



MASSWILDLIFE

DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581

p: (508) 389-6300 | f: (508) 389-7890

MASS.GOV/MASSWILDLIFE

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, Eve Schlüter/Deputy Director, Mike Huguenin/Assistant Director/Wildlife, 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/Connecticut Valley Wildlife District Manager, James Pollock/Operations Specialist, Capt. Scott Amati/OLE; PUBLIC: James Cardoza

DATE: November 15, 2023

LOCATION: MassWildlife Field Headquarters, Westborough, Massachusetts, and on Zoom

Chair Sears opened the November meeting at 1:15 p.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Durand to approve the minutes from the October business meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Foster; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Chair's Comments

Chair Sears reported a very productive meeting with the Commissioner and his facilitator during the discussion meeting that was held at 9:30 that morning. He also commented on the listening session the previous evening, saying that it was very interesting. He also reported that he had attended a White Tails Unlimited banquet the previous month, and that he will be speaking at the Berkshire Natural History Conference the following Saturday on non-game species. This-coming Sunday, he reported that Hunter Education Program instructors, led by Hunter Education Specialist Tim Bradbury, will be running a Basic Hunter Education class at the Stationery Factory in Dalton.

Director's Comments

Director Tisa reported that MassWildlife's Hunters Share the Harvest team was presented with the Governor's Carballo Award by the Governor and Lieutenant Governor, and that he had attended the ceremony at the State House. The success of the program shows the generosity of the hunting community and its willingness to give back, he said, so the Carballo Award is a very nice recognition for the program and will help raise its profile in communities around the state. The program is being co-led by Deer and Moose Project Leader Martin Feehan and Southeast Wildlife District Manager Jason Zimmer, and the other members of the team are Northeast Wildlife Manager Chalis Bird, Western Wildlife Manager Nate Buckhout, R3 Coordinator Astrid Huseby, Western Wildlife District Manager Andrew Madden, and O&E Communications Specialist Emily Stolarski. The Director reported that it was really a team effort and that even more people are involved, including Director's Assistant Susan Sacco, Assistant Director for O&E Nicole McSweeney, Assistant Director for Wildlife Mike Huguenin, CFO Kris McCarthy, and Federal Aid and Compliance Manager Lori Cookman.

MASSWILDLIFE

Director Tisa then passed out envelopes to each of the Board members and Commissioner O'Shea and explained that Mr. David Peters, a former Commissioner of DFG, had donated a taxidermy hawk he has had for many years for which he has had a federal permit. Mr. Peters wanted to donate the hawk to MassWildlife and the Director had accepted it on behalf of the agency. Mr. Peters had also wanted to share some printed materials he has created for reaching out to young people and students about conservation, and those materials were in the envelopes the Board members received.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Tom O'Shea also commended the staff for their receipt of the Carballo Award for MassWildlife's Hunters Share the Harvest program and he stated that it was a wonderful ceremony for the staff who could attend. The Commissioner reported that he spoke to Secretary Tepper who asked Governor Healey to take a photo with the staff. He reported the Governor seemed very pleased and surprised by the work MassWildlife did on that program and was very gracious in her praise for the program and the team.

The Commissioner also thanked the Board members for their time and thoughtful responses in the previous meeting that was a facilitated discussion of the Department's Strategic Plan. He thanked the Board members for attending the Forests as Climate Solutions listening session the previous evening, and thanked Mr. Sears, Mr. Sisk, and Ms. Ellsworth for offering oral comments. He was glad that the Board members heard the public comments offered by others. There is a lot of diversity of opinions and positions, but it was clear to the Commissioner that many people love our forest and care about their future.

He also reported that he had gone out with Dr. Greg Skomal of the Division of Marine Fisheries (DMF) to tag sharks in a long-term research project studying shark movements and behavior and that it was a very fascinating experience. Commissioner O'Shea had also participated in State House seafood day, to celebrate the DMF's work on sustainable fish harvest. He noted that 9 out of 10 of fish by volume of catch is exported from the state, so the possibilities of addressing food insecurity if we kept more of that fish locally are great.

