



MASSWILDLIFE

## DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

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

PRESENT: Dr. Joseph Larson/Chair, Michael Roche/Vice Chair, Bonnie Booth/Secretary, Ernest W. Foster IV, Stephen Sears, Dr. Brandi Van Roo, Ron Amidon/Commissioner/DFG, Mark Tisa/Director, Jon Regosin/Deputy Director, Kris McCarthy/Associate Director/Finance and Administration, Eve Schlüter/Assistant Director/NHESP, Michael Huguenin/Assistant Director/Wildlife, Trina Moruzzi/Assistant Director/Operations, Todd Richards/Assistant Director/Fisheries, Marion Larson/Assistant Director/Information and Education, Elizabeth Wroblicka/Chief/Wildlife Lands, Todd Olanyk/Supervisor/Central Wildlife District, James Pollock/Facilities Coordinator, Nicole McSweeney/Marketing and Promotion Specialist, David Stainbrook/Deer and Moose Project Leader, David Scarpitti/Turkey and Upland Game Project Leader, Hillary Siener/Wildlife Seasonal Worker, Elise Stanmyer/Wildlife Seasonal Worker, Maggie Upham/Wildlife Seasonal Worker, Major David Loos/OLE; PUBLIC: Dave Morin, Keith Fritze, John Kellstrand, Stan Andriski, Bob Durand, Elizabeth Magner

DATE: May 15, 2019

LOCATION: Division of Fisheries and Wildlife Field Headquarters  
Westborough, Massachusetts

Chair Larson opened the May meeting of the Fisheries and Wildlife Board at 2:35 p.m.

### Acceptance of Minutes

A motion was made by Secretary Booth to accept the minutes from the March and the April meetings as presented. The motion was seconded by Mr. Sears. The motion passed unanimously.

### Chair's Comments

Chair Larson reported that he had no comments.

### Commissioner's Comments

Commissioner Amidon provided the Board with printed copies of his comments, reviewing his schedule of meetings, events, and project reviews for the previous month, and looking ahead through May at upcoming meetings and events.

### Director's Comments

Director Tisa reminded the Board that the proposed Turkey hunting regulations public hearing was scheduled for the evening of the May meeting. He reported that a coyote listening session had been held by staff in Shelburne Falls the previous week. He also reported that another listening session was planned for June 4, 2019, in Westford, and that the final session was planned for June 18, the evening of the June Board meeting, in Buzzards Bay.

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### Law Enforcement Comments

Major David Loos recited some statistics of interest to the Board from the call list recorded by the OLE since the beginning of the year.

The Major also briefly told the Board about a bear case that recently went through the court system. The violator was assessed a \$5,000 fine, a 2-year license suspension, and the confiscation of the bow that was used in the incident.

### Deer Review and Antlerless Deer Allocation Recommendations (David Stainbrook)

Deer and Moose Project Leader David Stainbrook presented the annual Deer Review to the Board.

Mr. Stainbrook briefly explained how MassWildlife manages deer in the state, and stated that staff was recommending a management range adjustment in the eastern zones, to 12-18 deer per square mile of forest statewide. He explained that the Board-approved density ranges are meant to be benchmarks to meet the agency's goal of keeping deer numbers below the point of major impacts to forest, including on the diversity of plant species and the forest's ability to regenerate, but in balance with public desire and tolerance for deer. Noting that the Board had approved an expanded range for zones 1-9 in 2015, he stated that the range for zones 10-14 has not been changed since it was set in 1985, when there were fewer than 5 deer per square mile on most of Eastern Massachusetts. The staff believes that the benchmark of 6-8 deer per square mile for zones 10-14 needs to be updated and aligned with the rest of the state, to 12-18 deer per square mile. Mr. Stainbrook reported that the change would not change the way we manage deer, because the goal is still the same; the change would instead provide a more realistic benchmark to attain.

Mr. Stainbrook explained that the way MassWildlife manages the deer population across the state is through regulated female harvest, and that this is accomplished by allocating antlerless deer permits zone by zone in response to population trends. The number of permits allocated per zone depends on the targeted direction we want deer density to go – Increase, Stabilize, or Decrease – and the previous year's harvest data and success rates.

Mr. Stainbrook then presented the data on the 2018 deer harvest and current trends.

