MEETING OF THE MARINE RECREATIONAL FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PANEL
May 8, 2019
Westborough, MA

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

Department of Fish and Game: Commissioner Ron Amidon

Division of Marine Fisheries: Director David Pierce, Assistant Director Mike Armstrong, Deputy Director Dan McKiernan, Chief Fiscal Operator Kevin Creighton, Senior Biologists Greg Skomal and Brad Chase, Biologists Ben Gahagan, Matt Ayer, and John Boardman, Coordinators Dave Martins, Ross Kessler, Christine Cassidy, Kim Fine, and Sam Andrews, Policy Analyst Nichola Meserve

Office of Fishing and Boating Access: Director Jack Sheppard

Other: Ray Kane (MFAC Chairman)

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Patrick Paquette called the meeting to order at 10:37am. Introductions were made.

Regarding the agenda, Kevin Creighton indicated that Sam Andrews would give the recreational permitting update. The agenda was approved as amended without opposition.

Regarding the draft minutes from the Panel's May 14, 2018 meeting, Kalil Boghdan noted that he had also commented favorably regarding the value of the river herring viewing guide as an outreach material (page 10), and would like the minutes edited accordingly. A motion was made by Mike Pierdinock, seconded by Kevin Blinkoff, and approved unanimously to approve the draft minutes as edited.

Update on Recreational Permitting

Sam began with a presentation on saltwater angler permitting trends. In 2018, 187,255 saltwater angler permits were issued, with only about 10% going to female anglers. Sales took place primarily through the internet (69%), followed by retail stores (28%), and other (3%). Resident age 16–59 permits made up the majority (61%) followed by resident age 60+ permits (27%), non-resident age 16–59 permits (9%), and non-resident age 60+ permits (3%). The average age of 2018 permit holders was 49; with 31% being over age 60 and hence in the free permit category. In the next five years, another 10% of anglers will shift into the age 60+ category, indicating the need to recruit/retain/reactivate younger anglers for the Fund's stability. The geographic distribution of permit holders was unsurprisingly coastal focused, although unevenly so, suggesting certain areas that could be targeted.

In comparison to other years, permit sales continued to increase in 2018 but at a lower rate (only 1.8%, down from 3–5% increases in prior years), suggesting the possibility of plateauing soon. Sales only increased by 0.12% for resident age 16-59 permits, compared to over 4% increases for the other

three categories. While there was a 30% new customer acquisition rate to this category, there was also a 46% churn rate (representing those that did not renew a license or moved into the age 60+ category), although duplicate permits could be skewing these numbers to some degree.

Sam next reviewed the Division's strategies to recruit, retain, and reactivate saltwater anglers, which builds off the national "R3" initiate by the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation to increase fishing participation. Because most permit sales occur online, she focused on the online strategies.

First has been the implementation of a new *MassFishHunt* homepage that denotes it as an official licensing site of the Commonwealth (in response to the widespread licensing scam) and provides quick links to related content (e.g., fishing regulations, access locations). In addition, a short one-minute video on who needs a permit and how to get one has been added to the Division's recreational fishing page, which has resulted in a 53% completion rate for permit sales. End-to-end constituent experience research is planned to start next fiscal year from which the Division will derive methods for future improvements.

New in 2019 will be a marketing campaign with paid Google ads. A 2018 MA Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) marketing campaign that also influenced saltwater permit sales indicates this should be successful at boosting new and lapsed angler participation (as well directing people to the real licensing site). DFW will continue with both Google and Facebook ad campaigns in 2019, while DMF will focus exclusively on Google ads given that an estimated 97% of the additional $57,000 in direct sales of saltwater permits in 2018 was from Google ads.

Kalil suggested improving outreach about why a 60+ year old needs to get a permit when it's free. Patrick indicated that the need is for that information to be highlighted during the permitting process on the *MassFishHunt* webpage because the information is available on the DMF website already.

Mike Armstrong thanked Sam for her efforts on the R3 Plan and clarified for the Panel that she is not being paid out of the Marine Recreational Fisheries Development Fund (Fund) despite the direct link between these activities and the health of the Fund.

Kevin B. expressed support for our partnering with RBFF and the national R3 campaign. He questioned whether Google had been approached about correcting the misinformation it is spreading surrounding licensing, rather than our resorting to paid advertisements. Sam indicated that all customer complaints the Division hears about are logged, and RBFF is working on the issue nationally thought with limited success as of yet.

