

**MEETING OF THE MARINE RECREATIONAL
FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT PANEL**

**June 19, 2017
Weston, MA**

Attendance:

Panel Members: Kalil Boghdan, Mike Moss, Patrick Paquette (chair), Mike Pierdinock, Bill Smith

Department of Fish and Game: Commissioner George Peterson, Deputy Commissioner Mary-Lee King

Division of Marine Fisheries: Director David Pierce, Deputy Director Dan McKiernan, Assistant Director Mike Armstrong, Chief Fiscal Officer Kevin Creighton, Policy Analysts Nichola Meserve and Jared Silva, Senior Biologist Greg Skomal, Biologists Mark Rousseau, Dave Martins, John Boardman, Matt Ayer and Kimberly Trull, Coordinator Ross Kessler, Stock Assessment Specialist Tiffany Vidal

Office of Fishing and Boating Access: Assistant Director Doug Cameron

Other: Sheila Moss

Call to Order, Approval of Agenda and Minutes

Patrick Paquette called the meeting to order at 10:30am. Introductions were made.

Regarding the draft agenda, Mike Armstrong asked to move Free Fishing Days until after Fund Overview. Kalil Boghdan noted that item 7c should read Blish Point Launch Ramp (not Bliss). Mike Pierdinock indicated that item 5eii should be Potential Reef Projects in State Waters (not just Gulf of Maine). Patrick asked to add Public Meeting Law under Other Business. The agenda was approved as amended without opposition.

Bill Smith made, and Mike Moss seconded, a motion to approve the draft minutes from the Panel's previous meeting on July 13, 2016. Mike Pierdinock requested that his eVTR remarks on page 8 under Other Business have added, "Transiting details are confidential and need to remain as such." The Panel unanimously approved the minutes as revised.

Update on CY17 Recreational Permitting & FY17 Fund Overview

Kevin Creighton presented. He stated that the Department of Fish and Game is halfway through its 6-year contract with Active Network, the online permit vendor. Some enhancements over the previous contract include a lower transaction fee implemented for 2016 permits; a major effort to reduce duplicate user profiles (complete); a cleaner application (ongoing); and targeted information and education capabilities (ongoing). The Division has been focusing on improving the online application, given that over 65% of permits are purchased online. This is also why the Division had (successfully) pursued a legislative change to enable anglers to just carry the permit electronically. A link to the permitting application was also added to the mass.gov *Visiting & Recreation* webpage for easier access. Kevin noted that the mass.gov website is under redevelopment to make it service-based. Recreational saltwater fishing permitting was ranked as a top 20 service area, so DMF will be one of the first agencies to be molded into the new format.

Three major ways in which outreach about the permitting requirement was conducted during CY17 were: 1) Division sportfish biologists and permitting staff attending many sportsman's shows throughout the year; 2) dedicated staffing of the angler education program which targets youths; and 3) use of billboards along major roadways in advance of the free fishing weekend.

Permit issuance for 2017 was tracking lower than in 2016 most likely due to a slower start to warm weather. Overall, the trend is still increasing. The age of permit holders is skewed to higher ages, and those moving into the free permit (60+ years). There was an increase in <20 year olds in 2016 however.

Mike Pierdinock asked if Kevin had looked at these demographics across years for any trends. Kevin noted that the Division has only been issuing permits since 2011, but he'll plan to put together a 5-year trend in the future. Mike Armstrong added that RBFF has a program that focuses on angler retention, which the Division plans to make better use of, and also look into better ways to reach new anglers. Kevin states that the Division had used the program for two years but then lapsed. Mike Armstrong also commented that compliance is fairly high outside of major cities, and overall he believes we have about an 80% compliance rate. Patrick noted that this was similar to what North Carolina thought it was achieving (70%).

