



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, Bob Durand, Ernest W. Foster IV, Stephen Sears, Dr. Brandi Van Roo, 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, 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, Mark Reil, Bob Greco

DATE: January 14, 2021

LOCATION: Via Zoom Meeting

Chair Larson opened the meeting at 9:20 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Sears to accept the minutes from the December meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Foster.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Chair's Comments

Chair Larson reported that he had no comments at that time.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Amidon reported that he had been very busy with administrative matters. He also reported briefly on a matter that he thought Secretary Booth would appreciate when she learned of it: the Spenser Browning Pond access point is being worked on with OFBA [the Office of Fishing and Boating Access].

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Director's Comments

Director Tisa affirmed that that was great news from the Commissioner, that Browning Pond is very popular, and the improved access will be very welcome to anglers who like to fish that pond.

Law Enforcement Comments

The OLE's Lt. Col. David Loos stated that he was very happy to report no deer season accidents or serious incidents during December. Another bright spot in the previous month was when OLE was able to transfer some road-kill moose meat to the Wampanoag tribe on Martha's Vineyard. The Wampanoag are also able to get fish that are seized on the coast, but the moose meat was a novelty and very much appreciated. Lieutenant Colonel also reported that OLE is taking receipt of 12 new ATVs for enforcement and coastal patrols, and he stated that all the officers are signing up to take advantage of the COVID vaccine.

MassWildlife's Financial Outlook (Mark S. Tisa)

Vice Chair Roche reported that he was involved in the last public process regarding license fees, when then-director MacCallum and his staff proposed and got approval for license fee increases in 1995, effective 1996. He stated that when Director Tisa was appointed the Board identified a need to assess the financial status of the agency in detail, and a subcommittee was formed by the Chairman to assist the Director in looking at the agency's financial data, developing models for the future, and conducting a detailed analysis of what needed to be done. He reported that the Director's skill set was very important to the entire process because he was able to bring a lot of expertise. Vice Chair Roche stated that he felt it was a huge opportunity for the agency to move forward and was glad to be a part of it.

Speaking of the subcommittee he formed to work with Director Tisa, Chairman Larson stated that, as the senior Board member, Vice Chair Roche brought his long tenure with the Board and his experience of the previous process to the subcommittee. Secretary Booth is the representative for the state's largest county and provided very important input. Mr. Foster brought his business and financial experience to bear and also made significant contributions to the process. The Chairman agreed that when Director Tisa was appointed the Board was fortunate to have a Director with an M.B.A. and teaching experience in business administration. The Chairman also reported that the Director's initial analysis was deemed the best financial analysis of any agency that ANF [the Executive Office of Administration and Finance] had ever seen.

Director Tisa reported that the process that is being started is of tremendous importance to the agency, and very critical to the continued high quality of MassWildlife's future operations and programs. He thanked the members of the subcommittee for their hard work and participation in multiple meetings, pre-COVID, fortunately. The Director also thanked his key staff for many hours of hard work helping him prepare his report: Deputy Director Jon Regosin, CFO Kris McCarthy, Executive Assistant Susan Sacco, Marketing and Outreach Program Manager Nicole McSweeney, and Human Dimensions Project Leader Jody Simoes. He thanked Commissioner Amidon for his support and input throughout the process. Director Tisa stated that both he and the Commissioner are lifelong hunters and anglers, both grew up in Central Massachusetts, are the same age, and have the same passion for hunting, fishing, and shooting. He also reported that the Commissioner's strong ties with the sporting community was key and that he is arranging meetings with representatives from sportsmen's organizations across the state to gather their input on MassWildlife's programs and services and their views on a possible license increase.

Director Tisa reported that his analysis with the Board subcommittee and his staff indicates that a license fee increase is necessary. There has only been one increase in Massachusetts license fees in 40

years, and that was 25 years ago, in 1996. He pointed out that many things have changed in that time, and that MassWildlife has also greatly changed and expanded its programs and services in response to constituents' requests and emerging issues during those years. For example, the hatchery system has increased the size of the trout stocked, from under 50% at 12 inches or longer to over 70% at that size or better. The hatchery's need for a steady supply of cold, clean water has been secured with a pipeline directly from the depths of the Quabbin Reservoir, with resulting significant energy and overtime savings. MassWildlife's pheasant-stocking program is the best in New England, with more birds stocked than all the other states combined. Hunters have more days in the field with expanded seasons for deer, bear, turnkey, geese, and woodcock. The agency's holdings of Wildlife Management Areas has grown from 87,000 acres in 1996 to over 226,000 in FY 2020, and these lands require active management to maintain and improve the conserved habitat and stewardship to maintain the boundaries, improve signage, and protect the state's investment from encroachments.

