



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, Bob Durand/Vice Chair, 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, Martin Feehan/Deer and Moose Project Leader, Jennifer Sulla/DFG General Counsel, Captain Scott Amati/OLE; PUBLIC: Dave Morin, John Kellstrand, David Harbison, Marion Larson, Mike Woods, Michael Duclos, Bill Boles

DATE: June 8, 2023

LOCATION: MassWildlife Field Headquarters, Westborough, Massachusetts

Chair Sears opened the June meeting at 1:30 p.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

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

Mr. Sisk moved that the Chair move Agenda Item 5 after Agenda Item 6. Ms. Dyer seconded the motion. The vote in favor was unanimous.

Chair's Comments

Chair Sears thanked staff for conducting the R3 Summit and apologized that he was not able to attend. He reported attending a meeting at the Field Headquarters on the previous Monday where the Forests as Climate Solutions initiative was announced and explained. He thought it a positive meeting and bodes good outcomes for MassWildlife. He also reported that he had been asked by local Rep. Pignatelli to participate in a listening session in relation to guns, outdoor activities, and hunting. Rep. Michael Day was the leader and Chair Sears had been asked by the House Speaker. He reported that he was not able to attend when the time changed but was able to provide comments. He thanked Assistant Director of Fisheries Todd Richards and Assistant Director for NHESP Eve Schlüter for presenting on cyanobacterial blooms at a recent meeting.

Chair Sears also offered a personal observation that it has been an amazing year to see lady slippers: In an area where he would usually see 11 blooms, this year there were 47. On the other hand, at a place on the Cape where he usually sees them there were none to be found.

Director's Comments

Director Tisa reported that the July 19 meeting will be held at 11:00 a.m. at the Bristol County Agricultural High School, which is a phenomenal school that looks like a college; he finds it very impressive whenever he goes. He reported that there will be a presentation that was given at the

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meeting Chair Sears had mentioned, on Forests as Climate Solutions, by Kurt Gaertner, the EEA Assistant Secretary for Environmental Policy, and another presentation on the Hunter Education Program from Hunter Education Coordinator Susan Langlois. It will be a full day and the Director reported it should be quite interesting for the Board members.

Director Tisa also reported that staff had completed trout stocking for the year. It was another great year and the hatchery staff received kudos from the Director for a very difficult year. He also thanked and congratulated the District staff for getting all the fish out as smoothly and efficiently as usual.

The Director closed his comments by reporting that Deer and Moose Project Leader Martin Feehan had just won a 3-year, \$773,000 grant to study zoonotic diseases with other state and regional partners. It was a very competitive grant, and the Director offered his congratulations to Dr. Feehan for his success and stated that he would report somewhat more fully on the grant during his 2023 Deer Report later in the meeting.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Tom O'Shea apologized that he couldn't attend the Board's earlier discussion meeting because of a conflicting Marine Recreational Fisheries Council meeting, and he reported that he had taken a very interesting tour of DMF's New Bedford facility.

The Commissioner also reported that he had attended the R3 Summit and found it impressive to hear from national leaders in R3 and then hear about MassWildlife's plan to improve the effectiveness of its programs. He offered his view that the R3 Summit was great launching pad for engaging new audiences.

Commissioner O'Shea reported that Secretary Tepper had asked all her commissioners to develop 6-month priority goals, and he stated that he has done that in consultation with the DFG Directors. Not the least of his 6-month goals is the setting of biodiversity goals for the Department. He intends to do that work in parallel with his climate solutions work because he believes you can't talk about climate change solutions without looking at biodiversity.

The Commissioner then reported that he wanted to emphasize and second the Chair's remarks about the Forests as Climate Solutions initiative. He noted that there is more climate and carbon focus than in the past, and that it is in keeping with the administration's priorities. He reported working with the DFG legislative liaison to start meeting with legislators to talk about the issues and solutions. He also looks forward to being able to meet with the Board members, to get their opinions.

2022 Deer Review and 2023 Antlerless Deer Permits

Assistant Director for Wildlife Huguenin introduced Martin Feehan, the Deer and Moose Project Leader, who, he noted, recently received his Ph.D. from Cornell University. The Assistant Director provided context for the deer review, which is given once a year, unlike most other species. He noted that the deer program provides recreational opportunities, but first and foremost is focused on conservation.

Dr. Feehan opened his report by explaining in more detail the grant award the Director had mentioned. It is from the Recovering America's Wildlife act, administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, to develop a wildlife health and public outreach program for Massachusetts. Funds will help MassWildlife and partners research wildlife diseases and prevent their spread within the region. The 3-year pot of money is important because zoonotic diseases are able to jump the gap between animals and humans. The money will allow states to increase resilience, with surveillance, education, and directed-management components, and it will provide training and professional development for MassWildlife staff. It is also interagency, as the Director pointed out, with DPH, MEMA, DAR, and DMF all having roles, and allows a holistic approach to wildlife and ecosystem health.

