

FINAL MINUTES

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

April 12, 2018

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

MEMBERS:

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

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Dave Small, Kevin Powers, Timothy Flanagan, William Brumback
Absent: Mark Pokras, Andy Finton, Bryan Windmiller

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Jack Buckley, Jon Regosin, Jesse Leddick, Chris Buelow, Mike Nelson, Marion Larson

OTHERS: Dr. Allen Rutberg and his Tufts students: Milshaila Waldman, Colin McIntire, Tyler Hazard, Colleen Parker, Carly Merler, Jessica Baldeck, Jessica Weinstein, Chelsea Blink, Bethany Beauregard, Nicole Le, Sophia Dalterio, Leah Widdicombe, Alicia Pensarosa, Johanna Rahkonen, Robin Kopplin, Tayler Adamski, and Rafael Rabines

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

1. Approval of February Minutes

Joe Larson motioned that the February minutes be accepted, Kevin Powers seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

2. Chair's Comments – Kathleen Anderson

Kathleen mentioned how fortunate we are in Massachusetts to have such a large and vibrant Natural Heritage Program. Our heritage program dwarfs that of Montana, a state which, in acreage, dwarfs Massachusetts.

Kathleen commented that she remains intrigued by the expanding range of the black bear, which is moving into southeastern Massachusetts. Jack Buckley commented that there are an estimated 4,000 bears in the Commonwealth. Jack went on to describe some of the many challenges of managing the Massachusetts black bear population, as conflicts with humans are increasing. The

Division continues to urge the public to take down their bird feeders in the spring, when hungry bears wake up from their winter slumber.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

Dr. Larson took this opportunity to acknowledge Jack Buckley's many contributions to the Natural Heritage Program and to the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife as a whole. During Jack's tenure, a court challenge to MESA was defeated, MESA regulatory review has become more transparent, budget concerns have been alleviated, thousands of acres have been protected, and programs such as Natural Heritage, Wildlife, and Forestry have become integrated. Jack commented that he spent 30 years with the Division and leaves the agency "in good hands".

This was also an opportunity to acknowledge Betty Anderson's incredible contributions to conservation, and to present her with a digital photo album as a gift from the Advisory Committee and the Division. The digital frame was preloaded with 186 photos taken by Advisory Committee members and Division staff. Wayne Petersen, who was mentored as a teenager by Betty, took great delight in highlighting Betty's remarkable career achievements and her many awards.

Dr. Larson then described the April 10 Board meeting, commenting that certain public hearings had been postponed due to inclement weather.

- A response to letters of concern regarding rattlesnake introduction is currently being drafted.
- Dr. Larson is among three Board members presently conducting a search for a new Director. They will keep the search open until they are confident that the best person has been selected. During the interim period, Mark Tisa will be serving as Acting Director.
- Natural Heritage Fund contributions (i.e., tax check-off) in 2016 were far above previous years' – a very encouraging development.
- The Board adopted the proposed dog leash and waste disposal regulation.
- A public hearing on the proposed two-week extension of the deer archery season was held. The Board will consider all public comments and vote on it sometime in the future.

4. NHESP and Assistant Director's Report – Jon Regosin and Jesse Leddick

- Rebecca Zimmerer was hired as an Endangered Species Review Biologist. She comes with broad experience in agriculture and is immersing herself in all aspects of habitat management within the Division.
- The Division and its partners conducted an impressive prescribed burn of 115 acres at the Crane WMA. Grasshopper Sparrows, Sandplain Gerardia, and many other native species will benefit from the improved habitat conditions. Plans are to conduct prescribed burns at 10 other sites, including Muddy Brook WMA in Hardwick.
- Attention was drawn to several materials in members' packets:
 - Cape Cod Trail Race to benefit charitable organizations
 - A record was set in 2017 with 13,220 deer harvested in the Commonwealth

