

FINAL MINUTES

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

February 8, 2018

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

MEMBERS:

Present: Joseph Larson, Thomas Rawinski, Wayne Petersen, Mark Mello

Absent: Gwilym Jones, Jennifer Ryan, Kathleen Anderson

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Dave Small, Kevin Powers, Timothy Flanagan, William Brumback

Absent: Mark Pokras, Andy Finton, Bryan Windmiller

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Tom French, Marion Larson, Jack Buckley, Jon Regosin, Amy Hoenig, Jesse Leddick

OTHERS: Jack Van Loan and George Comiskey of the Parker River Clean Water Association

– The meeting was called to order at 1:40 p.m. –

1. Approval of January Minutes

Mark Mello requested that the minutes be clarified to say that it was Wayne Petersen, and not he, who reported the Common Greenshank sighting. Joe Larson motioned that the minutes be accepted, as thus amended. Kevin Powers seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve, as amended.

2. Vice Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

Mark shared the 1934 doctoral dissertation of Donald Wells Farquhar, *The Lepidoptera of New England*. It is a remarkable resource for understanding past and present distributions of moths and butterflies. Case in point is the now-scarce Imperial Moth, which was common in the 1930s.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

The February 6 Board meeting was followed by a public hearing.

- After years of wrangling, it was ruled that the EPA had a right to compel GE (General Electric) to comply with the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. Dr. Larson credited the Natural Heritage Program's Housatonic River biodiversity report as being

instrumental in the decision. A major undertaking will be the dredging of Woods Pond along the river to remove PCB-contaminated sediment.

- The Commissioner reported that the problem of filling position vacancies has been resolved.
- Director Buckley announced that he will be retiring in April, after 30 years with the Division. He reported that an agreement has been reached with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service regarding state-listed species. The meeting of bird banders went very well, with plans being made for an organized communications network.
- Bill Davis and Ralph Taylor will also be retiring in the near future.
- Trina Moruzzi has been promoted to the position of Assistant Director for Operations.
- The public hearing on the proposed dog leash and waste disposal regulation attracted 200 people, about half of whom spoke. While giving his report to the Committee, Dr. Larson commented that there is a clear need for additional dog-walking parks in the Commonwealth.
- The Board will be conducting a public hearing on a proposed two-week extension of the archery season for deer in wildlife management zones 10-14. The hearing is scheduled for March 7, in the evening, when more people might be able to attend.

4. NHESP Report – Jon Regosin

- The Program is hoping to fill two position vacancies, a Restoration Ecologist and the Endangered Species Review Biologist position left vacant following Jesse Leddick 's promotion to Chief of Regulatory Review.
- Jon took this opportunity to reflect on big-picture accomplishments, especially those occurring during Director Buckley's leadership; MESA, information management, communications, funding, and habitat management, all strengthened and vibrant!

5. Assistant Director's Report – Tom French and Marion Larson

- Marion took a few minutes to discuss the proposed extension of the archery season. The public hearing will be at 7:00 P.M. on March 7 at Field Headquarters in Westborough. She also mentioned a proposal to increase the daily bag limit of Canada geese to 15.
- Tom requested that members please notify Jennifer Longsdorf ahead of time if they are unable to attend meetings.
- The bird banders' meeting was very successful.
- A multi-state meeting on bats discussed, among other things, implications of the recent federal listing of the Northern Long-eared Bat. Projects receiving federal funds, such as those conducted by MassDOT, have to abide by certain performance standards. For example, MassDOT funded many acoustic surveys for bats in project areas. Multi-state groups and agencies are working to standardize bat inventory methods. The Tricolor Bat may soon be federally listed.
- Tom briefly described the news releases in members' packets, namely,
 - superbowl of birding results,
 - Eastern Cougar delisted and declared extinct,
 - small research grants (\$500 to \$1500) available via the Scott Melvin Memorial Fund (which will also partly fund a MassAudubon position on Cape Cod),

- two Division news pieces – “Fire Prescribed for Habitat Management” and “Go Wild on Your Taxes This Year”, and
- “Why Ecology Needs Natural History”, an article appearing in *American Scientist* (2017, vol. 105).

6. Coastal Project Reviews within the Commonwealth – Amy Hoenig, Endangered Species Review Biologist

Our coastal areas are experiencing high levels of development and recreation pressure, placing sensitive species at increasing risk. Nature’s fury and rising sea levels also affect these dynamic environments. One estimate shows sea levels rising five inches by 2030.

It is well understood that beaches and dunes help protect nearby infrastructure and private property. Activities occurring in the coastal zone include dredging, beach nourishment and management, coastal stabilization, energy development, and habitat improvement. The Division plays an important role in advising and regulating such activities, participating in multi-agency shore protection meetings with CZM and DEP.

Amy pays special attention to natural communities of significance and to rare species habitat. At its southern range limit, Oysterleaf (*Mertensia maritima*) is a critically rare plant species that grows on beaches in the Commonwealth. With 3,000 pairs of nesting terns, Bird Island has received strong protection and careful management. In Duxbury, restoration of Piping Plover habitat succeeded only after imported orange-colored sand was covered with more natural white-colored sand. Neat!

The Committee thanked Amy for her presentation and for her fine work at the water’s edge.

7. Member’s and Associate Member’s Comments

Tom Rawinski – Tom mentioned his soon-to-be published deer impact monitoring protocol, the ten-tallest method. He will email the near-final draft to members.

Kevin Powers – Kevin remains concerned about bycatch in gill nets. Pre-baiting the nets appears to be causing high mortality of Great Shearwaters.

Tim Flanagan – Tim called attention to the LiDAR terrain datasets available from MassGIS which can reveal amazing details of the landscape, in 3D. Even boulders can be seen! He shared an eye-popping image of Mount Greylock.

Bill Brumback – Bill will be publishing some amazing results from a long-term seed viability study of Small Whorled Pogonia. Seeds buried in 2003 were still 50% viable in 2017. He also mentioned a talk given by State Botanist Bob Wernerehl at the recent Massachusetts Task Force meeting.

Wayne Petersen – Wayne provided additional insight into the remarkable concentration of roosting crows in Lawrence. Other Massachusetts cities, such as Pittsfield, also have winter roosting colonies. Why do the birds do this? Probably safety in numbers – BIG numbers!

– The meeting adjourned at 4:18 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Thomas J. Rawinski, Secretary