Kevin moved on to an overview of the Marine Recreational Fisheries Development Fund. Over \$2.7 million was carried over from FY16 into FY17 in the Fund. Revenue into the Fund is from three sources: permit sales, donations, and a reimbursement from NOAA Fisheries for conducting the intercept portion of the Marine Recreational Information Program (MRIP). Permit revenue has averaged about \$1.23 million per year. There was a slight bump up last year (\$1.29 million). Donations remained steady at about \$40,000 per year. These likely come from the age 60+ group who qualify for a free permit and instead chip in the \$10 as a donation. The MRIP reimbursement has been directed into the Fund since FY14. It is about \$300,000 for FY17, an increase from the three prior years (\$150,000-\$175,000).

FY17 program expenditures (projected) are \$1.1 million. That's 83% of the FY17 appropriation of \$1.32 million. Underspensing resulted from some public access projects that fell through. Patrick asked for clarification on whether that money is still available for those projects if their status changes. Kevin replied yes, subject to another appropriation, but he cautioned that we might have to fight harder for it the second time around. After also accounting for a fringe assessment of \$155,000 that leaves just over \$3 million to carry over into FY18.

Kevin summarized spending on public access over the Fund's lifetime given the requirement for 1/3 of the annual appropriation from the Fund to be spent on this category. The five year average (FY12-16) shows that 33% of all spending has been on public access (37% when considering just permit revenue). While the percent has dipped below 33% in one year (FY14), Kevin felt there wouldn't be repercussions so long as the 1/3 is met over the life of the program.

Patrick commented that nothing prevents more than 1/3 of the appropriation being spent on public access.

Kevin concluded with a 10-year spending projection. Costs are expected to surpass revenue by FY25 because of increasing personnel costs (and assuming stable fixed costs and revenue).

Free Fishing Days

Mike Armstrong introduced this topic, reminding the Panel that the free fishing days for 2017 were the Saturday and Sunday of Father's Day (June 17 & 18). He reported that while the Division doesn't have a method to quantify how many people make use of it, we could look at permitting to see if there was a bump up. The Division has been trying to better advertise the opportunity per a prior Panel request. For 2017, we used the normal channels (social media, email to ~120,000 permit holders, DMF listserv and website) but also added new methods, specifically an advertisement in the June edition of On the Water magazine (including both print and website copies, their calendar, and their fishing report emails) and a message displayed on Department of Transportation roadside billboards. Matt Ayer noted that the billboards numbered over 100. Patrick commented that he had seen the message in numerous places.

Dan noted that the free fishing days were not in the Division's 2017 sportfishing guide primarily because of when they were decided. He suggested that the decision for 2018 be made now so that they could be included in the 2018 guide.

Mike Moss asked whether the billboards could also be used to ask people if they utilized the free fishing days. Matt Ayer replied that it would be technically possible to pose a question on the billboards, but he guessed that the response rate would be low, and there is also a safety aspect of asking drivers to call or text a response.

Patrick suggested that when people get a recreational fishing permit for the first time, they be asked if they previously participated in a free fishing weekend. Kevin indicated it would be possible to change the permit application to collect some additional information such as this. Applicants for a recreational lobstering permit have to fill out additional information. Bill Smith added that the only way to get a reliable count would be to issue a free fishing permit for the weekend. Patrick noted that regardless of usage, we're committed to offering the free fishing days. Mike Armstrong felt that the best option was to look at permit issuance trends, but the Panel agreed that Kevin should look into the permit application change.

On a related topic, Mike Pierdinock suggested that the permit application be modified to direct users to the regulations after they get their permit or provide resources (e.g., links, phone apps) for how to check the regulations. Nichola Meserve suggested a Broadcast could be sent to permit holders to provide them with these resources as well.

Patrick brought the discussion back to the free fishing days, summarizing the group consensus to better quantify use of the days if possible. In terms of increasing the days' use, he suggested the Panel set them now for next year to facilitate advertising as wide as possible (e.g., having them in the Division's Saltwater Guide). The Panel agreed to maintain Father's Day weekend as the days for 2018, and moreover, set the Father's Day weekend as the default selection but subject to an annual review.

The Panel also agreed it would like the Division to consider advertising the free fishing days in magazines (The Fisherman magazine and Coastal Angler magazine were suggested) and how it could reach a wider demographic. Mike Armstrong noted that the Division will have a new Information and Education staff member shortly, and he would bring this topic to her attention for developing a recommendation.

