



MASSWILDLIFE

DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

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

PRESENT: Steve Sears/Acting Chair, Bob Durand/Acting Vice Chair, Ernest W. Foster IV/Acting Secretary, Sasha Dyer, Emma Ellsworth, John Organ, Matthew Sisk, Ron Amidon/Commissioner/DFG, Mark Tisa/Director, Jon Regosin/Deputy Director, Kris McCarthy/Associate Director/Finance and Administration, Eve Schlüter/Assistant Director/NHESP, Michael Huguenin/Assistant Director/Wildlife, Trina Moruzzi/Assistant Director/Operations, Todd Richards/Assistant Director/Fisheries, Nicole McSweeney/Acting Chief/Information and Education, Pat Huckery/Northeast Wildlife District Manager, Todd Olanyk/Central Wildlife District Manager, Jason Zimmer/Southeast Wildlife District Manager, Andrew Madden/Western Wildlife District Manager, Joe Rogers/Conn. Valley Wildlife District Manager, Captain Scott Amati/OLE

DATE: August 23, 2022

LOCATION: MassWildlife Field Headquarters, Westborough

Acting Chair Sears opened the meeting at 9:03 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Durand to accept the minutes from the July meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Dr. Organ; the minutes were unanimously approved.

Acting Chair's Comments

Acting Chair Sears reported that the Wildlife Depredation subcommittee formed by former Chair Larson needs to meet again and continue its work. Noting that former Secretary Booth had been the chair of that subcommittee, he appointed Mr. Durand as the new chair and reported that the subcommittee was now composed of Mr. Durand, Ms. Ellsworth, and himself, and he asked Commissioner Amidon if he would like to assist the subcommittee in its work. Commissioner Amidon agreed.

Mr. Sears also reported, in reference to public comments provided at the July meeting, that action was being taken and MassWildlife staff will have a report for the Board at a later meeting.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Amidon reported that he had vacationed fishing in Alaska and was getting back into the swing. He reported he had attended the graduation ceremony for the Massachusetts Junior Conservation Camp the previous week and that the enthusiasm of the students was very high. He recommended that the Board members visit the camp to see all the activities and instruction the students receive.

Director's Comments

Director Tisa noted that he was a graduate of the Junior Conservation Camp himself, and that it is a great program for engaging teens who are interested in outdoor activities and skills. He reported that MassWildlife is an integral participant in the camp, with Hunter Education Administrator Sue Langlois and Aquatic Education Coordinator Jim Lagacy playing major roles in delivering the curriculum. In

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response to questions from the Board members, Director Tisa reported that the issue for including more young people is not funding, with many clubs and leagues offering full scholarships, but finding kids in this day and age who want to attend.

Director Tisa stated that he wanted to give the Board a brief update on the current licensing system. He reported that, at the same time that he and his staff were working to secure the license-fee increases, the Department, under the direction of Commissioner Amidon, put out an RFP for a new licensing vendor to service the licensing needs for MassWildlife and the Division of Marine Fisheries. Director Tisa pointed out that the procurement process is highly regulated and complicated. Commissioner Amidon assembled a team to identify the specifications required of the new system, develop the RFP, and analyze the proposals received. After reviewing the bids with the team, the Commissioner awarded the contract and the newly acquired vendor began operations at the end of November 2021. Director Tisa reported that he and his staff were excited about the potential opportunities in marketing, outreach, and customer service that the new system would offer. But 2 months into the contract, at the beginning of 2022, the vendor announced it was getting out of the licensing business with many “bugs” still remaining in the new system and causing problems for our customers trying to acquire their 2022 licenses, stamps, permits, and Antlerless Deer Permits [ADP]. MassWildlife had stressed all along that the ADPs were the most important aspect of the system, but the process for selling them did not work well, leaving many customers unaware that they had not applied when they thought they had, along with many other problems. Director Tisa stated that as Director he is ultimately responsible for the flawed system and he sent his apologies to the sportsmen and sportswomen of the Commonwealth. He also apologized to the Fisheries and Wildlife Board. But, for 2023, Director Tisa stated that he is making sure that ADP applicants know how to clearly apply for and buy their ADP permits and that he will do everything in his power to see that the process goes smoothly.

