



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, Ernie Foster/Secretary, Sasha Dyer, Emma Ellsworth, John Organ, Matthew Sisk, Mark S. Tisa/Director, Eve Schlüter/Deputy Director, Mike Huguenin/Assistant Director/Wildlife, Jesse Leddick/Assistant Director/NHESP, Nicole McSweeney/Assistant Director/Outreach and Education, Trina Moruzzi/Assistant Director/Operations, Todd Richards/Assistant Director/Fisheries, Pat Huckery/Northeast Wildlife District Manager, Andrew Madden/Western Wildlife District Manager, Todd Olanyk/Central Wildlife District Manager, Joe Rogers/Connecticut Valley Wildlife District Manager; Jason Zimmer/Southeast Wildlife District Manager, Maj. Kevin Clayton/OLE

DATE: June 18, 2024

LOCATION: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Region 5 Headquarters, 300 Westgate Center Drive, Hadley, Massachusetts, and on Zoom

Chair Sears opened the June business meeting at 12:40 p.m. and reported that Mr. Durand was away and would not be attending.

### Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Foster to approve the minutes from the May business meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Dr. Organ; the vote in favor was unanimous.

### Chair's Comments

Chair Sears reported that he had received a briefing on the Governor's response to the Forests as Climate Solutions initiative report by the Climate Forestry Committee from EEA Undersecretary Cooper and DFG Commissioner Tom O'Shea. The report was released to the public the next day and he sent it to board members and the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee that day. He stated that he had asked for a report at the Board's next meeting, which will be in Westborough, as part of a group meeting to which members of the DCR Stewardship Council and conservation partners including Mass Audubon and The Trustees will be invited. The Chair said he had had initial concerns about MassWildlife's ability to continue its habitat work in light of the Forests as Climate Solutions report, and he reported that the Biodiversity plan will drive habitat work in the future. He reported that he had also received a briefing on the deer review that Deer Project Leader Feehan was going to be giving at the day's meeting from Deputy Director Schlüter, Assistant Director Huguenin, and Dr. Feehan, and was appreciative of that.

The Chair apologized for missing a tree stand safety course with Worcester County League president Steve LaRivee but he had conflicts on Father's Day weekend and could not attend.

Chair Sears reported that he had participated in the annual Cheeky Schoolie Tournament on Cape Cod in May, and offered his congratulations to Mr. Sisk, who won. Chair Sears had partnered with Dr. Organ and caught nothing. But he reported that it was a great event, and he will participate again next year.

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Director's Comments

Director Tisa reported that Commissioner O'Shea would not attend the day's meeting and explained that Division of Marine Fisheries Assistant Director Mike Armstrong was retiring, and the Commissioner was attending his retirement event. He also reminded the board members that July 24, starting at 9:00 a.m., will be the employees' conference, and the following day will be the July board meeting, in Westborough.

Law Enforcement Comments

Major Kevin Clayton of the MEP reported that some of his officers had had tree stand safety courses; more officers will receive the training at a later date. He also reported that six new officers will be coming on, and all will go to Western Mass. He also reported that an entry-level test will be offered in August for new potential officers. The Major stated that he had attended an international Wildlife Compact meeting and will continue to work with Assistant Director Huguenin on implementation in Massachusetts.

Personnel Report

Deputy Director Eve Schlüter presented a candidate for hire at the Sunderland Fish Hatchery. She provided some highlights of the candidate's resume and qualifications.

New Hire

<i>Employee</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Location</i>
Austyn Morin	Hatchery Technician Wildlife Technician II	Sunderland

Dr. Organ made a motion to accept the Personnel Report as presented; Ms. Dyer seconded the motion; the vote in favor was unanimous. Dr. Organ noted that he was very impressed with the breadth of the employee's experience across the country and felt Massachusetts was very lucky to get him.

2023 Deer Review and 2024 ADP Allocations, with proposed regulation changes at 321 CMR 3.02(4)  
(Martin Feehan)

Deer and Moose Project Leader Martin Feehan provided the Board with a review of the 2023 deer hunting season, the ADP allocations for the 2024 season, the Hunters Share the Harvest program, the CWD project, and some proposals for regulatory changes.

