

Quabbin Watershed Advisory Committee Meeting
March 14th, 2016
7:30 PM

Location: DCR Quabbin Visitor's Center, Belchertown, MA 01007

Members Present: Tom Berube (MA Sportsmen's Council), Jim Boyko (Swift River Valley Historical Society), Tony Brighenti (North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association), Elisa Campbell (Sierra Club), Craig Cortis (Worcester County League of Sportsmen), Dennis Duguay (North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association - Alternate), Jerry Eves (Trout Unlimited - Alternate), Larry Gates (Quabbin Fisherman's Association), J.R. Greene (Friends of Quabbin, Inc.), Ralph Lapinskas (Public at Large), Tom Lautzenheiser (MA Audubon Society)

DCR Staff Present: Justin Gonsor, Bill Pula

Public Attending: Larry Bandolin, Pat Beauregard, Bonnie Booth, Rosemary Charron, John Conkey Sr., Tom French, Coreen Goodwin, John Green, Michael Hofler, Tom Kularski, Paul LaFlamme, Mike LaPrade, Owen Maloney, Bill Meehan, Brad Miner, Rosemary Oddy, John Ouellette, Laurie Pray, Evan Smith, Anne Stengle, Clayton Sydla, Heidi Waugh, Herbert Zimmerman, Bill Zinni

Superintendent's Report

Meeting Start Time: 7:30 PM

Approval of Minutes of Meeting on December 14th, 2015

Elisa Campbell made a motion to accept the minutes from the QWAC meeting held on December 14th, 2015. Jim Boyko seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Rattlesnake Proposal discussion

Tom French gave a presentation about timber rattlesnake biology and detailed the rattlesnake proposal at Quabbin. Highlights of that presentation are as follows:

- MassWildlife is a science-drive wildlife and habitat management agency

- The agency's mission is to restore, conserve, and manage all of the wildlife resources of the Commonwealth.
- 208,000 acres of habitat are managed for wildlife.
- MassWildlife – Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program - Main Priority
 - Conserve native plant & animal species listed as endangered, threatened, or of special concern
- Historic and current range of timber rattlesnakes in Massachusetts
- Examples of rattlesnake conflicts with people – It has been unlawful to kill a timber rattlesnake in MA since 1979. It is a serious criminal offense
 - Deliberate killing
 - Road mortality
 - Collecting
 - Habitat fragmentation
- Timber rattlesnake is listed as endangered in MA, NH, VT, CT, NJ, and OH, and as threatened in NY
- Fungal skin disease is affecting timber rattlesnakes
- Grant proposal submitted to the State Wildlife Grants Competitive Grant Program – March 27, 2013
 - The award will fund studies of the fungal skin disease as well as conservation management actions designed to enhance snake survival and increase the viability of imperiled snake populations.
 - Cooperators
 - Lead State: MA
 - Cooperating States: NH, CT, VT, NJ, TN, MN, WI, IL
 - Other Partners: UMass, University of IL, Roger Williams Park Zoo, USGS National Wildlife Health Center, Wildlife Conservation Society, Orianna Society
 - Grant: \$500,000 for two years
- Timber Rattlesnake Natural History
 - Age at first breeding – 9-10 years for females
 - Frequency of reproduction – every 3-5 years
 - Litter size – average = 9 (range 1-14)
 - Life span – about 30 years (up to 40 years)
 - Size – adults average 3 feet for female, 4 feet for male (maximum 4.5 feet)
 - Dispersal distance from hibernacula

- Gravid females – 1,000 feet or less
 - Non-gravid females – 1.3 miles or less
 - Males – 2.5 miles or less (maximum distance known = 4.5 miles)
- Access to unusually deep hibernation site is the greatest limiting factor to Timber Rattlesnakes in the Northeast.
- Plan is to place the snakes in a boulder field on the north end of Mt. Zion
 - Timber Rattlesnakes require unusually deep places to hibernate.
 - These sites are rare features on the landscape
 - Timber Rattlesnakes imprint on their hibernation site and are able to return to it every winter for the rest of their life.
 - If they don't return, they will die over winter.
- Timber Rattlesnake food sources
 - Mostly chipmunks and white-footed mice; other small mammals
 - Mt. Zion encompasses 1,300 acres and has an adequate food supply
 - A rattlesnake only eats the equivalent of 4 chipmunks a season.
- Snake predators
 - Eagle, bobcat, coyote, owl, hawk, fox, bear, fisher – all found at Quabbin
- Although rattlesnakes can swim, they are surface swimmers and would likely be predated in the process. If they made it to shore they would lose access to their hibernation site and not survive over winter.
- Juvenile snakes will be headstarted at Roger Williams Park Zoo (RWPZ) for release on Mt. Zion.
 - For the past four years MassWildlife has been releasing headstarted timber rattlesnakes at two of the snake's other population sites in the state.
- MassWildlife released 41 eagle chicks at Quabbin Reservoir - 1982-1988
 - First chicks born in the wild at Quabbin – 1989
- Previous Public Meetings where the rattlesnake proposal was discussed – 2013-2014
 - Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Board – December 2013
 - Massachusetts Fisheries and Wildlife Board Meeting – January 2014
- Upcoming public meeting where the rattlesnake proposal will be discussed
 - Massachusetts Water Supply Protection Trust Board Meeting
- Common rattlesnake misconceptions and misinformation