Overview of Funded Projects

Mike Armstrong kicked off an FY17 update on the seven main projects funded by saltwater permit fees. He started with the Permitting Project, which essentially funds two staff to process recreational permits, with a cost of about \$100,000.

Mike moved on to the Information and Education Project, which he noted is in transition due to staffing changes. Elaine Brewer, the original project coordinator, is no longer with DMF (but with DFW), and Maren Olsen, who was in the part-time angler education position, had taken a different position within DMF. Elaine's big tasks for the year had included a lot of social media outreach, and revamping the website to be better for recreational fishing information. DMF was in the process of bringing on her replacement, Christine Cassidy, hopefully by mid-July. Christine joins DMF from the New England Aquarium, has about 15 years of outreach experience, and is also an angler. Kim Trull, who had been working in the Division's Age & Growth Lab and running the Sportfish Angler Data Collection Team program, is the new Angler Ed person.

Kim presented on the Angler Ed program. Last year, seven clinics had been conducted, with about 300 kids involved. Through the angler assistance fund, \$500 had been granted to the City of Salem to buy rods and reels for youth, and \$500 had been granted to the non-profit group BELL (Building Educated Leaders for Life) to transport Boston city school kids to fishing locations. For calendar year 2017, five clinics had been scheduled (more possible). The first had occurred two weeks prior at Salem Willows, with 27 youths participating. Future events would be held at Cape Cod Canal (2) and New Bedford (2). At each event, the anglers receive a bag of goodies with some of the fishing gear used that day, the Division's Saltwater Guide, and more. Due to the staff transition, the grant assistance program had not yet happened, but Kim hoped to get that in motion.

Bill Smith asked whether adult clinics would be added, as had been discussed by the Panel in the past. Kim replied that she was interested to partner with fishing clubs for adult angler ed, and at a minimum provide equipment for events. Mike Armstrong noted that that is the model employed by DFW for many of their education programs. The Division's ability to hold more clinics, whether youth or adult, is limited by manpower, so this approach would enable more events. This would take more planning, but could possibly be added for 2018.

Mike Pierdinock and Kalil Boghdan suggested reaching out to tackle shops, gear manufacturers, and fishing clubs for free gear or other assistance at events (e.g., Bass Pro Shops, LL Bean). They'll provide some contacts to Kim upon request. Kim noted that past events had included donated tackle. Mike Armstrong pointed out that while DFW has three full-time staff for angler ed, we are working with one half-time staff, so expected output differs.

Patrick Paquette asked why fewer clinics were being held this year. Kim replied that it was in part due to timing of the events and the staff transition. Additionally, the BELL group had not requested a repeat event. Patrick felt that the program should be pursuing new opportunities, rather than piggybacking on events that fishing clubs already hold. He noted the inland fisheries model of having staff train volunteers that then teach fishing at various events. To that point, Kalil asked who currently helps Kim run the events. She replied that it is other DMF staff on a volunteer basis.

Patrick reminded Mike that he had raised the idea previously of regional fishing guides, similar to that he'd seen on the west coast, and was still interested in DMF considering this.

Mike Armstrong asked the Panel for any input on what the new I & E person should focus on. George Peterson recommended better advertising of how Fund money is used during permit purchasing, because there is a lot of misunderstanding about this. He thought this would keep the donation rate up and foster good feelings about the permit fee. Matt Ayer stated his plan to include a main article in the next Saltwater Guide on the Fund, projects completed, research conducted, etc.. Dan wanted some printed outreach materials that describe the process and outcomes because he had found that many people buying a permit at the boat show and other events are uninformed. The information is currently on the Division's website, but it is a little buried. Patrick felt that the point of purchase is the best place to advertise, via a piece of paper for an in-person purchase and a link for an online purchase. Matt noted that online purchases result in an immediate email being sent (when email address provided), and that would be a place to advertise the Fund's benefits.

Mike moved the discussion on to the Diadromous Fisheries Project, inviting Greg Skomal to present. Greg noted that he was really presenting in place of Project Leader Brad Chase, who was currently in Weymouth working on a fish passage issue.

