



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, Dr. Brandi Van Roo, Ernest W. Foster IV, Steve Sears, Bob Durand, 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, Nicole McSweeney/Acting Chief/Information and Education, Pat Huckery/Northeast Wildlife District Manager, 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, Captain Bill Woytek/OLE

DATE: June 22, 2022

LOCATION: MassWildlife Field Headquarters, Westborough

Chair Larson opened the meeting at 1:05 p.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 Dr. Van Roo.

The motion passed unanimously.

Chair's Comments

Chair Larson reported no comments.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Amidon reported that the Templeton Developmental Center transfer is in motion, while the Monson acreage transfer is making slower progress. He reported that the Ducks Unlimited and Western Mass. Duck Hunters photo event to commemorate the donation of a tub net launcher held before the Board's meeting that day was well-attended and very successful. The Commissioner stated that MassWildlife will continue these important partnerships and perhaps develop some limited mobility blinds for duck hunting and bird-watching on WMAs.

Director's Comments

The Director reported that Massachusetts Ducks Unlimited chapters and members are long-standing partners to MassWildlife, noting that they have a deep commitment to conservation and are very active around the state. Director Tisa also stated that he thought the Commissioner's suggestion for duck blinds was an excellent one and observed that the Ducks Unlimited leaders at the morning event have many skills and backgrounds to bring to such a project.

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Director Tisa asked Deputy Director Jon Regosin to report on three recent grants the agency has received. Deputy Director Regosin reported that MassWildlife staff had applied for Climate Adaptation funds made available by EEA (SHMCAP) and had received three grants, for coldwater refugia, for the preliminary design of the Great (salt) Marsh restoration, and for the BioMap3 rollout and community outreach efforts.

Law Enforcement Comments

Captain Bill Woytek of the Office of Law Enforcement was greeted by the Board members as a former MassWildlife Deer and Moose Project Leader before he made the career change to environmental law enforcement and was welcomed back to the Westborough Field Headquarters.

Captain Woytek briefly reported that as the seasons change the Environmental Police continues to shift its work from spring to summer recreational activities, including boating safety, parks patrols, search-and-rescue operations, and off-road-vehicle use patrols on WMAs. He also highlighted the large number of bear and moose calls that the OLE continues to receive and the close cooperation it is receiving from MassWildlife LART staff to manage bear and moose that wander into congested areas.

The Chair thanked Captain Woytek for attending the meeting and for his excellent report.

2021 Deer Review and 2022 ADP Allocations (Martin Feehan)

Deer and Moose Project Leader Martin Feehan was introduced by Assistant Director for Wildlife Mike Huguenin, who reported that Mr. Feehan started with MassWildlife a year ago, right before the June meeting, so this was his first Deer Review before the Board. Mr. Huguenin reported that Mr. Feehan has hit the ground running and has had a very productive first year with MassWildlife.

Mr. Feehan stated that he would be providing the Board with deer project updates from the past year, the 2021 deer harvest and longer-term abundance trends staff is documenting, the Antlerless Deer Permit allocations for 2022, and a proposed regulation change relating to the existing extended Archery deer season.

Among his deer project updates, Mr. Feehan reported that he and other staff continue to work with communities to open more private and municipal lands for hunting, particularly of deer. He noted that the Town of Harvard Conservation Commission has doubled the number of properties open to hunting and that the Town of Brewster approved a 3-week December Archery season in the Punkhorn area, as two examples of recent fruits of those efforts. He also reported that MassWildlife collaborated with the USDA Wildlife Services to test deer for SARS-CoV-2 antibodies and active-virus during the 2021 Shotgun and Primitive Arms deer seasons as part of a national surveillance program in 28 states. He reported that MassWildlife staff sampled 558 deer (just over the USDA's goal of 500 for the state): 86 were positive for antibodies, with the Delta detected as the active variant. He also stated that he will be working again this fall with the USDA on further surveillance. Mr. Feehan reported that he is planning to disseminate a survey to hunters this summer, in coordination with the USGS's Coop Unit at UMass/Amherst, to measure baseline knowledge about Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and about misinformation that might be circulating. This will allow staff to develop an effective communication plan to improve knowledge about CWD and guide future management. He stated that MassWildlife has also joined the SOP4CWD project, to collaborate with states across the country to predict areas of high risk for new invasions of CWD.

Mr. Feehan then reported on the 2021 deer harvest and offered a comparison to the previous 3-year average for context:

Season	Average 2017-2020	2021
Archery	5,811	5,894
Shotgun	5,374	5,008
Primitive	2,658	2,375
Youth/Paraplegic	115	86
Total	13,958	13,363

He noted that the total 2021 harvest represented a 10% decline from 2020, which was an all-time record year. Using a sequence of graphs, he took the Board through an analysis of the statewide harvest over an almost 35-year period, showing the generally increasing trend and then digging down into the season totals, including by analyzing the harvest breakdowns by groups of districts that are experiencing similar trends.

