



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, Mark S. Tisa/Director, Tom O'Shea/Commissioner/DFG, Mike Huguenin/Assistant Director/Wildlife, Eve Schlüter/Assistant Director/NHESP, Nicole McSweeney/Assistant Director/Outreach and Education, Trina Moruzzi/Assistant Director/Operations, Todd Richards/Assistant Director/Fisheries, Todd Olanyk/Central Wildlife District Manager, Pat Huckery/Northeast Wildlife District Manager, Andrew Madden/Western Wildlife District Manager, Joe Rogers/Conn. Valley Wildlife District Manager, Susan Langlois/Hunter Education Administrator, Kurt Gaertner/Asst. Secretary for Environmental Policy/EEA, Major Kevin Clayton/OLE; PUBLIC: Steve LaRivee, Charles Lewis, Michael J. Veloza, Bill Napolitano, Jim Cardoza, Brian Bastarache, Kourtne Bailey

DATE: July 19, 2023

LOCATION: Bristol County Agricultural High School, Dighton, Massachusetts

Chair Sears opened the June meeting at 11:00 a.m. He reported that Mr. Sisk was participating on the phone until he could arrive at the meeting location.

Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Vice Chair Durand to approve the minutes from the June business meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Ms. Dyer; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Chair's Comments

Chair Sears reported that he has been hearing from many people for whom a Massachusetts bill, HB 4420, is very concerning. He encouraged all Board members to reach out to their respective representatives and senators and ask that the bill be dropped in its entirety because many aspects of the bill will negatively affect MassWildlife's R3 efforts. He stated that he would provide a copy of his own letter to the rest of the Board members. He also recommended that Board members reach out to their constituents to make them aware and ask them to speak out about the problems in the bill.

Director's Comments

Director Tisa reported that the public hearing to expand the Archery deer season across the state by 2 weeks has been scheduled for the afternoon of the August meeting in Westborough. He reported that the change, if approved, would not be effective this year because of the timing, and he highlighted this as an example of the way MassWildlife makes every effort to expand hunting opportunity whenever the science supports it.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Tom O'Shea reported that he was glad to be back in the Southeast, where he had been the District Manager earlier in his career. He had also recently been in the Southeast for an eagle banding on the Taunton River, and he lauded the restoration of that species as a great example of the

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work being done by MassWildlife. He also pointed out the northern red-bellied cooter headstarting program as another great example of MassWildlife's successful efforts to restore species, and noted that Bristol County Agricultural High School is a great partner that has been and is raising cooters for release.

The Commissioner also reported that while he was on vacation in Maine several boating access sites were flooded and that most are still underwater, so he has been working with EEA to assess the damage and allocate resources to restore the affected sites. He cautioned that there is more to come as the state is still in the same weather pattern, and also with ongoing climate-change impacts.

Commissioner O'Shea reported that MassWildlife had sent two firefighters to Canada, and that he attended the send-off of the interagency crew with Commissioner Arrigo of DCR. He applauded the deployments as an excellent example of staff volunteering to work to help neighbors as well as performing the work they do in Massachusetts. In the context of climate change, our firefighters are working with prescribed fire to restore habitats that are appropriate and sustainable for the region. The Commissioner noted the paradox that fire can be destructive but is also restorative in the context of wildlife habitat.

The Commissioner also reported that he, the division directors, and his staff have identified the six priorities he had mentioned developing at the last meeting. The priorities support the major themes that he will be working on, including climate adaptation work, connecting to EJ [environmental justice] communities, and building the scale and impact of DFG's divisions across the department. He stated that Secretary Tepper was very supportive of using a strategic-plan format to flesh out the work. Other priorities were supporting the EEA's forest-climate initiative, given the number and reach of our WMAs. He was currently working on ways to work together among the divisions and to lay out a roadmap, and he stated that he would keep the Board informed on progress.

Law Enforcement Comments

Major Kevin Clayton of the Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) reported an uptick in the number of water-related fatalities, especially along the Connecticut River. He stated that OFBA [DFG's Office of Fishing and Boating Access] is communicating with OLE about the state of various ramps and localized changes to regulations related to temporary no-wake zones in some areas. The Major reported that he will be asking for publicity assistance to alert the public about ramp closures and temporary no-wake zones. Noting that the large amount of debris and silt is impeding OLE's ability to offer assistance, Major Clayton reported that his officers were monitoring the ongoing significant public-safety issues.