Fund monies for this project are primarily used to monitor herring runs. There are 48 towns with river herring runs, 80 river herring runs in the state, and 140 fishways. New monitoring and assessment technologies were implemented from 2013 to 2016, very little of which would have happened without Fund monies, including six 8-channel electronic counters and seven underwater video counters. There are now 34 runs with counts; 14 with census level quality and 8 with biological sampling.

Greg reviewed the abundance indices for the four rivers with the longest time series. These exhibit some promising signs of restoration since the harvest moratorium was implemented in 2006. Several rivers with shorter time series also show some bump in the last few years. Mike Armstrong pointed out that many of these increases were in rivers with recent passage improvements, calling attention to the importance of this work. NOAA Fisheries is primarily interested in dam removal to improve fish passage, so DMF doesn't get much of their funding for fishways, but we do a lot of work with the limited funds available.

Mike Pierdinock asked if the state owns the fish ladders. Mike Armstrong replied that they are primarily privately owned. State law says that owners are required to allow fish to pass, but DMF generally partners with them to provide some money, and often completes the projects at a much cheaper price than if the work were contracted out. Greg added that we often work with local groups to identify needs for fishways, and to monitor passage (visual fish counts).

Greg said that with some improvements to run status, the Division had received its first requests to reopen runs. The potential to do so requires a sustainable harvest plan approved by the ASMFC. Greg reviewed the specifics of the Nemasket River sustainable harvest plan proposal that the ASMFC had approved. The town has yet to decide to move forward with the plan. Bill Smith asked if there was a state-wide policy to help interested towns know how to develop a harvest plan. Greg replied that the Division works with towns upon request to develop a location-specific plan; additionally, the regulations at 322 CMR 6.17 provide some guidance about permits and daily harvest receipts. Mike Armstrong called attention to an expected decline in runs in the future because of 2016 being a drought year. Herring are generally age 3 and age 4 upon return.

Moving on to infrastructure, Greg reported that three new fish ladders were added in 2016 at locations with no previous passage: Aberjona River, Winchester; Borne Pond, Falmouth; and Looks

Pond, West Tisbury. Another existing ladder was rebuilt in the winter of 2016/2017 by the Town of Sandwich at Mill Creek. Dan McKiernan noted a novel feature about the project was that the town had paid for the repair using Community Preservation Act funds.

Mike Pierdinock inquired whether seals presented a problem for the operation of underwater cameras on the Cape. Matt Ayer responded that he wasn't aware of any, and suspects that seals didn't go up river that far.

Patrick reminded the Division that he didn't support Fund money being used to replace state money for such projects. Spending about 16% of the Fund appropriation can be justified because we are under a river herring harvest moratorium and this project will provide the monitoring to enable re-opening of runs. He wanted to make sure that DMF is establishing a run re-opening protocol that will provide an opportunity for harvest in all towns and all runs (e.g., Charles and Mystic Rivers). Mike Armstrong replied that monitoring is a key component for potential re-openings. For example, Weymouth would be easy, as there is a long-term monitoring program in place. Conversely, the Charles and Mystic River dams are state owned, so the state would have to establish monitoring as part of re-opening. Mike Pierdinock commented that he supported the state's policy for re-opening a run being based on sound science, and its even application across all runs/towns.

Mike Armstrong moved on to the portion of the Fund for Recreational Stock Assessment. This funds dedicated staff with assessment skills to improve the information for management use. Dr. Tiffany Vidal had been brought on to replace Dr. Mike Bednarski in this position. She will be involved with such species as fluke, scup, black sea bass, bluefish, and tautog.

Moving onto the MRIP Project, Mike invited the project's coordinator, Dave Martins, to provide a 2016 year-end summary. Dave displayed a map of the 518 sampling sites in MA, which are divided between three regions, each with a supervisor: Matt Ayer for Boston north, John Boardman for south of Boston; and Dave for Cape Cod and the Islands. The sampling schedule is derived by NOAA.

