



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, Bonnie Booth/Secretary, Bob Durand, Ernest W. Foster IV, Dr. Brandi Van Roo, Mark S. Tisa/Director, Jon Regosin/Deputy Director, Michael Huguenin/Assistant Director/Wildlife, Martin Feehan/Deer and Moose Project Leader, Jim Pollock/Facilities Coordinator, Capt. Scott Amati/OLE; PUBLIC: Liz Wagner, Dave Morin

DATE: June 18, 2021

LOCATION: MassWildlife Field Headquarters, Westborough

Chair Larson opened the meeting at 9:05 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Foster to accept the minutes from the May meeting as presented. 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. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Chair's Comments

Chairman Larson reported that it was very nice to be meeting in person again and that he was looking forward to being able to travel around the state for meetings sometime in the future.

Director Tisa reported that with the rescheduling of the June meeting Commissioner Amidon had a conflicting commitment and would not be attending.

Director's Comments

Director Tisa reported that the Governor has signed the legislation that was passed to allow remote participation in public meetings until April 2022. He stated that he also understands that further legislation that will allow for virtual meetings permanently is being considered.

Director Tisa reported that he had recently led a discussion with other state directors and industry representatives about the effects of the pandemic on state fish and wildlife agency outreach and R3 efforts. He posited the question: What if we could bring the country to a stop and the only thing you can do is go outside? Just a short time ago, this scenario was unthinkable, but it suddenly happened. The discussion had included statistics from I&E sections about participation rates. The Director reported that

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where states saw bumps in license sales across the country, fish and wildlife agencies know they can't take that for granted but must continue to fight for those customers. Director Tisa stated that our customers are everyone who enjoys the outdoors. In that sense, MassWildlife must continue to think more like a business: How can we give more value to our customers and make things more and more convenient for them? Any forms of restrictions are our enemies, in terms of serving our customers. State fish and wildlife agencies must be careful: we've tapped into a new group of constituents that we must continue to engage and make it easier for them to participate in their new pursuits.

Vice Chair Roche stated that the Director could provide a report of where and who we are as an agency, post-pandemic: how MassWildlife looks now and how it will do its work going forward. Director Tisa reported that we are still very transitional right now and nothing will be settled out before the end of the year. The pandemic and the agency's response to it are ongoing and constantly evolving, and Director Tisa stated that the staff doesn't know enough about the state's responses to make any detailed plans.

Chair Larson reported a conversation he had had years ago with Gige Darey. The former Chair had said that MassWildlife's priorities are three: first: the health of the resources in its trust; second: the public at large, because the people ultimately own the resource in common; and third, the sportsmen, who have made very special contributions since the 1930s, including to the conservation of migratory birds, conservation funding, and active wildlife population management.

Director Tisa remind the Board that the three public hearings were upcoming the following week on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, June 22-24, 2021, at 6:30 p.m., noting that the full revised license fee proposals and all the meeting information are online.

Law Enforcement Comments

The OLE's Captain Scott Amati reported that Law Enforcement has restarted the trainings it offers to the public, including boating and ATV safety. Public Relations events are also restarted, and he reported that these demands are having a huge impact on stretched resources.

Capt. Amati also reported on recent animal issues. The OLE has seen an exponential increase in bear complaints. The radio room is receiving between 5 and 10 a day, and he has never seen anything like it. He noted that, as is usual, 95% of the problems are people-caused; it's not a problem with the bears. He also reported that 3 bears and 2 moose had been road-killed recently and there has been a Bald Eagle rehabilitation spike, mostly concerned with fledglings. The OLE is also receiving continual snake calls in this period (all milk snakes). OLE is also helping MassWildlife with bringing permitted rehabilitators into compliance and there have been some recent white-water rafting incidents.

The Captain also reported that the OLE's Task Forces are in full gear to train local law enforcement to help with patrols of the Connecticut, Quinsigamond, and Merrimack rivers, noting some striper issues at the Lawrence Dam. He also outlined several recent issues and complaints of interest to the Board.

2020 Deer Review and 2021 Antlerless Deer Permit Allocation (Michael Huguenin)

Assistant Director for Wildlife Mike Huguenin introduced MassWildlife's new Deer and Moose Project Leader, Martin Feehan, who had started in his position during the month, and provided an outline of the coming presentation. He briefly reviewed MassWildlife's approach to deer management in Massachusetts and reported on the 2020 deer harvest and trends, breaking out the western and central regions (zones 1-9) and the eastern region (zones 10-14) and discussing them separately.