- Recovering America’s Wildlife Act (H.R. 4647) was reintroduced in Congress. The legislation is strongly supported by The Wildlife Society and others.
- Carolyn Mostello, the Division’s Coastal Waterbird Biologist, was the honored recipient of Mass Audubon’s Hemenway & Hall Wildlife Conservation Award.
- Two articles on MassWildlife’s little brown bat study were included in members’ packets. Jennifer Longsdorf has been coordinating this study and is again requesting reports of bat colonies from the public similar to 2017. In 2017, MassWildlife contracted with BRI to survey little brown bat populations throughout Massachusetts, and plans to partner with a contractor in 2018 to continue the work initiated last summer.
- Other articles in the news concerned falconry, MassWildlife’s habitat improvement grants, spotted turtles, invasive plants, bald eagles, grasshopper sparrows, a water rescue off Martha’s Vineyard, and a local effort in California pressing agencies there to officially recognize sasquatch as a species.

5. Notification of Potential 2019 Changes to the Massachusetts List of Endangered, Threatened, and special Concern Species – Jon Regosin

Members were asked to review the proposed list changes found in their packets.

6. The Status of Whip-poor-will in Massachusetts – Chris Buelow, NHESP Restoration Ecologist

Historical accounts showed Whip-poor-wills to be quite common in Massachusetts. However, as open lands grew into forest, and as fire suppression peaked, the Whip-poor-will was silenced across much of the state. By 2011, breeding bird data described the species as local and strongly declining. Conservation attention was urgently needed.

Present strongholds exist at 1) Joint Base, Cape Cod, 2) Manuel Correllus State Forest, 3) Myles Standish State Forest, and 4) Montague Plains. Lesser concentrations exist at Plum Island/Crane Beach, Quabbin, Cape Cod National Seashore, Nantucket, Fort Devens/Bolton Flats, and Freetown State Forest.

The good news is that recovery efforts are underway, with MassWildlife in the forefront of these efforts. Chris showed dramatic maps showing Whip-poor-wills favoring recently managed barrens habitats. Wayne Petersen made the insightful comment, “If you build it, they will come.” In other words, if barrens are managed, the birds will favor them. It is encouraging that the Whip-poor-will is on the road to recovery, thanks to the Division’s habitat restoration efforts.

Members were in awe of the amazing images that Chris showed of this most alluring bird species.

7. Member’s and Associate Member’s Comments

Tom Rawinski – Tom reported that he gave a presentation at a public meeting in Braintree about deer impacts in that town’s forests. MassWildlife’s David Stainbrook also spoke. The outcome

will be a deer hunting policy to be developed by the Conservation Commission. Tom believes that archery hunting, beyond the 500-foot setback distance, will accomplish next to nothing in alleviating Braintree's deer overabundance problem.

Kevin Powers – Right Whales have returned to the ocean waters of Massachusetts, but none have been seen with young. Last year 17 or 18 Right Whales died off-shore, which is disconcerting for this critically rare species. According to Eco-RI, a breeding bird census is underway. Lastly, Kevin drew attention to a newspaper article featuring the gardening work of Jonathan Shaw, former Committee member and nephew of Betty Anderson.

Tim Flanagan – Tim is waiting for spring to arrive in the Berkshires. In Cheshire, there is some excitement about Peregrine Falcons seen regularly near a former raven nest site.

Wayne Petersen – Wayne reported that Sandhill Cranes have returned (to nest?) to Burrage Pond WMA. Spotted Turtles have also made a recent showing there.

Dave Small – Peter Hazelton recently gave a presentation to the Athol Bird and Nature Club. A field trip was held to Muddy Brook WMA. Dave participated in a training program for Paul Catanzaro's Keystone Cooperators at Harvard Forest.

Mark Mello – Mark will be attending the Northeast Naturalists conference in Burlington, Vermont this weekend and presenting a poster on Mass Moths, a collaborative effort with Steven Whitebread and Dan Zimberlin to amass statewide historical and current records of the moths of Massachusetts.

Prior to adjournment, Marion Larson provided copies of an issue of *Massachusetts Wildlife* for the student guests.

– The meeting adjourned at 3:30 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Thomas J. Rawinski, Secretary