MA was required to perform 707 assignments for 2016. We shifted 50 assignments out of December into the prime months. DMF added on another 435 assignments during May–October, for a total of 1,185 assignments. The number of assignments peaks during the summer months. Each assignment is a 6-hour time slot at a specific location, where as many anglers are interviewed as possible. Just 18 assignments were cancelled for the year (sickness, weather).

The total number of shore-side interviews for the year was 3,116 (shore, charter, private/rental). The private/rental mode was sampled the heaviest (1,880), followed by shore (735), then charter (501). Headboat sampling, which is conducted onboard, totaled 59 trips, with 1,298 angler interviews. July and August were sampled the heaviest.

Kalil asked how the sites are selected. Dave answered that they are randomly generated from a matrix based on expected angler visits. The places with the highest expected fishing activity get sampled the most. It is designed to avoid personal bias.

Dan McKiernan asked for an explanation of the effect of not sampling a specific site all year. Mike Armstrong replied that it has no effect because there are redundant sites sampled. Unless a particular site has a catch rate that is different from everywhere else in the state, there is no effect to not sampling that site.

Patrick asked how the site matrix is reviewed and modified. Matt Ayer responded that the observations of the samplers about site activity are collected by the three supervisors to update the matrix. Dave further explained that NOAA derives the sampling assignments on a monthly basis, and will use our most recent matrix each time. Mike Pierdinock asked about the methods and how data are expanded. Mike Armstrong suggested that he schedule a separate meeting with staff to get a better understanding of the sampling methods.

Mike Armstrong invited Mark Rousseau to cover the Artificial Reefs update. Mark began with an update on the Harwich reef, showing underwater video of the site from one month post-deployment, several months post-deployment, and finally from May 2017. The videos demonstrated the colonization of the reef. In the latest video, the concrete surfaces were covered, and many small and large fish were present. Lots of recreational fishing activity was taking place at the site on all visits. Mark reminded the Panel that the permit for the site is still open, so more material could be deployed there, although there is nothing in the pipeline.

As for potential new projects, staff had been investigating Lower Cape Cod Bay because the Cape Cod Salties and Cape Cod Charter Boat Association had expressed an interest to DMF. The process for building a reef includes site selection, permitting, material acquisition, and finally deployment. As for Lower Cape Cod Bay, three potential locations had thus far been identified for further exploration based upon review of available sediment composition data. Ideally, we are looking for a sand dominated area; we want to avoid rock and gravel areas that already provide good habitat. The potential locations will next be surveyed with sidescan sonar from DMF vessels (planned for July).

Mark pointed out that there are notable differences between Cape Cod Bay (CCB) and Nantucket Sound (where the Harwich Reef was successfully deployed). CCB includes right whale critical habitat, has commercial surf clam trawling activity, sand mining areas, and different recreational species. These are all things that would affect permitting.

Additional reef-related updates included: DMF has installed acoustic receivers and temperature monitors on all five MA reefs; discussions were ongoing about near-port staging areas for materials; and staff was working with the Cape Cod Salties to deploy new material to the Yarmouth tire reef.

Patrick stated that the potential site in CCB that was in front of Barnstable channel was in a major traffic area, and he would advise against siting a reef in a major transit area. Additionally, the potential difficulties for siting a reef in CCB should include the abundance of lobster gear. Mark responded that both these issues would be considered during permitting.

Mike Pierdinock expressed his pleasure with the efforts to build more reefs in MA waters, and wanted them peppered throughout the state like NJ and FL. Each permitted area should have multiple sites. He felt another selling point would be keeping some activity off Stellwagen Bank.

Mark pointed out that DMF doesn't currently have sufficient staff or funding to tackle reef building more aggressively. Because permits close after a number of years, we don't want to go after permits too fast without having actual material to deploy. It's also hard to compare MA to FL; Florida's program is run by the counties (not the state), and they have a 365-day recreational season to support.

Mike Pierdinock asked why DMF wasn't looking south of the Cape. Mark replied that it was because the Yarmouth and Harwich sites are still open. Yarmouth is a 125-acre site, so it can accommodate all the material we can find.