- Have rattlesnakes already been released at Quabbin? – No; spring of 2017 would be the earliest any potential releases could occur.
- Will public access to Quabbin be further restricted because of this project? – No
- Will rattlesnakes spread off of Mt. Zion to other parts of Quabbin? – No
- Will rattlesnakes be released on other islands at Quabbin? – No
- Since Mt. Zion is an island, will the snakes run out of food? – No
- Will rattlesnakes be brought from other states? – No
- Will adult rattlesnakes be moved to Quabbin from other populations? – No
- Is it true that the state plans to release 150 rattlesnakes? – No
- Summary
 - Timber Rattlesnakes have always occurred in Massachusetts.
 - Only 5 isolated populations remain. They are located in areas heavily used by the public.
 - These remaining populations are in jeopardy of disappearing.
 - It is the mission and statutory responsibility of MassWildlife to conserve all native species, including Timber Rattlesnakes.
 - A population in a part of Quabbin Reservoir already restricted from public access can serve as a safety net where rattlesnakes can be protected from the public.
 - Because of limited availability of locations where rattlesnakes can hibernate, and survive winter, they will not spread to other parts of the Quabbin Reservoir.
 - Their presence in a restricted area poses no public risk, and requires no changes to the existing public access policies.

J.R. Greene asked whether the rattlesnake populations throughout the state could recover naturally, without the help of MassWildlife's headstart program. Tom French answered that populations probably could recover if they weren't negatively affected by people. Sites where these snakes survive are shared by many people.

J.R. Greene asked if the headstart program has been running long enough to know whether it is successful. He also asked about the merits of adding snakes to existing populations vs. establishing new population sites. Tom French answered

that headstarting is an established practice that works; but doesn't guarantee the success of the project. Keeping existing populations from disappearing is a stopgap so that the species doesn't disappear immediately while you focus on other management strategies.

J.R. Greene asked about the need to cut brush or drop trees at the Mt. Zion den site over time. Tom French answered that it is standard operating procedure to create cover at den sites. It is expected that the den site on Mt. Zion would need to be maintained every ten years or so, but each site is different.

J.R. Greene asked about the transmitters that will be embedded in the released snakes. Tom French mentioned that the purpose of the transmitters is not to protect the public. The radio transmitters are surgically implanted into the snakes and are good for two years. After two years it is possible to capture the animal and insert a new transmitter, allowing for two more years of tracking. The snake's movement patterns become defined within those first four years. Future generations would also be confined to the Mt. Zion den site as well.

J.R. Greene asked if the food supply on the northern end of Mt. Zion becomes scarce, could the snakes migrate down to the baffle dams at the southern end of the island. The public is allowed on the southern baffle dam during the summer months. Tom French answered that he didn't see the need for any public policy changes at Quabbin. Food supply will be adequate and winter denning at the baffle dams would not be possible.

J.R. Greene commented that Mt. Zion is the site of multiple large stone boundary markers. He suggested mapping and documenting those markers before releasing the snakes on the island.

Tom Lautzenheiser commented that MA Audubon is in full support of MassWildlife's proposal. He read a letter of support on behalf of MA Audubon. That letter is attached at the end of these minutes. He also talked about his experiences hiking at Mt. Tom along the Holyoke/Easthampton line where there currently is a rattlesnake population. He has hiked in the area 2-3 times a month for the past 12 years and has never had an experience/conflict with a rattlesnake in that area.

Ralph Lapinskas commented that he was concerned about the potential loss/change to public access. He also questioned that if the project was successful, would additional release sites at Quabbin be considered. Tom French answered that Mt. Zion is the only spot at Quabbin where there are plans to release rattlesnakes.

Jim Boyko commented that the Swift River Valley Historical Society (SRVHS) has chosen not to give an opinion on the proposal. He did mention that their board felt that the project was unlikely to cause harm to public, but didn't want to voice support or opposition to the proposal.

Craig Cortis asked if there is a definite measurable genetic difference between snakes in Massachusetts and snakes in other states. Anne Stengle, doctoral student at UMass Amherst studying the genetics of timber rattlesnakes, answered that every timber rattlesnake population in each state is a separate genetic cluster.

Elisa Campbell commented that she has hiked most places in the state where rattlesnakes occur and has never encountered a problem. She is in support of the proposal.

Larry Gates commented that the Quabbin Fisherman's Association is against the proposal. They are opposed to the proposal on the basis that the area is not completely off limits to the public and feelings that the proposal should have been brought to QWAC sooner.

Dennis Duguay commented that the North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association's is concerned with keeping Quabbin 'alive' to the public. He is concerned that rattlesnakes can not only swim, but swim underwater. He is concerned rattlesnakes will get off the island and into areas where people hike and fish. He questioned who would be held responsible if someone gets bitten. He is concerned about how the proposal will affect local tourism and businesses in the area as well.

Tony Brighenti commented that over the years, the North Worcester County Quabbin Anglers Association have supported the bald eagle restoration project, loon nesting project, Quabbin's deer hunt, and various issues regarding the

watershed forestry program. However, their board of directors voted to not support the rattlesnake proposal. They are concerned that it might result in public access being compromised in the future. There is concern that a boat could break down near the island, be forced to land on the island, and then someone could potentially get bitten by a rattlesnake.

Bill Pula commented that part of DCR's mandate is to protect the resources of the Commonwealth and also to encourage the survival of endangered species. He talked about the successes at Quabbin of the restoration programs for both bald eagles and common loons. He is in support of the proposal.

Tom Lautzenheiser questioned the statement that 'Mt. Zion isn't completely off limits to the public'. Bill Pula clarified that there is a portable toilet on one of the baffle dams leading to Mt. Zion that boaters are allowed to dock at and use.

Tom Lautzenheiser also commented that MassWildlife has clearly established that people are a significant threat to rattlesnakes in Massachusetts. He talked about how few opportunities there are in the state to establish a rattlesnake population where there aren't existing roads, trails, people, etc. in the immediate area. He reiterated that every state agency has the responsibility to ensure that their actions, at the very least, do not harm rare species. He does not see the proposal negatively affecting public health or water quality.

J.R. Greene questioned whether or not the baffle dams would be suitable winter den sites for rattlesnakes. Tom French answered that it would in no way be possible; the boulder site is not deep enough.

Larry Gates questioned why QWAC was not informed about the proposal at an earlier date. Tom French answered that since it is MassWildlife's proposal, the topic was first discussed at their board and advisory committee meetings. The earliest that snakes would be released on Mt. Zion would be the spring of 2017.

Bill Meehan commented that Tom French will be presenting the proposal to the Water Supply Protection Trust Board on May 26th. Rattlesnakes in Massachusetts are protected under the Endangered Species Act. He questioned how many people have been arrested and brought to court since rattlesnakes were made a protected species in the state. He also asked about what MassWildlife is currently

doing to reduce rattlesnake mortality at their current den sites in the state. Tom French answered that the Blue Hills rattlesnake population is in the middle of an area that can receive around 200,000 hikers per year, which is a lot of people to monitor. He talked about how difficult it is for wildlife law enforcement officers to catch people in the act of breaking the law, or even retroactively as there is usually little or no evidence. MassWildlife doesn't track annual statistics on how many people have faced prosecution related to harming rattlesnakes. However, Tom French talked about two cases within the past two years that involve people harming rattlesnakes. One case is ongoing while the other was recently concluded.

A member of the public commented that he didn't think recreation/tourism to Quabbin would diminish if the proposal went through as planned. He cited the Blue Hills outside Boston that receives lots of recreation but is also home to one of the state's rattlesnake populations.

Herman Zimmerman commented that he is a landowner who abuts Quabbin and is concerned the rattlesnakes could eventually make their way off the island and on to people's property. He also questioned what population controls are in place for rattlesnakes and what the maximum expected population would be for the rattlesnakes on Mt. Zion. Tom French talked about rattlesnake history in the state and specifically about how their need for a winter hibernation site limits their dispersal. In Massachusetts history there has never been a population of rattlesnakes that spread away from their traditional hibernacula and increase their range.

