



MASSWILDLIFE

## DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

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COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
DIVISION OF FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE  
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE BOARD  
BUSINESS MEETING MINUTES

PRESENT: Steve Sears/Chair, Bob Durand/Vice Chair, Ernie Foster/Secretary, Sasha Dyer, Emma Ellsworth, John Organ, Matthew Sisk, Mark S. Tisa/Director, Tom O'Shea/Commissioner/DFG, Eve Schlüter/Deputy Director, Mike Huguenin/Assistant Director/Wildlife, Jesse Leddick/Assistant Director/NHESP, Nicole McSweeney/Assistant Director/Outreach and Education, Trina Moruzzi/Assistant Director/Operations, Todd Richards/Assistant Director/Fisheries, Pat Huckery/Northeast Wildlife District Manager, Andrew Madden/Western Wildlife District Manager, Todd Olanyk/Central Wildlife District Manager, Joe Rogers/Connecticut Valley Wildlife District Manager; Jason Zimmer/Southeast Wildlife District Manager

DATE: March 20, 2024

LOCATION: MassWildlife Field Headquarters, Westborough, Massachusetts, and on Zoom

Chair Sears opened the March business meeting at 1:00 p.m.

### Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Mr. Durand to table the minutes from the February business meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Dyer; the vote in favor was unanimous.

### Chair's Comments

Chair Sears reported good news from the Berkshires, including from an article about 1,100 acres in Sheffield that is being conserved with significant effort by a number of partners. He noted that it is a great success story. He also reminded the meeting that the Berkshire County League's annual Conti dinner was approaching, on Saturday, April 13, 2024, and asked anyone interested in attending to contact him for tickets. He also said he was pleased that Governor Healey and EEA Secretary Tepper were able to join staff for a bear den survey this year. He feels it is important for the administration to understand what wildlife management is and why it is important. He also reported being able to join one himself again this year.

Chair Sears reported on the ongoing issues at Onota Lake, saying that staff has been very helpful dealing with them. He reported that there are questions from Berkshire County about the transportation of harvested deer before it is checked, noting that there is still a concern that it is illegal to do so without displaying some part of the deer. On the other hand, people are still concerned about negative views of hunters as a result of the display of a harvest. He thanked Commissioner O'Shea for inviting Board members to DFG's biodiversity forum and stated that he found it informative. He also reported that he had received the save-the-date notice of the 2024 R3 Summit being held on May 19.

The Chair shared a historical story that was recently reported in the Berkshire Eagle. Retired President Cleveland was on a fishing trip and was cited by a law enforcement officer for keeping a bass that was a ¼-inch too short. The former president had to go to court and pay a fine as a result. Mr. Sears stated that the fish is now preserved somewhere, as is the boat used in the incident.

MASSWILDLIFE

### Director's Comments

Director Tisa reported that MassWildlife had received authorization to hold two public hearings in April. A public hearing on the proposed MESA List changes will be held on Tuesday, April 9, 2024, at 1:00 p.m., as an online-only hearing, and the Director encouraged the Board members to attend and observe if they are able. The public hearing for the 2024-2025 migratory bird hunting seasons, which must be held in April to comply with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's April 30 filing deadline, will be held on Wednesday, April 17, at 2:30 p.m., during the April business meeting, which will begin at 12:30 p.m.

The Director stated that MassWildlife and the Board will have a very busy and full year. In June, there will be a comprehensive deer review. In the fall, there will be a full black bear review. Director Tisa reported that the following week he will be participating in the annual North American Wildlife and Natura Resources Conference, which sponsored by the Wildlife Management Institute. The Director noted that he was appointed chair of the Trust Funds committee and that he is the vice chair of the Joint Task Force on Federal Aid, so it will be a very busy conference.

Referring to the governance meeting that was held prior to the business meeting, Director Tisa noted that Mr. Foster will hopefully be able to attend the R3 Summit. He applauded Ms. Ellsworth's comment in the earlier meeting that a love of nature and hunting are not mutually exclusive, and also her goal to better engage the land trust community in MassWildlife's conservation and management work, which is in line with staff's relevancy efforts. The Director also wanted to add that the Hunters Share the Harvest program is very important, including in the relevancy realm and for local food security, so he wants to keep it on the Board's radar.