After his 2020 harvest analyses, which included record or near-record harvests in the respective seasons, Mr. Huguenin reported the staff recommendations for the 2021 Antlerless Deer Permit

Allocations, which, as he discussed throughout the presentation, do not propose any changes to the antlerless deer permit allocations from the 2020 season. This is because changes were made over the several years before and including 2019 to stabilize deer numbers statewide, and staff wants to see how the deer population trends continue to be affected by those changes over the next few years.

Dr. Van Roo observed that staff hasn't recently discussed impacts of the harvest beyond the health of the deer populations, such as habitat impacts from over-browsing. She stated that she would be interested to hear more about these aspects of MassWildlife's deer management. Dr. Van Roo also asked to hear about the staff's approach and strategies for working with municipalities and other landowners to control deer populations. Assistant Director Huguenin reported that staff will be happy to discuss efforts to assist towns and the results of those efforts. He stated that recent and ongoing browse surveys and pellet surveys are yielding results that will soon be ready to piece together, especially as the new Deer and Moose Project Leader comes up to speed.

Vice Chair Roche moved to endorse the ADPs as recommended; Dr. Van Roo seconded the motion. Discussion followed.

Vice Chair Roche pointed out that MassWildlife is managing deer in two different areas: staying on top of changes in the population over time and mitigating impacts on non-hunters in their backyards.

Mr. Foster asked about the possibility of a third buck tag. Assistant Director Huguenin stated that staff would have to study the number of people who currently harvest both of the antlered tags they get, and would also need to look at the effect on the population. Mr. Durand reported that Vermont had previously given three buck tags, but recently reduced the number to two because of the unintended effect on the overall buck populations. Mr. Foster also asked about the status of the idea of a lottery for ADPs in Western Mass. Assistant Director Huguenin reported that the agency may have the ability to conduct a lottery for ADPs because the new license vendor has the capability to analyze trends and provide data on impacts, which would have to be studied carefully. Mr. Foster also asked whether it would be beneficial to give the Western part of the state more days to hunt. Mr. Huguenin said that MassWildlife could theoretically lengthen the deer season but may have to reduce the total number of ADPs to compensate. He noted that a lot of the work we do is to both manage the deer to control the population and to provide more access and opportunity for hunters, so the balance is a delicate one.

Vice Chair Roche moved the question.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee Report

Chair Larson reminded the Board members that the Advisory Committee is meeting 4 times a year. He reported that the zip code data for tax-form donors has been analyzed by staff on a 3-year basis and staff is producing a map. He reported that some difficulties remain with an analysis, especially for towns that don't have a separate zip code (Pelham, e.g.) Mr. Durand suggested to perhaps increase advertising

for the “Conserve Endangered Wildlife” donation in areas with either high or low donor numbers and see what the results look like over several years.

The Chair reported that the drafting of BioMap3 is going well and that staff expect to complete it in the fall of 2022, noting that it is a 2-year-project. He also reported on website improvements for the Heritage program and that the process has been redesigned to report listed species online because there are more electronic filings and staff wanted the whole process more streamlined for data compilation. He also reported that wildlife rehabilitators are licensed by the Heritage program, that the requisites for that license have been revised, and a website has been created specifically for wildlife rehabilitators.

Set Meeting Date

The Director recommended setting the July meeting at a later date. After a brief discussion, the Board agreed that the Director will consult and advise the members, then choose an appropriate date.

Member’s Comments

Dr. Van Roo reported that she has a backlog of students who need field experience and asked that anyone with opportunities contact her for more information. She pointed out that students are always looking for field work but that the COVID year of 2020 prevented many from gaining that valuable experience, so the backlog is even greater this year.

Vice Chair Roche commended all staff for all their work and efforts over the past year and a half. Director Tisa thanked Mr. Roche and agreed that staff has done a tremendous job and that he plans to soon start visiting the installations himself to meet with staff, and that he would be happy to pass on the Board’s accolades.

Mr. Foster and Mr. Durand reported no further comments.

There being no more discussion, 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 Dr. Van Roo.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Executive Session

Deputy Director Jon Regosin presented one proposed acquisition, which was reviewed and unanimously approved by the Board.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 10:45 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonnie Booth
Secretary

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

June agenda

Draft May meeting minutes for review

Spreadsheet of Natural Heritage Fund Taxpayer Donations (1992 to 2020)

Documentation for the executive session