

FINAL MINUTES

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

October 12, 2017

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

MEMBERS:

Present: Mark Mello, Thomas Rawinski, Wayne Petersen, Joseph Larson, Kathleen Anderson

Absent: Gwilym Jones, Jennifer Ryan

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Dave Small, Kevin Powers, Timothy Flanagan, Bryan Windmiller

Absent: William Brumback, Mark Pokras, Andy Finton

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Jon Regosin, Tom French, Mike Nelson, Andrew Vitz, Marianne Piche, Peter Hazelton

OTHERS:

Boston University students Esther Elmholt, Miguel Hernandez, Michael Kenov

– The meeting was called to order at 1:35 p.m. –

1. Approval of September Minutes

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

2. Chair's Comments – Kathleen Anderson

Betty inspired the Committee by presenting biodiversity statistics from her property in Middleborough. She has documented 36 of the State's 50 mammals, 193 of its 400 birds, 25 of its 46 herps, 47 of its 63 butterflies, and 35 of its 106 Odonates. Noteworthy sightings included Golden Eagle, moose, and cougar, the latter of which she recounted in fascinating detail.

3. Board Member's Comments – Joseph Larson

- The Board met on September 19 in Pepperell at the beautiful Lawrence Library.
- Of proposed regulations reviewed, the policy on dogs was cleared by Administration and Finance. The Board will hold a public hearing next month on the proposed dog policy.
- The Board heard a presentation by PhD student Susan McCarthy who described human dimensions of suburban deer management.
- Pat Huckery updated the Board on recent happenings in the Northeast District.

- A public hearing was held on proposed changes to the map of wildlife management zones. The changes were very minor, and no comments from the public were received.

4. NHESP Report – Jon Regosin

- Proposals are being accepted for this year’s Habitat Management Grants; \$500K is available this year.
- Jon called attention to the Division’s new and improved website.
- Massachusetts is part of the Regional Conservation Network funded by 4 percent of wildlife block grants received by Northeastern states. The multi-state network will concentrate their efforts this year on turtles and pollinators.
- The prescribed fire position remains unfilled and an environmental review position is now vacant.
- Noteworthy discoveries of the 2017 field season included Lesser Snakeroot at the Blue Hills and Spadefoot Toad in Wayland.

5. Assistant Director’s Report – Tom French

- Tom mentioned that a Great White Shark license plate is now available in Massachusetts.
- Donations to the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Fund are up 15%. The average donation is now \$11.00.
- Bird strikes to aircraft was the topic of a meeting with USDA Wildlife Services, MassPort, and USFWS. There have been 1,500 bird strikes documented over the past 21 years, three or four of which resulted in significant engine damage. Gulls remain the birds most often struck.

6. Response to inquiries about review of the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA) list – Mike Nelson, Jon Regosin & Tom French

- A brief handout outlined the procedure to be followed when responding to inquiries about MESA list reviews: 1) list changes are posted on the Division’s website, 2) the list is reviewed every three to five years, and 3) questions will be referred to the Assistant Director (of NHESP), who will consult with taxonomic experts as needed.
- The Division’s website also has the listing proposal form and a document about listing endangered species in Massachusetts.
- Pleased with the above procedure, Dr. Larson stressed the importance of keeping the public informed when list reviews are initiated.

7. *State of the Birds 3: Massachusetts Birds and Our Changing Climate* – Joan Walsh, Massachusetts Audubon Society

Joan first described the long history of Mass Audubon’s involvement with bird conservation. She then distributed copies of *State of the Birds 3* to committee members and summarized many of the report’s findings.

Using data from E-Bird and present climatic conditions, “climate envelopes” were developed for Massachusetts birds. With climate change, many bird species are modeled to have greatly reduced distributions by 2050, disrupting or otherwise affecting such things as egg laying timing, chick provisioning, number of clutches, over-winter survival, return dates, and prey vulnerability.

Birds were classified as either Highly Vulnerable (61 species), Likely Vulnerable (22 species), or Least Vulnerable (60 species). Species such as Saltmarsh Sparrow, Ruffed Grouse, Purple Finch, and even our State Bird, the Black-capped Chickadee, may face an uncertain future in the State.

The report and its findings may play a role in the future when designing nature reserves, writing State Wildlife Action Plans, and adding species to E/T/SC lists.

8. Member’s and Associate Member’s Comments

Mark Mello – Mark and Bryan Windmiller described their discovery of a most unusual tiger moth which feeds on Rattlebox (*Crotolaria sagittalis*).

Tom Rawinski – Tom mentioned that a South American tick species, the tortoise tick (*Amblyomma humerale*), was found in 2013 on an apparently wild Box Turtle on Long Island, NY; the first such record outside of captivity in the Nation. Tom heard about it firsthand from the discoverer.

Joe Larson – Joe announced that George Peterson, recently retired Fish and Wildlife Commissioner, received the prestigious Francis W. Sargent Award.

Bryan Windmiller – Bryan mentioned that he will soon be working for Zoo New England.

Kevin Powers – Kevin discussed and then showed a remarkable video of the on-shore feeding frenzy of thousands of Great Shearwaters at Race Point.

Wayne Petersen – Wayne elaborated on the unprecedented concentration of seabirds this year near the coast.

– The meeting adjourned at 4:45 P.M. –

Drafted & Submitted by: Thomas J. Rawinski, Secretary