Major Clayton provided the Board with an overview of actions connected to the current hunting and other recreational seasons and activities; a detailed report of recent OLE activities, including fish-and-wildlife-related examples of calls for service that Environmental Police officers had responded to in the previous month; and the outlines of ongoing and recently completed investigations. He stated that fire will be an increasing problem with climate change and that the OLE and departments need to be more attentive to it. He reported he was considering tabletop exercises on what to expect and how to respond to problems that may occur.

On the personnel front, the Major stated that OLE had recruited 15 new officers and that the police academy for the recruits would start the following month.

Personnel Report (Eve Schlüter and Nicole McSweeney)

Assistant Director for NHESP Dr. Eve Schlüter reported a new hire recommended by the hiring manager.

<u>Employee</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Location</u>
Alec Kaisand	NHESP GIS Manager Conservation Biologist III	Westborough

Mr. Durand made a motion to accept the personnel report as submitted; second: Dr. Organ; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Assistant Director for Outreach and Education Nicole McSweeney also reported a new-hire recommendation.

<u>Employee</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Location</u>
Marlena Timins	Field Headquarters Clerk Clerk IV	Westborough

Mr. Durand made a motion to accept the personnel report as submitted; second: Mr. Foster; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Forests as Climate Solutions (Kurt Gaertner)

Kurt Gaertner, Assistant Secretary for Environmental Policy in the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA), began by reviewing the extent and types, by managing agency, of the over 525,375 acres of state-owned forest lands in Massachusetts, which include MassWildlife's WMAs, the DCR's State Parks and Forests, and the DCR's Water Supply Protection lands.

Assistant Secretary Gaertner then provided an overview of the Forests as Climate Solutions initiative, which was unveiled in early June by EEA in an informational meeting for statewide lands conservation partners, as was reported by Director Tisa and Chair Sears at the June meeting.

Assistant Secretary Gaertner reported that the Forests as Climate Solutions initiative grew out of four foundational documents that are now elements of the initiative, starting with the Governor's campaign climate platform involving forestry positions. The Governor had pledged to establish Strategic Forest Reserves to provide [ecosystem services] and preserve our matured forests to draw down carbon. She had also pledged to establish a Forest Protection Program that will provide enhanced incentives to willing private landowners to keep their trees growing rather than harvesting them. The program will reward private landowners who manage their forests for reducing emissions over each harvest cycle, including by increasing intervals between harvests, conserving the oldest mature trees, protecting soil carbon during harvest, and other improved harvesting and management practices. Finally, Governor Healey said she would place a temporary moratorium on commercial harvesting on state-owned public forest land and within the first year develop and implement a science-based state forest management plan that accounts for the impacts of climate change on our forest resources and the role our forests can play in protecting the climate.

The Assistant Secretary said the initiative is also incorporating data and work already done, including for the 2050 Clean Energy and Climate Plan, which had five key forestry-related recommendations: Protect 40% of the Commonwealth's land by 2050 (currently 27% is protected); expand the protection, management, and restoration of natural and working lands and their capacity to remove and store carbon; incentivize sustainable forest management practices that will allow us to produce forest products over the long term; encourage the use of more durable forest products from local forests; and create a Forest Viability Program to strengthen local sawmills and the forest economy.

Also incorporated is the Resilient Lands Initiative, with its recommendation to protect and improve the quality of life for Massachusetts residents through land conservation, restoration, and stewardship initiatives that conserve and enhance the health of forests, farms, and soils. And the Healthy Soils Action Plan, which provides an assessment of the condition of Massachusetts soils and a blueprint for how to protect and properly manage soils to support thriving ecosystems and communities. The Assistant Secretary reported that the team will use and build on these documents as they work toward forests as climate solutions.

Assistant Secretary Gaertner discussed the reasons Massachusetts manages and harvests timber from its three types of public land, and he noted that a tiny fraction of the total acres is harvested each year, or approximately 1,450 acres out of 525,375+ total acres. He reported that, as of the June 5 meeting when the initiative was announced, the state will pause active forest management on state forest land for 6 months. During the pause, to ensure future land management decisions fully account for climate mitigation and resilience, the EEA is developing and will follow an updated set of climate-oriented forest management guidelines; only already-contracted and public-safety projects meeting established exemption criteria will proceed during the pause. EEA will issue new climate-oriented guidelines to be used for all state forest management projects. Mr. Gaertner stressed that future forest management project review will resume after the six months, starting again December 5, which will allow a reasonable but fixed period for guideline development.

