



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, Ron Amidon/Commissioner/DFG, Mark S. Tisa/Director, 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, Jason Zimmer/Southeast Wildlife District Manager, Andrew Madden/Western Wildlife District Manager, Joe Rogers/Conn. Valley Wildlife District Manager, Troy Gipps/Publications Manager, Astrid Huseby/R3 Coordinator, Jim Lagacy/Aquatic Education Coordinator, Pam Landry/Wildlife Education Coordinator, Courtney Nicolson/Outreach and Marketing Manager, Emily Stolarski/Communications Coordinator, Jennifer Sulla/General Counsel/DFG, Christine Smith/Asst. General Counsel/DFG, Anne Gagnon/Land Agent/DFG, Captain Scott Amati/OLE, Lieut. Mark Brighenti/OLE. PUBLIC: Dave Morin, Elizabeth Magner, Chris Giglio, Kelly Dalbec, Jeff Miller, P. B. Patel, Christopher Borgatti, Steve Larivee

DATE: March 30, 2023

LOCATION: MassWildlife Field Headquarters, Westborough

Chair Sears opened the monthly business meeting at 9:05 a.m.

### Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Secretary Foster to approve the minutes from both the December and January meeting. The motion was seconded by Dr. Organ; the vote in favor was unanimous.

### Chair's Comments

Chair Sears offered his thanks to the staff in Fisheries in the Western District for their comments on issues related to drawdowns of Pontoosic Lake. He reported that the staff has been very helpful with efforts to investigate and understand the effects of drawdowns in the lake.

### Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Amidon reported that he had provided testimony to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, which held its annual hearing at UMass Dartmouth, including about the importance of habitat restoration and maintenance. He reported about a dozen legislators present and they had a lot of questions, including about possible expansion of MassWildlife's Hunters Share the Harvest Program. The Commissioner reported that he confirmed it would expand. He also testified about boat ramps that continue to need work.

The Commissioner stated that many events were planned, including for Earth Week. He announced a Herring River Estuary groundbreaking the next day, reporting that it would be the largest wetland restoration project north of Florida. Among the many activities for Earth Week he reported that MassWildlife had multiple stocking events to engage children and families during what would also be the spring school vacation week. Another event would be held at Abbey Brook in Chicopee, where DER

MASSWILDLIFE

had removed two dams, with help from some former Board members, and is now removing two culverts. A celebration was also planned by DMF at Forage Pond Dam in Kingston, where the Brockton Water Authority had built a temporary fish ladder and then removed the Jones River Dam.

#### Director's Comments

Director Tisa introduced the recently hired Community Engagement Biologist, Meghan Crawford, and provided a brief synopsis of her background. The Director reported that she was an asset and he and Assistant Director of Wildlife Huguenin were excited to have her representing MassWildlife before the public.

The Director pointed out that the previous meeting was only the second one he has missed during his tenure.

Director Tisa reported that he has been appointed by AFWA to the board of directors of the American Sportfishing Association with industry representatives, representing directors across the country on that board. He also was awarded the Innovation Award by the National Wild Turkey Federation for MassWildlife's expansion of its habitat restoration program, and he reported that he had accepted on behalf of the habitat staff and the entire agency.

The Director also reported that during the previous week at the North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference Dr. Organ had given an excellent talk on the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation. The Director had many meetings throughout the weeklong conference to create additional partnerships, including with senior leaders of the USFWS, for the Northeast landscape partnership.

Director Tisa then highlighted recent staff accomplishments and leadership roles. He reported that Assistant Director for NHESP Eve Schlüter and TNC's Andy Finton had presented to the Environmental Business Council of New England on BioMap, which they demonstrated can be used by the member businesses. The Director also reported that Assistant Director of Fisheries Todd Richards and Dr. Schlüter have been taking leadership roles in advancing the agency's regional landscape conservation work, noting that he has been hearing accolades from other national leaders about their work. Assistant Director of Outreach and Education Nicole McSweeney had presented a paper to the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation's annual conference and Director Tisa reported that he has heard very positive reports about her talk from other national leaders. Assistant Director McSweeney has also received three grants for her program's outreach and marketing work. The Director announced that R3 Coordinator Astrid Huseby is assuming the chair role for the R3 Committee of NEAFWA and is organizing an R3 Summit coming in June. He noted that the Board members would be invited and would hear more about the summit in the coming months. Director Tisa ended his comments by reporting that he and Dr. Schlüter would be meeting the Mt. Grace Land Conservation Trust board to report on BipMap and meet its members.