David Pierce asked how many of the age 60+ permit holders donate to the Fund. Mike A. indicated that overall there are about 4,000 people that donate annually, and Sam surmised that most are likely over 60 though this ought to be confirmed. Mike Moss asked if a 60+ year old could buy a $10 permit instead of the free permit, to which Sam responded no because the licensing application cross-references with the individual's age that is entered. She added that donations can be given in any amount though.

Ron Amidon shared three common comments he has heard about saltwater angler permits: 1) support for a half price permit from age 60–69 followed by an optionally free permit for age 70+ (can select from free or paid permit), which would align with freshwater permitting; 2) poor knowledge about the ability to donate; and 3) desire for annual renewal with auto-billing by credit card. He also asked if free licenses factor into the totals that Wallop-Breaux considers in funding determinations, to

which Mike A. responded that the guiding language is for "paid" anglers only. Ron then suggested that the minimum age for free permits should be considered for an increase.

Patrick asked whether the number of free vs. paid permits affects the MRIP reimbursement amount. Kevin indicated it is not considered. Patrick inquired how much of the 30% of new customers to the resident age 16-59 permits in 2018 was from the DFW campaign. Sam indicated she would have to research that. Patrick noted that the trend of lots of new customers with bad retention is rather widespread among various membership-based affiliations.

Mike M. asked that the Panel discuss changing the permitting structure (i.e., fee for paid permit and age for free permit) under Other Business. Patrick agreed.

FY19 Fund Appropriation and Spending

Kevin C. presented, beginning with a review of revenue sources for the Fund. Revenue from permits jumped from about $1.3 million in FY2017 to $1.45 million in FY2018. The MRIP reimbursement in 2018 went up slightly to about $300,000. Donations to the Fund, which generally average about $40,000, peaked in FY2018 at over $47,000. Across all years, donations have put over $325,000 into the Fund.

Kevin displayed expenditures from the Fund for a typical year by category (e.g., permitting, artificial reefs, stock assessment). The MRIP and Public Access Projects generally require the most funding (though 2/3 of MRIP expenses are typically recovered by reimbursement).

Kevin displayed the Fund's financial summary for FY2013–FY2018. Of note was that the year-end balance has been steadily increasing, concluding with ~ $3.85 million to carry forward into FY19. Kevin projected Fund revenues of $1.3 million in permit sales (similar to FY2017 and down from FY2018 due to 2019's cold, wet spring), $40,000 in donations, and $305,000 in MRIP reimbursement. Projected program expenditures are $1.95 million (assuming $1 million spent on the Deer Island fishing pier), with another ~$0.17 million debited from the Fund for the fringe assessment. All told, this would result in a FY2019 year-end balance of $3.37 million to carry into FY2020. The decline in the year-end balance reflects higher expenditures due to spending finally occurring on Deer Island.

Overall, spending on public access (compared to all spending) averages 30% and was 15% for FY18. Spending on public access (compared to permit revenue) averages 34% and was 19% for FY18. With ample spending on Deer Island expected in FY2019 and 2020, these percentages will increase to better achieve the required 1/3 on public access. In FY21, Kevin anticipated the Fund would have $100,000 to spend or save for the next large project. Kevin concluded with a 10-year projection for the fund. Assuming steady-state expenditures and revenue, expenditures are expected to surpass revenue in about six years.

Mike P. asked whether the 10-year projection factored in the aging out of paid permits. Kevin C. responded that he assumed a leveling off, and that the projection highlights the need for campaigning to attract new anglers. Mike P. further inquired whether such campaigns have been successful in other states. Sam responded that Georgia had a very successful one, including email and postcard renewal reminders. Christine added that DMF's long-term outreach plans also include more activities to entice youth anglers. Mike A. suggested that consideration could be given to boosting funding for angler ed programs to increase youth (and their parent) involvement.

Patrick asked that the long-term projection be singled out as an agenda item for future meetings to ensure that discussion about how to balance the budget occurs in advance of spending surpassing revenue. Mike A. agreed and indicated that DMF would bring forward some projections that include changes to the permit fee structure in terms of the price and age tiers. He noted that the median fee around the country is around $15 dollars, as opposed to MA's $10, and that a change would require approval by A&F (the Executive Office for Administration and Finance). Changing the age cut-offs would require legislative action. Ron requested that an attempt be made to quantify the revenue that could be garnered by automated permit renewal for the projections. Mike A. also cautioned that construction costs are on the rise with regards to making spending projections.