The Director also reported that since 1996 MassWildlife has taken over the administration of the Hunter Education Program from the Massachusetts Environmental Police, has been given responsibility and authority to regulate for the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act, and has developed a number of youth skills programs. These include special hunt days and programs for pheasant, waterfowl, turkey, and deer hunting, as well as the National Archery in the Schools Program and Trout in the Classroom, which both introduce school children to skills and concepts in recreation, statistics, and biology. Learn-to-hunt programs and other adult skills programs have also been created or expanded to meet public demand for enriched experiences and species-specific skills.

MassWildlife has also taken advantage of the digital age by developing online tools to help hunters and anglers enrich their experiences, including with updated bathymetric pond maps for download, near-real-time trout stocking reports, and The MassWildlife Lands Viewer to scout for access to new and existing hunting and fishing areas. Ease of license-buying and harvest reporting has also been enhanced, moving to online platforms accessible on computers and smartphones.

Director Tisa then reviewed MassWildlife's revenue sources, noting that the significant majority of the agency's funding (\$16,885,500 in FY 2021) comes from the sale of hunting, fishing, and trapping licenses and of associated permits and stamps and from the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, also known as Federal Aid. The remaining revenue comes from a combination of MassWildlife's share of the gasoline tax, magazine sales, donations, and a small amount of money from the state's General Fund. He reported that the agency also receives revenue from the Land Stamp that is purchased with every license (approximately \$1 million per year) but noted that those monies can only be used for the acquisition of land and habitat, not for agency operations.

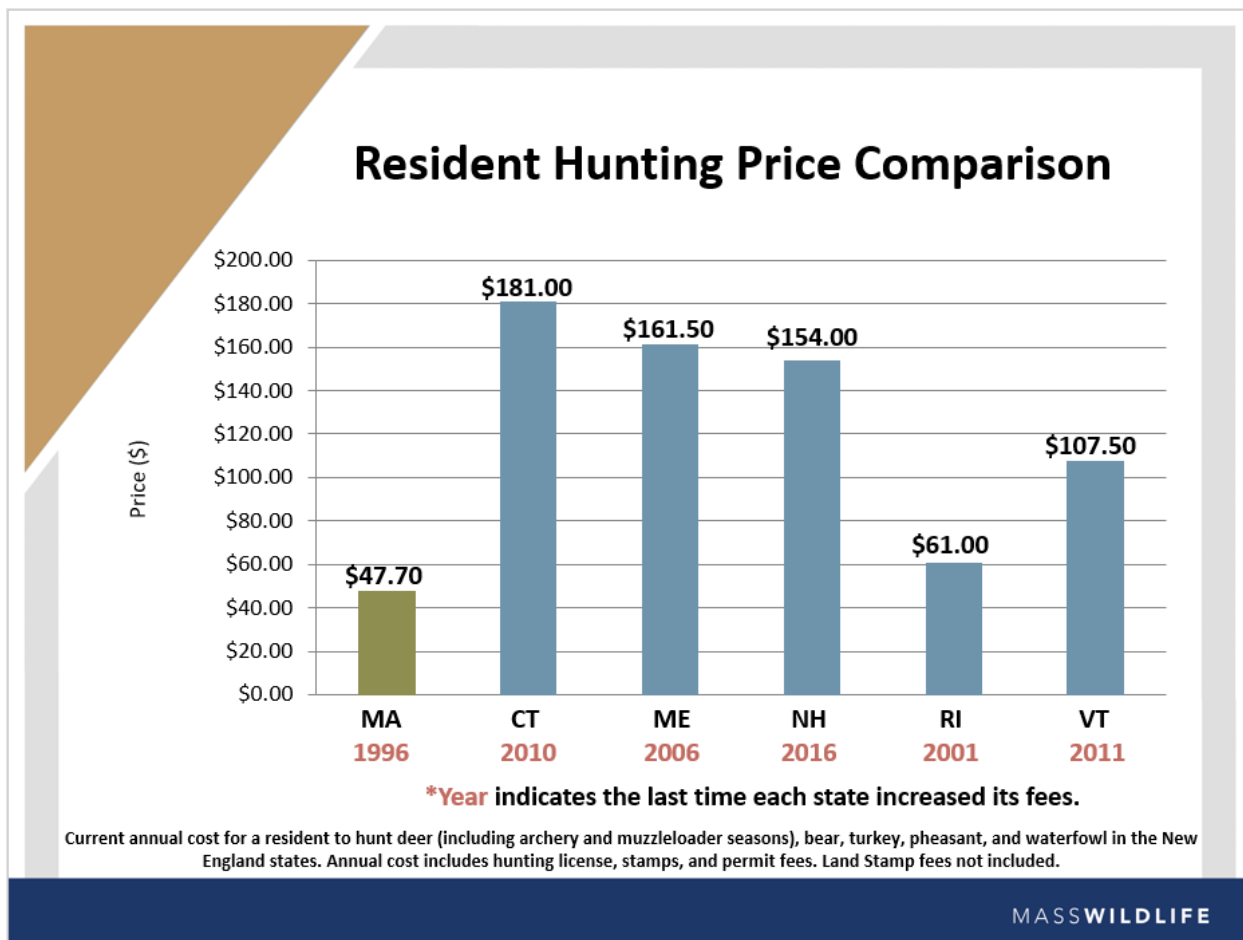
Turning to MassWildlife's expenses (\$18,400,000 in FY 2021), Director Tisa reported that 10% is spent for the administration of the agency's operations and programs, 33% on fisheries and wildlife management—the research and population management work of the agency; 14.5% on the trout and salmon hatchery system; 3% on the pheasant and quail stocking program; 11% on the work of land acquisition, stewardship, and habitat restoration; 6.5% on Information and Education, including the many skills and youth programs mentioned previously; 2% on the Hunter Education Program; and fully one-fifth or 20% of the agency's costs come from 'state-mandated' expenses, including collective bargaining adjustments, fringe, and payroll taxes. Director Tisa noted that MassWildlife as a state agency has no control over these added costs, which are increasing annually between 2.5% and 5%, depending on the year.