A member of the public asked about when rattlesnakes hibernate in Massachusetts and whether or not timber harvesting at Quabbin would be affected by the proposal. Anne Stengle answered that they generally get back to their hibernacula in October and don't resurface until the following May. Tom French answered that forestry operations would not be affected.

A member of the public made several comments. He reminded everyone that these rattlesnakes only breed once every 3-5 years. He talked about how wildlife habitat is continually lost through various forms of development. He didn't see letting rattlesnakes go extinct as an option. He hikes and fishes at Quabbin

regularly throughout the year and doesn't feel that the proposal will endanger public safety.

A member of the public commented that he feels the proposal highlights the continued insensitivity by the people on Beacon Hill making decisions for people in this part of the state.

A member of the public commented that we share this world with all the other creatures in it; that we are losing more species every day. He feels that when we have the opportunity to protect a native endangered species that we should do it; especially considering that the statistical probability of a rattlesnake hurting someone in Massachusetts is very small.

A member of the public commented on the notion that people seemingly want to be perfectly safe; but no one is ever perfectly safe in this world. He feels that the likelihood of someone being injured by a rattlesnake as a result of this proposal is extremely miniscule. He reiterated that rattlesnakes already occur in areas that are highly used by hikers with little to no conflicts; whereas the Quabbin proposal would put rattlesnakes on an island where people aren't allowed to begin with. He also commented that one of the reasons why the rattlesnake populations aren't doing well in the state is from mortality by cars and people. He stated that working to protect endangered wildlife in Massachusetts is not a popularity contest; that it is conducted as science based management. Tom French talked about Mt. Zion being one of the only locations in the state where a rattlesnake population could be established where the snakes are free from the dangers of people.

A member of the public questioned how many facilities in the state have rattlesnake anti-venom on site. Tom French answered that only the larger hospitals in the state have anti venom on hand, but that they are able to ship across the state if need be.

Larry Bandolin, Belchertown resident, commented that he has experience helping conduct rattlesnake research and in his opinion they shouldn't pose any danger to members of the public not specifically seeking the snakes out.

A member of the public commented on his family's history of working in the forestry/logging industry in areas where rattlesnakes exist and never having a conflict with them; that they tend to keep to themselves unless threatened or bothered.

A member of the public asked how, if rattlesnake habitat in Massachusetts is so restrictive and dispersal so limited, did the species originally propagate its range. Tom French answered that the current range was established between 5,000-9,000 years ago after the melting of the last glaciers in North America. During that warming period they were not restricted to deep hibernation sites. Within the last 5,000 years cooler winter temperatures have restricted their movement and dispersal.

A member of the public asked about why timber rattlesnakes were chosen for this proposal as opposed to another endangered species; one that might be federally endangered as opposed to state endangered. Tom French answered that the timber rattlesnake has declined more than any other New England reptile. It is also a species where human persecution has played a large role in their decline. He talked about MassWildlife's mandate to protect biodiversity in Massachusetts, not the country.

A member of the public asked about a fungus that is killing rattlesnakes. She questioned if that was a larger mortality issue for the snakes than people killing them. Tom French answered that they are trying to figure out if the fungus is a primary pathogen or if it is a secondary pathogen that takes advantage of an already compromised immune system. It appears that the fungal infections are influenced by climatic cycles. The fungus first came about during the coldest and wettest spring in the last 100 years. Rattlesnake populations in New Hampshire have been hit hard by the fungus. Populations in this part of the state don't seem to be affected.

Elisa Campbell made a motion to support MassWildlife's rattlesnake proposal at Mt. Zion. Tom Lautzenheiser seconded the motion. Elisa Campbell, Tom Lautzenheiser, Jerry Eves, Craig Cortis, and Ralph Lapinskas voted for the motion. Larry Gates and Tony Brighenti voted against the motion. J.R. Greene, Jim Boyko, and Tom Berube abstained. The motion passed 5 to 2.

2016 Quabbin Fishing Season update

Bill Pula updated the committee on events surrounding the 2016 Quabbin fishing season. Opening day will be Saturday, April 16th. 15 new Suzuki motors were purchased in the off season to be used on the rental boats; with plans to purchase a dozen more the following season. New docks at boat launch areas 2 and 3 were also constructed in the off season. New lifejackets have been purchased.

Joe O’Laughlin pond will be reopened to private boats this year. It was previously closed to privates due to an invasive species being found in the pond.

The Special Olympics will not be happening at Quabbin this year. The entire event is being moved to Marlborough and Quabbin is no longer close enough to host the fishing portion of the event. Tony Brighenti formally thanked Art and Vicki Miner for all their help over the years organizing the annual Special Olympics event at Quabbin in years past. He suggested someone from the committee draft a letter of thanks to both of them.

Quabbin fishing season parking passes will go on sale in the visitor center on Sunday, March 27th.

Member Issues

Jim Boyko talked about some of the positive and negative effects zebra mussels can have on a water body. They are filter feeders and can improve water quality but also pose problems clogging pipes and reproducing extremely quickly.

Elisa Campbell asked for an update on the annual bike race event around Quabbin that ends with a large meet-up at the observation tower. Bill Pula mentioned that they made sure limit the number of riders to 500 and also to have them change the date so it didn’t overlap with opening day of fishing season or the Walk of Champions event that takes place at the Goodnough Dike.

Elisa Campbell commented on an invasive alga named didymo, nicknamed rocksnot. She was told that it is not likely to be spread by hikers. Bill Pula mentioned that it is not found at Quabbin.

Craig Cortis asked if Quabbin has a policy in place for the use of recreational drones. Bill Pula answered that Quabbin’s Public Access Plan is currently being

updated and will include a policy on drones. All updates to the plan will first be brought to the committee, possibly at the June meeting.

J.R. Greene asked for an update on the unauthorized trail cutting issue in the Ware River Watershed. Bill Pula talked about the recent Ware River Watershed Advisory Committee where the idea of forming a 'Friends of the Ware River Watershed' group was discussed. To be officially recognized they would need to negotiate a Memorandum of Understanding with DCR. 4 or 5 tickets have been written over the past month for unauthorized trail usage. At Wachusett Reservoir, watershed rangers found a person actively cutting illegal trails; he was subsequently arrested by the State Police.

Meeting End Time: 9:40 PM

Upcoming QWAC Meetings:

- Monday, June 6th, 2016 at 7:30 PM – DCR Quabbin Visitor Center, 485 Ware Road, Belchertown, MA 01007



Endangered Timber Rattlesnake Conservation Includes Introduction on Quabbin Island

The Timber Rattlesnake is listed as an Endangered Species in Massachusetts and has experienced the greatest modern decline of any native reptile. It is a high conservation priority species for the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, (MassWildlife) the agency with the legal responsibility and mandate to conserve endangered and common wildlife species. Currently, there are only five populations of Timber Rattlesnakes in the Commonwealth. As part of an overall conservation strategy, MassWildlife is proposing to establish a small number of rattlesnakes on Mount Zion, a large island closed to the public at the Quabbin Reservoir in central Massachusetts.

Native to Massachusetts, the Timber Rattlesnake has lived here continuously long before European settlement. Humans are the greatest threat to the Timber Rattlesnake. While killing or disturbing this snake is a serious criminal offense, these acts, combined with road mortality, continue to be major factors that contribute to the rattlesnake's imperiled status. The proposal to establish a small discrete population of Timber Rattlesnakes at the Quabbin Reservoir has evolved out of the need to have at least one location in Massachusetts where this native endangered species will avoid people.



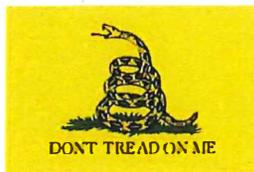
Snakes used for this project will be offspring of Massachusetts snakes. Juvenile snakes will be headstarted in captivity by the Roger Williams Park Zoo in Providence, RI for two winters allowing them to grow large enough so that they will have the best chance of surviving to adulthood. While rattlesnakes are perfectly good swimmers, this island is large enough that they would have little motivation to swim away. Even if the snakes did swim, they would pose no measurable risk to the public, considering rattlesnakes have long lived in popular state parks and wildlife lands heavily used by people elsewhere in Massachusetts.

Throughout human history, snakes of all types have been feared, maligned, and persecuted. Because the Timber Rattlesnake is venomous, people express understandable concerns for their safety and the safety of family members and pets. As a venomous snake, the Timber Rattlesnake certainly has the potential to be dangerous, but the reality is that there has been no public harm. Timber Rattlesnakes are generally mild in disposition and often rattle their tails to alert animals and people. Wild bites to people (who don't deliberately handle or disturb a rattlesnake) are extremely rare. Most modern bites occur as the result of irresponsible (and illegal) activities that involve handling or harassing the animals. The latest antivenin treatments have greatly reduced the danger even if a person is bitten.

The Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, the agency with the legal mandate and scientific expertise is working hard to ensure that this imperiled and fascinating snake does not finally disappear almost 400 years after European settlement.

**Learn more: Mass.gov/dfw/timber-rattlesnake-conservation
Mass.gov/dfw/timber-rattlesnake-facts**

The Timber Rattlesnake in Massachusetts History



The Timber Rattlesnake figures prominently in the Commonwealth's early history as a symbol of strength. In 1622, Chief Canonicus of the Narragansetts sent arrows bound in a rattlesnake skin (likely from the Blue Hills) to Governor Winthrop as a challenge for war. The Governor returned the rattlesnake skin filled with powder and shot with a message of defiance. The familiar Gadsden Flag with a coiled Timber Rattlesnake and the words "DON'T TREAD ON ME" was designed in 1775 for use in the American Revolution and was later used by the Continental Marines.

www.mass.gov/masswildlife

Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
Field Headquarters, One Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581 (508) 389-6300



**WATER SUPPLY CITIZENS
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**
to the Mass. Water Resources Authority

485 Ware Road
Belchertown MA 01007
(413) 213-0454
fax: (413) 213-0537
email: info@wscac.org

March 14, 2016

Commissioner Leo Roy
Dept. of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway Street
Boston, MA 02114

Re: MassWildlife Proposal for the Endangered Timber Rattlesnake at Quabbin

Dear Commissioner Roy,

As a stakeholder in the programs and policies of DCR's Division of Water Supply Protection (DWSP), the Water Supply Citizens Advisory Committee (WSCAC) reviews and comments on activities that occur on DCR watershed lands.

While our primary focus is water quality and source protection, WSCAC also supports the opportunity for DWSP to partner with MassWildlife and the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program to protect rare and endangered species. With over 100,000 acres of protected land, these areas provide a significant contribution to the viability of many plants, birds and animals in Massachusetts.

We support the current MassWildlife proposal to introduce a small native population of the endangered timber rattlesnake to Mount Zion at the Quabbin Reservoir. This large island, off-limits to the public, will provide suitable habitat and increase the possibility of the snake's survival.

The Quabbin watershed continues to benefit from the research generated by the partnership between DWSP and the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife. WSCAC supports these efforts and the current proposal to ensure the survival of the endangered timber rattlesnake in our state.

Sincerely,

Whitney Beals
Chair

Lexi Dewey
Executive Director



208 South Great Road • Lincoln, Massachusetts 01773
tel 781.259.9500 • fax 781.259.8899 • www.massaudubon.org

February 25, 2016

Jack Buckley, Director
Mass Division of Fisheries and Wildlife
1 Rabbit Hill Road
Westborough, MA, 01581

Director Buckley:

Mass Audubon supports the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife's (MassWildlife) efforts to conserve the Timber Rattlesnake, a state-listed Endangered Species. Like you, we too have observed the great decline of this species and believe that halting this decline should be a conservation priority for the Commonwealth.

We also support, as an important component of MassWildlife's rattlesnake conservation strategy, the establishment of a population of rattlesnakes on Mount Zion Island in the Department of Conservation and Recreation's Quabbin Reservoir. This large island, off-limits to the public, offers a unique opportunity to establish a Timber Rattlesnake population in the state. The island hosts abundant prey species necessary to support a rattlesnake population, as well as suitable potential hibernacula, while the risk of adverse interactions with people is minimal.

Good luck with the project, we look forward to following its success.

Sincerely,

Gary R. Clayton
President

Mass Audubon works to protect the nature of Massachusetts for people and wildlife. Together with more than 100,000 members, we care for 35,000 acres of conservation land, provide school, camp, and other educational programs for 225,000 children and adults annually, and advocate for sound environmental policies at local, state, and federal levels. Founded in 1896 by two inspirational women who were committed to the protection of birds, Mass Audubon is now one of the largest and most prominent conservation organizations in New England. Today we are respected for our science, successful advocacy, and innovative approaches to connecting people and nature. Each year, our statewide network of wildlife sanctuaries welcomes nearly half a million visitors of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds and serves as the base for our work. To support these important efforts, call 800-AUDUBON (283-8266) or visit www.massaudubon.org.