



MASSWILDLIFE

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, Jon Regosin/Deputy Director, Mike Huguenin/Assistant Director/Wildlife, Eve Schlüter/Assistant Director/NHESP, Trina Moruzzi/Assistant Director/Operations, Nicole McSweeney/Assistant Director/Outreach and Education, Todd Richards, Assistant Director/Fisheries, 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, Meghan Crawford/Community Engagement Biologist, Jennifer Sulla/General Counsel/DFG, Christine Smith/Asst. General Counsel/DFG, Anne Gagnon/DFG Land Agent/Northeast Wildlife District, Captain Scott Amati/OLE. PUBLIC: Dave Morin, Chris Borghatti, Steve Larivee, Liz Magner, Chris Giglio

DATE: February 21, 2023

LOCATION: MassWildlife Field Headquarters, Westborough

Chair Sears opened the monthly business meeting at 9:00 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Durand to approve the minutes from both the December and January meetings as presented. The motion was seconded by Dr. Organ; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Chair's Comments

Chair Sears offered his thanks to the staff in Fisheries in the Western District for help with issues related to drawdowns and herbiciding of lakes and ponds. He reported that the staff has been very helpful with efforts to investigate and understand the effects of drawdowns in lakes and ponds.

He also reported that the Berkshire County League's Conte Awards banquet is being held on April 22.

Deputy Director's Comments

Deputy Director Regosin thanked Ms. Ellsworth for quotes she had provided to the writer in the Daily Hampshire *Gazette* in defense of doing commercial harvesting for habitat on MassWildlife lands. He reported that most of the article referred to DCR and that the Boston *Globe* is running a poll on the issue of commercial harvesting on public land. There followed a brief discussion of recent assaults on the wood products industries and the benefits of habitat management.

The Deputy Director also reported that several MassWildlife staff had recently been acknowledged in the state's Performance Recognition Program, including Chief of Regulatory Review Jesse Leddick, Regulatory Review Assistant Melany Cheeseman, and the entire team behind the Adelante! fishing outreach program.

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Law Enforcement Comments

Captain Scott Amati of the Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) reported OHV enforcement actions in Western Massachusetts. He also reported that OLE's awards committee had announced its awards for OLE officers for the previous year, including several lifesaving awards. Captain Amati also reported a lull in activity due to the weather. Regarding OLE's recent efforts to hire additional personnel, the Captain reported that there are 14 slots to be filled, the interviews begin at the end of March, and background checks would be shortly. OLE hopes to have its candidates enter the police academy by August.

Personnel Report (Nicole McSweeney)

Assistant Director of Outreach and Education McSweeney presented the Board with the hiring manager's recommendation for the position indicated below, including highlights of the candidate's qualifications and experience.

New Hire

<i>Employee</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Location</i>
Courtney Nicolson	Outreach and Marketing Coordinator Game Biologist III	Westborough

Vice Chair Durand moved to accept the personnel report as presented. Dr. Organ seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Chair Sears suggested that new employees be encouraged to attend the next monthly business meeting after they start, to meet the Board members.

2023-2024 Migratory Game Bird Hunting Seasons (Michael Huguenin)

Assistant Director for Wildlife Michael Huguenin gave the Board members a brief PowerPoint that outlined the staff's projections and expected recommendations for the 2023-2024 migratory bird hunting seasons. Mr. Huguenin reported that the Atlantic Flyway Council meetings would not be held until later in the month (February), but that staff was confident of about 90% of the expected federal frameworks that would determine what was possible in Massachusetts. He stated that, if the request for a public hearing on the matter was received, he and other MassWildlife staff would develop the regulations draft as quickly as possible and submit it to the necessary authorities for approval. Once approval was received, staff would forward the draft regulations to the Board members and advertise them widely to the public for comments. Mr. Huguenin stated that he would present the federal frameworks and the final staff recommendations, after consideration of all comments received, at the public hearing.

Mr. Durand moved that the Board approve the proposals, instruct staff to create regulations based on them, and take them to a public hearing as soon as possible; Dr. Organ seconded the motion.

After a brief discussion, the vote in favor of drafting regulations based on the proposals was unanimous.

Western Wildlife District Overview (Andrew Madden)

Western Wildlife District Manager Andrew Madden began by referencing the detailed presentations that have already been made to the Board by Joe Rogers, the Connecticut Valley District Manager, and Todd Olanyk, the Central District Manager, stating that he believed the Board already had a very good understanding of the core functions of the Districts and their collective basic operations, so, like Northeast District Manager Pat Huckery and Southeast District Manager Jason Zimmer at previous meetings, he had structured his presentation on the Western District by skipping over the basic

operations and instead focusing on his staff and on some of the more interesting, unique, and important projects and activities in the Western District.

