



MASSWILDLIFE

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, Bob Durand, Ernest W. Foster IV, Stephen Sears, Dr. Brandi Van Roo, 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, Marion Larson/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 Scott Amati/OLE; Public: James Wilkins

DATE: November 16, 2021

LOCATION: Zoom

Chair Larson opened the meeting at 11:01 a.m.

Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Durand to accept the minutes from the October meeting as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Foster.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Chair's Comments

Chair Larson reported that he didn't have any comments at that point.

Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Amidon stated that some legislators have been influenced by people who want to limit work on habitat management in the state. He reported that he and some of the MassWildlife Habitat Program staff met with two of the legislators and educated them on the importance and value of active habitat management on wildlife lands. He reported that he is creating a similar process with the ENRA Joint Committee of the legislature. The Commissioner reported that there were two walks on Montague Plains and they both went extremely well, including a chance encounter with two bird hunters who

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talked to the assembly and shared the many benefits of active management on the Montague Plains that they have seen over the years.

Director's Comments

Director Tisa thanked the Commissioner for the work he is doing to illustrate and explain the benefits of habitat management. The Director reported that it has been frustrating to know that legislators often aren't fully informed about MassWildlife's activities while being able to do little about it. He stated that Commissioner Amidon is filling a void that has been there for a long time and is helping to make a difference in efforts to have habitat management be better understood.

Director Tisa reported that he had a story he wanted to relate that epitomizes the above-and-beyond efforts of MassWildlife staff. Director Tisa had been working at the Field Headquarters one recent day when the clerks at the front desk told him that a gentleman had been in earlier with a road-killed deer that he wanted to check in, but he had no idea what he should do. The clerks, Colleen Hubbard and Jill Durand, explained the process and helped the man get the necessary permit. They recommended that he take the deer to a butcher to process for him. The gent returned sometime later saying that the butcher wouldn't process the deer because it wasn't field-dressed, but he had no idea how to do it. The clerks suggested he contact his friends and find a hunter who could help him, but he said he didn't know anyone who hunted and went back outside. The Director heard the story from the clerks as he was leaving, commended their efforts to help the man, and went outside. There, at the back of the building, he found Aquatic Education Coordinator Jim Lagacy, who was back from a rod-and-reel delivery and helping the gent: field-dressing, skinning, and cutting up the deer and putting the meat in bags for him. Director Tisa snapped a photo on his phone of the very happy customer with Mr. Lagacy and showed it to the meeting. He commended Ms. Hubbard and Ms. Durand for their courtesy and Mr. Lagacy for his willingness to go above and beyond at the end of a busy day.

Law Enforcement

Captain Scott Amati reported on an extremely busy month for the Office of Law Enforcement. He provided the Board with an OLE personnel update; an overview of actions for current and preparations for upcoming hunting and other recreational seasons; a detailed report on recent OLE activities, including numerous fish-and-wildlife-related examples of calls for service that Environmental Police officers had responded to in the previous month, both inland and marine; and the outlines of ongoing and recently completed investigations of suspected violations and infractions.

The Chair thanked Captain Amati for his detailed report.

MassWildlife Staff Recent Activity Updates (Leanda Fontaine and Jim Lagacy)

Chief of Information and Education Marion Larson briefly introduced the two employees to give short presentations on recent agency activities.

Water Chestnut Removal Project on Three Mile Pond (Leanda Fontaine)

Western Wildlife District Aquatic Biologist Leanda Fontaine reported on a major effort by staff from throughout the agency to eradicate water chestnut from Three Mile Pond in the Three Mile Pond WMA in Sheffield. The pond is 165 acres, and its shoreline lies completely within the boundaries of the WMA. Water chestnut was first discovered at Three Mile Pond in 2011, and brief removal efforts began in 2013. Ms. Fontaine reported that staff revisited the pond in 2017 and found that the water chestnut had exploded into an invasion along the northern shore around the existing boat ramp, with more sparse areas of plants at the southern end near the dam that forms the pond.

Annual removal efforts began in 2017, with a more intensive removal program from 2018 to the present. She reported that the best removal method is hand pulling, a very physically demanding and time-consuming process, and that research showed that the best time to do it is in early July before the plants set their seed, which can lie dormant in the substrate of the pond for a decade or more. Since 2017, approximately 10 truckloads of plants were removed by staff from the Western District and the Field Headquarters working in kayaks and canoes. Ms. Fontaine tracked over 25 hours spent hand pulling on over 12 acres that are being closely monitored, with about 2 solid acres of dense patches removed. She showed dramatic before and after photos of two areas of the pond where dense patches of water chestnut had been removed that are already supporting an abundance of native pond plants.

