



MASSWILDLIFE

DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

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

PRESENT: Dr. Joseph Larson/Chair, Michael Roche/Vice Chair, Bonnie Booth/Secretary, Bob Durand, Ernest W. Foster IV, Stephen Sears, Dr. Brandi Van Roo, Mark Tisa/Director, Jon Regosin/Deputy Director, Eve Schlüter/Assistant Director/ NHESP, Michael Huguenin/Assistant Director/Wildlife, Trina Moruzzi/Assistant Director/Operations, Todd Richards/Assistant Director/Fisheries, Marion Larson/Chief/Information and Education, Adam Kautza/Pat Huckery/Northeast Wildlife District Manager, Todd Olanyk/Central Wildlife District Manager. PULBIC: Liz Manger, Dave Morin

DATE: August 24, 2021

LOCATION: Via Zoom meeting

Chair Larson opened the meeting at 10:00 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Durand to accept the minutes from the June meeting and the minutes from the July meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Secretary Booth.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Chair's Comments

Chair Larson reported no comments.

Director's Comments

Director Tisa reported that the agency has approval for the public hearing to establish the pheasant and quail permit and reported that it would be held during the September meeting.

Law Enforcement

Captain Scott Amati reported that the OLE has 7 new officers in the field. He reported an increase in assaults and public disturbances at the state parks, and that OLE officers had helped with road closures and property checks due to the storm over the previous weekend. Captain Amati also reported that the task forces organized to help with patrols on the Connecticut and Merrimack rivers and Lake Quinsigamond were up and running and stated that it was successful boating year with fewer incidents.

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The Captain reported that the OLE will assist the Town of Tyngsboro with its planned fireworks and that the river will be shut down for a period.

Addressing upcoming commitments for the OLE, Captain Amati reported that officers are getting ready for the hunting seasons while boating numbers are down this year, likely mostly due to COVID. Officers are monitoring bait sites for bear and goose in preparation for fall hunting. He stated that OHV activity was picking up, with 7 accidents so far this season. On the marine side, he reported an increase in cases of violations for blue crab and other species, and that officers had assisted with jellyfish stings in the New Bedford area. On freshwater he reported a normal year for activity, but an increase in anglers lacking licenses and some with too many hooks.

It has been a normal year moose and bear complaints. Captain Amati reported that a dog had attacked and killed piping plover chick and that the incident was under investigation. OLE assisted with a humpback whale entangled in fishing gear. The Captain also reported that a 3-4-foot alligator had been seen in the Westfield River; officers were attempting to locate it. He also reported that snake calls were up this year, including a timber rattlesnake in a previously undocumented town.

Chair Larson thanked Captain Amati for attending the meeting and for his detailed report.

Wild Trout Evaluations for Conservation and Management (Adam Kautza)

Assistant Director of Fisheries Todd Richards stated that he wanted to give the Board a brief update on Fisheries activities before introducing Dr. Kautza. He reported that fall trout stocking would start soon, and staff is planning and gearing up for it. He noted that the hatcheries had changed production to increase fall output and that this year over 50% of the fish stocked will be 14-inch rainbows. He reported that some Fisheries work was made difficult this year because of so much water, noting that Dr. Quiñones couldn't find coldwater climate-change refugia because they are inundated with water from the main rivers and streams.

Assistant Director Richards then introduced Coldwater Fisheries Resource Project Leader Adam Kautza, who he stated is normally very busy in the field at this time of year but was before the Board to report on his recent work. Assistant Director Richards reported that Dr. Kautza has been extremely active since he was hired, not only in his work on coldwater fisheries resources but also helping out in other areas, like the Hunter Education Program field days and the Teaching with Trout program.

Dr. Kautza reported on the Fisheries Section's work to identify wild trout streams and to classify them into categories to better study and then promote the best of them to trout anglers. He began by noting the broad-scale classification of wild trout streams as Coldwater Fisheries Resources (CFR) according to the regulations at 321 CMR 5.00, which defines CFRs as waterbodies that contain coldwater fish. He listed the 11 coldwater fish in Massachusetts, which include Brook, Brown, and Rainbow Trout, and posed the question of whether staff could make a category that was wild-trout specific, to make it more meaningful and useful to anglers and perhaps aid in targeting wild trout streams for land acquisition, for example.

He reported that the first step was to compile the available data and highlight those CFRs that support wild trout. Of the 1,187 wild trout streams that have current fish data, Dr. Kautza reported that 1,160 have wild Brook Trout, 193 have wild Brown Trout, and 8 have wild Rainbow Trout. Next, the Fisheries Section needed to classify existing wild trout streams into categories. After noting that other agencies use varying systems, Dr. Kautza reported that MassWildlife chose to classify its wild trout streams by number of trout per kilometer of stream, extrapolated from standard electrofishing survey data. He stated that this classification is based on percentiles relative to trout species present and stream order, i.e., a surrogate for stream size and longitudinal position in the landscape.