#### Law Enforcement Comments

Captain Scott Amati of the Office of Law Enforcement (OLE) reported that there are currently 14 positions to be filled at OLE; the interviews begin at the end of March, and background checks would begin shortly. OLE still hopes to have its candidates enter the police academy by August.

He also briefly reported on activities for the spring seasons. Officers were offering trout stocking monitoring where needed and answering anglers' questions. On the education side he reported a ramping up of the OLE's programs on boating safety and it's continuing participation in MassWildlife's Basic Hunter Education classes.

Lieutenant Mark Brighenti reported about a recent violation involving illegal deer hunting, noting that it involved a lot of work in the field as well as in courtrooms, and he elaborated on OLE's role in assisting with staff on trout stocking to ensure fairness. He also commented that he is glad to be involved in face-to-face Basic Hunter Education classes, stating that he feels it's important to make eye contact with the students.

#### Outreach and Education Program Overview (Nicole McSweeney)

Assistant Director Nicole McSweeney introduced herself and briefly reviewed her own work history with MassWildlife, first hired as the Promotion Specialist, then promoted to the Outreach and Marketing Manager before becoming the Assistant Director of Outreach and Education (O&E) in August 2022. She reported that most of her staff was present, with the exception of the front-desk clerks, Colleen Hubbard and Jill Durand, and Steve Foster, of the pheasant program and Hunter Education logistics. Each staff person present then introduced themselves and spoke briefly about their areas of expertise.

The Outreach staff includes Emily Stolarski, Communications Coordinator, who maintains the agency's website, coordinates the monthly newsletter, and works with the Districts and all staff on the whole gamut of communications efforts. Jody Simoes introduced himself as the Human Dimensions Project Leader, analyzing license and other kinds of data to spot trends and inform the marketing and outreach efforts of the section. Troy Gipps reported that he is the Publications Manager and editor of *Massachusetts Wildlife* magazine. Courtney Nicolson is the newest member of the O&E team, having been hired in February 2023 as the Outreach and Marketing Coordinator. She reported that she maintains the agency's social media accounts by creating posts of interest to MassWildlife's audiences and responding to comments, as well as working with other staff on agency marketing and promotion initiatives.

The Education staff then introduced themselves. Jim Lagacy is the Aquatic Resources Education Coordinator, working with a cadre of volunteers to provide fishing clinics and other fishing-related events around the state. Pam Landry is the Wildlife Education Coordinator and she reported that she provides teacher training and materials for Project WILD and related school-age programs, as well as running the Junior Duck Stamp program, other public education programs throughout the year, and the wildlife component of the Massachusetts Envirothon. Astrid Huseby is the R3 Coordinator, and Assistant Director McSweeney reported that she would be giving her own presentation on those efforts at a subsequent Board meeting. John Gutzeit is the Learn to Fish and Hunt Programs and Outreach Specialist, working with Mr. Lagacy and Ms. Huseby in support of fishing events and the Learn to Hunt initiative, among other recreation-related duties. Susan Langlois is the Hunter Education Program Administrator, and she oversees the entire Hunter Education Program, including working with the public and the volunteer instructors to deliver the program's many offerings. Cynthia Pratt is the Hunter Education Administration and Program Assistant, providing office support to the program, answering the many phone calls, and helping the public enroll in courses. Timothy Bradbury is the Hunter Education Specialist, coordinating and teaching many courses based at the Westborough Field Headquarters and online, in addition to providing first aid and CPR training to staff.

After the staff introductions, Assistant Director McSweeney reported briefly on the reasons behind the O&E Program's Relevancy and R3 efforts. Putting it into context, the world is changing. We are becoming more urbanized, more reliant on technology, and more diverse as a public. As a result, people's values and how they relate to conservation are also changing. There is an increased disconnection from nature. At the same time, she reported that fish and wildlife agencies across the country are struggling with a decline in hunting and fishing participation. This has implications for MassWildlife's ability to fund conservation, since we are primarily funded by license sales and a federal

excise tax on hunting and fishing equipment, but it also has serious implications for our ability to manage fish and wildlife effectively.

Assistant Director McSweeney stated that MassWildlife's programs and outreach can't just focus on hunters and anglers if the agency wants to continue conserving fish and wildlife. It's critical for MassWildlife to engage and serve broader constituencies, learn as much as we can about what their values are, and find how those values intersect with our mission. This investment in engaging and serving broader constituencies cannot and will not come at the expense of leaving behind long-term allies such as hunters and anglers. Relevancy and R3 initiatives are agency-wide and aren't just about communications. For example, for R3, MassWildlife is actively working to increase access to lands for hunting and fishing and making sure our regulations are simple and easy to understand.