Law Enforcement Comments

Captain Scott Amati from the Office of Law Enforcement reported that, on November 19, the newest group of officers will start on field training with experienced officers, and that in January six police academy graduates will enter the in-service academy. He estimated that by the end of the coming year OLE will have an additional 10 officers. He then provided the Board with a brief overview of recent OLE activities, including wildlife-related examples of calls for service that Environmental Police officers had responded to in the previous month.

Personnel Report

Deputy Director Eve Schlüter presented the Board members with her recommendation as the hiring manager for the Assistant Director for Natural Heritage and Endangered Species; touched on highlights in the candidate's resume and experience; and introduced the candidate, who was in attendance at the meeting.

Promotion

<u>Employee</u>	<u>Position</u>	<u>Location</u>
Jesse Leddick	Asst. Dir. for Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program Manager VI	Westborough

The Chair congratulated Mr. Leddick and thanked him for attending the meeting. Mr. Sisk moved acceptance of the Personnel Report as presented; Mr. Durand seconded the motion. The vote in favor was unanimous.

Hunter Education Working Group Final Report and Recommendations

Assistant Director for Outreach and Education Nicole McSweeney reported on the process the working group conducted, including the charge to the working group, its composition, and the steps the Board members and staff followed as they explored the program and its impact.

Assistant Director McSweeney reported that the mission of the Massachusetts Hunter Education Program (MHEP) is to protect the lives and safety of the public, promote the wise management and ethical use of our wildlife resource, and encourage a greater appreciation of the environment through education. She noted that the purpose of the working group was to evaluate whether the MHEP is fulfilling its mission through the administration of Basic Hunter Education. Initial conversations among the working group members identified a few key questions. Ms. McSweeney enumerated the questions and the answers at which the working group had arrived.

Is Basic Hunter Education meeting student needs? Are the Basic Hunter Education class formats and curriculum offered meeting required standards and best practices?

Assistant Director McSweeney reported that the answer to this question is yes. MHEP Administrator Susan Langlois had provided a MHEP overview to the Fisheries and Wildlife Board in July, including data on volunteers, students, and course offerings that showed the MHEP is meeting current North American standards and existing student demand.

Is MassWildlife recruiting and retaining a diversity of high-quality Volunteer Instructors? How do Hunter Education Volunteer Instructors feel about the MHEP?

Assistant Director McSweeney reported that, in addition to reviewing currently available volunteer data, the working group also developed and distributed a volunteer survey to get a more detailed look at volunteer instructors' experiences, attitudes, and levels of satisfaction.

Human Dimensions Project Leader Jody Simoes then reported in depth on the results and working group analysis of the survey. After detailing the questions posed and the answers received from the volunteer instructors, he concluded that the survey captured a representative sample of the instructors; that, overall, the respondents expressed positive or very positive views of the program; and that there were some topics identified that were expressed by a small minority of respondents where improvements could be made. Most of those topics related to the program's current vacancy in MassWildlife's Volunteer Coordinator position; the Volunteer Coordinator manages the volunteers and provides effective communication with the MHEP.

In her conclusion, AD McSweeney reported that the working group had reached four recommendations:

- Hire a Volunteer Coordinator to build better internal capacity and enable MassWildlife to better manage volunteers;
- Develop a fully online Basic Hunter Education course to meet student demand for that format;
- Expand efforts to connect interested Hunter Education graduates with next steps in their hunting journeys;
- Promote hunting benefits and educational opportunities.

Addressing each recommendation in turn, she went on to report that MassWildlife has submitted the Volunteer Coordinator position to the state Human Resources Department and is awaiting

announcement of the open position. MassWildlife is also in the process of developing a request for proposals to create a fully online Basic Hunter Education course to meet demand from students for that format. And Assistant Director McSweeney reported that the working group found that MassWildlife is already engaged in efforts to connect graduates with additional learning tools and experiences as well as in promoting the benefits of hunting and MassWildlife's existing educational opportunities in traditionally underrepresented areas, and both those efforts are continuing.

When Assistant Director McSweeney had concluded her report, Mr. Foster asked the other Board members of the working group if they had any further comments. Ms. Dyer reported that she appreciated the interactions she was able to have with the volunteer instructors, and that she also appreciated the hard work and active participation of the staff. Dr. Organ reported that he's been a Hunter Education instructor in Massachusetts for over 20 years, so he had had his biases, but that he was impressed with and appreciated the staff's input, especially from Human Dimensions Project Leader Jody Simos, with his ability to provide additional data. Dr. Organ also appreciated the engagement and passion of the instructors who had participated, which demonstrates their commitment to passing on their hunting heritage.

Mr. Foster thanked the Director and the Chair for initiating the working group, thanked the staff, and thanked the instructors for their participation. He thought the survey was invaluable, especially to save time and expense. He stated that he recognizes the expense of the process, and felt it was very worthwhile and productive. He asked the leaders of the county leagues and the MCA to help the program continue to recruit new, younger, more diverse instructors, and to volunteer themselves as instructors. He thanked Hunter Education Program Administrator Susan Langlois and Hunter Education Specialist Tim Bradbury for their assistance when he had taken Hunter Education again and then took the training to become an instructor himself. He reported to the Board members that the evaluation process will be ongoing and thanked them for their support. Mr. Foster also recognized the contributions of the Office of Law Enforcement, whose officers offered comments and feedback during the process.

After a brief discussion, Chair Sears thanked the members of the working group for their efforts.

Election of Officers

The Chair asked for a motion to turn the meeting over to the Secretary for the purpose of holding the annual election of officers. Mr. Durand so moved; Mr. Sisk seconded; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Secretary Foster called for nominations for Chair. Mr. Durand nominated Mr. Sears; Dr. Organ seconded the nomination. Secretary Foster asked if there were any other nominations. Hearing no more nominations, the Secretary moved to close the nominations. Mr. Durand seconded the motion; the vote to close the nominations for Chair was unanimous. The vote for Mr. Sears as Chair was taken. Mr. Sears abstained. The vote was six in favor with one abstention.

The Secretary called for nominations for Vice Chair. Ms. Dyer nominated Mr. Durand; Dr. Organ seconded the nomination. Secretary Foster asked if there were any other nominations for Vice Chair. Hearing no more nominations, the Secretary moved to close the nominations. Mr. Sisk seconded the motion; the vote to close the nominations for Vice Chair was unanimous. The vote for Mr. Durand for Vice Chair was taken and was unanimously in favor.

The Secretary called for nominations for Secretary. Mr. Durand nominated Mr. Foster; Dr. Organ seconded the nomination. Secretary Foster asked if there were any other nominations for Secretary. Hearing no more nominations, the Secretary moved to close the nominations. Mr. Sisk seconded the

motion; the vote to close the nominations for Vice Chair was unanimous. The vote for Mr. Foster for Secretary was taken and was unanimously in favor.

The elections being over, Secretary Foster returned the meeting to the Chair.

Set December Meeting Date

The members discussed the date and time of the December business meeting and decided on December 7, 2023, at 10:00 a.m.

Members also discussed the January meetings and chose January 17, 2024. A governance meeting was set for 10:00 a.m. and the business meeting at 1:00 p.m.

Members' Comments

Mr. Sisk reported that a BioMap presentation was being given by MassWildlife's Sarah Wasserman at Pond Meadow Park in Braintree to its board the evening of the meeting and that he would attend.

Ms. Dyer reported that she had asked if she could accompany a pheasant stocking trip and thanked Central Wildlife District Manager Todd Olanyk and Central Wildlife Technician Ian Sypek for providing her with that opportunity. She reported that she had wanted to learn more about tracking dogs so contacted a professional tracker and was able to accompany him on an evening track. The dog found the deer immediately and the young hunter was very pleased. Ms. Dyer also reported that she had participated in the BOW deer hunting program and will be present at Devens for the shotgun deer hunt.