Mr. Foster thanked the Director for his remarks and commended him and his staff for their efforts in a very difficult situation that was out of their control. Mr. Sears stated that the clerks had done and were doing an exceptional job working with the public throughout the process, as were the District Managers and other customer-service staff.

Law Enforcement Comments

Captain Scott Amati reported that the MEP are looking forward to transitioning from summer recreational activities to hunting season activities and other seasonal enforcement issues for the sister agencies. He provided the Board with an overview of actions connected to the current recreational seasons and activities; a detailed report on recent OLE activities, including numerous fish-and-wildlife-related examples of calls for service that Environmental Police officers had responded to in the previous month, both inland and marine; and the outlines of ongoing and recently completed investigations of suspected violations and infractions. The Chair thanked Captain Amati for his report.

Personnel Report (Kris McCarthy)

CFO Kris McCarthy presented the Board with the hiring managers’ recommendations for three backfill positions, including highlights of the candidates’ qualifications.

Promotion

<u>Employee</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Location</u>
Nicole McSweeney	Assistant Director of Outreach and Education Program Manager VI	Westborough

New Hire

<u>Employee</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Location</u>
Alexandra Echandi	Endangered Species Review Biologist Conservation Biologist III	Westborough
Chantel Hernandez	Procurement Coordinator Program Coordinator I	Westborough
Sarah Lawson	Sunderland Hatchery Technician Wildlife Technician II	Sunderland

Mr. Durand moved to accept the personnel report as presented; Dr. Organ seconded the motion; the vote in favor was unanimous. Dr. Organ reported that he was very impressed with the caliber of the candidates and congratulated the hiring managers on their highly qualified new staff.

Fisheries Program Overview (Todd Richards)

Assistant Director for Fisheries Todd Richards provided the Board members with a detailed report on the work and accomplishments of the Fisheries Program. He began by calling on his staff that was present to briefly introduce themselves and their responsibilities.

Assistant Director Richards stated that, working at a fish and wildlife agency, staff often refers to resources in terms of funding or plants, animals, and their habitat, but MassWildlife's most important resource is the people who work for us. The Fisheries Program's goals can only be accomplished with the efforts and input of the hatcheries, districts, and program staff. He also paid tribute to MassWildlife's many partners, including private conservation organizations, sporting clubs and groups, watershed associations, and other state and federal agencies, all of whom are critical to developing objectives and accomplishing them.

Mr. Richards organized his report around the three major goals of the Fisheries Program, which are to conduct monitoring and research, protect and restore aquatic resources, and provide high-quality recreational opportunities. He stated that all the categories overlap and support each other, and his presentation described the categories and illustrated how they interact.

Beginning with monitoring and research, the Assistant Director provided a detailed report on the many fish community surveys staff conducts each year, which are accomplished through fish collection in many forms, depending on the size of the waterbody being surveyed, and stressed that the fish themselves tell the story about their habitats in ways we cannot otherwise measure, including about the hydrology, water quality, connectivity of the habitat, and geomorphology. He explained the Program's use of a statewide fish database, which can be used in many ways to protect fish and wildlife resources.

Moving on to protection and restoration of fisheries resources, Mr. Richards reported that protecting fish and wildlife through regulations like seasons and bag limits can be effective, and that these have always been important traditional methods of conservation. MassWildlife also uses other regulations to protect fish and wildlife from diseases and invasive species through regulations on importation, liberation, and aquaculture. However, he explained that other protection and restoration avenues are needed. Our regulations can limit the number of fish you can take, for example, but they do not, except under MESA, allow the agency to protect the habitat in which the fish live. Other agency's regulations are more capable of accomplishing that task, and MassWildlife's information can help them provide the protection fish and wildlife resources need. As an example, Mr. Richards reported that MassWildlife's fisheries information has been incorporated into the Surface Water Quality standards. By demonstrating that many streams and rivers maintain wild, self-sustaining populations of coldwater fish, the Mass.