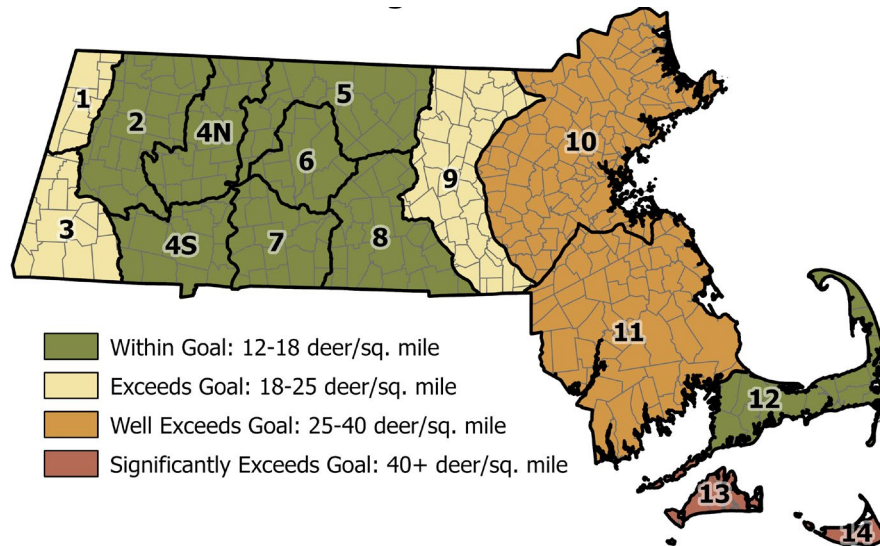
Beginning with the 2023 harvest, Dr. Feehan announced the totals for each season:

<b>Season</b>	<b>Average of 2020-2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Archery	6,364	6,385
Shotgun	5,323	6,118
Primitive	2,861	2,865
Youth/Paraplegic	113	154
<b>Total Harvest</b>	<b>14,661</b>	<b>15,522</b>

He reported that the key takeaways from the 2023 deer harvest were 1) a 2% decline from the record-setting 2022 season, largely due to poor weather conditions during Archery and primitive seasons that likely blocked a new record harvest; 2) new record deer harvests in zones 9 and 14; 3) a new record Youth day deer harvest of 144 deer; and 4) approximately 17,800 meals of donated venison distributed

by MassWildlife’s Hunters Share the Harvest program. He reviewed highlights in trends in the harvest, including by season, by sex/age, and between adult male harvest in zones 1-9 and in zones 10-14. He also reminded the members and attendees that the extension of the Archery season in zones 1-9, which was approved in 2023, will unify the Archery season statewide this year, October 7—November 30.

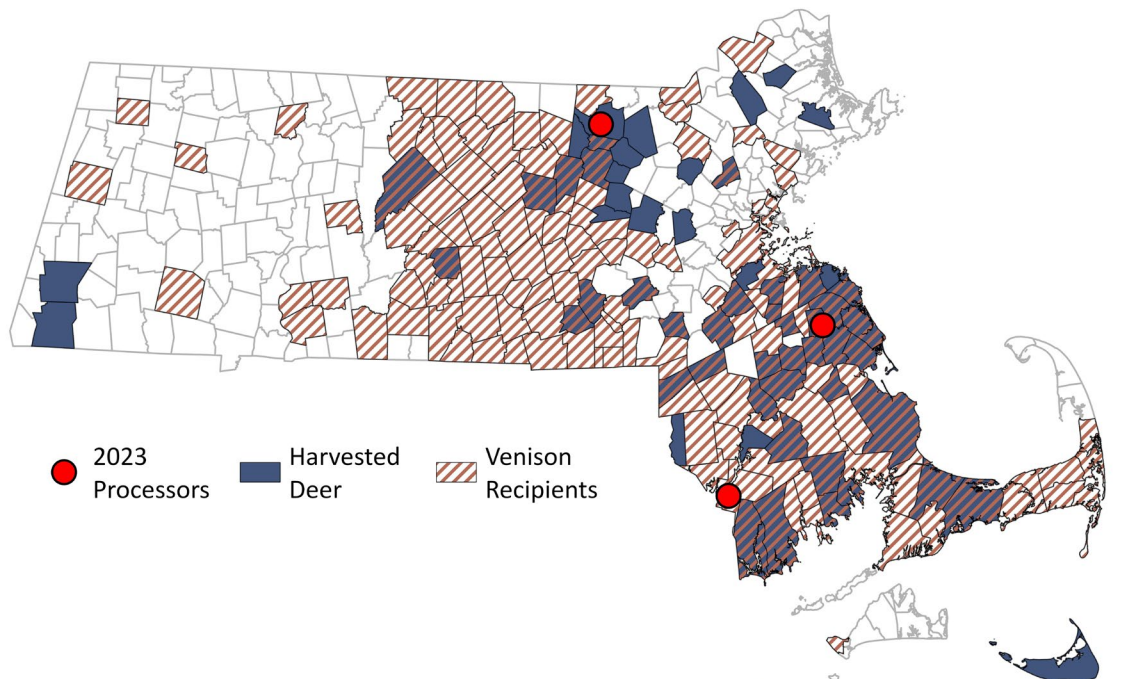
Dr. Feehan reported that the antlerless deer permit allocations will remain the same in this the third year of the 3-year cycle and showed the current state wildlife management zone map, color-coded to illustrate the population levels relative to MassWildlife’s statewide goal of 12-18 deer per square mile:



WMZ	Proposed Allocation*	Population Trend
1	800	Increasing
2	400	Stable/Increasing
3	2,050	Stable/Increasing
4N	800	Stable/Increasing
4S	600	Stable
5	1,950	Increasing
6	400	Stable/Increasing
7	3,000	Stable/Increasing
8	3,100	Stable
9	7,200	Increasing
10	No Cap	Increasing
11	No Cap	Increasing
12	1,350	Stable/Increasing
13	No Cap	Increasing
14	No Cap	Increasing

Dr. Feehan then reviewed the second year and first full year of the Hunters Share the Harvest (HSH) program, reporting that the equivalent of 17,800 meals were distributed in 2023 and noting that the 93 deer that were donated represent more than 2% of the harvest in the zones where there are HSH processors available. He thanked the 75 hunters who donated those deer and listed the five food security programs that participated in distributing the meals: the Mass Military Support Foundation’s Food4Vets program, Daniel’s Table, the Worcester County Food Bank, the Herring Pond Wampanoag Tribe, and the Wampanoag Tribe of Aquinnah.

To illustrate the scale of the impact of HSH thus far, Dr. Feehan showed a state map coded with the locations of the processors (3), the towns where the deer were harvested (65), and the towns (157) where recipients (more than 5,200) of the venison live:



Dr. Feehan closed this portion of his presentation by detailing the work that continues to be done to further expand the reach of and develop the HSH program for the long term, including the recruitment of additional processors in the western part of the state, the procurement of a third-party nonprofit to assist with logistical support for the processors, and strategies to cement the long-term financial security of the program.

Turning to MassWildlife's multi-year collaboration in Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) research and prevention with the USGS through the Fish and Wildlife Cooperative Research Unit (Coop Unit) at UMass Amherst, Dr. Feehan provided a brief review of CWD, reporting that the disease is incurable and always fatal to affected deer and is spread by prions, or misfolded proteins, that affect several deer species, including the native white-tail deer. He reported that CWD disproportionately impacts male deer, that the prions persist in the environment indefinitely, and that affected animals can fail to exhibit clinical signs of infection for 18 or more months, during which time they are producing prions and spreading them in the environment. Confirming that CWD has not been detected in Massachusetts, he also reported that states with known occurrences of CWD (i.e., CWD-positive states) spend an average of almost \$775,000 annually on CWD management. For the long-term health of the Massachusetts herd and to avoid the negative logistical and financial impacts to MassWildlife, it is imperative that CWD be prevented in the state for as long as possible.

Dr. Feehan reviewed the CWD project timeline, which included a multi-year risk assessment and the development of a communication strategy for MassWildlife and wild deer stakeholders and is continuing into 2025 with the implementation of CWD educational programming and preventative strategies for the state. He showed an updated distribution map for CWD detections in the U.S. and Canada and reported on the results of a survey of Massachusetts deer hunters that found that 40% of those who responded said they had hunted for deer and other CWD-susceptible cervids outside the state in the last 5 years and that almost 90% of the respondents said that prevention of CWD in Massachusetts was

important to them, among other results. Considering all the evidence that proactive steps are needed and warranted to prevent CWD, Dr. Feehan reported that the agency had undertaken a structured decision-making process among MassWildlife's subject-matter experts facilitated by the Coop Unit scientists to identify and thoroughly analyze the key problem and all the possible solutions to determine the best course of action for our state. He reported that the Cooperators' report will be published shortly, staff is implementing communication strategies this year, work is continuing on response and communication plans and defining triggers for action, and he will be proposing some regulatory changes as part of the strategy.

Before Dr. Feehan turned to the proposed regulation changes, the Chair called a 10-minute break at 1:45. The Chair reopened the meeting at 2:00.