The Director reported that the challenge today is that agency's revenues are not meeting expenses and have not done for several years. There are several reasons for this: license and stamp fees have not

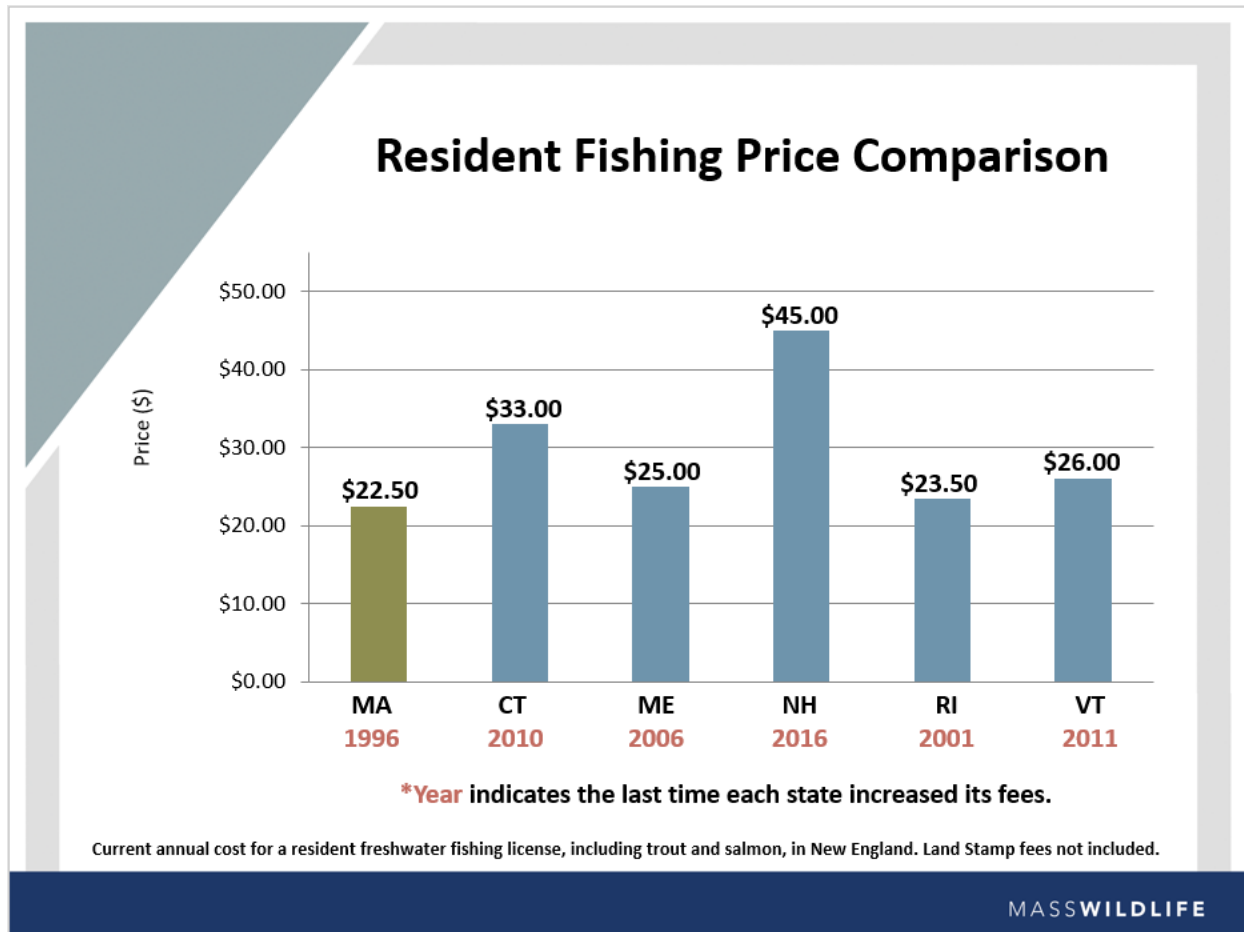
been increased in 25 years; the expanded programs and services and the increasing ‘state-mandated’ costs discussed earlier; declining license sales and the unrealized revenue from free licenses mandated by statute; and inflation since 1996, which has eroded the buying power of existing license fees. Director Tisa discussed each of these factors in detail, then reported that the cumulative effect of these factors over the past several years is resulting in the depletion of the agency’s ‘savings account,’ the Inland Fish and Game Fund. With current projections of flat revenues and the rising state-mandated costs, he reported that the Fund will be in a negative balance in FY 2025. These projections make it imperative that an appropriate level of license fee increases be instituted as soon as possible; ideally, effective in calendar year 2022.