The classes that the wild trout streams have been broken into are:

- Class A – Exceptional
- Class B – High Quality
- Class C – Intermediate
- Class D – Marginal

Dr. Kautza then introduced the concept of Premier Wild Trout Fisheries, a special classification for promoting the best-of-the-best wild trout fisheries to anglers. He reported that these premier streams have Class A or Class B total abundance; greater than median abundance of larger individuals; and a stream size that is conducive to angling, i.e., more than 3.5 meters wide, with parking available and public access. He reported that to date 40 streams meet the criteria as Premier Wild Trout Streams, based on recently updated fish survey data and field investigation, and he stated that 40 additional streams need to be surveyed and investigated to confirm their status as “Premier.”

This wild trout stream classification system will be used to promote angling and inform anglers of the special opportunities the best streams can provide, including through the GoFishMA interactive map. It will also enable staff to better prioritize future actions, including possible land acquisition, stream conservation and/or restoration, survey and possible climate-change refugia locations, and actions that will promote aquatic biodiversity.

After a brief discussion, the Chair and Board members thanked Dr. Kautza for his work and his excellent presentation.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee Report

The Chair reported that Advisory Committee was very impressed with a presentation on the prescribed fire program at its last meeting, and that the members were very complimentary to the staff.

Confirm Meeting Date

Members confirmed the date for the September Fisheries and Wildlife Board meeting. Members agreed to Tuesday, September 28, at 9:00 a.m., with a public hearing at 9:30 in the same meeting.

Member’s Comments

Secretary Booth had no comments.

Vice Chair Roche reported that he recently took the Basic hunter education course in its current hybrid form. He stated that he has taught the course for over 40 years, but the new presentation of the material has changed enormously. The positive attitude and appreciation of the students was noticeable to everyone. He reported that all 45 students passed the exam, and all did extremely well, better than he had ever seen in the past. He praised the focus on the learner and reported that the new tools are being used to enable the learner to be successful. He said he couldn’t say enough good things about it and was very glad to see it for himself.

Dr. Van Roo reported that most professional societies are thinking about diversity and inclusion, including The Wildlife Society, and the process it recently engaged in was very enlightening. She reported that she was part of that effort and requested that staff give the Board a summary of MassWildlife’s efforts on diversity and inclusion. Dr. Van Roo requested that the Chair create a working group of the Board to further study MassWildlife’s efforts in order to enhance them, no matter how well the agency is currently doing. She also wants to know whether MassWildlife is doing any assessments of the workplace environment, to gauge how staff feels about the diversity and inclusion efforts the agency is making.

Chair Larson asked Dr. Van Roo to make a brief outline of her requests, prioritize them, and share them with the other Board members first, to aid staff in accomplishing the objectives. He elaborated that the other Board members may have additions or comments, and he would like to include those in what is shared with staff.

Mr. Durand added that part of the difficulty is that the number of women and minorities that take the classes or major in wildlife conservation is very small. He said that one way to improve that may be through Hunter Education, which introduces people who may then have an interest in pursuing careers. Mr. Durand also applauded the the entire license-fee process and highlighted the efforts of those in state government and the legislature to reimburse the free licenses in the fiscal year 2022 budget.

Mr. Foster asked for a talk about the falconry program, stating that he was aware of some exciting growth in interest and would like to hear about the program.

Mr. Sears stated that he echoed Dr. Van Roo's concerns about diversity and inclusion in the conservation sciences, and that he was glad to hear that the Director and the entire state are focused on these issues. On Hunter Ed, Mr. Sears said he wants to see a sustained effort to make it as widely available as possible. He also stated that he was looking forward to a presentation on the new licensing system, particularly interested in a fair allocation system for ADPs [antlerless deer permits]. He added that the license-fee-increase process showed that MassWildlife is working together with its constituents, and he hopes to carry that into other issues of mutual importance.

Chair Larson noted that when he was a young professor at UMass/Amherst, women were not even allowed to major in wildlife conservation, and he hardly ever saw women in attendance at conferences. He added that he will be very interested to explore where women and other minorities are being trained, then try to recruit from those programs. Dr. Van Roo added that she has a lot of ideas for initiatives and other efforts that could be undertaken. She was one of the women experiencing that exclusion and thinks the progress should have come quicker and that we should be much further along with the inclusion of women and minorities, but that she will wait for the working group to be formed to discuss her ideas and fully explore the possibilities.

There being no further comments from the Board members, a motion was made by Vice Chair Roche to adjourn the open session and reopen in executive session for the purpose of discussing certain land acquisitions whose negotiations might be compromised by discussion in open session and to not return to open session afterward. The motion was seconded by Mr. Durand.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Session

Deputy Director Jon Regosin presented four parcels for consideration by the Board that were all unanimously approved.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonnie Booth

Secretary

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

August agenda

June and July meeting minutes for review

Handout: Proposed Pheasant and Quail regulation changes

Spreadsheet of Natural Heritage Fund Taxpayer Donations (1992 to 2020)