FY19 Project Review

Diadromous Fish Project

Brad Chase presented on the Diadromous Fish Project, which was budgeted roughly $189,000 for FY19. He had decided to focus on river herring, although the Project works with 15 species in MA. Two of the Project's six staff are supported by the Fund. There are two main branches of work: fish passage/habitat restoration, and fish biology/management.

Brad reviewed recent projects in the category of fish passage/habitat restoration. At the Weir River in Hingham, there had been an inoperable fish ladder, which was repaired in 2018 with just a few hundred dollars. Downstream of the area, the Fishway Crew had found that the stream channel was overgrown, and subsequently worked with the town at very low cost to make improvements. At Pilgrim Lake in Orleans, a new fishway with an electronic counter was installed in 2018 that is now successfully passing fish. Brad considered this a great example of a cooperative project with a town, in which the town provided funding for the materials and DMF provided the labor. He noted that fish counts have been increasing at the site. Improvements at the Jones River in Kingston represented a whole watershed approach, conducted with the Division of Ecological Restoration. Following removal of the dam in 2011, river maintenance upstream of that area was completed in 2016–2018. Herring showed up last year and on April 22 of this year, DMF put in a temporary fish ladder with plans to design a permanent ladder for the site. Brad believed that fish are passing here for the first time in maybe 150 years. At Town Brook in Plymouth, an eel ramp was installed in 2018, and a video counter added. Brad noted that this was the steepest eel ramp DMF has built, and it is working out well.

Moving on to spawning run counts, Brad reported that MA has four sites with 20 years of data from which a combined index is generated. These include the Monument River, the Nemasket River, Weymouth Back River, and the Mattapoisett River. The 2018 value was similar to 2016, and much better than the 2017 dip. Brad expected favorable results for 2019. He noted that the ASMFC-approved harvest plan for the Nemasket River had not been implemented by the town. Brad noted some work performed at the Back River had included the installation of an eel ramp and smelt brook channel improvements. The Mattapoisett River's count had declined in 2018 unlike the other three rivers, the cause of which Brad was unsure.

Brad made note of two sites where the installation of a fish ladder produced a very good response in fish counts: Herring Brook, Pembroke, and the Mystic River. Ben Gahagan added that the Pembroke count was increasing again in 2019 which the locals are very excited about, and at the Mystic, a nature-like fishway is being planned for installation in the next 3–5 years which would open up 100 acres of habitat.

Brad reported that similar optimistic signs are not being observed for other metrics like repeat spawning percentage and an expanded age structure. He stated that the value of the counting data is two-fold: in addition to being a great education/awareness opportunity, time series data are necessary to consider any eventual fishery re-openings. At present, there are four runs with fish counts between 200,000 and 300,000; four runs between 300,000 and 500,000; and five runs above 500,000.

Brad summarized the Projects' highlights that support from the Fund has helped achieve: the development of relative abundance indices for five diadromous species; good coastal coverage for river herring; innovations and field applications of eel passageways; electronic and video counting systems for river herring; and efficient construction and repair of small fishways. Problematically, however, is that funding opportunities have declined and many sites need maintenance. Accordingly, DMF is pursuing an additional $150,000–$250,000 annually to bolster the project.

Kalil asked if groups like local watershed organizations have been contacted about ways in which they could contribute to maintenance of fish passage. Brad responded that it is done on a case-by-case basis, and more could likely be done. The traditional application is to work with the towns.

Ray Kane suggested that towns may be more interested to contribute financially to run maintenance once runs reopened. Mike A. noted that there are likely only five runs in the state that could be reopened in the foreseeable future, compared to hundreds throughout the state. Ben added that DMF is already working well with the towns and local organizations for the five runs in this category.

Patrick asked for any updates on the Neponset River. Brad responded that there is long-term interest to add passage at or remove the Lower Mills Dam; he expected progress on this in the next few years. Mike A. added that dam removals tend to present a number of obstacles, and this speaks to the alternatives for fish passage that DMF can implement.

Patrick noted that he expects the Charles River to turn in a good run count for 2019, based on what he's seeing below Watertown Dam.

