

FINAL MINUTES

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

June 14, 2018

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

MEMBERS:

Present: Kathleen Anderson, Thomas Rawinski

Absent: Gwilym Jones, Jennifer Ryan, Wayne Petersen Joseph Larson, Mark Mello

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Dave Small, Kevin Powers, Timothy Flanagan

Absent: Mark Pokras, Andy Finton, Bryan Windmiller, William Brumback

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Tom French, Mike Nelson, Lynn Harper

OTHERS: Jack Van Loan (Parker River Clean Water Association), George Comiskey

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

1. Approval of May Minutes

Kevin Powers motioned that the April minutes be accepted, Dave Small seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

2. Chair's Comments – Kathleen Anderson

Kathleen shared a number of recent news items:

- There are predictions that sea level rise could affect much of Boston.
- A 10,000 year old mastodon skeleton was discovered in Ipswich.
- Our eastern coyotes once interbred with wolves and show some traits of wolves, such as larger size, cooperative hunting in family groups, and noisy howling at night.

Kathleen's property at Wolf Trap Hill in Middleborough is regularly visited by students and Kathleen's Native Americans friends, who partake in the sweat lodge. So many place names in Massachusetts end with the letters, "et", which translates to "at the place of".

3. Board Member's Comments

There were no board member's comments since Dr. Larson was absent.

4. NHESP Report – Mike Nelson

- Perhaps the most important role of the Committee is to review proposed list changes. Such a review will commence at the July 12 meeting, when members will receive all 22 proposals on thumb drives. The proposals may also be accessible via Person-to-Person File Transfer, which requires users to set up a profile and password.
- Mike provided to members a one-page summary of the proposed list changes.
- Mike reminded members that the Committee does not meet in August, so review of the proposals will occur at the September 13 meeting.

5. Assistant Director’s Report – Tom French

- Tom reported on the results of the recent colonial waterbird census. The census occurs every ten years. Overall, there weren’t many major surprises. There were lots of American Oystercatchers, Glossy Ibis, and Common Eider, the latter species perhaps originating locally from introductions by Phil Stanton decades ago. Species that no longer occurred as breeders included Cattle Egret, Arctic Tern, and Tricolored Heron.
- Bald Eagle and Peregrine Falcon banding in underway.
- Headstarted Red-bellied Cooter and Blanding’s Turtles were released.
- Much botanical field work is occurring, as well as Blanding’s Turtle, and bat work. Much prescribed fire management is occurring.
- A workshop was held to train Eversource crews about turtles occurring along transmission lines.
- Other news items in members’ packets described a prescribed burn at Myles Standish State Forest, linking landscapes, North Atlantic Right Whales, off-shore wind energy development, and the Division’s bat and turkey sighting citizen science programs.

6. Mass Wildlife Land Protection: Planning and Process – Lynn Harper, Habitat Protection Specialist

Lynn began by mentioning that she and others are “straight out” these days as the close of the fiscal year approaches. Land protection by the Division is strategic, taking into consideration the occurrence of MESA species, proximity to existing DFW lands, fishing and hunting access, clear title, road access, BioMap 2, and whether a parcel occurs in one of the 127 focus areas in the Commonwealth. A willing seller is also necessary. The Division occasionally acquires gifts of land.

Land protection can be a long process, sometimes taking 20 years before a deal can be reached. Other times a land deal takes only three months. The Land Agents in each District are the ones on the front lines, making phone calls, knocking on doors, and establishing relationships with landowners.

Land protection is coordinated by the Lands Committee, with members representing Wildlands, Land Protection, Legal Counsel, Wildlife, Fisheries, and Natural Heritage. Parcels under consideration are numerically ranked. All proposed land deals are subject to approval by the Fisheries and Wildlife Board.

Lynn used the Townsend Hill WMA as an example, showing the progression of land protection from 2008, to 2014, to 2016. In all, 665 acres are now protected in Townsend.

On average, the Division protects 3,500 acres of land and spends \$5-8 million each year. For FY2019, \$5.125 million are available for land protection. The Division presently owns and manages 215,000 acres of land.

A lively discussion followed and members thanked Lynn for her excellent presentation.

7. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

Tim Flanagan – Tim met with a western Massachusetts State Representative to discuss the contentious issue of lake drawdowns. Ideally, lakes are to be drawn down prior to freeze-up and refilled by spring. But this doesn't always happen, and no penalties are issued. Freshwater mussels and other aquatic species can be harmed by the drawdowns.

Tom Rawinski – Tom described a recent field trip with State Botanist Robert Wernerehl to Essex County.

Kevin Powers – Kevin called attention to the March 7, 2018 New York Times op-ed that described the plight of the Right Whale. Ship collisions and entanglements in fishing gear remain high mortality factors. Also disconcerting is the fact that no young were born this year, and only five last year. A female Right Whale will give birth only once every eight years.

Changes in ground fishing quotas are leading to more line fishing.

NOAA has been petitioned to designate discrete population segments for the Leatherback Sea Turtle, then to downlist the Northwest Atlantic population to Threatened which would allow for greater incidental take under Section 4D of Federal regulations.

Dave Small – Dave reported exciting discoveries of the Ebony Boghaunter (*Willimsonia fletcheri*) in Athol and Royalston. He and his group of volunteer naturalists will hope to find the Ski-tipped Emerald (*Somatochlora elongata*) next month.

A new park along the Millers River in Erving has three wonderful panels describing the endangered species occurring in town.

– The meeting adjourned at 3:45 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Thomas J. Rawinski, Secretary