Kalil asked why only 10-acre sites were being looked for. Mark responded that an Environmental Impact Report is required for sites more than 10 acres, and that would make the process even longer. Mark reviewed the permitting process and the approvals that have to be given, each taking much time.

Patrick asked if materials like decommissioned wind turbine parts and vessels are considered. Mark replied that DMF has avoided vessels because they generally require clean up first which can be very costly. A state like NJ that uses vessels has a much larger budget, often from private donations.

Mike Armstrong invited Ross Kessler to provide the Public Access Update. Ross began with a map displaying all public access projects to date. Efforts have been made to distribute the projects geographically and demographically. They differ in size from large infrastructure projects like piers to small improvements often done through the small grants program.

Ross provided an accounting of the planned FY17 projects. The Small Grants program had run, giving up to \$15,000 to awardees for small infrastructure improvements. These must be at sites that provide equitable access to all users. 2017 grants went to Manchester by the Sea for installing separate trailer and kayak ramps at a site; Beverly for improving shore access at Obear Park; Scituate for LED lights at town and state ramps; and Chatham for fillet stations at the Barn Hill and Ryder's Cove ramp locations. Two applicants' proposals were pushed out to FY18 because of permitting requirements that were expected to be resolved next year. These included ramp lights, wash down station, and extension of ramp floats at a Truro site; and an expansion of floats at Bicentennial Park in Fall River.

FY17 funds had contributed to supporting alternative plover management initiatives to reduce beach closures. This was the last year of multi-year spending on this initiative.

The FY17 spending plan had included acquisition of property along the Weweantic River in Wareham to provide shore and car-top vessel access, but only a small amount of money had been spent (about \$5,000). A sales agreement with the land owner had been struck to sell the property at the appraised value of \$101,000 and the town was in support, but then a buried tank was discovered. The purchase was suspended because the seller did not want to mitigate for the presence of tanks.

Mike Moss asked if DMF could clean the site after purchase. Ross responded that this was very risky; if the tank was properly sealed, removal might be just \$10,000, but any leaks or spilled would greatly drive up that cost. Mike suggested there might be a way to investigate the liability before going further.

Mike Pierdinock commented that he made part of his living cleaning up properties and wouldn't touch it unless the seller assessed the damage. As is, bank financing for a sale would not be available. A site assessment alone could be \$50,000. The typical gas station is about \$150,000 to clean up.

Mike Armstrong suggested that the seller might still change his mind about performing the clean-up because the presence of the tank is now public knowledge and makes the property basically unsellable in its current state. If so, the Panel was supportive of continuing with the project.

The plan for a potential Salem Willows Fishing Pier rehabilitation or replacement had gone according to plan. The process for permitting was begun, as well as surveying of the site.

Regarding the Deer Island Fishing Pier, Ross stated that all permitting, planning and engineering had been completed over several years of Fund spending. However, the project was in need of public support to continue because some Winthrop residents had begun voicing opposition. Additionally, with an estimated price tag of \$1 million for construction, funding for the pier was still needed. DFG was trying to get legislative support for an appropriation, but it hadn't happened yet. Construction would otherwise have to be postponed until next year. The Panel further discussed how appropriations from the Fund work, specifically, how if money goes unused it goes back into the Fund and has to be re-appropriated.

Patrick asked if it was the lack of public support that was interfering with getting the appropriation. George Peterson and Mary-Lee King replied that based on discussions with legislators, they did not believe this was the issue, but calls to legislators from the public would help to get the appropriation increased for it. The problem may in part be a misconception about state funding; i.e., the optics of building a million dollar fishing pier while cutting other state programs. Patrick predicted that legislators will begin to get calls about repealing the fishing license if the state doesn't release the permit money for the projects it was intended for.

Mike Pierdinock asked how long the construction permitting for the pier would be valid. Doug Cameron replied that it depends on the permit; the shortest is a 3-year permit which we're about half a year in to, although we can request an extension.

Patrick Paquette restated a prior request for a multi-year spending plan. The Deer Island project in particular, with its higher cost, emphasized this need. Mike Armstrong indicated it could be done, but pointed out that Deer Island is the first large project that is scheduled to be financed solely by the Fund. George agreed that a multi-year spending plan was needed, especially given Kevin's 10-year projection for the Fund.