Ms. Fontaine reported that, moving forward, the plan is to continue annual monitoring and removal of sprouted plants and to continue reconnaissance of the remaining shoreline with annual efforts through 2027 and biennial monitoring for reemergent plants after 2028. She also noted that water chestnut has been discovered in Smiley Pond, further south in Egremont, where Ms. Fontaine reported that hand pulling will be needed in the coming years as well, before it can become too dense and established. She closed by thanking her many colleagues who helped with the tremendous and successful effort to control this invasive plant.

Dr. Van Roo asked whether it was practical to try to recruit kids or the larger community to help with the efforts, and Ms. Fontaine reported that she will be reaching out to the Friends of Smiley Pond group to help with that pond, which is very far south in Egremont.

The Board members thanked Ms. Fontaine for and congratulated her on the success of her efforts thus far.

Staff-assisted Summer Fishing Program (James Lagacy)

Aquatic Education Coordinator Jim Lagacy reported to the Board on an R3 effort he spearheaded in 2021 to engage staff in R3 through teaching fishing programs at a time when most of the program's longtime volunteers were not quite ready to hold in-person events. Mr. Lagacy reminded the Board that the Aquatic Education Program has many different kinds of events where staff and volunteers teach basic fishing skills, aquatic ecology, fish anatomy, outdoor ethics, etc., from family fishing clinics and festivals to adult fishing programs, including fly fishing, ice fishing, and Becoming an Outdoorswoman, in addition to the rod-and-reel loaner program that he administers for agencies and organizations around the state.

Mr. Lagacy explained that the program goal was to have up to 15 agency staff that were willing to run clinics, ideally, a minimum of two clinics per district for the 2021 summer. The programs were held in targeted areas based on last year's license data showing where newly licensed anglers reside, in an effort to retain those license buyers, especially in urban/suburban areas. Clinic locations were selected by staff in coordination with Mr. Lagacy and R3 Coordinator Astrid Huseby, and desirable locations had ample open shoreline access as well as known populations of sunfish. The courses were advertised through email and targeted social media and consisted of two parts, an online tutorial of basic information that was taped by Mr. Lagacy and his I&E colleagues that participants viewed prior to the fishing event, and that is still available on the MassWildlife website as an online learning tool.

Reporting the results, Mr. Lagacy stated that 22 staff members signed up and were trained from four district offices, three hatcheries, and the Field Headquarters. Consequently, he was able to run 12 staff-assisted summer fishing programs, reaching a total of approximately 250 people, which averaged out to about 20 people per clinic. He received a lot of positive feedback from both attendees and staff, and he thanked his colleagues by name for their willingness to help in this pilot outreach effort.

After a brief discussion, the Board members thanked Mr. Lagacy for attending and wished him continued success in his future R3 endeavors.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee Report

The Chair reported that the NHES Advisory Committee did not meet in November and asked the Board members to note in the Heritage donation report in their meeting packets that donations are maintaining the level they've reached over the previous 3 years.

Confirm Meeting Date

Members confirmed the date for the December Fisheries and Wildlife Board meeting: Tuesday, December 14, 2021, at 9:00 a.m. After conferring with the Director, the Board decided to defer setting the January date until the December meeting.

Mr. Durand moved that the Chairman turn the meeting over to the Secretary for the purpose of conducting the annual election of officers. Mr. Sears seconded the motion.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously.

Board Election of Officers (Bonnie Booth)

Secretary Bonnie Booth opened the elections by asking for nominees for the office of Chair. Mr. Sears nominated a full ballot of officers: Mr. Larson for Chair, Mr. Roche for Vice Chair, and Ms. Booth for Secretary. Mr. Durand seconded the nomination.

Ms. Booth asked for other nominations. Hearing none, Ms. Booth called for a motion to close the nominations. Mr. Foster so moved; Mr. Sears seconded the motion.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously and the nominations were closed.

Secretary Booth called for a vote on the nomination of Mr. Larson for Chair, Mr. Roche for Vice Chair, and Ms. Booth for Secretary.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The vote passed unanimously.

Secretary Booth thanked the Board members for their participation and returned the meeting to the Chair.

Member's Comments

Mr. Sears reported on a wonderful Yokum Ridge dedication event with the Berkshire Natural Resources Council in honor of former Fisheries and Wildlife Board Chairman George Darey. He stated that a beautiful stone bench had been constructed using a stone found within feet of where Mr. Darey was standing when he said that, if there was ever to be any memorial for him, he'd like it to be at that spot. Mr. Sears noted that he had sent photos of the event to his fellow Board members. He also stated that he wished staff much success and the best of luck in their efforts to get new licensing system up and running on December 1.