For context, Director Tisa presented an analysis the agency has done to compare the current Massachusetts license, stamp, and permit fees to hunt and fish to those charged in the other New England states. The analysis found that Massachusetts has the lowest fees of all the New England states, especially when examined in an apples-to-apples comparison of the same seasons and species hunted or fished in all the states:

Current annual cost for a resident to hunt deer (including archery and muzzleloader seasons), bear, turkey, pheasant, and waterfowl in the New England states. Annual cost includes hunting license, stamps, and permit fees. Land Stamp fees not included.



Current annual cost for a resident freshwater fishing license, including trout and salmon, in New England. Land Stamp fees not included.



Director Tisa pointed out that all the other states have updated their fees more recently than Massachusetts and that many are considering further increases because they face the same challenges to revenue and expenditures that Massachusetts faces.

The Director stated that constituent support is vital to all the agency's actions. He advised the Board that he was planning to widely publicize and host three public information sessions on Zoom in early February, to report to interested members of the public about the agency's programs and finances and gather feedback about public satisfaction with MassWildlife's programs and services and the level of support for the idea of license fee increases. He said that after staff analyses the comments received, he and the Board subcommittee intend to present a proposed schedule of new fees to the Board and the public at the Board's February monthly meeting, and that he hoped to be authorized by ANF, the agency that sets fees in the Commonwealth, to conduct public hearings on the proposed fee schedule sometime this spring. He reiterated that any increases proposed will be calculated to close the revenue gap and that no increase was contemplated before 2022.

Vice Chair Roche made a motion to accept and endorse Director Tisa's report and direct him to hold the public information sessions that he recommended conducting in February. Dr. Van Roo seconded the motion.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Larson thanked the subcommittee members and Director Tisa and his staff for their work developing the analyses and the presentation, noting that the agency's finances will be of paramount importance in the coming months.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee Report

Chair Larson reported that the Advisory Committee is starting its protocol of four meetings a year and will decide at the meeting later the same day to set its meeting schedule for the year. It will also be open to scheduling additional meetings if and when needed by staff. The Chairman offered his thanks to Mr. Durand for offering to help try to secure zip codes for the state-tax-form donors to the Heritage Fund, to give the agency a more detailed view of where those donors are in order to target areas that may be underrepresented with information to encourage new donations.

Set Meeting Date

Members confirmed the Director's request for the February Fisheries and Wildlife Board meeting, scheduled for February 17, 2021, at 9:00 a.m.

So moved by Dr. Van Roo; seconded by Mr. Sears.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Member's Comments

Dr. Van Roo and Mr. Durand reported no comments.

Mr. Foster reported that he wanted to flag everyone's efforts to get the financial analysis right and stated that he thought this was the best meeting in a long time. He offered his congratulations to the Director and his staff for their excellent work.

Mr. Sears recognized MassWildlife staff and community members' efforts to pay attention to the lake drawdowns in the Western District. He stated that there is no regulatory control, but they are a big issue in Berkshire County and he appreciates the work of so many people to try to improve the situation.

Vice Chair Roche apologized for being late and reported that he had been hacked earlier in the week and thought that his computer was fixed but encountered another glitch when he tried to join the meeting.

A motion was made by Dr. Van Roo 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

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Session

Deputy Director Jon Regosin presented six proposed acquisitions, which were each reviewed and each unanimously approved by the Board.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:05 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonnie Booth
Secretary

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

January agenda

Draft December meeting minutes for review

OLE Calls for Service log: MassWildlife: 2020 Calendar Year

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

Documentation for the executive session