

MASSACHUSETTS WILDLIFE

No. 4, 2017

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**Joseph "Archie" Hagar,
Hunting for Likes,
Woodlots for Wildlife**

JOSEPH A. HAGAR: STATE ORNITHOLOGIST 4

— Wayne R. Petersen

Widely recognized as an authority on the American Black Duck, Hudsonian Godwit, Broad-winged Hawk, Peregrine Falcon, and Black Rail, State Ornithologist Joseph "Archie" Hagar left an indelible mark that continues to inform management decisions today.

HUNTING FOR LIKES: HOW TO KILL IT ON SOCIAL MEDIA 14

— Nicole McSweeney, Astrid Huseby

Social media provides hunters with a fantastic opportunity to share their stories and promote the hunting tradition but navigating the complexities of the digital world requires a thoughtful approach.

LABORS OF LOVE: MANAGING A SMALL WOODLOT FOR WILDLIFE 22

— Bill Davis

A landowner's account of improving the quality and diversity of forest habitat to benefit wildlife.

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On the Cover: Late afternoon in a snowy wood. The Ruffed Grouse (*Bonasa umbellus*) seen here is a State Wildlife Action Plan species that thrives in young forest and shrubland habitats, which provide abundant fruits, buds, and catkins (preferred grouse foods), and high stem densities that offer grouse much needed protective cover from avian predators like hawks and owls. Nikon digital photo © Bill Byrne

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Editorial

Cutting Trees for Conservation

In implementing our statutory mission, MassWildlife is confronted by an array of challenges, and maintaining the natural diversity of our wildlife populations is front and center. An active and aggressive forestry and habitat management program is critical if we are to succeed. Over the last decade, MassWildlife has been directing significant resources into forestry and habitat management. Our forestry staff has more than doubled over the last 10 years including two employees dedicated to habitat work on private land.

Our current forestry initiative is guided by Forest Management Guidelines adopted by the Fisheries and Wildlife Board in 2000. The guidelines establish forest habitat goals and provide a framework for all forestry and habitat management on agency-owned land (mass.gov/masswildlife-habitat-goals). In my view, this document can and should be used as guidance for forest management across the state. Although the Division is not legally the state forestry agency, it has been one of my goals as Director to make MassWildlife a strong and consistent voice reinforcing the importance of forest management for maintaining diverse wildlife populations. I believe the actions of the agency demonstrates our commitment to that goal.

Specifically, we have launched three habitat management initiatives on MassWildlife lands and extended our influence and impact on private land.

Grassland habitat goals for MassWildlife lands have largely been met thanks to capital funding provided by the Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. We expanded and restored nearly 1,000 acres of grasslands at the Frances Crane WMA in Falmouth and the Southwick WMA in Southwick. This work was guided by a grassland bird conservation plan developed by MassWildlife in collaboration with The Trustees, The Nature Conservancy, and Mass Audubon and approved by the Fisheries and Wildlife Board. This scientific

approach represents a paradigm shift as we focus on managing our public lands to preserve the ecological values that directed the original acquisition. It is also sound economic policy: Diverse wildlife and enhanced outdoor experiences provide important economic benefits (*see Editorial, No. 3, 2017*). With the grasslands acreage goal largely accomplished on state wildlife lands, we will need to be diligent in maintaining these critical habitats, mostly by mowing and prescribed burning.

Prescribed Fire is widely recognized today in conservation science as an important ecological management tool. However, many people are surprised to learn about the historical role fire played in shaping key portions of the Massachusetts landscape associated with excessively well-drained and nutrient-poor soils in some river valleys and coastal areas. For many decades, fire suppression on natural lands was general policy throughout Massachusetts and the entire United States. This was due to uncontrolled slash fires and the damage wrought after timbering in the late 1800s. Fire exclusion resulted in declines of numerous wildlife species and the degradation of entire ecosystems, including sandplain grasslands and heathlands, scrub oak shrublands, pitch pine-scrub oak barrens and ridgetops, calcareous fens, and oak woodlands, which provide habitat for state- and federally listed rare wildlife.

MassWildlife partners with other public agencies and private conservation organizations to conduct prescribed burning on select protected lands in Massachusetts annually. Our approach to prescribed burning is scientific and not undertaken lightly. Although our focus is habitat management, prescribed fire can also reduce wildfire risk and increase public and firefighter safety.

Young Forest habitats—areas of dense tree saplings and sprouts—have become scarce in Massachusetts over the past 50 years and now occupy less than 4% of the forested landscape. MassWildlife's habitat goals call for 10%–15% young forest to conserve wildlife that rely on this unique habitat, including New England Cottontail, American Woodcock, Ruffed Grouse, and Golden-winged Warbler. These species have dwindled and need young forests for nesting, foraging for food, and evading predators. These same habitats are also

used by many songbirds, and by game species such as White-tailed Deer, Wild Turkey, and Black Bear.

A critical point to understand is that those portions of the Massachusetts landscape that formerly sustained vibrant, open habitats for wildlife through natural disturbances like flooding and fire have seen a disproportionate share of the human development that has occurred. While nearly two-thirds of Massachusetts remains undeveloped, the one-third that is developed supported much of the natural river flooding, beaver flooding, and fire that formerly occurred here. We are confronted with a simple choice: Replace these natural processes with active habitat management to conserve wildlife species associated with these open habitats, or don't replace them and lose species and diversity. At MassWildlife, we choose to act in favor of wildlife and their habitats.

Private Land accounts for 80% of forested land in Massachusetts and as a wildlife agency we need to explore ways to influence the land management decisions made on these lands. We seek to build partnerships with private and municipal landowners that will:

1. Improve habitat for Species of Greatest Conservation Need and other species; and
2. Expand wildlife-related recreational opportunities for hunting, fishing, trapping and wildlife observation on conserved lands.

A new MassWildlife Habitat Management Grant Program initiated in 2015 with financial support from Secretary Beaton gave us an important new tool to improve wildlife habitat. Over the last three years we have directed \$1.2 million toward projects on private and municipal lands. Interest in these grants far exceeded our expectations. In our first year, there were \$1.3 million dollars in applications for \$300,000 in available funds. This indicates the potential opportunity to influence management



decisions favoring wildlife habitat on private lands. To complement this work, we have hired a forester through a grant from the Wildlife Management Institute to provide technical assistance to landowners.

MassWildlife has been expanding its working relationship with the forestry industry on several fronts. We have had discussions with the Massachusetts Forest Alliance (MFA) on streamlined implementation of the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act for forestry projects. In addition, MassWildlife

partnered with the MFA on a joint grant proposal to the Natural Resource Conservation Service to increase funding for private landowners to enhance wildlife habitat on their land. We were pleased to learn in December that this grant was selected for funding. This will provide up to \$1.8 million dollars over five years to expand our work on private lands and provide additional technical assistance to landowners. This unique initiative between a state wildlife agency and a forestry industry group combines assets benefiting wildlife across multiple ownerships.

The elements of these initiatives must all be based on a transparent policy process and a strong science foundation. They must also be built on a commitment to inform and educate the public about the need for this work. Toward that end, each of our projects is preceded by public site walks. We have a goal of developing demonstration sites where the public can see firsthand the benefit of active management to wildlife. There is nothing intuitive in the idea that cutting trees represents an environmental benefit. The obligation is on us to articulate the importance of this work and demonstrate success through monitoring and ongoing science.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jack Buckley". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Jack Buckley, *Director*

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