Dr. Feehan provided the Board with deer project updates from the past year, including a review of steps staff took to ensure customer ease of access to Antlerless Deer Permits (ADP), a report on MassWildlife's Hunters Share the Harvest program, which is gathering more partners and is focused on recruiting more meat processors, the program's primary limitation; and outlines of the studies and research projects MassWildlife is conducting on deer health, including Chronic Wasting Disease.

Dr. Feehan also gave an overview of deer management in Massachusetts. He outlined the data that is collected every year from the animals themselves and from hunters; MassWildlife's deer abundance management strategy, which is accomplished by regulating female harvest by Wildlife Management Zone; and a discussion of deer-density estimates and their implications. He reviewed changes made in 2022, including increases to the ADP allocations from the previous 3-year cycle and a proposal to unify the Archery deer season in all zones that has not yet gone to public hearing.

Dr. Feehan next recapped the 2022 statewide deer harvest by season:

Season	Average of 2019-2021	2022
Archery	6,233	6,543
Shotgun	5,034	5,823
Primitive Arms	2,636	3,366
Youth/Paraplegic	115	121
Total	14,016	15,853

The 2022 total represents a 18.6% increase over the 2021 harvest.

Dr. Feehan then conducted an extensive review of the longer-term abundance trends staff is documenting by zone, after which he reported that the staff recommendation is that the ADP allocations for 2023 would remain unchanged from those of 2022, which was the first year of the current 3-year cycle. Staff also recommended that the Board agree to remove the daily purchase caps for the WMZs that have no cap on the number of ADPs available (10, 11, 13, and 14), to help bring down the very high deer densities in those zones.

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

After a brief discussion, Dr. Organ moved that the Board endorse the staff's recommendations for the 2024 Antlerless Deer Permit allocation and the removal of ADP daily purchase caps as specified by Dr. Feehan; Mr. Durand seconded the motion. The recommendations were unanimously endorsed.

Law Enforcement Comments

Captain Scott Amati of the Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) reported that officers were recently focused on supporting the trout stocking activities of MassWildlife. He also reported that there are currently 14 positions to be filled at OLE and the agency has 15 candidates. The second interview process began the day of the meeting and would continue through mid-August, and background checks were ongoing.

Captain Amati 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.

Hunter Education Working Group Update

Mr. Foster was not present at the meeting, so he had provided some notes to Ms. Dyer.

Mr. Foster's notes reported that a discussion was held recently about the Board's processes when using working groups. A decision was made that, in order to remain in good standing regarding our state's open meeting laws, working groups will be conducting business in open public meetings.

The Hunter Education working group will soon be posting invitations to meet with board members and past and present Hunter Education instructors, as well as MassWildlife staff, to discuss topics pertaining to everything "Hunter Education." The working group looks forward to reporting its progress at next month's board meeting.

DFG General Counsel Jennifer Sulla was invited by the Chair to discuss the Open Meeting Law in relation to the working group model. She cited examples of similar state bodies and advised the Board to conduct all working group meetings going forward in accordance with the law.

Confirm July Meeting Date

The members confirmed the date and time of the July business meeting, which is July 19, 2023, at 11:00 a.m., at the Bristol County Agricultural High School.

Members' Comments

Mr. Sisk reported he was glad to hear of the Commissioner's plans for developing biodiversity goals.

Ms. Dyer complimented Dr. Feehan's presentation. She also spoke very highly of the R3 Summit the previous weekend, reporting that it was a very good day. She stated that she was most impressed by the attendees invited and the very varied backgrounds of the participants.

Mr. Durand thanked Mr. Feehan and congratulated him on the grant.

Ms. Ellsworth reported she was not able to attend the meeting Monday. She stressed the increasing population pressures on rural areas combined with the generational and land-wealth transfer that's happening now on town and regional land trusts like Mount Grace. She also reported that she would be present at the Mass. Land Trust Coalition quarterly meeting being held in the Field Headquarters the following day.

Dr. Organ commended staff efforts for the R3 Summit and stated that they did a great job. He also commended the senior staff that were all present and engaged, which was very good to see in light of

MassWildlife's relevancy goals. He also reported that he had attended the gun listening session in Greenfield, which he said was dominated by gun advocates, including a women's gun group.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Durand to close the open session and open an executive session for the purpose of discussing proposed land acquisitions whose negotiations would be compromised by discussion in open session, and to not reconvene in open session. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sisk.

Mr. Durand: Yes

Ms. Dyer: Yes

Ms. Ellsworth: Yes

Dr. Organ: Yes

Mr. Sears: Yes

Mr. Sisk: Yes

The vote in favor was unanimous, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:35 p.m.

Executive Session

Staff presented two parcels for the Board's consideration and approval. The two parcels were each voted on by the members and both were unanimously approved.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Durand [for] Ernie Foster
Secretary

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

June agenda

Draft May business meeting minutes

Packet for the executive session