Surface Water Quality Standards (WQS) went from 32 segments designated as coldwater in 2000 to more than 300 streams so designated today. In addition, all of the more than 1,300 Coldwater Fisheries Resource streams (321 CMR 5.00) are included under the anti-degradation provisions of the WQS. He noted that CFRs are more than just trout, with a dozen coldwater fish species in the state's waters. Mr. Richards detailed other protection and restoration efforts, including the development of a wild trout management plan and the wild trout stream classification system; lake and pond management; and interagency policy development, where MassWildlife Fisheries staff has been instrumental in incorporating biological criteria, such as into the Water Management Act, by providing input to Interbasin Transfer Act decisions on the Water Resources Commission, having a seat on the Drought Management Task Force, providing input to the Interagency Fish Toxics Committee, and being the lead agency for fish kill response. Mr. Richards also discussed the active habitat management the agency conducts, including through dam removal and remediation and culvert replacement for fish passage and climate resilience.

Assistant Director Richards then dove into the Fisheries Program's work to publicize and make more accessible the many recreational opportunities in Massachusetts. He noted the wide diversity of species to fish for and the many places there are to fish, providing the example of the many species eligible for pins under the Sportfishing Awards Program. He also detailed the state's hatchery system, where Hatchery staff raises and District staff stocks high-quality trout and landlocked salmon for anglers to catch and enjoy in a nourishing, high-quality meal. Mr. Richards touted the agency's trout stocking reports (mass.gov/trout); its stocking efforts across the Commonwealth, including in towns with environmental justice communities; the new app developed by staff to guide anglers to the right fishing locations for their desired species (GoFishMA!); and the Teaching with Trout program for school-age kids to raise trout, learn about their biology and life history, and stock the fingerlings in a local waterbody that is stocked with trout.

Assistant Director Richards closed his presentation by noting that the Board members and anyone interested in more information about the many ways that MassWildlife conducts research, works to protect and restore aquatic habitat, and provides recreational opportunities should refer to the recent issue of *Massachusetts Wildlife* magazine devoted entirely to the Fisheries Program [No. 1, 2022].

Connecticut Valley Wildlife District Overview (Joseph Rogers)

Assistant Director for Operations Trina Moruzzi introduced Connecticut Valley District Manager Joe Rogers, who provided the Board with an overview of Connecticut Valley District activities and responsibilities.

Mr. Rogers provided the Board with an overview of the District staffing structure, explaining that the District Wildlife Biologist and Fisheries Biologist oversee and work with the four Wildlife Technicians, and all work in coordination with the program Assistant Directors and project leaders in Westborough. There is also a Clerk and a Stewardship Biologist in each District, and a Land Agent, who works for the Department but is closely integrated with the MassWildlife staff.

The District Manager reported that the Connecticut Valley office receives 10-20 calls a day, related to wildlife species such as bear, coyote, and red fox; assisting with license purchases; and inquiries about other permits. He highlighted the trout stocking that the District conducts every year, reporting that the Connecticut Valley District distributes 90-100,000 trout annually in spring, summer, and fall in 437 stocking locations. District staff also assist the biologists in Westborough with numerous fisheries projects, including lake and river surveys; American shad research in the Connecticut River, including in coordination with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; and Swift River trout research and monitoring. District staff also assist Field Headquarters staff in conducting freshwater shellfish surveys, and Mr.

Rogers noted that all six of the state's MESA-listed freshwater mussels occur in the Connecticut Valley District. The District staff will also investigate reports of fish kills to determine whether they are natural or due to manmade events.

Mr. Rogers then reported on the wildlife projects and research that the District participates in every year, including its pheasant-stocking activities (10,000 birds a year); the Large Animal Response Team (LART) calls the District receives; black bear research and collaring; and many other wildlife monitoring projects, including eagle surveys and banding, ruffed grouse drumming surveys, wood duck box surveys, waterfowl indicated pair surveys, deer pellet transects, goose banding, and eastern whip-poor-will surveys, to name just a few.

He also reported on the District's habitat management and stewardship responsibilities, with 37 WMAs and 38 Conservation Restrictions (CR) and Wildlife Conservation Easements (WCE). Providing detailed looks at work on several WMAs, Mr. Rogers discussed the staff's mowing, brush cutting, and invasive species control activities, as well as its cooperative work with the Habitat Program conducting forestry practices, applying prescribed fire (with five qualified staff in the District), enhancing early successional habitat, and overseeing the work of contractors on MassWildlife lands. Stewardship activities are also important components of the District's work, involving CR and WCE compliance monitoring, boundary patrol and marking, dealing with illegal dumping and other encroachments, and making access enhancements. Mr. Rogers' District is also home to the agency's CNC machine, professionally producing all the new WMA signs for the agency's lands across the state.

Mr. Rogers explained that assisting the MassWildlife Lands Committee with land acquisition is also an important District function, as is its public outreach work, including through a large, manned exhibit at the Franklin County Fair every year, enrichment activities for the Mass. Junior Conservation Camp, Hunter Education classes, and urban fishing outreach events.

After a brief discussion, the Chair and other Board members thanked Mr. Rogers for his work in the Connecticut Valley and his very informative report.

Confirm September Meeting Date

After a brief discussion, members confirmed the date and time for the September Fisheries and Wildlife Board meeting on Monday, September 12, 2022, at 9:00 a.m. Members also discussed the October meeting, and selected October 20, 2022, at 9:00 a.m.

Member's Comments

Mr. Sisk expressed his admiration and appreciation for the staff presentations.

Ms. Dyer reported also being a Mass Junior Conservation Camp graduate and reported that her club also had trouble finding kids this year. She also noted that she had enjoyed meeting the Central District staff during a recent visit to the West Boylston office.

Acting Vice Chair Durand thanked the staff for their presentations and their professionalism on the job.

Acting Chair Sears reported that the Board members were visiting the Districts and then will also visit the hatcheries, which he was enjoying and learning a lot from. He thanked Mr. Richards and Mr. Rogers for their presentations.

Acting Secretary Foster reported that he had never been more proud to be part of the Board.

Ms. Ellsworth stated that it was wonderful to get in-depth presentations, and that she now feels she has a much better understanding of the workings of the agency. He reported that she had grown up in Monague when the Montague Plains WMA was an embarrassment, but now it has been transformed into an ecological wonder.

Mr. Organ said he was very impressed with the new hires and the due diligence of the hiring teams. He also stated he was impressed and delighted to find out through Mr. Richards' remarks that both he and Dr. Slater had studied with such preeminent scientists. Director Tisa added that Mr. Organ was preeminent scientist in his own right, and that if he was asked to name the top 10 conservation biologists in the country, Dr. Organ would be one of them. The Director wanted the meeting to know that Dr. Organ had been instrumental in the fight to recover the sportsmen's money that was being diverted a number of years ago. As Chief of Federal Aid in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Dr. Organ was a long-time advocate for the agency, then he ended his career as the head of the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Units across the country. Dr. Organ is a top-flight scientist to help the Board and help the staff by guiding the agency's work.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Durand to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Ms. Ellsworth.

The vote was unanimous, and the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernie Foster

Acting Secretary

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

Agenda

Draft July minutes

Personnel Report

Spreadsheet of Natural Heritage Fund Taxpayer Donations (1992 to 2021)

Copy of *Massachusetts Wildlife* (No. 1, 2022), the Aquatics issue