Ms. McSweeney then briefly discussed the O&E Program's public engagement goals:

*Increase public awareness of MassWildlife and deepen understanding and trust of how we manage wildlife resources for everyone.*

She explained that this goal includes initiatives like implementing a consistent brand and delivering quality customer service. Several years ago, MassWildlife conducted a rebranding exercise to update the seal, publications design, the color palette, and statewide signage. This has been an effort spanning many years, because people need to first be aware of MassWildlife before staff can build trust, and then understanding and support for its mission. This goal also includes efforts to be transparent about our decision-making and demonstrate how our management decisions and regulations are based on the best available science to achieve our conservation goals.

*Enhance the public's access to information about Massachusetts' fish and wildlife.*

This goal primarily focuses on ensuring that information is easy to find and understand. MassWildlife provides consistent, accurate information through all channels based on the best available science. This also means determining what information is most important to our target audiences and providing it in the ways they are most receptive to. Being responsive to public inquiry is also very important in this context.

*Increase public support for the continued conservation and management of fish, wildlife, and their habitats.*

We demonstrate why MassWildlife's activities are important by making it personal and relevant to our audiences, and we highlight conservation success stories, especially those that address public concerns and interests. We also quantify and share the economic and conservation benefits of MassWildlife's many activities.

*Foster the public's appreciation for wildlife and reduce human-wildlife conflicts.*

This goal includes educating people about the fish and wildlife they might encounter in their communities and providing ways they can get involved in conservation at the local level. In particular, staff has continued to develop effective methods to proactively provide advice to minimize human-wildlife conflicts.

*Provide outdoor recreation opportunities that improve the quality of life for all people.*

MassWildlife's outdoor skills programs are at the center of this goal. Staff works to provide information that is easy to access and understand about regulations and where to go for outdoor recreation. Outreach materials highlight MassWildlife's role in providing quality opportunities for outdoor recreation, including wildlife and habitat management and land protection. This goal also works toward

increasing cultural acceptance of hunting, fishing, and shooting sports, and fostering an understanding of the importance of these pursuits to conservation and management.

With the foregoing as context, Ms. McSweeney provided a brief review of the program's core functions, which are education, public relations, information and outreach, and human dimensions, and gave multiple examples of each. She stressed that, like MassWildlife's management activities, its communications are adaptive and responsive to data analysis. And its pioneering, data-driven efforts have not gone unnoticed: Ms. McSweeney reported that MassWildlife has been nationally recognized for piloting new ideas, going after – and winning – competitive grant funding, and sharing case studies at conferences and webinars. MassWildlife staff also serves on NEAFWA R3 committees and on the AFWA Furbearer Management Committee for Trapper Education, IHEA Standards, and Research.

Ms. McSweeney also pointed out that while all people benefit from MassWildlife's conservation efforts, less than 5% of our residents fish, hunt, or trap, meaning very few people financially contribute to its efforts. For MassWildlife to continue managing the Commonwealth's natural resources in the future, she stated that staff constantly needs to improve communication and adjust MassWildlife's programs to ensure they serve everyone. Understanding the public's values, adjusting agency focus to align with the public's values where appropriate, and ensuring that both the agency and the public understand how the agency's efforts are relevant to all residents are key to broadening agency funding and increasing public support.

Ms. McSweeney then details the results of a public attitudes survey of Massachusetts residents that was conducted in March 2022 by Responsive Management, an independent, non-partisan survey organization. It was funded by MassWildlife, Mass Audubon, The Nature Conservancy in Massachusetts, Trout Unlimited, and The Trustees of Reservations. The new survey results found that Massachusetts residents across demographics and from every part of the state overwhelmingly support public funding for land conservation and outdoor recreation. After detailing some of the survey's specific findings, Ms. McSweeney reported that in addition to more formal efforts like the public attitudes survey, MassWildlife also has a wealth of data from platforms like its website that give staff insights into what people care about. She stated that hunting and fishing topics make up a big percentage of what people are coming to MassWildlife for, but just general wildlife information is also very popular. People are curious about the common wildlife around them. The O&E program works very closely with other agency staff to evaluate this data and create resources to minimize conflict.

Turning to specific efforts MassWildlife has engaged in to engage with and publicize its relevancy within the wider culture, Ms. McSweeney detailed a number of them, including showing images of the results of the rebranding analysis and rollout for publications, property signage, vehicles, and staff clothing; work to standardize how MassWildlife's properties are presented in Google Maps; updated fact sheets on the web that are easily editable, easier to access on mobile and for translation services, and containing added agency information; *Massachusetts Wildlife* magazine; the agency's very popular monthly newsletter; its social media accounts; and its interactions with traditional media.