Director Tisa asked Assistant Director of Fisheries Todd Richards to respond to public comments given at the previous meeting. Assistant Director Richards stated that Mr. Sydla's comment had two basic components: issues with salmon and with small-mouth bass in the Quabbin. Mr. Richards reported that salmon have been declining since the reservoir was created, and the DCR, the agency responsible for managing the reservoir as a water source, is happy because low productivity of plankton, and hence fish like salmon, improves water quality. This year was not a good year because fewer smelt this year. When there are enough smelt, then there are have good salmon populations and a good harvest year. Mr. Sydla's other concern was about smallmouth bass, which are doing well and had a very good year in the Sport Fishing Awards program.

Chair Sears asked the Director about the Board members' attendance at the NEAFWA conference in April. The Director reported that the conference is for a career-professional audience, so the Board does not need to attend. Dr. Organ provided other details and confirmed that the presentations are technical and science-based, not geared to laypeople.

### Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner O'Shea confirmed that the Governor and her team greatly enjoyed the bear den survey, and he applauded the MassWildlife staff's professionalism. He also reported on another field trip for EEA Secretary Tepper and Secretary of Education Patrick Tutwiler, who were given a detailed introduction to the Teaching with Trout program at a local school. He stated that it was very well received and a great opportunity to engage with the secretary of education about this method of mainstreaming biodiversity education in the schools.

Commissioner O'Shea reported that he appreciated the Board's engagement in the DFG's biodiversity initiative and reported that his team is planning a fall rollout; he knew the previous fall that 180 days to roll-out was very ambitious, but a lot of work was being done and needs to be done so he is looking forward to releasing it.

The Commissioner noted one issue that was missing from the Board’s priorities discussion during the previous meeting, namely, climate-change impacts to wildlife are an important issue in which MassWildlife is already heavily engaged. He reported that the stakeholders in the Forests as Climate Solutions initiative had wanted a forest forum, so a forum was being held the following day with UMass and he would be attending it. Commissioner O’Shea also reported that the Department met with the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe in a meeting hosted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; he thought the meeting very productive and encouraging for the prospect of additional meetings.

The Commissioner closed his remarks by noting several recent articles in the Boston *Globe*, including the news that the Marine Fisheries Advisory Commission had voted to create a spawning closure for horseshoe crabs during much of their spawning season.

#### Law Enforcement Comments

Major Kevin Clayton thanked the chair and stated that he oversees the Inland Bureau and Special Operations. He reported that Colonel Santos had retired two weeks previously and wished the Colonel a happy and healthy retirement. He then provided the Board with a brief overview of actions connected to the current hunting and other recreational seasons and activities; a detailed report of recent OLE activities, including fish-and-wildlife-related examples of calls for service that Environmental Police officers had responded to in the previous month; and the outlines of ongoing and recently completed investigations.

#### Personnel Report

Assistant Director Nicole McSweeney and Assistant Director Todd Richards introduced members of their respective staffs who were approved for hiring or promotion at recent board meetings.

#### **Introductions**

<i>Employee</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Location</i>
Michelle Collins	Outreach and Marketing Coordinator Conservation Biologist III	Westborough
Jeffrey Osgood	Outdoor Education Volunteer Coordinator Game Biologist III	Westborough
Jeremy Davis	McLaughlin Hatchery Technician Wildlife Technician III	Belchertown

#### Teaching with Trout (Todd Richards and Adam Kautza)

Assistant Director of Fisheries Todd Richards introduced Coldwater Project Leader Adam Kautza, who talked through the different components of the Teaching with Trout program for schools. Dr. Kautza reported that the program is designed to use brook trout as a model organism to teach Massachusetts students, appropriately at various grade levels, about developmental biology and life history, water quality and chemistry, and broader conservation concepts related to local aquatic resources. He detailed the components of the program, what MassWildlife provides to participating schools, what the students do in the course of their lessons for 3-4 months, and reported that the fingerlings will reach 3-4 inches by the time they are released into a preapproved local waterbody that is suitable for them.