Mr. Foster congratulated the Hunters Share the Harvest team for winning the Governor's Carballo Award, and thanked Mr. Haskins in the Southeast District for agreeing to process donated deer as part of the program. He also recognized Larry Cook, an avid conservationist and sportsman who had passed away the previous Saturday and asked to dedicate the meeting to the memory of Mr. Cook.

Mr. Durand stated his thanks to the Commissioner for the morning's Strategic Plan discussion. He also reported that the Massachusetts Farm Bureau conference is being held at UMass Amherst and he will be reporting on the depredation working group outcomes.

Ms. Ellsworth also thanked the Commissioner for his Strategic Plan work and stated that she was excited about observing and participating in the process. She also acknowledged the excellent work of the pheasant stocking program, reporting that she had had a recent opportunity to go out with two women hunting stocked birds for the first time at the same time; it was a very gratifying experience.

Dr. Organ also thanked the Commissioner for engaging the Board in his strategic planning process. He also reported that he served on a panel at the The Wildlife Society's (TWS) annual conference and had prepared for it by asking the Director, the Deputy Director, and the Assistant Director of O&E for help with certain aspects of his research. He stated that the TWS conference is a great opportunity to interact with students and prospective scientists, and that the previous year's panel was biased against state agencies. Dr. Organ was therefore gratified that he was able to push back this year and show the quality and dedication of MassWildlife staff.

Public Comment (Amy Thurber)

Ms. Amy Thurber stated that she is from Dartmouth. Our Herd is a group of 150 landowners and farmers in Westport and Dartmouth who have been struggling with damage from over-populated deer foraging on their properties. Ms. Thurber stated that the group started over a year ago and has grown very quickly in the interim, mostly because landowners perceive that they have a crisis in deer management in their towns. She stated that she and other members of the group have been working with MassWildlife staff and greatly appreciate their information and efforts to offer solutions, but that

Dartmouth and Westport need long-term solutions that are not currently available in the regulations or the state laws.

Ms. Thurber explained that the town of Dartmouth has been severely impacted by a prolonged drought and invasive caterpillars, so the trees in the forest are mostly dead. Deer browse has destroyed the forest understory and stymied seedling production. She referenced the large number of deer-vehicle collisions cited in the Dartmouth Police Department report she had provided to the Board members via email. She also read a letter written by a farmer who cataloged his losses in his farming operations. Ms. Thurber also addressed the high cost of fencing and the reasons fencing doesn't work in the Dartmouth-Westport area, and the reasons that current hunting regulations don't offer a remedy that works.

Ms. Thurber made several requests of the Board members. She said that Our Herd is asking for a year-round, easily accessible depredation permit that will allow the harvest either to be retained and eaten, so that the venison is not wasted and as an incentive to hunt, or donated to the Hunters Share the Harvest program. Our Herd also requested that MassWildlife extend the deer hunting season into January to increase the harvest, and expand the Hunters Share the Harvest program to create more demand for venison.

Ms. Thurber concluded her comments by noting that, under the current deer hunting regulations, most of the two towns can't even be hunted due to existing setbacks, and she stated that Our Herd would like to work with MassWildlife and the Commonwealth to reduce setbacks for bowhunting under safe conditions and to allow deer hunting on Sundays. Because the forests are dead, the overpopulated deer are in farms and yards. With Massachusetts steadily losing hunters every year, Our Herd believes the deer hunting regulations are antiquated for the purpose of population control for human health and safety.

Chair Sears thanked Ms. Thurber for her informative report and acknowledged that the members had received copies of the materials she had provided in advance in their meeting packets.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Durand to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Foster. The vote in favor was unanimous, and the meeting was adjourned at 3:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernie Foster
Secretary

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

November agenda

Draft October business meeting minutes

November personnel report

2024 Massachusetts Guide to Hunting and Fishing

Public comment summary submitted by Amy Thurber and Our Herd

Our Herd petition letter to MassWildlife and the Fisheries and Wildlife Board, with signatures

Facsimiles of personal letters provided by Our Herd from farmers and landowners in the Southeast

Transcript of Dartmouth Police Department report record for deer-vehicle collisions, January 1—

November 30, 2022