



## DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

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### FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE BOARD DECEMBER BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES

PRESENT: Steve Sears/Chair, Emma Ellsworth/Vice Chair, Bob Durand, Sasha Dyer, John Organ, Mark S. Tisa/Director, Tom O'Shea/Commissioner/DFG, Trina Moruzzi/Assistant Director/Operations, Andrew Madden/Western Wildlife District Manager, Peter Milanesi/DFG Western Wildlife District Land Agent, Col. Chris Mason/OLE, Major Kevin Clayton/OLE, Lieutenant Tara Carlow/OLE

DATE: December 4, 2024

LOCATION: The Stationery Factory, 63 Flansburg Ave., Dalton

Chair Sears opened the December business meeting at 4:30 p.m. and introduced the Board members.

#### Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Dr. Organ to accept the minutes from the November business meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Dyer; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Chair Sears stated that the Board was advised less than 24 hours before the meeting that comments were not being made without prior notice on the agenda. Commissioner O'Shea reported that the DFG General Counsel is looking at the issue and that he and the Director would be sorting it out. He noted that the advisory commission of the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) also has comments on its agenda and that it does not post the topics in advance.

Director Tisa invited the Board members to join the MassWildlife holiday potluck lunch later in the month.

Chair Sears stated that it used to be that issues that are late breaking could be discussed but he's not sure whether this is allowed, reiterating that the Board had less than 24 hours' notice of the requirement.

Chair Sears also introduced the new Colonel of the Environmental Police, Chris Mason; Colonel Kevin Clayton; and Lt. Tara Carlow, who were all present.

#### Update on the Plan to Implement the Biodiversity Executive Order (Tom O'Shea)

Commissioner Tom O'Shea reminded the members that he had shared the comments received in writing and during the public listening sessions for the plan to implement the Biodiversity Executive Order, and he asked that the members provide any comments they might have about the public comments and about the plan after his remarks.

The Biodiversity Executive Order had two charges. The Commissioner reminded the meeting that the first charge was to study all existing efforts to sustain biodiversity across the whole of government with input from other state agencies, as well as from nonprofit organizations and the public. The second charge is to develop a set of statewide goals for biodiversity conservation to be accomplished by 2030, 2040, and 2050. His staff is currently finalizing the report to the Governor's office, which he expects to be done and delivered to the Governor by the end of the month.

Commissioner O'Shea reviewed the four main goals that came out of the effort, grouped around four main ideas: protect, restore, sustain, and connect. He stressed that the goals are working toward a nature-positive future, to improve condition of our species and habitats, so that all can thrive, including people. He stressed that the work and the report represent a unique opportunity to elevate DFG's biodiversity mission to the level of climate and the economy in the eyes of the public.

Commissioner O'Shea stated that part of the "protect" goal is to double the pace of land protection, particularly on lands identified as critical in BioMap, with the result that more than half the state's protected lands will be in BioMap. "Restoration" is a clear goal, both in uplands and in wetlands; habitats are degraded, dams are being removed, etc., so there's a lot of work to do to get ahead of the decline. Addressing the "sustain" goal, he cited food security, a sustainable fisheries economy, and maintaining and increasing access to wild foods, and noted that all are key components of the plan. There are marine-focused goals, too, under DMF, with some under MassWildlife (i.e., marine mammals). Finally, the plan seeks to "connect" people to nature, too, by giving grants to municipalities to protect more open space, restore biodiversity at the neighborhood level, and provide access to nature to all citizens.

Commissioner O'Shea highlighted the plan's core commitments, including the whole-of-government approach, which is meant to both capture all the efforts already being made and identify creative ways other agencies can contribute to the success of the plan; the importance of partnerships and sustained collaboration with private organizations; supporting indigenous leadership and incorporating traditional knowledge in the stewardship of lands and waters; and equity in rebuilding biodiversity in all neighborhoods, expanding urban greenspaces and tree canopy, and restoring urban rivers to build climate resilience.

The Commissioner explained that part of the work to be done is around work and jobs: workforce development will include preparing students for clean-energy and nature-based blue and green careers, but also all the jobs needed in our habitat-restoration efforts, to bring back uplands and wetlands and waters as habitat for wildlife. Such programs for high schools and post-secondary vocational-technical programs will be developed with guidance from the state's Executive Office of Education. A Youth Biodiversity Council to advise the Governor is also envisioned, as are paid internships focused on biodiversity conservation.

If the goal is to increase biodiversity writ large, Commissioner O'Shea stated that research and monitoring will be key to establish and track biodiversity metrics and build on existing efforts. Baselines need to be set and a targeted monitoring program stood up to track progress over time to measure and demonstrate success. He acknowledged that the Department and its divisions need additional funding support to achieve the goals. There is another Environmental Bond coming, but he is also thinking about innovation like a biodiversity credit plan to quantify net-positive benefits for biodiversity to leverage private financing, along with creative sources of dedicated funding from existing revenues. The Commissioner stressed that the plan and its component parts need to get to point where people see the need for and the value of the work being done so that they support it.