Ron remarked that he is very interested to see growth in Brad's group and is actively working to increase the capital and operating budget. There is lots of support from EEA, including the new secretary, but the difficulty is with A&F, so he's trying to grow support among legislators. He added that there would be an event on May 14 in collaboration with DCR at the Mystic Lake Dam. He would provide full details and an invitation to the panel members.

Mike P. asked whether habitat or some other cause was responsible for the decline in the Mattapoisett River. Brad surmised that multiple causes could be at play, including ground water removal and stream maintenance issues. He was working with the towns to get the spillways managed properly. Mattapoisett and Agawam will be areas of focus to try to understand what's going on. Mike P. wondered whether seals and birds could be increasing natural mortality. Brad thought it could be a factor but was not the cause for the runs' condition today. Ben added that the recent declines (2002–2006) were also a coastwide event, not just MA, and pointed out the wide breadth of study DMF is conducting to better understand recruitment drivers and bycatch implications.

Mike P. questioned why Middleborough and Lakeville were not pursuing a harvest re-opening for the Nemasket. Brad responded that the towns' initial interest was diminished by the fish count dip in

2017, plus the likelihood of the Nemasket to be the only open run. He noted that he has since been hearing from more constituents with an interest to reopen there or elsewhere.

Mike P. asked if there is overlapping use of eel and fish ladders. Brad responded that because glass eels are poor swimmers they can't handle the steepness of Denil fishways, but they can navigate a weir and pool fish ladder, and can go steep with a low flow (provided it's not a metal surface). Thus, it is possible to design a system that works for multiple species.

Dan McKiernan asked about the cost and operation of electronic counters. Brad informed that they cost about $15,000 each, and DMF has purchased some of those deployed, while towns have purchased others. For the latter, DMF builds the housing and instructs the town on the system's use. Some are solar operated, others battery. Project staff have found that towns struggle to operate them on their own, and hence need a lot of DMF technical assistance. Project staff are maxed out on the support they can provide to towns on them.

Kalil suggested that high schools be considered for providing ongoing assistance with fishway passage, as student involvement could be a steady stream. Christine responded that while it's beyond the I & E Project's ability to involve students directly, plans are being developed (for implementation next year) to work with a group that will provide instruction with our oversight at the high level. She noted that the Division had also been approached by the aquarium for an educational project.

Mike A. concluded this agenda item by remarking that the two biologists added with Fund monies had more than doubled the Division's knowledge and results. He felt that the run status reflected this too, and thanked the Panel for its support of the Diadromous Fish Project.

<u>MRIP Project</u>
Dave Martins reviewed the purpose and importance of the MRIP Project to estimating valid recreational fishery catch data for stock assessment and management uses. He reminded the Panel that enforcement of recreational fishing regulations was not a part of MRIP's mission, and intercepting those non-compliant trips is actually an important element to accurately estimating catch. The Project was budgeted roughly $400,000 for FY19.

For 2018, NOAA required a base number of 792 survey assignments, to which DMF added another 405, for a total of 1197. The majority took place during May–October. The resulting number of interviews was 4,356 in total, up from 3,501 in 2017. This included 534 charter, 3,189 private boat, and 633 shore angler interviews. For headboats, staff accompanied 58 trips, conducting 1,209 angler interviews (up from 1,105 in 2017). Two samplers were generally assigned to each trip given the number of anglers aboard.

Other items of note for 2018 included the task of retiring inactive fishing sites to increase survey efficiency, which reduced the number of sites state-wide from 522 to 210. For example, on the Cape, 128 sites were retired, leaving 68 for inclusion in the survey. Also, beginning in 2019, data collection in the field will switch from paper logs to tablets, with improvements made to efficiency and data quality.

Dan asked if angler cooperation with MRIP intercepts had improved. John Boardman responded that the refusal rate remained around 50%, and that the increase in the number of interviews was a result of efficiency gained in retiring inactive sites. Matt Ayer added that MRIP staff are instructed in how to take an active approach in encouraging completion of interviews.

Mike P. asked about the location of the data storage from the field tablets. Dave indicated that data goes directly to the ACCSP database, although corrections can subsequently be made if necessary. Mike also queried staff about observations of fishing effort levels in March and April, which would be of interest to the catch estimates that result for cod and haddock for Wave 2. Matt responded that effort was very low.

Kevin B. asked about the information that is provided to anglers during intercepts, i.e., what MRIP is, its importance. Dave responded that interviewers are provided with an MRIP brochure to distribute to interested anglers. Matt added that staff also regularly meets with for-hire captains and fishing organizations and stresses the important of MRIP, and is also trying to do more outreach through popular fishing magazines, including a pending article in On the Water Magazine.

Mike A. noted that DMF met with party boat captains a month ago to discuss cooperation with MRIP interviewers, as well as compliance with regulations especially in relation to black sea bass and scup. A few of the worst offenders would be absent from the fishery this year following enforcement busts last year. Dan commented that DMF needs to have a similar meeting with charter boat captains now.

David inquired whether other states, NY for example, have taken the same level of initiative with regards to MRIP cooperation. Dave remarked that NY does have some problems with logistics of sampling certain areas like the east end of Long Island well. Dan pointed out that MA has either the worst or second worst refusal rate.

Mike P. commended MA for the effort DMF puts into MRIP sampling in comparison to other states despite our refusal rate. He suggested that some captains might downplay cooperation due to distrust in data collection especially as it related to eVTR reporting requirements for data that goes unused in management.

Artificial Reef Project

Mike A. provided a recap of the Artificial Reef Project in Mark Rousseau's stead. He reminded the Panel that money from the Fund covers reef monitoring expenses only (budgeted ~$10,000 in FY19), but his report would include other advancements during the year.

Highlights included: 1) annual monitoring of the Commonwealth's five artificial reefs, including the collection of acoustic data from tagged fish through the receiver deployed on each reef; 2) progress with regards to permitting multiple new reef sites in Cape Cod Bay in primarily sandy bottom, thus adding important benthic structure once materials are deployed; 3) potential to secure $225,000 in grant funding from the Department's ILF Program to deploy 2,000 cubic yards of additional material to the Yarmouth Tire Reef, which would likely occur in fall/winter 2019; and 4) successfully securing a storage site in New Bedford to stockpile materials as they become available, for deployment as funding allows, with an MOU already signed to receive 1000+ cubic yards of granite and concrete debris from South Coast Railway.

Mike P. applauded DMF for its work on building artificial reefs and supported the development of more in MA.

David noted that the Division had inquired about potential materials from the Swansea plant cooling towers' destruction, but initial discussions had indicated problematic timelines. Ron commented that there are several bridges in the queue to come down, which could provide more material in an

affordable fashion given that these often come down onto a barge, providing a win-win situation to deploy into the water at the same time.

Public Access Project

Ross Kessler reviewed the Division's activities towards preserving the public's fishing access in the Commonwealth, which was budgeted $467,000 from the Fund for FY19. Small grants were awarded to four projects, although installation of most was still pending (recipients have until the end of the fiscal year). The funded projects were: lights for Gifford State Boat Ramp in New Bedford; car-top racks at the Peter Igo Park and Green Harbor Boat Ramp in Marshfield; lights at the Lynn Heritage State Park in Lynn; and new decking at the fishing pier by the Harbormaster's office in Beverly.

Two proposed small projects were not awarded. Eastham requested kiosks (for signage) at four locations, but they already had kiosks and one site was not open access; and Kingston had asked for funding to help build access along Jones River at Mulliken's Landings, but, while a worthy project, it's completion timeline did not align with the funding period.

Ross updated the Panel on the Deer Island Fishing Pier next. Its development had been more contentious than expected with the neighboring community of Winthrop, and many changes to the plans were required, including revision to the parking lot area and size but with more of the cost being deferred to MWRA. ACK Marine (of Quincy) had been selected as the contractor, with construction expected to begin in August and be completed by February. Ross reported that the company had been excellent to work with thus far and they were busy with material acquisition currently.

Mike A. asked if there was any reason to think that a ribbon cutting event couldn't be planned for next May. Ross suspected that would work.

With regards to future large projects to fund after completing Deer Island, at the top of the list is to rebuilt Salem Willows fishing pier as previously discussed. The City had recently put some money into the pier to keep it operable, but it was still in very bad shape.

Ross reviewed several other large projects for possible future funding. The idea for a small pier upriver from Bicentennial Park in Fall River had been previously discussed, which Ross indicated he was waiting for Mayoral issues to stabilize before pursuing much. South Dartmouth was potentially interested in the development of a new pier at Padanaram, but was in the midst of due diligence to develop and confirm community support first. Fair Haven had also approached DMF about a pier at Little Bay, a great striper and bluefish spot, for which they would pay for engineering. Lastly, several challenges remained unresolved with regards to possible acquisition of the Weweantic River property in Wareham: the owner is asking $200,000 despite being the property being appraised for $115,000; the owner has not filed the required after-the-fact Notice of Intent with the town and DEP (effectively placing a lien on the title); and the slope of the property will make installation of ADA compliant equipment a real challenge (switch back ramping).

Mike M. asked about parking at the Weweantic property. Ross indicated that there are currently curb cuts, but the site would allow some additional parking.

Ross continued with a few potential small projects for the future. First was building a car-top ramp at Horseshoe Mill dam on the Weweantic River in cooperation with the Buzzards Bay Coalition. They had done the permitting already, so the expected cost was about $5000. Second was to assist F&W

and the North and South Rivers Watershed Association with funding for upgrades at a potential acquisition site on the North River in Pembroke.

Kalil asked how many large projects had been completed all together and who is responsible for day-to-day maintenance. Mike responded that Salem Willows would make five, and Land Management Agreements determine who is responsible for what.

Patrick asked if small grant recipients are required to acknowledge DMF's contribution to the funded improvement in any way. Ross replied that we typically install a sign ourselves.

The Panel discussed the future of the Small Grants program. Kalil opined that it created a lot of goodwill and real improvements for a minimal cost, and he would not want it to be defunded. Mike M. voiced support for funding both big and small projects, such as through the program. Mike P. agreed with both of them. Patrick concluded that the Panel supported the continuation of the Small Grants program.

Information & Education

Mike A. reminded that Panel that I & E was budgeted about $119,000 for FY19, which funds Christine Cassidy as the project's full-time coordinator (full-time) and Kim Fine as the project's half-time angler education assistant.

Kim provided the Panel with a summary of angler education activities last year. The Take Me Fishing Program had hosted eight fishing clinics in 2018, which engaged about 150 youths. Nearly all of these would be repeated in 2019, plus several more, with a growing list of partnering organizations. Based on feedback received in 2018, most events in 2019 would include two 2-hour clinics (rather than one 3-hour clinic which most people weren't staying the full time for). Each clinic can accommodate about 20–30 participants, so in this manner the program was expected to grow in 2019. Under the financial assistance program in 2018, DMF had granted $500 to Salem to assist in their development of fishing programs. Kim also noted the legislative earmark in the FY20 budget for The Fishing Academy, a non-profit working to engage inner city kids in saltwater fishing.

Kalil asked how partnering organizations are identified for angler clinics. Kim indicated that it is typically the organizations that hear about DMF's involvement in clinics by word of mouth and then they contact us about helping to design a clinic. She stated that more clinics as currently conducted could be added but only with more staff or volunteers for the angler ed program, although the hope is to develop a curriculum whereby organizations could be trained and equipped to host their own event.

Patrick asked for more information on the Fishing Academy funding. Mike A. clarified that it does not come out of the Recreational Fund, but is a legislative earmark on DMF general funds. Patrick was glad to hear this.

Christine then reviewed other I & E activities for FY19. DMF's social media presence continued to grow through Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (although Flicker was discontinued). For example, Facebook grew 27%, adding 1270 followers; Instagram grew 80%, adding 1,222 followers; and Twitter grew 23%, adding 601 new followers. Engagement had increased on Instagram, but decreased on Twitter due to refocusing the account on Advisories primarily. She added that most feedback on social media is positive. Top posts had included things like the striped bass license plate, the springtime arrival of river herring, the white shark fatality, DMF circle hook regulations, the

increase in fines, and right whale regulations. The "What is it? Wednesday" contest on Facebook had been continued with winners receiving a rod & reel combo provided by Bass Pro Shops. She had begun using Instagram to highlight various DMF programs and projects, and get user-generated content.

DMF had also recently partnered with the Anderson Cabot Center for Ocean Life on a video to promote best practice recommendations for ethical angling, specifically in relation to the Gulf of Maine groundfish fishery. The research project will lead to maps for when and where to fish to avoid cod. A media packet was being developed, including a survey to ask people about how they like to get their information.

With regards to print media, the coloring books (saltwater fish and sharks) were being distributed. Copies had been printed for two years (reflected in the decreased budget for FY20). Roughly 4,500 of the Striped Bass circle hook promotion cards had been distributed since January. Staff had engaged directly with the fishing public at eight shows, distributing loads of stickers, recreational fishing guides, and other print media.

Christine also indicated that she was involved with how the new Striped Bass Conservation specialty license plate was being promoted. Mike M. asked about how the proceeds are used. Dan responded that, unlike other MET plates, funds from this one will go into a dedicated fund for striped bass and river herring conservation and research efforts. Mike A. added that there will be a board including DMF, MET, NGOs, fishermen, and others to oversee the spending through an RFP process. Dan noted that there is an MOU in place that establishes this process. Patrick expressed support for the plate and projected that the minimum number required for production would quickly be met. Christine added that public interest had been high since the announcement that had just been released on Friday. DMF was developing a list of FAQs to better advise the public.

Christine then reported on the new exhibit that was nearing completion at Cape Cod Canal Visitor Center. The exhibit focuses on the canal as a highway for marine species, as well as fishing in the canal. The visitor center has an annual visitation of 35,000–40,000 people of diverse demographics. The exhibit was developed in partnership with the Army Corps of Engineers. Dan noted that there had been a marine display in the building before but it was showing its age. He expressed great optimism about the final product, and indicated that an opening event would be planned for June most likely.

Mike P. suggested that the ACOE could also assist DMF by way of posting fishery regulations signs along the canal. Mike A. responded that this is DMF's responsibility and something we plan to do.

Recreational Stock Assessment

Mike A. gave the Panel a quick update on the recreational stock assessment position. Tiffany Cunningham had left DMF for a great opportunity in New Caledonia working on tuna. The Division was in the process of hiring her backfill, with the candidate interviews having just been completed.

Striped Bass Research Project

Ben Gahagan summarized his striped bass research that is aiming to provide information on stock compositions of aggregations, year to year stability of aggregations, and any differences in mortality among the aggregations. The methods include acoustic tagging, with 260 fish tagged thus far, and genetic stock identification. Ben displayed a number of chord diagrams depicting some of his early results. He reported that the majority of fish tagged in MA recently are going to the Hudson River for

spawning, followed by Chesapeake Bay, and Delaware Bay. A size effect was present, such as in 2016, the schoolies in MA were mostly Hudson River fish, but the commercial sized bass had more Chesapeake Bay fish mixed in. Delaware Bay had a greater contribution in 2017. Aggregation fidelity was also identified, with fish tagged off MA having a high rate of return (70–100%) to the same area of MA the next year.

Regarding the genetic work, Ben had run genetics on all 260 fish, thus forming a baseline. Six distinct populations can be identified along the east coast: two in Canada and four U.S. Atlantic. Interestingly, the Delaware and Chesapeake fish were lumped genetically, which Ben theorized could be due to the Delaware having been depleted in the past and possibly recolonized with fish from Chesapeake. He was also working on developing methodology to identify a fish to where it was spawned, so as to understand the fisheries' impact.

Mike A. provided some context as to why Ben's work is so important. The multi-stock model that Gary Nelson had developed for the 2018 benchmark assessment had failed peer review because there wasn't enough genetic information to link catch to its stock component. Ben's work would provide this for future model development.

FY20 Fund Appropriation Budget and Proposal for FY20

Mike A. reviewed the proposed spending plan for the FY20 Fund appropriation of a projected $1.7 million. He indicated that most changes are union-negotiated pay increases.

In the Permitting Project there were no other changes. For the MRIP Project, Mike indicated that he hoped to save a little of the proposed budget by hiring seasonals through the state rather than through a contractor (the former has resulted in timing issues in prior years but efforts were underway to facilitate quicker hiring of these routine and necessary positions). The I & E Project budget was a little less than FY19 due to lower printing costs as referenced earlier by Christine. The Diadromous Project was unchanged except for pay adjustments. Under Public Access, the budget for FY20 is up due to the planned spending of close to $600,000 for the Deer Island Fishing Pier, some of which is essentially rolled over from last year when it wasn't spent. The Artificial Reef budget was up slightly for more spending on cameras and other equipment. And there was no change to the Recreational Stock Assessment budget.