Mr. Gaertner highlighted some key action plan items. EEA will expeditiously develop, in consultation with a select group of outside experts and through a public process, climate-oriented management guidelines that it will implement and promote; it will apply the updated management guidelines to state forest management projects and to incentives for private and municipal landowners; and affirm that state forest management projects follow the updated guidelines before they proceed.

In an effort to reduce forest land conversion and increase permanent forest land conservation, the Commonwealth will strategically conserve additional forest land to permanently preclude conversion and improve land use to minimize forest loss. Key actions will include implementing the Resilient Lands Initiative to guide land conservation and related efforts of the state and other entities, with a focus on policies, programs, and investments that conserve forest land. EEA will also provide the resources to realize the Clean Energy and Climate Plan's objective of protecting 30% of Massachusetts by 2030 and 40% by 2050, much of that land to be forested. The secretariat will also set, and commit to attaining, goals for forest land conservation (currently ~35% of forest land is protected); and reduced land conversion (e.g., by 2030 reduce the conversion rate by 50%). To achieve these goals, EEA will engage stakeholders about its land conservation/use goals and strategies; enhance EEA land conservation and land use programs; partner with landowners, land trusts, and municipalities; and pursue complementary policies (e.g., solar siting).

Mr. Gaertner stressed that this is a broad initiative; it started from the Governor's mandate but added many other aspects. Regarding reserves, he said they are also looking at private ownerships as part of the total reserves, given the large percentage of forested private land, and intend to actively acquire land with the specific intention of adding it to reserves.

Mr. Gaertner then outlined the specifics of the process EEA has initiated for developing the forest management guidelines, land conservation and reserve expansion, landowner incentives, and forestry business assistance. He reported parallel efforts for implementation simultaneous with public engagement starting in FY 2024 and stated that EEA will look to have its action items funded and in place before FY 2025.

After a brief discussion, the chair and Board members thanked Assistant Secretary Gaertner for his time and expertise in explaining this new EEA initiative.

Hunter Education Program Review (Susan Langlois)

Hunter Education Program Administrator Susan Langlois presented a review of MassWildlife's Hunter Education Program (MHEP). She reported that the mission is to protect the lives and safety of the public, promote the wise management and ethical use of our wildlife resource, and encourage a greater appreciation of the environment through education. At the same time, MHEP's role is to coordinate and administer courses statewide in accordance with EEA's Office of Law Enforcement (OLE), the International Hunter Education Association (IHEA), and state standards. It must meet the law, Chapter 131 section 14, which dictates IHEA standard course content and a minimum 12 hours of instruction. Ms. Langlois noted that meeting the IHEA standards is important because hunter education certificates are valid anywhere in North America to be eligible to purchase a hunting license, and maintaining that reciprocity is a high priority. The MHEP trains and certifies its instructors and must maintain quality courses that are available in all areas of the Commonwealth. The MHEP also issues and maintains student records and promotes its courses to the public.

Ms. Langlois explained that the MHEP is conducted according to an MOU with the OLE, which investigates and reports hunting accidents and whose officers may present the Massachusetts laws and regulations at courses. The bulk of the courses are conducted by a corps of volunteer instructors, who number about 325 per year and typically serve as instructors for 10.5 years.

There are six courses offered by the MHEP in the course of a year. Two are mandated: Basic Hunter Education and Trapper Education, both condoned by the IHEA and the AFWA [Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies]. Four additional courses are offered that are considered advanced disciplines: Bow Hunter Education; Black Powder (muzzleloader) Education; Waterfowl Identification and Hunting; and Map, Compass & Survival. The vast majority of courses offered each year are the Basic Hunter Education, since that is mandated and in relatively high demand compared to the others. Ms. Langlois explained that there are three learning formats accepted by the IHEA. In-Person (traditional) formats are conducted all in classrooms (face-to-face) for the entire course. Blended formats are a mix of home study (online) and in-class instruction. The third format is pursued fully online as self-study, which means the students complete the entire course on their own. While the MHEP is investigating and would like to offer a fully online option for its students who want it, Ms. Langlois noted that there are obstacles to doing that in the statute that have to be addressed first.

Ms. Langlois also explained what's involved in the administration of the MHEP, including the customized database it uses to track students through the process, from first inquiry about taking a course through being issued a certificate of completion. Emphasis is placed on meeting demand for courses across the state, which involves a lot of coordination among instructor teams, venues, and students. Ms. Langlois provided an analysis of levels of demand for courses, seats available, and seats filled, showing that there are normally enough seats provided to meet demand, so other factors are preventing the filling of all available courses, including a high percentage of no-shows among those who register for courses. She provided the demographics of Massachusetts students, including by age, gender (including a small percentage of students who identify as nonbinary), and ethnicity. Ms. Langlois also named and discussed the roles of the staff of the MHEP, noting that all the full-time employees are highly experienced and vital to the success of the program, while four seasonal staff provide fill-in for areas of the state where there are no volunteers teams and therefore no course offerings and for teams who are short on instructors for various reasons.

Ms. Langlois summarized her report by noting that the MHEP is meeting course demand, offering a variety of format options to meet student needs, and pursuing a fully self-taught option to increase accessibility, and will continue to use data to improve the student experience while maintaining internationally recognized standards for course content and delivery.

After a brief discussion, the Chair and Board members thanked Ms. Langlois for her work and her informative report.

Hunter Education Working Group Update

Mr. Foster announced that the next meeting of the working group would be on July 27 and that it would be open to the public via a Zoom webinar. The working group has surveyed Hunter Education instructors and will review that information. He reported that he had spoken to [former Board member] Mike Roche, who has taught Hunter Education for decades and who noted that education has changed radically in past 30 years, and course formats need to adapt and have been adapting. Courses are best taught by professional educators; it's one thing to tell hunting stories, another to be an educator. MassWildlife has a workshop for new instructors, but new instructors also need seasoned leaders. Mr. Foster stated he was impressed to find out that instructors will even read exam questions if needed to help their students. He reported that he will bring suggestions out of the working group's discussions.

Confirm August Meeting Date

The members confirmed the date and time of the August business meeting, which is August 15, 2023, at 10:00 a.m., at the MassWildlife Field Headquarters in Westborough, with an option for the public to join on Zoom. The public hearing on 321 CMR 3.02 (Unified Archery Deer Seasons) is confirmed at 1:00 p.m., the same day, location, and Zoom link.

The Chair asked the Board and decided to hold a discussion meeting at 12:00 p.m. on the same date.

Members discussed September 13, 2023, at 1:00 p.m., in Westborough, for the September meeting.

Members' Comments

Mr. Sisk stated that the presentations were eye-opening and interesting. He also wondered whether, with all the recent rain, field surveys are being impacted, and was informed that stream surveys, in particular, have had to be paused because of dangerously high water.

Ms. Dyer reported that she had attended a National Wild Turkey Federation leadership training. She represented Massachusetts and reported that she heard over and over from other participants about quality of the MHEP and Massachusetts' hunting programs generally. She reported that the South has lower turkey recruitment than the Northeast does, so there are different programs to increase the hatch. She also stated that she saw an interesting presentation about the younger generation and their learning and experiential preferences, so she was glad to see that the MHEP was seeking to incorporate them. She offered more detailed information to anyone interested. She also offered an observation about the MHEP, thinking that it could target millennials with programming they want and then they bring their families with them. She also reported that she has organized a ladies' night with a panel of women outdoor enthusiasts hosted by the National Wild Turkey Federation's Women in the Outdoors Program on August 8 at the Stone Cow Brewery in Barre focused on all things hunting and outdoors. MassWildlife is helping to promote the event in its calendar.

Mr. Foster reported that he had appreciated the Commissioner's opening remarks.

Mr. Durand reported he would be attending a Central District New England Brittany Club outing during the coming weekend.

Ms. Ellsworth congratulated staff on its publicity for a rare butterfly found at Montague Plains.

Dr. Organ reported a contact for providing Board training and said he would follow up with the Director and the Chair.

Mr. Sears thanked the Director and staff for developing a concise PowerPoint for the Board members to use to speak to legislators and advocate for MassWildlife. He also thanked the Bristol Agricultural High School for hosting the meeting in its beautiful LEEDS building and offered his thanks to staff for all the great work.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Durand to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Foster. The vote in favor was unanimous, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernie Foster
Secretary

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

July agenda

Draft June business meeting minutes

Personnel Report

Email from Mr. Kevin Duggan to the members of the Fisheries and Wildlife Board regarding proposed firearm legislation pending in the Massachusetts Legislature

Email from Mr. Don Shebell to the members of the Fisheries and Wildlife Board regarding proposed firearm legislation pending in the Massachusetts Legislature