Secretary Booth complimented Mr. Sears' photographic skills and thanked him for the photos.

Vice Chair Roche applauded recent habitat management work he had visited at the Birch Hill Wildlife Management Area as a great example of the work MassWildlife is doing around the state to improve habitats for all native species.

Mr. Durand reported no comments. He stated that he was looking forward to working with everyone in the coming year and that he seconded Mr. Sears' good wishes to staff for the updated MassFishHunt rollout.

Mr. Foster reported that he was doing a lot of hunting recently in different parts of the state and that he could see and enjoy first-hand the many benefits of all the habitat management work the agency has been doing in the past several years.

Dr. Van Roo reported that she had had an excellent meeting with Chief of I&E Larson and R3 Coordinator Huseby about MassWildlife's work to address diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice in its programs, and she shared some highlights of that meeting. Dr. Van Roo reported that Ms. Larson had told her that she assesses all aspects of the social justice work of the agency for EEA on a regular basis, and that Ms. Larson has begun looking at ways to share those assessments with the Board members and others. As some examples, MassWildlife staff has long been targeting schools with programs to connect children with nature, exploring how to engage in hunting on a budget, and promoting the many health benefits of being outdoors. Ms. Larson had also pointed out that MassWildlife's online posts are accessible to translation software apps, to reach a diverse array of language speakers and that staff has been extending outreach to correction communities. In addition to ongoing retention efforts, MassWildlife has been focusing recruitment on new audiences and venues that don't know about its programs already and therefore aren't taking advantage of them, part of staff's efforts to get the word out better. Staff is also working to open better lines of communication to traditionally underserved groups and reaching out to Outdoor Afro, for example, an organization introducing more people to all sorts of outdoor activities, as well as outreach to Native American communities. Dr. Van Roo reported that they also discussed how MassWildlife can encourage young people today to see themselves as wildlife biologists. One answer is paid internships for field

experience, and Dr. Van Roo wants to see changes in access to the fieldwork opportunities that are required for not only exposure to but also advancement in the field sciences. Dr. Van Roo offered her thanks again to Ms. Larson and Ms. Huseby for their time and for the great discussion of the issues.

Public Comments to the Board: James Wilkins, Springfield

Mr. James Wilkins of Springfield thanked the Board for the opportunity to address the meeting. Mr. Wilkins noted that it was refreshing to hear the board speak about the importance of habitat. As a teacher at Central High School in Springfield, he stated that he would echo Dr. Van Roo's comments about the importance of reaching out with recruitment efforts to underserved communities.

Mr. Wilkins stated that his concerns started with grouse and trout, but really come down to habitat. Everyone agrees habitat is the way to go. In that context, he stated that pheasant and hatchery-raised trout have to be talked about. He briefly reviewed information he has researched about the current economic situation of the agency and asked how we got here, noting that decisions made now will affect 20-30 years down the road. He stated that habitat needs to be part of the vision. Citing a hatchery feasibility study of some years ago, he said it was the only document he found that discussed the future. He believes that wild trout and grouse are the lifeline of the agency's future, so his proposal is to get rid of the hatchery and pheasant-stocking programs and switch those staff to habitat. Noting that there is no mention of hatchery trout or pheasants in MassWildlife's mission statement, he stated that there is no mention of grouse or wild trout in the Annual Reports he was able to access, from 2009 to 2019. He stated that hatcheries and pheasant stocking don't make economic sense. As a hunter, fisherman, and trapper, Mr. Wilkins doesn't see that those programs sustain themselves, including in economic and environmental terms, given climate change and the other challenges Massachusetts faces.

At the conclusion of Mr. Wilkins remarks, the Chair thanked him for attending and sharing his views with the Board.

A motion was made by Vice Chair Roche to move into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing certain land acquisitions and to not return to open session. The motion was seconded by Mr. Foster.

Chair Larson: yes

Vice Chair Roche: yes

Secretary Booth: yes

Dr. Van Roo: yes

Mr. Foster: yes

Mr. Sears: yes

Mr. Durand: yes

The motion passed unanimously at 12:33 p.m.

Executive Session

Deputy Director Jon Regosin presented two parcels to the Board members and after some discussions both were unanimously approved by the Board.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonnie Booth

Secretary

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

November Agenda

Draft October minutes for review

Spreadsheet of Natural Heritage Fund Taxpayer Donations (1992 to 2020)

Handout: PDF from Mr. James Wilkins in support of his verbal comments at the meeting