Beginning with a number of photos of some of the more picturesque wildlife management areas in the Western District, Mr. Madden introduced his staff. Starting with himself, Mr. Madden reported that his MassWildlife origin story began in 1999, when he was hired as the Western District Fisheries Biologist. At that time, he was the youngest employee by more than 10 years. Fast forward 23 years and he's at least 10 years older than almost all the staff. During that time, the Western District has relocated its offices, turned over the staff entirely, and greatly increased its technological and scientific capabilities.

He then introduced Peter Milanese, the DFG Land Agent of 38 years. Although Mr. Milanese is a DFG employee, Mr. Madden reported that he is closely integrated with the District staff. Mr. Milanese has been involved with the protection of nearly 50,000 acres in the District, and he has orchestrated five of the seven landscape partnership projects in the state. He knows every parcel in every town and will be a huge loss when he decides to move on to his next chapter.

District Clerk Debra Lipa has been with MassWildlife for 8 years and is the hub of the District wheel. In addition to her excellent public service to walk-in and phone customers, she does procurement, federal aid narratives, vehicle tracking, and much more. Nothing alters District operations more than when the Clerk is on vacation or otherwise out of the office, and Mr. Madden reported that that is certainly true in Ms. Lipa's case.

Jacob Morris-Siegel started working in the Western District as a Wildlife Technician 16 years ago and was promoted to Stewardship Biologist when those positions were created. Mr. Morris-Siegel is an avid caver, which has been very helpful for the District's bat work. Mr. Morris-Siegel has advanced technically to the point where he is the go-to GIS person for the District. He also works closely with Mr. Milanese on land acquisition and research.

Nathan Buckhout has been in the Western District for about 7 years as its Wildlife Biologist. He started with MassWildlife in 2014 in the same position in the Southeast District before transferring out west. Working with Furbearer and Black Bear Project Leader David Wattles, Mr. Buckhout has greatly increased the Western District's participation in bear research and monitoring. He is also the District's best animal wrangler. In addition, Mr. Buckhout has a great rapport with the public, which has been important in dealing with some challenging bear issues in recent years.

Leanda Fontaine has been with MassWildlife for 18 years and has been the Aquatic Biologist in the Western District for 7. Before joining the Western staff, Ms. Fontaine worked in the Westborough Fisheries Section, having started as a Wildlife Technician in Westborough in 2005. She helps with all aspects of District activities, aquatic and terrestrial. Ms. Fontaine is the go-to person for fish identification, is excellent with the public at stocking and fishing events, and is a great representative for the agency.

Ray Bressette has been with MassWildlife for 6 years as a Wildlife Technician in the Western District. He is an avid hunter and angler, and his passion for those activities comes through when he is interacting with the public and has provided an important perspective on regulatory discussions in the District. Mr. Madden stated that Mr. Bressette probably knows every oak ridge and bass pond in the District.

Eli Pease has been a Wildlife Technician in the Western District for 3 years. Mr. Pease began working for the Western District as an AFS Hutton fellow as a high school senior. After college, he worked for Kentucky Fish and Game, Pennsylvania Fish and Game, and the Franklin Land Trust before joining the MassWildlife staff as a full-time employee. Mr. Pease has great enthusiasm for all hunting and has taken

many new hunters out for the first time. He also volunteers his time to teach youth turkey hunting in Rhode Island.

Heather Sadler has been with MassWildlife for 15 years as a Wildlife Technician, most of that time with the Sunderland Hatchery. She transferred to the Western District 1 year ago and Mr. Madden reported that she has been an excellent addition to the staff. Ms. Sadler is fearless about trying new things and is game for any District activity. She has also provided important perspective and mentorship for some of the younger staff.

Colby Kellogg-Youndt has been a Wildlife Technician in the Western District for 6 months, since September 2022. She has blended in quickly and brings a practical and thoughtful approach to the job. Ms. Kellogg-Youndt has a lot of valuable skills and Mr. Madden hopes to keep her on his team for a long time.

Mr. Madden then discussed some of the focal points of his team's work in the Western District. Land protection is always a focus in the Districts, and Western staff regularly conducts site visits and coordinates between acquisition and stewardship activities. Western has over 67,000 acres among its WMAs and WCEs, with 18 of both types of property exceeding 1,000 acres. Staff also puts a lot of time into outreach, including focusing staff energy and attention to give volunteer interns from a number of Massachusetts colleges some valuable field experience. Western also has its own paraplegic deer hunt, a favorite event for staff that is very fulfilling and fun. Lake and pond issues also command the attention of Western staff, as do the partnerships staff has formed with other state and regional organizations to improve land protection, public access, and community relations. Another important project is the monitoring of bat hibernacula, of which there are many in the Western District, and bat populations generally. Mr. Madden's news was mostly sobering in this regard, with very small remaining populations of most native bats after the decimation of white-nose syndrome. Some of the hibernacula work includes conducting winter surveys, securing the entrances to the mines and caves to protect them from intrusion, and installing temperature and humidity sensors to better understand the underground conditions.

Mr. Madden then detailed several interesting and important projects that are ongoing in the Western District, including its work in loon conservation. Staff has established the first successful Berkshire County nesting pair on a loon raft and is cooperating with the Biodiversity Research Institute in Portland, Maine, on a loon translocation project. Bears are another full-time project in the Western District, and Mr. Madden reported that his staff monitors its collared females and conducts den-site visits during the winter, in addition to the almost constant outreach and education staff conducts to keep the residents and seasonal visitors informed about best practices for keeping bears wild and out of people's yards, dumpsters, and homes.

This brought Mr. Madden to a brief discussion of some of the challenges Western District staff faces, including rapid response to questions about and problems with wildlife in communities, and he showed a sampler of photos of the various animals that have been brought to or rescued by District staff, including turtles, red fox, lynx, and raptors. Some of these require transport to Tufts or transfer to wildlife rehabilitators. LART [large animal response team] calls are another District challenge and typically involve bear and moose that need to be harassed away from properties or anesthetized and transported. These are coordinated with local, state, and environmental police and with Wildlife staff from the Field Headquarters. Challenges brought Mr. Madden back to discussing bears and recent strides made in working closely with some towns to establish local ordinances against the intentional and unintentional feeding or attracting of wildlife. Mr. Madden explained that these ordinances are

designed to address chronic problem individuals and business owners, in some cases, who either put out food for bears or don't secure trash and dumpsters against them.

Mr. Madden closed his presentation by emphasizing the critical role played by the District offices, which form the "backbone of the agency," performing core functions and implementing conservation programs, closely interacting with the public, providing public service well beyond MassWildlife's traditional constituents, and doing a little bit of everything almost every day. Mr. Madden commended District staff across the agency for stepping up and excelling during the pandemic, along with the staff of all the hatcheries.

After a short discussion, the Chair and Board members thanked Mr. Madden for his work and his informative report.

Confirm March Meeting Date

The members confirmed the date and time of the March meeting, which is March 30, 2023, at 9:00 a.m. Members also tabled the setting of the April meeting date and time until the Director could provide his input.

Member's Comment

Mr. Sisk reported several requests. He stated that the presentations from staff have been very helpful, and that he would like to understand how the budget works, including for land protection, and he'd like to see the agency's organizational chart. He also asked for an update on the Quinnepoet Dam removal; Assistant Director Richards stated that he would investigate, and that the project is mostly with the Division of Ecological Restoration.

Ms. Dyer reported that she had attended a Worcester County League meeting and was impressed by the diversity of clubs represented. She noted that Central District Manager Todd Olanyk's detailed report was very much appreciated by the attendees and was impressive. She asked about ways to put all the district League reports online, and an extended discussion ensued of ways to share all the information coming out of the Districts, with MassWildlife's traditional constituents and the wider public.

Mr. Foster commented that he would like the Board's meetings to again be on Zoom, including in the interests of possibly increasing public attendance.

Ms. Ellsworth reported that she had recently participated in a bear den survey trip, which she thoroughly enjoyed and found very affecting. She offered her thanks to Dr. Wattles and the other staff involved in the den site visit.

Dr. Organ reported the passing of Johnnie Benedetto, who is known well beyond Massachusetts as a trapper extraordinaire, expert woodsman, and passionate advocate for trapping and for conservation. He stated that Mr. Benedetto had a unique capability for communicating his passion for wildlife to hunter and trapper education students and the general public, and noted that, when agencies and conservation organizations had opportunities or needs to put forward a fur trapper to the general public, Mr. Benedetto was the first choice. His knowledge and love of animals came through strongly, and touched all he interacted with. Dr. Organ said he will be sorely missed. Vice Chair Durand moved that the meeting be adjourned in memory of Mr. Benedetto, given his lifelong role in conservation in Massachusetts and in the country. Dr. Organ seconded the motion. The vote in favor was unanimous.

Vice Chair Durand reported that he had provided another depredation presentation to the Massachusetts Sportsmen's Council, where it was well-received. He reported that the Worcester County and Essex County league banquets were both being held on April 25. Mr. Durand also stated that he had enjoyed the excellent presentations from staff.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Vice Chair Durand to close the open session in memory of Mr. Benedetto and open an Executive Session for the purpose of discussing proposed land acquisitions whose negotiations would be compromised by discussion in open session, and to not return to open session afterward. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sisk.

The vote was unanimous, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:00 a.m. in memory of Johnnie Benedetto.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernie Foster
Secretary

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

February agenda
Draft December and January business meeting minutes
Personnel report