In-person biological deer check resumed in 2012, and, to help illuminate trends, staff collects information used for modeling the abundance of deer in each Wildlife Management Zone. Mr. Feehan stated that MassWildlife uses a Downing Reconstruction Model for harvest-based abundance estimates, noting that this method does not sample areas closed to hunting and that areas with significant closure are likely to have much higher deer abundance than harvest-based estimates would predict. Here, Mr. Feehan demonstrated through another sequence of graphs showing the agency's density estimates in each Wildlife Management Zone that some zones, including zones 2, 4N, and 4S, are maintaining densities well within the Board-approved statewide goal of 12-18 deer per square mile. But data from the other western zones – zones 1 and 3 – are indicating that densities there are rising and are now slightly above the statewide goal. He demonstrated a similar analysis for zones 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9, which showed that 5-8 are relatively stable, while Zone 9 is becoming increasingly similar to zones 10 and 11, which are above the statewide goal with high densities and showing persistent growth. Zone 12 is still relatively stable but increasing in density, and in zones 13-14, where densities are very high, the harvest is actually declining.

Given the trends revealed by these analyses and after reminding the Board that MassWildlife sets its Antlerless Deer Permit (ADP) allocations on the assumption that they will be kept stable for the ensuing 3 years so that effects on abundance can be thoroughly studied, Mr. Feehan reported that staff was ready to propose changes to the allocations for the next 3 years.

WMZ	2019-2021 Adj. Allocation	Change	Proposed Allocation	Population Trend
1	700	+100	800	Increasing
2	360	+40	400	Stable/Increasing
3	1,900	+150	2,050	Stable/Increasing
4N	750	+50	800	Stable/Increasing
4S	600	0	600	Stable
5	1,800	+150	1,950	Increasing
6	370	+30	400	Stable/Increasing
7	2,900	+100	3,000	Stable/Increasing
8	3,100	0	3,100	Stable
9	6,600	+600	7,200	Increasing
10	14,500	No Cap	No Cap	Increasing
11	15,500	No Cap	No Cap	Increasing

12	1,250	+100	1,350	Stable/Increasing
13	2,700	No Cap	No Cap	Increasing
14	2,700	No Cap	No Cap	Increasing

Mr. Feehan explained that the proposed allocations marked “No Cap” are functionally unlimited, being set well above the maximum number of ADP permits that are sold each year in those zones.

After analyzing past harvests by sex to show the trends in a couple of sample zones, Mr. Feehan then outlined a proposal for the Board’s consideration to unify the Archery deer season statewide by extending the Archery season 2 weeks earlier in zones 1-9 to match that already established in zones 10-14, with the change to begin with the 2023 season. He explained that this proposed change simplifies the regulations, the seasons, and enforcement; would allow hunters to spread out their effort and therefore creates more hunting opportunity; and addresses feedback staff receives from many Archery hunters wanting more hunting opportunity. Discussing the impact of the existing extended Archery season in zones 10-14, Mr. Feehan reported and showed with a graph that the extended season in zones 10-14 did not increase the harvest beyond the established trajectory but rather redistributed the harvest based on hunter preference and was very popular with Archery hunters who don’t want to overlap with pheasant season.

Mr. Feehan closed his presentation with a request to the Board to endorse the ADP allocations and to direct staff to develop specific regulations that would extend the Archery season statewide to match the current extended season in zones 10-14 and take those proposed regulations to a public hearing for public feedback and comments.

Vice Chair Roche made a motion to accept the review and endorse the ADP allocations as presented; Dr. Van Roo seconded the motion; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Vice Chair Roche moved that staff be directed to develop specific draft regulations to extend the Archery deer season statewide and take them to a public hearing to solicit comments. Dr. Van Roo seconded the motion; the vote in favor was unanimous.

The Board members thanked Mr. Feehan for an excellent and interesting presentation.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC) Report

Chair Larson reported that the Advisory Committee will be meeting again in the following month.

Set July Meeting Date

After a brief discussion, members set the date and time for the July Fisheries and Wildlife Board meeting: Monday, July 18, 2022, at 1:00 p.m.

The Director asked the Board to set the August meeting as well. After a brief discussion, the Board members settled on Tuesday, August 23, 9:00 a.m., with a possible hearing at 11:00 a.m. on the proposed field trial regulation changes.

Member’s Comments

Secretary Booth, Mr. Foster, Vice Chair Roche, Mr. Sears, and Dr. Van Roo reported that they had no further comments.

Mr. Durand reported that he was late because he attended a presentation of a portrait of Steve Quill, a founding member and former treasurer of the Massachusetts Outdoor Heritage Foundation and a great supporter of conservation in Mr. Durand’s district. Mr. Durand reported that the event went very well,

Mr. Quill and his family were pleased with the portrait, and that he was very glad to see Mr. Quill and some of the other foundation board members who were present.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Dr. Van Roo to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Roche.

The vote was unanimous, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:15 p.m.

Director Tisa reported to the assembly that the scheduled public hearing on the proposed amendments to the regulations at 321 CMR 3.00 Hunting; specifically, regulations relating to the hunting of Pheasant, Quail, and Small Game, would be opened promptly at 3:00 p.m. in the same room.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonnie Booth
Secretary

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

Agenda

Draft May minutes

Spreadsheet of Natural Heritage Fund Taxpayer Donations (1992 to 2021)

Letter in support: Worcester County League of Sportsmen's Clubs

Draft Pheasant, Quail, and Small Game regulations package