With the remaining roughly $25,000, Mike was proposing to conduct a striped bass acoustic mortality study, thereby continuing the line item for Striped Bass Research Project for another year. He reminded the Panel that the 9% rate that is used in assessments is from a Paul Diodati study conducted in Cat Cove over 30 years ago now. He wanted the Division to conduct an even better study next spring, in which we would catch striped bass with various hook configurations (e.g., j hooks, circle hooks, artificial) and tag them with acoustic transmitters, and put up an array of receivers to assess mortality. He hoped to operate in both Plum Island Sound and the Annisquam so as to incorporate a temperature variable on mortality rates. The whole cost would be an estimated $60,000 or more, so only partial funding would come from the Recreational Fund. Mike wants DMF to be the subject matter experts on striped bass discard mortality.

Patrick supported the research to compare circle hook vs. j-hook mortality, especially given the current discussions about striped bass management options, but he would also be interested to see a release mortality study of other effects like wire line.

Mike P. asked if the total budget was higher than usual in order to pay for Deer Island. Mike A. responded that was the case, but that the Fund balance had been inflated for several years by not spending on a big project and saving for Deer Island.

Mike M. made, and Mike P. seconded, a motion to recommend the spending plan as proposed. The motion carried unanimously. Mike M. thanked Mike A. and his staff for the good presentations, which made the Panel's support of the spending plan easier.

Free Fishing Days for 2020

The Panel discussed whether they wanted to make any change to the default free fishing days for 2020, deciding to continue with Father's Day weekend (June 20–21, 2020).

Election of Chair

Mike A. reported that the Panel should have a cycle of chair elections like other Division panels and committees. The plan moving forward would be to conduct elections every two years. David opened up the floor to nominations.

Mike P. nominated Kalil for chair. Kalil indicated interest in the position, and recognized Patrick for his past leadership. Mike A. also thanked Patrick for stepping up during a turbulent time. Patrick expressed support for the new elections schedule. Kalil was appointed Chair of the Panel unanimously.

Other Business

Panel Member Comments

Mike M. recommended that the Panel request legislation to change the age of free permit from 60 to 65 years old. He noted that that was what the original panel for the permit's development had recommended based on 60–64 year olds typically remaining part of the workforce and having the fiscal resources to pay for a permit. Mike P. asked if such a change would go through a public comment process. Mike A. responded that there would be a hearing at the state house for the Natural Resources Committee. Patrick suggested that it might be wise to request the permit's fee structure be aligned with inland permits. It was decided that staff would produce for the Panel's next meeting a series of projections on the impact to Fund revenue from various changes to the age of a free permit, the cost of the permit, and automatic permit renewal. It was noted that the latter may be complicated by what the vendor can do and what if any affect auto renewals may have on how sampling assignments are generated.

Patrick voiced concern that the recreational fishery was being ignored with regards to mitigation for offshore wind development. He suggested that the Recreational Fund would be a good place for some of that money to land. David responded that mitigation discussions are ongoing, but they are pointing to monies being put into a trust to be paid to harvesters for gear loss. He indicated that he will have a meeting with EEA in advance of the next working group meeting and will consider suggesting Patrick's idea. Mike P. thanked David and Ron for listening to the recreational community on this subject, particularly with relation to Vineyard Wind including a study of impacts to highly migratory pelagic species. Ron commented that the group was working to better identify the structure and flow of the mitigation funding.

Public Comments

Ray Kane expressed concern about the high refusal rate for MRIP interviews and wanted to know what the Panel or Division was planning to do to address it. Mike A. responded that, for starters, he would task staff with reviewing the refusal rate data with regards to where, when, and who is refusing, to try to get a better understanding of why, before developing an action plan. Patrick added that is was outside the Panel's purview to address this. Mike P. thought the variable PSEs by state needed to be addressed as well. Matt commented that switching to the use of tablets in the field will free up time for area biologists to better train surveyors and be in the field engaging with the public. Mike P. suggested that cooperation would increase if the data collected in eVTRs were used for fishery management purposes and not just to assess effort.

Seeing as there was no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:43pm.

Meeting Documents

- May 8, 2019 Draft Meeting Agenda
- May 14, 2018 Draft Meeting Minutes
- FY20 Recreational Permit Revenue Spending Plan

Meeting Presentations

- Recruitment, Retention, and Reactivation of Saltwater Anglers
- Update on Marine Recreational Development Fund: Revenue and Spending Summary
- FY19 Project Reports: Diadromous Fish, MRIP, Artificial Reefs, Public Access, I & E, and Striped Bass Research