

FINAL MINUTES

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

October 13, 2016

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

MEMBERS:

Present: Kathleen Anderson, Mark Mello, Thomas Rawinski

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

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Timothy Flanagan, Dave Small, Karen Searcy, Bryan Windmiller

Absent: Andy Finton, Mark Pokras, William Brumback, Kevin Powers

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Tom French, Eve Schluter, Mike Jones

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC:

Jack Van Loan, Jamie Bogart, Fred Errington

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

Department of Fish and Game Commissioner George N. Peterson, Jr. and Deputy Commissioner Mary-Lee King were in attendance briefly and introduced themselves to the Committee. Committee members did likewise. Commissioner Peterson thanked the Committee for its important work over the years.

Members of the public in attendance also introduced themselves and spoke briefly of their interests.

1. Approval of September Minutes

Dave Small motioned that the September minutes be approved, Tim Flanagan seconded the motion, and members voted unanimously to approve the minutes.

2. Chair's Comments

Kathleen Anderson called attention to the many wonderful "Living with Wildlife" fact sheets that are available on the Division's website. Tom French mentioned plans to produce another educational resource for the public, a field guide to Massachusetts reptiles and amphibians, which would combine materials published in separate issues of *Massachusetts Wildlife*.

For more than 60 years, Kathleen has been documenting the biota of her property in Middleboro. Hers is, without question, the best known property in Massachusetts from a natural history perspective. Kathleen described her great excitement in seeing a Zone-tailed Hawk (*Buteo albonotatus*), and in discovering signs of moose on her property. A lively discussion of moose ecology then followed. The cold-adapted moose may be suffering increased heat stress as the climate warms. Ticks also are taking a toll on the moose population. Dave Small mentioned an annual moose survey at Quabbin Reservoir conducted by deer hunters who report and map their moose observations.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

Dr. Larson was not in attendance, so no comments were given. However, the Committee's packets included a report of the September Advisory Committee meeting as it contained some reminders of interest the Committee expressed in future topics for meetings. It also contained a reminder for Committee members to send Tom their questions and comments on the new Board Policies on Wildlife Lands and Walking Trails that they would like a staff member to address at a future meeting.

4. NHESP Report – Eve Schluter

- Patty Levasseur, formerly of MassAudubon, was hired to work on the Piping Plover habitat conservation plan (HCP).
- A position has been posted for a data conservation specialist.
- List changes are one step closer to being approved and finalized.
- Eve mentioned that Jon Regosin will be attending a meeting of the NE Wildlife Administrators Association.
- Eve congratulated Mike Jones and others in the Division for hosting the Blanding's and Wood Turtle Conservation Symposium on October 3-4, 2016. The symposium attracted 80 people from 19 states and four Canadian provinces.

5. Assistant Director's Report – Thomas French

- Tom announced that Dave Wattles was hired for the position of Bear and Furbearer Biologist.
- The Division will soon receive an occupancy permit for the new utility building.
- A new reptile species has been reported for Massachusetts, the Italian Wall Lizard (*Podarcis sicula*). A breeding population of the species was documented in the Fenway District of Boston.



- A recent article in the *Journal of Mammalogy* detailed the long-distance dispersal of the mountain lion that ended up being killed in a vehicle strike in Connecticut.
- Tom passed around a superlative new book, *Land Snails of West Virginia*, richly illustrated with photographs.
- Lastly, Tom called attention to news articles placed in members' packets. Topics included the current drought, pollinator conservation, the Blue Hills deer hunt, and the fate of the manatee captured this summer in East Falmouth.

6. Frameworks for Freshwater Turtle Conservation in Massachusetts – Mike Jones, State Herpetologist

Freshwater turtles of Massachusetts represent ancient lineages of evolution. Recent conservation efforts have culminated in conservation plans for Blanding's and Wood Turtles, and a symposium hosted by DFW.

Massachusetts has 10 species of freshwater turtles. Threats include habitat destruction, habitat fragmentation, and poaching. Some local populations have dwindled and now represent "ghost populations" where reproduction has all but ceased.

A network of conservation biologists from many states convenes regularly as a working group to discuss conservation challenges. Massachusetts affords the strongest legal protection for declining turtle species in the region; such protection is all but lacking in certain other states. Work is progressing toward a regional conservation strategy which would involve implementing management plans.

The Wood Turtle has experienced widespread population decline. Existing populations tend to be small. Genetic analysis is a new tool to help identify local populations.

One advancement has been the development of standard sampling and monitoring protocols for use across the region. The protocol involves searching for turtles along a one kilometer section of linear habitat for one hour. GIS analysis can now identify stream habitats as impaired versus non-impaired from a landscape quality perspective.

In the 1800s, Henry David Thoreau and Louis Agassiz both recorded their observations of Wood Turtles in Massachusetts. The turtles measured by Agassiz from Lancaster in 1857 were smaller than those found today, for reasons that remain unclear.

A lively discussion of turtle biology and conservation followed.

7. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

Dave Small – The Barrens Buck Moth is doing well at the Montague Pine Barrens, thanks in part to the habitat management work there. Similarly, the grant-funded habitat improvement project in Athol will be discussed at the next MACC meeting.

Mark Mello – Mark also mentioned the impressive flights of Barrens Buck Moths that he observed in southeastern Massachusetts. He recently conducted moth sampling on Pasque Island and documented four state-listed species

Karen Searcy – Karen reported the discovery of hispid goldenrod (*Solidago hispida*) in Franklin County. The species had been known previously in the state only from historic records.

– The meeting adjourned at 4:05 p.m. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Thomas J. Rawinski, Secretary