Ms. McSweeney then provided a brief review of the Hunter Education Program within O&E and the ways in which staff has worked to improve how MassWildlife's regulations are presented to the public, including using more plain language where possible; ensuring consistent messaging between printed the publication and the website; making them easier for search; using bulleted lists to make them easier to read; and by soliciting feedback from our web form, the District Clerks, hunter education students, and staff about points of confusion and areas needing updates. She also talked about efforts to reach broader, more diverse audiences with programs like free family fishing classes, the Junior Duck Stamp Program, which connects youth with nature through art and engages about 300 K-12 students per year,

by providing a curriculum for students, educators, home school, and non-formal groups to learn about habitat conservation. These are often non-traditional audiences that may not have any experience with MassWildlife, including private art studios. The program includes a statewide traveling exhibit comprised of 100 pieces of the students' art each year.

Ms. McSweeney closed her presentation by noting that MassWildlife's conservation partners play a critical role in helping the agency scale its programs and amplify its messages.

After a brief discussion, Chair Sears thanked Assistant Director McSweeney for her informative report.

Chair Sears announced that he has established a subcommittee of the Board to review the Hunter Education Program in response to questions from unspecified persons. He reported that Mr. Foster would chair the subcommittee and that Ms. Dyer and Dr. Organ would be the other two Board members that would work with O&E and Hunter Education Program staff to create the review.

#### Open Meeting Law Review (Jennifer Sulla)

DGF General Counsel Jennifer Sulla provided the Board members with an examination and exposition of the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law and its implications for the Board's conduct and meetings. Ms. Sulla reviewed the purpose of the law, cited the governing statute and regulations, and defined the meetings that are covered by the law, as well as the concepts of 'deliberation,' 'quorum,' and 'jurisdiction' as they apply to the Board's meetings. Ms. Sulla noted that MassWildlife staff creates and posts the meeting notices, but she reviewed the rules for posting and the required elements of a meeting notice. She then reviewed meeting in executive session, and detailed the ten purposes defined in the regulations for which an executive session can be held, noting that they are the only reasons acceptable under the law, and that any other type of deliberation must be carried out in an open meeting. Ms. Sulla also reviewed the rules while in executive session and for remote participation by the public and by members, the current status of emergency procedures, and the outlines of the elements required for meeting minutes.

After a short discussion, the Chair and Board members thanked Ms. Sulla for her presentation.

#### Confirm April Meeting Date

The members confirmed the date and time of the April meeting, on April 26, 2023, at 2:00 p.m. Members also discussed the May meeting, selecting May 16, with the time of day and location to be decided later.

Chair Sears repeated that he wants to meet in June on the same day as the DCR Stewardship Council so that the boards could have a joint meeting. The DCR Stewardship Council is meeting at the Field Headquarters on June 8, 2023, at 5:00 p.m., so Chair Sears proposed and the Board members agreed to hold a governance meeting [in the morning], the business meeting [early afternoon], and the joint meeting at 4:00 p.m.

#### Member's Comment

Dr. Organ reported he was at the North American as Director Tisa had remarked. He said it is the largest policy-related wildlife conference in North America. He had attended the AWCP [American Wildlife Conservation Partners] meeting, which he said was analogous to the MCA [Massachusetts Conservation Alliance], as the representative for the Orion Hunters Association. He reported that the AWCP generates consensus documents every 5 or so years. He also noted that many important AFWA meetings take place at the North American, and the presentations included one on the next 50 years of the Endangered Species Act; another was a discussion of the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation.

Ms. Ellsworth reported that she had attended a recent Worcester County League meeting where the featured speaker was Colin Novick from the Greater Worcester Land Trust. She also reported that she had attended because Phil and Erin Stevens won the Landowner of the Year award and Phil is on the board of Mount Grace.

Ms. Dyer thanked the staff for a recent bear den trip. She also reported that she had demonstrated turkey calling for a recent MassWildlife event.

Mr. Sisk reported he also enjoyed a bear den trip. He also stated that the quarterly Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee meeting was upcoming in early April and he would report on it at the April meeting.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Foster 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 Ms. Dyer.

The vote was unanimous, and the open session was adjourned at 11:40 a.m.

#### Executive Session

The Board members reviewed six parcels under consideration for acquisition by DFG. All were unanimously approved.

There being no further business, Dr. Organ moved that the session adjourn; Mr. Sisk seconded the motion; the vote in favor was unanimous and the meeting adjourned at 12:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernie Foster  
Secretary

#### List of documents presented to the Board in its March meeting packets

March agenda  
Draft February Minutes  
Packet for Executive Session