westborough, with an option for the public to join on Zoom.

The Chair asked the Board and decided to hold a discussion meeting on the same date at 3:00 p.m.

Members discussed the October business meeting and settled on October 24, 2023, at 11:00 a.m., in Dalton or some other Western District location.

Members' Comments

Mr. Sisk stated that he would be working on getting the reimbursement for free and reduced-price licenses in statute and invited other Board members to join the effort.

Ms. Dyer reported that she had conducted an evening program for the Junior Conservation Camp. She had contacted Culturist Chuck Bell at the Sunderland Hatchery and was able to get trout for the program. She brought the trout and barramundi, which she usually brings, and was able to compare the anatomies of the two species for the campers. Ms. Dyer also reported that she had held an evening at a local pub for a discussion of issues for women in the outdoors. She reported that MassWildlife staff publicized and supported the event, and Ms. Ellsworth and Lt. Carlow of the OLE were also on the panel, which was very well-received. The panelists came away with a shared sense that the participants had been understanding and had more sympathy for people who hunt and the hunting lifestyle.

Mr. Foster thanked Operations Specialist Jim Pollock and Program Coordinator Jim Burnham and the other staff involved for putting up a Zoom meeting, stating that he had received feedback that the public will really appreciate it. He also offered his personal thanks to all who had participated in the Hunter Education instructor survey and reported that he wants to recruit more Hunter Education instructors.

Mr. Durand seconded Mr. Sisk's comments, stating that he agrees it's time to move on that issue and that he will work with Mr. Sisk. Mr. Durand also noted that he's heard from a lot of people who worked against the bill that had caused so much concern the previous month and he reported that it has been removed from consideration.

Ms. Ellsworth complimented Ms. Dyer on the spectacular women in the outdoors event, noting that Ms. Dyer's warmth in making everyone feel comfortable had a real impact. She expressed her own gratification at being able to be in the room with so many other women who are passionate about outdoor pursuits and offered her thanks to Ms. Dyer. She reported that the annual state agency and land conservation retreat will be held at Harvard Forest, October 5-6, noting that MassWildlife staff also participate in the retreat. Ms. Ellsworth stated that farms are in crisis this summer with the early frost for fruit that affected the entire berry season and the flooding several weeks later that inundated fields. She noted that crop insurance doesn't apply to small acreages like those in Massachusetts, so it's not available here and many farmers are struggling.

Dr. Organ reported the Hadley Hunter Education team is putting on a Trapping course on September 9 and a Waterfowl Identification course on September 23. He invited the other Board members to attend. He also reported that Jack Shea of the Ashfield Rod and Gun Club is putting on an unofficial seminar on bow hunting and that Dr. Organ will teach tree stand safety. He also stated that he will be traveling to Olympia next month, where he's been invited to present on conservation principles. Noting that Washington state has the marine component in their commission and that they also have wolves, Dr. Organ reported that the state fish and wildlife agency has a diversity of issues and also a diversity of members.

Mr. Sears thanked the Hunter Education Program working group for its efforts and looks forward to its report.

Public Comment: Donald Graves

Mr. Graves reported on damage being done to farmers' crops in Western Massachusetts by deer and bear, and provided a photo in advance of a damaged cornfield that was provided to the members in their meeting packets. Mr. Graves requested that more be done to facilitate solutions for the farmers dealing with crop damage.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Durand to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Foster. The vote in favor was unanimous, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernie Foster
Secretary

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

August agenda
Draft July business meeting minutes
Personnel Report
Public hearing package