The remainder of the presentation focused on proposed regulatory changes. Dr. Feehan reported that staff was requesting the Board's approval to develop specific regulations with the legal teams at DFG, EEA, and ANF to take to a public hearing.

To address parts of the CWD prevention strategy, Dr. Feehan explained the reasons why staff recommended sunsetting the remaining existing captive deer facilities in the state, both propagators and education permittees, and expanding deboning requirements to include all venison harvested outside New England. To further management objectives as well as increase opportunity and enhance R3 [Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation] efforts statewide, Dr. Feehan detailed the reasoning and existing public feedback behind the staff's recommendations to clarify that food plots are legal to hunt, to authorize the use of deer decoys during the Archery-only season (currently legal in all neighboring states), to remove the daily antlerless bag limit so successful hunters in zones with surplus antlerless deer permits can harvest more deer, to authorize the use of the Youth deer permit for any open deer season, to exempt naturally shed deer and moose antlers from possession permit requirements, and to create a winter Primitive Arms [muzzleloaders and archery equipment] season for the month of January in Wildlife Management Zones 13 and 14 [i.e., Nantucket and Martha's Vineyard]. Regarding the last recommendation, Dr. Feehan noted that the season would run January 1–31, would require the new-year license and Primitive Arms stamp, would create an either-sex Winter Deer Permit for use only during the winter season, assumes that the antlerless tag bag limit will be adjusted, and allows the use of the new year's regular antlered tags.

After a number of questions and comments from Board members, Ms. Ellsworth moved that the proposed changes be developed into regulations and sent to a public hearing; Dr. Organ seconded the motion. After some additional discussion, Ms. Ellsworth moved the vote. The vote in favor was unanimous.

#### Set the July Meeting Date

Chair Sears proposed July 25, 2024, at 10:00 a.m., at the Field Headquarters in Westborough for the July business meeting. He also proposed a group meeting at 1:30 p.m. with state agency and non-governmental partners to hear and discuss a presentation by EEA Undersecretary Stephanie Cooper and DFG Commissioner Tom O'Shea [*Secretary's note*: it was subsequently confirmed that EEA Director of Land Policy and Planning Kurt Gaertner will also be presenting at the 1:30 meeting] of the Commonwealth's Response to the Report of the Climate Forestry Committee.

Members also discussed the August business meeting and agreed to hold it at the Parker River National Wildlife Refuge in Newburyport. The Director reported that his staff would confirm the date the facility was available, ideally August 21 or 22. The September business meeting was also discussed, and it was decided to hold it in Westborough, but the date was not set.

Members' Comments

Mr. Sisk reported that he had attended a Quinepoxet dam removal event and was very impressed. He also acknowledged several Deerfield and Massachusetts-Rhode Island chapters of Trout Unlimited members who were attending the meeting.

Ms. Dyer reported that she had attended recent eagle bandings and was very impressed with the blood work being done and with the delicacy, tact, and professionalism shown by the staff dealing with members of the public who are very interested in these birds.

Mr. Foster reported that the Mass. Trappers do a lot with tanning hides and might be a resource to Dr. Feehan. He reported participating in a Deerfield TU fishing event. He also stated that the emphasis on youth hunters should be shifted to new hunters, as the R3 program is doing.

Ms. Ellsworth reported a very exciting land closing happening in real time for Mount Grace and a group of partners. She reported that it is a gorgeous property in a landscape partnership of five landowners, including the DCR and Mass Audubon. She noted that it was the first place she learned to goose hunt and that most of the property will be open to passive recreation.

Dr. Organ reported that Central District Manager Todd Olanyk had run a Hunter Education class at the Ashfield Rod and Gun Club in Plainfield and as usual did an excellent job. Dr. Organ also reported being very impressed with Dr. Feehan and the leadership and research he is part of and sharing with the board. He stated that it was nice to be back in his former workplace where he worked so many years. He was very glad to see Dr. Larson in attendance and stated that they had met many years ago at UMass and he still considers Dr. Larson a mentor.

Mr. Sears thanked staff again and stated he was pleased that deer management is making progress.

There being no further business, Mr. Foster moved to adjourn; Mr. Ellsworth seconded; the vote in favor was unanimous and the meeting was adjourned at 3:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernie Foster  
Secretary

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

June agenda

Draft May meeting minutes

June personnel report

“Response to the Report of the Climate Forestry Committee” by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts