



MASSWILDLIFE

DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581

p: (508) 389-6300 | f: (508) 389-7890

MASS.GOV/MASSWILDLIFE

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, Ron Amidon/Commissioner/DFG, Mark S. Tisa/Director, Jon Regosin/Deputy Director, Kris McCarthy/CFO/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, Marion Larson/Chief/Information and Education, Nicole McSweeney/Marketing and Outreach Manager, Joseph Rogers/Supervisor/Conn. Valley Wildlife District, Todd Olanyk/Supervisor/Central Wildlife District, Jason Zimmer/Supervisor/Southeast Wildlife District, Andrew Madden/Supervisor/Western Wildlife District, Pat Huckery/Supervisor/Northeast Wildlife District, Lt. Col. David Loos/OLE

DATE: February 17, 2021

LOCATION: Via Zoom Meeting

Chair Larson opened the meeting at 9:00 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Vice Chair Roche to table the minutes from the January meeting. 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 thanked the Commissioner for introducing the information sessions the Board held during the month and for his work with his staff to forward the legislative issues that the public is highlighting during the outreach process. The Chair stated that he appreciated it when the Commissioner explained to the public the conflict of interest stricture MassWildlife staff and the Board members are under against lobbying for legislative change.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Amidon reported coordinating with MassWildlife staff to work with DCR to open some of its closed properties. He reported that part of the discussions was the management of wildlife on those

MASSWILDLIFE

areas. The Commissioner also reported working with the mayor of Fall River on improving access to the Freetown Bioreserve. Over the years, gates have gone up to restrict access, and the Commissioner reporting he is working to expand access.

Director's Comments

Director Tisa reported that he had no comments at that time.

Law Enforcement Comments

The OLE's David Loos reported a significant uptick in ice fishing and also associated vehicles, including ATVs and dirt bikes. He also reported an uptick in snowmobile activity, with the most activity the OLE has seen in the past three winters. He regretted informing the Board of a fatal snowmobile accident in Western Mass., and reported that officers are working on an ongoing basis with SAM [Snowmobile Association of Massachusetts] on safety outreach to snowmobilers. The Lieutenant Colonel also reported that OLE officers were first on the scene at a plane crash in Webster and provided first aid until EMTs arrived to assist.

In personnel news, Lt. Col. Loos reported that there are three more new officers in OLE field training, while four recruits are entering the police academy.

Chair Larson thanked the Lieutenant Colonel for attending the meeting and for his informative report.

Personnel Report (Kris McCarthy)

CFO Kris McCarthy presented the Board with two nominations, both to backfill critical existing positions.

Promotion

<u>Employee</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Location</u>
Brian Hawthorne	Habitat Management Program Leader Environmental Analyst V	Westborough

New Hire

<u>Employee</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Location</u>
Martin Feehan	Deer and Moose Biologist Game Biologist IV	Westborough

Mr. Durand moved that the Personnel Report be accepted as presented; Dr. Van Roo seconded the motion.

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.

License Fee Proposal (Mark S. Tisa)

Director Tisa began his presentation by sharing a little of his personal background, in case members of the public were attending the meeting who didn't know him.

The Director began by thanking hunters, anglers, and trappers, who are and have been MassWildlife's vital partners through the years, providing financial support; fish and wildlife conservation and management through their activities in the field; sharing their observations in the field, both of wildlife and of encroachments or other issues on the Wildlife Management Areas; time spent volunteering and mentoring and inspiring the next generation of conservationists; and their input, support, and enthusiasm for MassWildlife's programs and services.

Director Tisa then reviewed his presentation from the previous meeting for the benefit of new attendees. He highlighted the many programs and services added or expanded in the last 25 years and discussed the agency's current and projected finances in detail. He also discussed an apples-to-apples comparison between Massachusetts' current license fees and those charged in the other New England states.

Director Tisa then called up on MassWildlife's Marketing and Outreach Manager, Nicole McSweeney, to provide a review of the public comments received to date on the agency's programs and services and on acceptance of the idea of potential license fee increases in 2022. Ms. McSweeney reported that MassWildlife had conducted extensive outreach efforts, including through a dedicated web page, Mass.gov/Masswildlife-Funding, created specifically to gather comments and provide basic information and including a number of FAQs on the agency's programs and funding; a newsletter announcement to 88,000+ subscribers; social media posts on all MassWildlife's social channels; outdoor writers and other media; sporting groups and partners; current agency program volunteers; and the comments received during the public information sessions. She reported that three public information sessions were held to inform the public about MassWildlife's current programs and funding, including its near- and long-term financial outlook, on February 4, 6, and 9, on Zoom, and that 109 members of the public had attended.

Ms. McSweeney summarized the results of staff outreach, stating that MassWildlife received over 125 individual comments, including via the web form, phone calls, emails, letters, and the information sessions. Those comments included comments from organizations, including the Essex County, Worcester County, and Berkshire County leagues; the Massachusetts Conservation Alliance; the Massachusetts Sportsmen's Council; the MA-RI Council of Trout Unlimited; the Lenox Sportsmen's Club; and the Leicester Rod & Gun Club. She reported that nearly all the respondents expressed support for MassWildlife's programs and services, including specific comments on positive interactions with professional staff and its high-quality hunting and fishing opportunities, education programs, trout and pheasant stocking programs, digital tools, and WMAs. Many stated outright support for a license increase. Most expressed their support for or understanding of the need, but offered other suggestions, including that the agency should seek other revenue sources, charge non-residents more, institute a new pheasant or trout stamp, and avoid raising fees for minors. Few commenters stated they were against any fee increase. There were also comments and suggestions on matters and issues that are outside of MassWildlife's control, whether because they are mandated in statute or are governed by other agencies.