Mike Armstrong asked for Panel input on the scale of projects that should be undertaken and in what circumstances. Financing a large infrastructure project (like Deer Island) with Fund money only requires 3–5 years of no public access spending other than small grants to rebuild the Fund. Was the Panel okay with that, he asked, or should large projects only be undertaken with outside funding, or do we focus on smaller projects only and do a lot of them? He noted that the decision had been made to proceed with Deer Island and it will take time to rebuild the fund, but he questioned if this is the way the Panel wants to continue.

Bill Smith asked for clarification on the minimum balance that the Division was comfortable drawing the Fund down to, noting that there is a \$2.7 million carryover. Kevin Creighton replied that the minimum he, as CFO, was comfortable with was \$2.5 million; meaning a \$1 million drawdown for Deer Island was possible, but it would take several years of no/limited public access spending to rebuild the Fund to \$2.5 million. At the start of each year, at least \$1.3 million is needed to continue existing projects.

Doug Cameron provided the final cost estimate for constructing a Deer Island fishing pier. The raw numbers without contingencies were \$836,000 for the pier, and \$305,000 for the parking area of which 50% is born by MWRA, for a total state obligation of \$990,000. With contingencies (15%), the estimate was \$1.3 million, including the MWRA obligation. George added that we could break ground next spring if a supplemental budget provided funding before the end of this calendar year.

Mike Armstrong raised the idea of a “stamp” as a revenue generator for the Fund. Mike Moss reflected on the Legislature’s past decisions regarding the permit fee (\$10 instead of \$15) and no-fee age (60 instead of 65 years) as unwise. Patrick expressed wariness with any discussions about raising the permit fee or establishing a stamp. Dan added that another avenue was external funding, but that would require fundraising to essentially become a part of Ross’ job. Patrick noted that additional public access money could come from the other projects; their level funding is just an assumption, not a necessity.

Mike Pierdinock stated support for continuing the Deer Island project, but was worried about funding future big projects in the same way due to the impact on the Fund. He preferred spending plans which included multiple smaller projects rather than one big project, seeing the former as benefitting more people. He added particular support for more reef-building projects.

Bill Smith commented that multiple smaller projects had been the Panel/Division’s approach for multiple years, and Deer Island was the first big project with only Fund support. He felt that the amount of access provided should be the metric for funding decision, and that Deer Island would provide equivalent access as multiple smaller projects given its location in an underserved area.

Mike Moss agreed that Deer Island equaled multiple smaller projects in terms of access provided, but not all big projects would be the same. They need to be evaluated case by case. Mike Pierdinock commented that one benefit to multiple small projects is not having to worry about getting the legislature to appropriate more funds.

Dan suggested that this discussion be continued after the requested multi-year spending plan is prepared, at a meeting this fall. Patrick specified that he wanted a multi-year spending plan that included both Deer Island and Salem Willows in it.

FY18 Fund Appropriation and Division Spending Plan

Mike Armstrong called attention to the one-page handout with the FY18 spending plan. The total budget of \$1.3 million is in the Governor’s budget. The only change from FY17 is in salaries based on normal step raises, except less for the recreational stock assessment position (new staff).

Bill Smith asked what the expected reimbursement was for the \$386,000 budgeted for MRIP. Kevin Creighton said he’d need to double check because last year it had been \$300,000, but it was about \$175,000 in years prior, and he wasn’t certain their wasn’t a billing issue with fiscal and calendar year. Mike Armstrong said he could provide a clarifying memo to the Panel. He noted that DMF had asked for more because the cost of hiring seasonals through the temp agency went up. We are reimbursed for everything but the cost of our add-on intercepts. Patrick commented that our add-ons must cost a lot if we only get back \$175,000.

Kalil asked how the budget is projected for the next fiscal year without knowing what permit sales will be. Kevin said he works with the state’s budget office and bases it off prior year spending. Kalil also asked if there is flexibility between spending on the projects. Mike Armstrong indicated there was because there are categories of spending (e.g., staff, equipment), but we are not held to the distribution between the projects on the handout.

