

**MEETING OF THE MARINE RECREATIONAL
FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PANEL**

December 6, 2021

Via Webinar

Attendance:

Panel Members: Kalil Boghdan (chair), Kevin Blinkoff, Mike Moss, Patrick Paquette, and Mike Pierdinock

Department of Fish and Game: Ron Amidon and Mark Reil

Division of Marine Fisheries: Daniel McKiernan, Michael Armstrong, Kevin Creighton, Greg Skomal, John Boardman, Matt Ayer, Ross Kessler, Dave Martins, Nichola Meserve, Julia Kaplan, Brad Chase, Ross Kessler, Kim Trull, Christine Cassidy, and Maggie Nazarenus

Office of Fishing and Boating Access: Doug Cameron

Members of the Public: Bob Larsen

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Kalil Boghdan called the meeting to order and began by recognizing a time constraint on today's meeting. He asked the Panel to keep to the time allotted on the agenda. He then turned the floor to Commissioner Ron Amidon for some announcements. Ron thanked the Panel and addressed some concerns he received regarding his status as the Commissioner with the announcement that the Governor will not seek reappointment. He went on to state that he has a lot of work left to do and plans to be around for the foreseeable future to help with the Panel's needs.

The draft agenda was approved unanimously without revision (motion by Mike Pierdinock, second by Kevin Blinkoff). The draft minutes from the Panel's May 20, 2021 meeting were approved unanimously without revision (motion by Mike Moss, second by Patrick Paquette).

Recreational Permitting Update

Update on Alternative Fee Structure for Permits

Commissioner Amidon stated the alternative fee structures as discussed by the Panel have been sent up through EEA to the administration, and that the Department had begun reaching out to legislators to see if there was interest in changing legislation relative to the age at which free licenses are issued as well as the cost of licenses themselves. Additionally, Ron reported that there seemed to be interest in the idea of a reimbursement for the free permits that are issued.

2021 Permit Issuance

Mike Armstrong discussed permit issuance and reported a 10% decline compared to last year. He reminded the Panel that the pandemic had presented an unprecedented high rate of permit purchases. Mike then discussed an increase in residents who are eligible for a free permit, and closed his comments by discussing permit revenue by fiscal year.

New MassFishHunt Recreational Permitting Platform

Story Reed provided the Panel with a presentation regarding the new permitting system. He began by describing the previous permitting system, and the intensive RFI and RFR process to replace it in 2020 and 2021, as led by the Department of Fish and Game in collaboration with DMF and MassWildlife. The project to build the system kicked off in March. Story described the customer transaction fees and how they differ from the old system.

Story moved on to discuss new and improved functionality within the new system as well as new requirements such as a username and password, linked accounts and auto-renewal, and a more efficient staff and vendor interface. The new system will feature modernized and improved analytics and data. Story then showed the Panel what the customer interface looks like. He discussed how the “go-live” date of December 1 went, remarking that overall, there was a smooth transition with relatively minor issues which were resolved in under a minute with many hands on deck in Westborough. Story highlighted ongoing efforts that will continue to be built out over time, and concluded with how DMF plans to send an email to all customers on the listserv with information on how they can purchase a permit for 2022.

Commissioner Amidon added how the process to create a new permitting system began over three years ago, and Department of Fish and Game put a lot of time figuring out how to structure the team for the process. He commended Story and his team for their input on the process. Ron highlighted the arduous process of determining the language that would go into the RFR. Ron closed his comments on congratulating the team for successfully completing the process to get the program up and running.

Christine Cassidy then discussed the event management and customer relationship management aspects of the new permitting system. Christine stated the DMF team expected to be using the event management feature starting in March. She described how DMF can use the new system to target customers who may be interested in attending certain events. Christine highlighted an integrated angler education event registration within *MassFishHunt* such as google map integration; the ability to set event size with automatic waitlist; and integrated release forms. Christine also highlighted improved customer communication such as pre- and post-class communication emails; post-event survey options; and direct link to registration page from social media channels. Christine expressed excitement over the new system and explained it will be a beneficial tool for the outreach program.

Project Updates

The meeting moved on to a review of upcoming projects as well as possible future projects.

Salem Willows Pier: Mike Armstrong stated the city of Salem is paying for demolition to the Salem Willows Pier. Ross Kessler stated things should be moving along this week. Mike asked when construction will begin. Ross reported that, according to the engineer, construction is expected to begin at the beginning of the fiscal year.

Possible New Pier Projects: Mike Armstrong highlighted possible new pier projects which would be built in Somerset; Dighton; and Fall River. Mike welcomed any questions from the Panel.

Small Grants: Mike Armstrong moved on to discuss the public access small grant program. He reported that there has been a lack of interest in applications for small grants with the rising costs for materials. Mike stated that the current maximum grant is \$15,000. He asked the Panel to consider an increase to the individual max grant amount such as \$25,000 and reduce the number of grants or increase the grant program which currently has a \$50,000 Fund allocation. Mike stated he will take any questions from the Panel.

Patrick Paquette thanked Mike for the presentation. He stated this program is the piece of the overall funding management that was built to preserve access. He wanted to ensure that the goal of the program does not get changed. Mike Armstrong stated that the goal would not change, the goal would solely be to increase interest in the program from towns.

Patrick also asked if a beach management entity could apply for funding to participate in the HCP statewide conservation permit program. Ross stated this is possible with the caveat that there is equitable access. Mike stated that the program has been a large success and provides visibility for DMF, and making the grant amount larger could be widely beneficial.

Shad Restoration: Mike proposed a new project restoring shad in the Taunton River. He stated DMF would follow the model successfully used in the Charles River to work with the USFWS to stock millions of shad larvae in the Taunton River for five years. Mike stated the Taunton River is the largest undammed river in coastal Massachusetts and there is a lot of good habitat that would allow for successful stocking. Mike went on to discuss the cost which he estimated would be about \$30,000/year, totaling \$150,000 over five years. He stated the cost would not require staff. He stated he plans to come to the Panel with a proposal at the spring meeting.

Mike Pierdinock asked how far up the river the larvae would be placed. Brad Chase stated DMF would target the upper third of the river closer to downtown Taunton.

Commissioner Amidon expressed excitement over the project idea. He stated the timing for this project is great and suggested DMF refocus on the Charles River upon completion of this project in five years.

Kevin Blinkoff asked about success in other rivers in the northeast. Mike and Brad described other stocking efforts, and the successes and challenges that came with the efforts.

Patrick Paquette expressed support for restoring shad in the Taunton River. He hopes that the Panel will have input in the budget for the project especially if money needs to be taken as a tradeoff from other possible projects. He also expressed interest in dam removal projects and offered any help he could provide.

Panel Member Discussion

Cape Cod Canal Handicapped Access Sites: Mike Moss discussed his proposal to add more handicapped access recreational fishing sites to the Cape Cod Canal. Mike listed six specific locations that he thought would benefit from small, pier-like structures based on their characteristics including ample parking, minimal slope, and a short distance to the water's edge: Tidal Flats Recreation Area (Bell Rd); the Museums at Aptuxet; Bourne Recreation Area at the

Cape Cod Canal (under the Bourne Bridge, Cape side); the ACOE Visitors Center (already accessible but could be made better); Sagamore Recreation Area (next to the Sagamore Br., mainland side); and Herring Run Recreation Area. He outlined his rationale and hoped the Panel would support the proposal. Kalil expressed interest in further developing the proposal and invited any input.

In terms of how this proposal might progress, Ross stated that he and Mike had discussed a potential partnership with ACOE, including who would pay for certain aspects of the project.

Patrick Paquette expressed his support for the concept, though noting that it would require a lot of footwork and that there may be some permitting obstacles. He discussed the recently passed infrastructure bill and stated that DMF should look into receiving federal funding for this proposal.

Kevin Blinkoff expressed support for the proposal. He asked if there could be an opportunity to add handicap access when the canal bridges are replaced. Ross stated this idea has been considered, but there would be high costs associated with maintaining the structures. Dave Martins made note of the Brighton Street Bridge and how people are no longer allowed to fish with the construction of the new bridge.

Mike Pierdinock also expressed support for the concept and was hopeful that DMF could possibly obtain funds from the federal level. He asked about next steps once funding is secured. Ross stated approaching ACOE and creating an agreement with them to move forward with the project. Mike Pierdinock then asked if Ross would come back to the panel with a finalized proposal and asked about a timeline. Ross stated DMF does not have approval to meet with anyone yet, and currently this project is in preliminary stages. Mike Armstrong added that he thinks it could be appropriate to have informal discussions with the ACOE, which Kalil supported moving forward with.

Kalil briefly discussed the Deer Island Pier opening and thanked Patrick Paquette for his speech at the opening. Kalil welcomed any other comments from those in attendance. Director McKiernan highlighted the Deer Island video that was created to gain some traction around the project. Kalil then turned the floor to Patrick Paquette to discuss his enforcement activities proposal.

Permit Fees to Support Enforcement Activities: Patrick Paquette stated that enforcement levels are one of the top concerns he hears from recreational fishermen, and that he is often asked if permit fees could be used to support law enforcement in areas that have a high concentration of recreational fishing. As such, he was bringing this question to DMF. Mike stated that this would be possible, however, it would be detrimental to the recreational budget. Mike also highlighted that when the recreational permit was created, it was agreed upon that the money would not be used for enforcement. Commissioner Amidon stated he advocates for the increase in staff for the Massachusetts Environmental Police (MEP), and that he would endeavor to work with Director McKiernan to have the budgetary and legal teams look into this to see if it would be appropriate. He added that there are staff working to identify additional funding for the MEP to increase staffing.

Director McKiernan stated that he understands the nature of this proposal is conceptual. He stated the MFAC has had success in bringing the MEP staffing shortage to the attention of legislature, and suggested that the Panel submit a similar letter. Commissioner Amidon agreed with Director McKiernan and stated the letter from MFAC gained traction and helped the MEP hire ten additional employees a year. He thinks that a letter would be well received from the Panel. Kalil stated if there were no objections from the Panel (there weren't), he would be happy to work with the Panel to draft a letter regarding enforcement. He asked the Director and Commissioner how to proceed. Dan stated DMF could work with the Panel and suggested that Patrick should create some talking points for the letter. Patrick stated he would be happy to put something in writing.

Patrick further clarified that he brought this up because he felt a responsibility due to the amount of times he hears complaints regarding enforcement. He stated he believes there is a sufficient amount of money within the state budget to cover the enforcement of recreational fishing areas of concern. He thanked the Panel for taking the time to address this issue.

Kalil and Director McKiernan had a brief conversation clarifying the purpose of the letter. Kevin Blinkoff also noted his support for writing a letter.

Other Business

Kalil welcomed comments from the Panel and thanked the DMF staff for their informative presentations, as well as those who have attended.

Kevin Blinkoff expressed concern over the 10% drop in permit sales; he would like to see action to increase the sales for this upcoming year.

Mike Moss thanked Ross, Dan, Nichola, and Mike Armstrong for all their hard work.

Patrick Paquette stated the work of the Panel is meaningful and remarked there are few places in the US that get as many services out of the permit fees as Massachusetts does.

Seeing as there was no further business, the meeting was adjourned (motion from Mike Pierdinock, second by Patrick Paquette).

Meeting Documents

- ❖ December 6, 2021 Draft Meeting Agenda
- ❖ May 20, 2021 Draft Meeting Minutes

Meeting Presentations

- ❖ Recreational Permitting Updates
- ❖ Project Updates