After the Commissioner's remarks, the Board members offered some observations on the comment documents he had shared and about the plan components. Dr. Organ advised that Iowa's would be a good model to examine because it has put together a suite of funding sources for its fish and wildlife agency.

Ms. Ellsworth stated that she had been struck in the written comments by how much people care and how many people care about the issue. She thinks habitat restoration is not just maintaining habitat for existing species. It's also about climate-change mitigation, and both problems need to be addressed. Ms.

Ellsworth also suggested reexamining the use of the word 'restore.' The land can't always go back to how it was at some point in the past. Rather, we need to think about what the climate is now and what kinds of habitats can be sustainable. Dr. Organ agreed that resiliency is a better term than restoration, because it implies adaptation to changing circumstances and not a going back to a prior state that may not be possible due to the changed climate and other factors.

Ms. Ellsworth went on to state that in her position she thinks a lot about how we could double the pace of land protection to meet the goals. One of the major bottlenecks to completing projects that she sees is the lack of land surveyors and qualified appraisers. She reported that there are literally two people in the entire state that can do appraisals that qualify for federal funding, and she has to schedule those appraisals 6 months in advance. So, workforce development is key, to make people aware of and get more young people into these fields and professions. She believes the state also needs to think about private stewardship and find more ways to work with private deedholders who really care and have a lot more capacity to deal with their acreages than agencies with tens of thousands of acres have. She also thought that the state should highlight the economic development in land protection: protecting land brings tens of millions of dollars into the state, but this is rarely talked about.

Mr. Durand congratulated Commissioner O'Shea on the responses he received. He was impressed by the amount of support for primary- and secondary-growth forests. He was also surprised there was not more interest in major, landscape-scale land protection, where large or wide-ranging species would have sufficient habitat to sustain them. He was also surprised by the lack of comments about K-12 education, which he said wasn't mentioned at all, and he stated his belief that we need more exposure for young people. He also didn't see anything from Environmental Justice communities, and very few comments from the sporting communities. He noted that additional funding sources to get there will be important, including to clear the backlog of projects currently not being closed because, after sometimes years of waiting for funding to come through, people give up and then those opportunities are lost.

Chair Sears asked whether additional written comments from the Board would be helpful, and Commissioner O'Shea said he welcomed any additional support.

Ms. Dyer stated she was struck by the diversity of topics in the comments, including issues like rodenticide use on farms. She stated that it is important to find a way to incorporate ideas about environment- and conservation-related professions for high schoolers, so they are aware that these are careers they could pursue. Noting that this is not in DFG's or MassWildlife's expertise, she said it highlights the importance of engaging other agencies and professionals that are in the education space.

Chair Sears encouraged exploring how the state could tap into energy resources purchase and sales agreements to be part of an additional funding mechanism. The state should link energy use and land protection and have a tiny percentage that could be directed to land protection. He also suggested that state universities could offer additional scholarships for study in the supporting fields where qualified people are lacking, perhaps creating programs in the state university system with scholarships and internship opportunities in fields where we lack people to fill these jobs. He also repeated that the current DFG land agents, some with decades of experience, will leave holes very difficult to fill as they retire. He has often said there should be apprentices for those positions before that expertise is gone. Chair Sears also suggested looking at the DPU as a source of funding, since every person in the state has electricity consumption and that nexus could provide supporting revenue.

Dr. Organ pointed out that there is a model in Wyoming where the state funds rural schools with fees from mineral and energy extraction. He commended Commissioner O'Shea and his staff for keeping on mission and engaging the public so effectively. Dr. Organ observed that Massachusetts is a small state

and it may be worthwhile to use the biodiversity plan to engage some neighboring states to work together on common goals and have a bigger impact. As things continue to change and species' ranges shift, Massachusetts needs to work with our neighbors. Commissioner O'Shea reported that there is already work in that direction being done by Assistant Commissioner Ryan, who is working with the other Northeast states to draft regional agreements. He reiterated that the Biodiversity Conservation Plan has been a full agency effort across the divisions, with a core team that has done a great job.

Confirm the January Meeting Date

Chair Sears confirmed the January meeting on January 15, 2025, at 10:00 a.m., at the MassWildlife Field Headquarters in Westborough.

There being no further business, Mr. Durand moved to adjourn. Ms. Dyer seconded. The vote in favor was unanimous and the meeting was adjourned at 5:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernie Foster  
Secretary

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

December agenda

November minutes draft