Mike Pierdinock made, and Bill Smith seconded, a motion to approve the budget as proposed. The Panel approved the motion unanimously.

New Business

Mike Armstrong indicated that this part of the agenda was for issues raised by Panel members for discussion.

DMF Saltwater Sportfish Guide Cost and Distribution: Bill Smith commended the Division on its production of the guide, and asked about the distribution process, noting that he hadn't seen it at certain tackle shops near him where he had expected to (e.g., Belsan Bait & Tackle). Matt Ayer responded that the timing of distribution this year had been delayed until May because of pending rule-changes for several major recreational species (cod, haddock, fluke, black sea bass). Tackle shops are the first priority for distribution, then places like Walmart and visitor centers. Matt asked the Panel to contact him or other DMF staff with any specific locations they'd like the guide distributed to. Bill also suggested that staff check the online version, as last he'd looked it still said "show edition."

Potential Expansion of MA Catch and Release Trophy Fish: Mike Pierdinock had suggested an expansion to all species, which Mike Armstrong stated had occurred. John Boardman added that, as a result, he was tracking more entries into the tournament this year already (40 so far; had 75 total last year). There were many more entries from kids. The rules to the tournament are in the guide and online. Mike Pierdinock said he was happy with the changes.

Blish Point Launch Ramp: Kaili Boghdan reported that he had received a call from a member of the Cape Cod Fly Rodders about a petition being circulated to improve this ramp. Ross commented that he thought OFB runs that facility and should take the lead in addressing this issue.

Doug Cameron described the ramp. It was built over 30 years ago and is managed by the Town of Barnstable. It is located within a critical environmental concern area, so permitting for improvements is more difficult. No impermeable surfaces would be allowed in the area. Due to active sediment transport, the ramp repeatedly fills in with sand and the Town tries to clear it from time to time. Parking spots in the crushed stone lot aren't defined, so it is generally less efficient, and there is little maneuverability in the immediate area. Doug reported that OFB had reached out to the town through the Harbormaster to set up a meeting. The local Conservation Commission would need to be brought in. The petition is requesting a paved/lined parking area and a ramp of double the current size. Doug doubted that this could get permitted. He is currently waiting on the town to schedule a meeting to discuss the issues.

Patrick reported that he had also spoken with a member of the group, and had experience using the ramp. He agreed with Doug's assessment that while there are problems with the ramp and parking lot, getting the requested improvements permitted would be next to impossible. The parking area is prone to flooding and sand transport can't be stopped.

Kalil wondered if there might be some smaller fixes possible. Doug noted that the Town could charge a user fee for the ramp (with OFB approval), the proceeds of which have to go into maintenance. If the request is for a parking attendant, it will probably result in a fee increase to use the ramp.

Other Business

Patrick Paquette raised a question about the application of the Open Meeting Law to querying the Panel members by email for agenda topics. Moreover, as he had not been trained in the law, he suggested some training for the Panel. Jared Silva indicated that he would ask counsel for input on that particular question. He suspected that so long as there wasn't deliberation, it is not a violation.

Patrick also commented on the new recreational lobster videos and how excellent they were. He was interested to have similar education tools for other topics, specifically related to recreational fishing. Dan McKiernan noted that the Division planned to put the production company on retainer and he would be happy to expand the video collection. Panel members should submit any ideas for additional video subject matter.

Dan McKiernan asked when the Panel would like to meet again, noting that the goal is for at least two meetings per year. Mike Armstrong noted that the RFR for small grant projects still needed to be sent out, and he suggested that the Panel have a call on the grantees. There was no objection.

Seeing as there was no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:30pm.

Meeting Documents

- ❖ June 19, 2017 Draft Meeting Agenda
- ❖ July 13, 2016 Draft Meeting Minutes
- ❖ FY18 Recreational Permit Revenue Spending Plan

Meeting Presentations

- ❖ Update on Recreational Permitting & Fund Overview
- ❖ FY17 Project Status Reports: I & E, Diadromous Fish, MRIP, Artificial Reefs, and Public Access Projects