

## FINAL MINUTES

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

June 13, 2019

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

#### **MEMBERS:**

Present: Joseph Larson, Wayne Petersen, Mark Mello, Tim Flanagan

Absent: William Brumback

#### **ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:**

Present: Dave Small, Kevin Powers, Russ Hopping, Bryan Windmiller

Absent: Andy Finton

#### **AGENCY STAFF:**

Present: Eve Schlüter (Assistant Director), Sarah Maier (Information Manager), Peter Hazelton (Chief of Conservation Science), Mike Jones (State Herpetologist)

#### **OTHERS:**

Ranee Duncan (public member at large)

– Mark Mello (Vice Chair), called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. –

#### **1. Approval of the March Minutes**

Joseph Larson motioned that the April minutes be accepted, Tim Flanagan seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve.

#### **2. Acting Chair's Comments – Mark Mello**

The Acting Chair noted that the wild cherry sphinx moths have been out with the spring season.

#### **3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson**

The last of the coyote listening sessions will be taking place and DFW staff will be developing a report from all of the sessions. The Board will then develop a recommendation. The issue of coyote competitions is not unique to MA as other states are experiencing them as well.

#### **4. NHESP/ Assistant Director's Report – Eve Schluter**

The Committee welcomed Eve back to NHESP and this was Eve's first Advisory Committee meeting since being back.

Eve reported on the following:

The F&W Board will be setting a date for a public hearing to advance the proposed updates to the MESA list.

The Nature Conservancy and MassWildlife recently held a joint meeting as both entities are doing a lot of collaboration.

There are still vacancies on the Advisory Committee and suggestions to fill these vacancies are welcome.

Eve also indicated that meeting topics are welcome and suggested one topic the committee should consider is carbon sequestration. John Scanlon and Brian Hawthorne have been working on this topic and will likely present to the Committee in the future.

Updates on Heritage projects: Online donations will go live in July, the next priority habitat atlas will be started later this year, and working on making the online permitting for MESA more streamlined.

#### **5. Current Status of the Northern Red-bellied Cooter – Mike Jones (State Herpetologist)**

The species has been a conservation target in Massachusetts for years with a headstart program at the core of the conservation effort. The species closest relatives are the painted turtles. The headstart program has been running for 36 years and 4,457 turtles have been released to date.

Heritage conducted a study looking at the survivability of headstarted turtles between 2013 and 2016. Several of the recaptured turtles were quite old. One was 36 years old, another 60-70 years old, and one unconfirmed at 70 years old.

The species was confirmed to just 7 ponds in MA prior to the headstart program. The study indicated a 91-98% survivorship with headstarted turtles at 3 locations (ponds).

Region wide, there is an 80% chance of finding headstarted turtles and there was a 59% occupancy of ponds within the focus area. Two of the 3 major ponds with headstarted turtles appear to be stable or increasing in Plymouth. The estimate is more than 1,000 turtles in these ponds.

The species is still under the protection of the Federal Recovery Plan and USFWS will reevaluate the status through a Species Status Assessment. Massachusetts will also move to develop a state conservation plan for the species soon.

Burrage Pond and Assawompset Ponds are also headstart sites.

## **6. Member's and Associate Member's Comments**

**Dave Small** – None

**Kevin Powers** – None

**Wayne Petersen** – None

**Bryan Windmiller** – None

**Russ Hopping** – Russ mentioned that one of the black skimmers banded by The Trustees, Biodiversity Works, and MassWildlife two years ago on Martha's Vineyard returned this year. This is the first banded skimmer to return to MA that is known.

**Tim Flanagan** – None

**Mark Mello** – Mark commented that while surveying at Roger Williams Zoo he found a bag with live fish in it.

– The meeting adjourned at 2:48 P.M. –

Drafted by: Russ Hopping, Associate Advisory Committee Member