

FINAL MINUTES

**Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee
(NHESAC)**

December 8, 2016

DFW Field Headquarters, Southwest Meeting Room #103
1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581

MEMBERS:

Present: Kathleen Anderson, Mark Mello, Thomas Rawinski, Gwilym Jones, Joseph Larson, Wayne Petersen

Absent: Jennifer Ryan

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Dave Small, Karen Searcy, Bryan Windmiller, Andy Finton, William Brumback, Kevin Powers

Absent: Mark Pokras, Timothy Flanagan

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Jon Regosin, Eve Schluter

– The meeting was called to order at 1:36 p.m. –

1. Approval of October Minutes

Kevin Powers motioned that the October minutes be approved, Dave Small seconded the motion and members voted unanimously to approve the minutes. Note: the Committee did not meet in November.

2. Chair's Comments

Kathleen Anderson had no comments to share.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

Dr. Larson summarized the November 22, 2016 meeting of the Fisheries and Wildlife Board.

- The plan to introduce rattlesnakes to Quabbin Reservoir has been on hold, pending further review by three-person subcommittee of the Board appointed by the Chair. That group will meet and present their recommendation to the Board at the December 19, 2016 meeting.
- The Board Chair announced that he would soon be stepping down from his long-held position.

- Massachusetts Environmental Police reported that the State had 14 boating fatalities in 2016.
- The *Massachusetts 2015 State Wildlife Action Plan* was approved by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- Director Buckley and others within the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies are reviewing allocations of Federal funds.
- A regulatory change would allow youth waterfowl hunting opportunities for persons 15-17 years in age.
- Jon Regosin gave a presentation on invasive species to the Board and highlighted control efforts happening in the Districts.
- The Blue Hills deer hunt was held again this year.
- Listing changes proposed about two years ago have been approved by the Secretary, but not yet by Administration and Finance. NHESP would like these changes finalized before the production of its next Priority Habitat map, due in 2017.

4. NHESP Report – Eve Schluter

- The new Priority Habitat maps would be out for public comment in 2017.

5. Assistant Director’s Report – Presented by Eve Schluter, in Tom French’s absence

- Director Buckley and Eve met with the Department of Energy Resources to discuss criteria for solar installations.
- The documents management project is going great! It will allow on-line filing of MESA reviews.
- Michael Lachance was hired as a data management specialist.
- The fire ecologist position remains open, and plans are to advertise for a restoration ecologist.
- \$100,000 has been cut from the Program’s budget for next year.
- The Program/Division hosted a very successful Roseate Tern recovery meeting which attracted people from five different countries. Special thanks to Carolyn Mostello for all she did!
- The Program/Division hosted the *2016 Year-end Massachusetts Amphibian Conservation Projects Meeting*, which focused on the Eastern Spadefoot and the Jefferson/Blue-spotted Salamander complex.
- In the news, Eve called attention to items in member packets. Karro Frost was featured in an article, *Globally rare, locally found*. A press release from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service announced the newest National Wildlife Refuge, Great Thicket NWR. Lastly, the Cape Wildlife Center will be closing, as discussed in *The Barnstable Patriot*.

6. Discussion of Translocations and Reintroductions – Eve Schluter and Jon Regosin, NHESP

Wildlife success stories in Massachusetts include the reintroduction of Wild Turkey, Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon. In recent years, recovery efforts for endangered species such as the Eastern Spadefoot, Common Loon and Sandplain Gerardia have included introductions.

Committee members had a lively discussion with Program staff about many biological, ethical and legal considerations. Wayne Petersen suggested that the term ‘repatriation’ is more accurate than ‘reintroduction’ in cases where a species is returned to its formerly occupied native habitat. Such a term may be more appropriate, for example, in the case of the Quabbin rattlesnake ‘repatriation’ plan. The Program must continue to wrestle with implications for regulatory review; some introduced populations may be afforded protection under MESA, others not.

7. Member’s and Associate Member’s Comments

Tom Rawinski – Tom met with State Botanist Bob Wernerehl to discuss ways to prioritize sites for invasive plant control. He also reported good progress on his deer impact monitoring method, which should be published in 2017.

Gwilym Jones – Gwil mentioned a study implicating climate change as a cause of caribou decline in Alaska. In discussing New England Cottontails, Gwil mentioned that 300 of 1,700 museum collections he examined were New England Cottontail, as opposed to Eastern Cottontails.

Bryan Windmiller – The drought had a negative impact on turtle hatchings. But turtle nests that were watered by people had good success. Released headstarted Blanding’s turtles also fared poorly, due to low water levels. This has been the third year in a row with virtually no Eastern Spadefoot breeding.

Kevin Powers – Kevin mentioned that a new report, *Abundance and Distribution of Seabirds off Southeastern Massachusetts*, shows seabird distributions in the vicinity of the proposed wind farm development: <https://www.boem.gov/RI-MA-Seabirds/>

Karen Searcy – Karen was surprised to see two Red Foxes in an urban area of Amherst.

Andy Finton – Andy was hopeful that a dam removal along Rattlesnake Brook, a tributary to the Taunton River, would restore herring habitat.

Wayne Petersen – Wayne was excited to report that MassAudubon has embarked on a large-scale wetland restoration project at Tidmarsh Farm in Plymouth. Although MassAudubon is the principal player and will eventually be the owners of the property, this project is the result of extensive efforts by many other contributing groups. When completed, the restored wetland should provide outstanding habitat for fish and wildlife.

Bill Brumback – Bill attended a conference in VA on Small Whorled Pogonia ecology and management. To date, no one has been able to grow this federally threatened plant species from seed, which certainly hampers recovery efforts.

Dave Small – Dave announced the formation of the *New England Entomological Society*, which to date has members most keenly interested in Lepidoptera. A goal is to attract young people into the group.

Mark Mello – Mark announced the creation of a new database, spearheaded by the Lloyd Center for the Environment, called *Mass Moths*. It is a provisional list of all moth taxa in the State and will be expanded to include county distributions. He also mentioned large numbers of Widgeon (>700) counted in Tiverton during a recent census. Canvasback numbers, in contrast, were much lower than in the past.

Joe Larson – Joe reported that coyotes had been especially active behind his house in Pelham.

– The meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Thomas J. Rawinski, Secretary