Director Tisa then detailed a proposed schedule of new fees that he explained were structured to address the revenue shortfall, were projected to sustain the Inland Fish and Game Fund for another decade, were comparable to the other New England states, and if adopted would not go into effect until 2022. The Director asked the Fisheries and Wildlife Board to authorize him to request approval from the

Executive Office of Administration and Finance (ANF) to hold public hearings on proposed new license fees in the spring of the current year.

Vice Chair Roche thanked the subcommittee and the Director for all their work over the past 2 years. He stated that the plan proposed gives a clear path to MassWildlife's financial future and enables it to continue to provide its excellent programs and services.

Mr. Roche made a motion to instruct the Director to move forward with the regulatory process as described; Secretary Booth seconded the motion.

Chair Larson asked whether the Board members had anything they wanted to add.

Mr. Foster stated that, as a member of the subcommittee, he was most interested in the listening sessions, though he was concerned that attendance was skewed by Zoom difficulties. He felt the process was an excellent example of leadership and thanked the Director for all his work to clearly convey a difficult subject.

Mr. Sears stated that he would echo the previous comments: a lot of thought went into Director Tisa's presentation and Mr. Sears was very encouraged that the public has participated. He said that he wanted to highly encourage people to help unconnected people get their comments in. He stated that he had heard all the comments at the listening sessions and also heard from people who couldn't participate but had comments.

Dr. Van Roo offered thanks to the Director for keeping Board members goal-oriented and focused on the things they can do and, importantly, which areas they don't have the ability to affect.

Secretary Booth thanked the entire Board for their attention to the issues involved in the agency's financial situation and for their feedback.

Hearing no further discussion, Chair Larson called a vote on the motion.

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.

Director Tisa added that he would be working closely with the Commissioner's office to expedite the required paperwork needed by ANF to continue the regulatory process. He reported that the District Managers have done an excellent job reaching out to their constituents in their districts and reaching people who had a range of comments. The Director stressed that anyone who wants to comment from today on the proposed fees can do so; the public does not need to wait for the public hearings. He stated that he fully recognizes the agency's need for other revenue streams, adding that the model for funding wildlife conservation in this country is 100 years old and is broken. He and his staff are working on that and recognize that sportsmen can no longer carry the whole weight.

Set Meeting Date

Members discussed dates for the March Fisheries and Wildlife Board meeting. Members selected Tuesday, March 23, at 9:00 a.m.

The members also scheduled the April meeting, on April 23, 2021; 9:00 a.m. Vice Chair Roche moved that staff should try to schedule a public hearing on that date to finalize the 2021-2022 Migratory Bird Hunting seasons. Mr. Durand seconded the motion.

Director Tisa reported that the meetings to establish the federal migratory bird frameworks were still being conducted and that Assistant Director for Wildlife Mike Huguenin would present the federal frameworks and the outlines of the Massachusetts proposed seasons and bag limits at the March meeting, to give plenty of time for comments before the proposed April hearing.

Chair Larson called for a vote on the April hearing date.

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.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee Report

The Chair reported that the Advisory Committee had agreed to schedule their meetings four time a year and that it has not had a meeting since the start of the year.

He also reported that the agency has received from the Mass Department of Revenue a distribution of donors to the Natural Heritage Fund based on the donors' zip codes, after assistance from Mr. Durand, to know where these donors live and where in the state there may be room for improvement and more targeted outreach. The Chair added that he hopes the data will provide leads in engaging donors and maintaining donations over time.

Member's Comments

Mr. Foster expressed his approval of Director Tisa's repeated use of the word 'backbone' when describing the role of sportsmen and -women in MassWildlife's programs, and he thanked the sportsmen for all their work throughout the year.

Mr. Durand stated that he wanted to thank the sportsmen and -women of the Commonwealth for participating in the information sessions and for their comments.

Vice Chair Roche stated that he agreed the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation is broken, as the Director had stated, and said that the state needs to be creative and look for effective ways to fund the agency's vital and popular programs. He stated that the first step is to pass a fee increase, but work needs to be done to modernize conservation funding.

Secretary Booth added that MassWildlife is very fortunate to have the Worcester Telegram and Gazette, whose outdoor reporter Mark Blasis wrote an excellent recent article on the need for the license increase.

Mr. Sears stated that he also wanted to recognize the volunteers that help with our programs and repeated Ms. Booth's shout-out to the outdoor writers in the state, including Gene Chague in the Berkshires and others in the western and eastern parts of the state. He stated he was grateful for the great work everyone is doing to get the word out on MassWildlife's programs and activities.

A motion was made by Vice Chair Roche to move into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing certain land acquisitions and to not return to open session. 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 Joh Regosin presented two proposed acquisitions, which were each reviewed and both unanimously approved by the Board.

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 February meeting packets

January Agenda

Spreadsheet of Natural Heritage Fund Taxpayer Donations (1992 to 2019)

Documentation for the executive session