Dr. Kautza reported that the 2023-2024 Teaching with Trout program is engaging 64 schools in 47 Massachusetts towns, which translates to approximately 5,100 students. He noted that the program expands every year, despite the decline during the COVID-19 pandemic, and has rebounded since the COVID restrictions were lifted. He stated that the overarching goal, beyond simply education, is the

opportunity to engage students in a way that helps them develop an appreciation for our aquatic resources and the factors that influence them in the real world.

#### Confirm the April Meeting Date

The Board confirmed that the April monthly business meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 17, at 12:30 p.m., with the Migratory Bird hunting public hearing at 2:30 p.m. the same day.

#### Members' Comments

Mr. Sisk introduced a member of the audience from the Greater Boston Chapter of Trout Unlimited. He reported that he'd had an opportunity to see a Trout Unlimited film called "Black Water" that was very good. He also reported that there is a new mayor in Braintree who contacted him as a Board member because Braintree had what was originally thought to be a fish kill but turned out to be a dumping incident of invasive species.

Ms. Dyer reported her appreciation for the biodiversity workshop, especially the role staff played in moderating between the of points of view of different people with different goals. She believes the best work comes from when people disagree but can talk respectfully. Ms. Dyer reported that she recently judged a turkey-calling contest and participated in an open panel discussion and was surprised by the diversity in the ages of people who are interested in starting new pursuits. She also reported that she wants to work to find mentors for would-hunters among clubs and the county league.

Mr. Foster reported participating in teaching his second Basic Hunter Education class. He reported that the age group was older, on average, and that the Hunter Education staff was very helpful, including by supplying laser rifles. He also reported that he had attended the Springfield Sportsmen's Show and spoke to many different sportsmen and -women about issues of concern to them, including requests for a review of our bear hunting regulations with an emphasis on adding a second tag and extending the season.

Mr. Durand reported talking to the mayor of Lowell, the first Cambodian American mayor in the country. He stated that Mayor Chau would like a seminar about fishing for that community, so Mr. Durand will talk to staff about the possibility. He reported that he will attend the League of Essex County Sportsmen's Clubs' banquet, which is being held on the same night as the Worcester County League banquet, so he may not be able to attend both. He reported that he also appreciated participating in the Biodiversity Forum, and he also appreciates the Teaching with Trout program, which is doing great outreach to get the word out.

Ms. Ellsworth reported that she was not able to attend the forum but heard great things from the Mount Grace staff who attended. She reported doing a lot of outreach in the Connecticut River Valley and is open to attending meetings of groups in the Valley to meet their constituents.

Dr. Organ reported that he had sent the Board members an invitation to attend the Cooperative Research Unit annual meeting. He also reported that his team would be conducting a Basic Hunter Education course in Hadley the following Saturday. Dr. Organ said he would be attending the forest forum the following day at the Olver Building and hopes that private forest landowners will also attend. In particular, he noted that there are incentives available to protect working forests about which they will learn more at the forum.

#### Public Comment

Mr. Kevin Parsons of Shelburne Falls reported that he spends a lot of time working to protect and conserve the Deerfield River. Mr. Parsons provided the Board members with a packet of supporting materials and read a statement in which he asked that a 7-mile stretch of the river be set aside and not stocked with trout.

There being no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Durand to adjourn the meeting and go into executive session for the purpose of discussing proposed land acquisitions whose negotiations would be compromised by discussion in open session, and to not return to open session afterward. The motion was seconded by Ms. Dyer. The vote in favor was unanimous, and the meeting was adjourned at 2:50 p.m.

Executive Session

There were six parcels presented to the Board for consideration. All six parcels were accepted in roll call votes of the Board members.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Ernie Foster  
Secretary

List of documents presented to the Board in its March business meeting packets:

March agenda

March personnel report

Letter to Chair Steve Sears from Eric Halloran, president of the Deerfield River Watershed Chapter of Trout Unlimited, *RE* trout stocking in the upper Deerfield River

Information packet of documents provided by public commenter Kevin Parsons *RE* trout stocking in the Deerfield River

Handout on the Teaching with Trout Program

Department of Fish and Game's March 20, 2024, Budget for Land Acquisition and Due Diligence Costs  
Documentation for the executive session