	<b>Average 2015-2017</b>	<b>2018</b>
<b>Archery</b>	4,672	5,183 (Record)
<b>Shotgun</b>	4,793	6,531 (10-year record)
<b>Primitive</b>	2,285	2,696 (Record)
<b>Youth/Paraplegic</b>	135	141
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,885</b>	<b>14,551 (Record total)</b>

Mr. Stainbrook reported that some of the reasons for such a high harvest may include increasing numbers of deer in the west and central regions from a period of low permit issuance; increasing numbers in the east from lack of hunting access; good weather for hunting and the presence of tracking snow, which led to high shotgun season harvests; and low food availability, i.e., deer have to move more frequently and further for food. He presented his deer population analysis by management zone, since, he reported, statewide harvest does not tell us about deer population trends in each region of the state. Using graphs to show the trends in numbers of deer harvested, he stated that it is helpful to break the state into two areas when looking at deer management issues and trends. In general, in zones 1-9, deer

numbers have been kept relatively stable over the past 30 years through careful antlerless deer permit allocations and regulated hunting. Staff has kept antlerless deer permit allocations low over the past 10 years in many of these zones, to allow conservative population growth.

Analyzing deer density in the context of the state's management ranges, Mr. Stainbrook reported that we have kept antlerless deer permits low for the past 5-10 years in zones 1-4 to allow some population growth. Acknowledging that there are highs and lows in areas of any zone, he reported that we are seeing increasing deer numbers that are approaching the upper end of the current management range. We are also documenting some forest impacts on our WMAs and other lands that are open to hunting, such as state forests. In response, the staff recommends a conservative increase in the allocations to stabilize deer numbers.

In Wildlife Management Zones 5-8, Mr. Stainbrook reported that the deer numbers appear to be within our management range to near the upper end in some areas and appear increasing to stable. The Quabbin has also reduced the female harvest over the past 2 years and 'rested' more areas from hunting, which will help bring Zone 6 back into the middle of the management range. Staff is also documenting some forest impacts in these zones on our WMAs and other lands that are open to hunting, such as state forests. The staff recommends a conservative increase in the allocations in zones 5, 7, and 8, with no change to allocation in Zone 6.

There is some variability in Zone 9 relative to development, with lower numbers along the border with zones 5 and 8, and higher numbers along the eastern edge, along I-495. In general, it is at the upper end of the state management range and increasing. Also, we are documenting forest impacts in most of the huntable areas. The staff therefore recommends an increase in the allocation to stabilize deer numbers and allow for additional permits relative to the Wachusett hunt, about which he spoke in some detail.

Mr. Stainbrook observed that, on average, the deer population is within the management range in zones 1-9, but there is always variability within each zone, with some areas having lower deer numbers and some with higher deer numbers. The variability typically comes down to hunting access, hunter effort, and habitat quality.

Turning to the Eastern zones, 10-14, deer numbers have gone from very low (when it was rare to see a deer in some areas), to quite abundant, and much of this is related to the lack of hunting access and the discharge setbacks that create a lot of sanctuary areas, which limits harvest. In areas where there has been adequate hunting access, he reported that we have likely kept deer numbers stable to slowly growing, but in areas with limited to no hunting access, deer numbers have been steadily growing.

While there is enough hunting access in the west and central zones to afford great management ability, the eastern zones show a quite different story. Deer numbers can be close to goal levels in areas with adequate hunting access and very high in areas with a lack of hunting access and major restrictions to hunting. Overall, average densities are higher than our management range for all of the eastern zones and we are seeing increasing trends in many areas. Mr. Stainbrook pointed out that though staff typically increases the permit allocation to reduce population, in zones 10, 13, and 14, antlerless permits are essentially unlimited, given how long it takes the surplus permits to sell out in recent years (almost 2 weeks in 2018 in Zone 10; never in zones 13 and 14), so an increase in the allocation will not lead to more deer harvested, just more unfilled permits per hunter.

However, he stated that that is not completely the case for Zone 11, which sold out within a few days. Thus, the staff recommends increasing the allocation of antlerless permits in Zone 11 to help increase antlerless deer harvest.

Mr. Stainbrook then provided the recommendations of staff, based on this year’s review. Staff is proposing to update the management range in zones 10-14 from 6-8 to 12-18 deer per square mile of forest, producing one statewide management range and one goal. He also provided the proposed 2019 Antlerless Deer Permit allocations, by Wildlife Management Zone. For context, he also provided the 2018 allocation numbers, indicated the size of the proposed changes, and the desired outcomes.

WMZ	2018 Allocation	2019 Allocation	Proposed Change	Population Trend
<b>1</b>	500	<b>600</b>	<b>100</b>	Increasing
<b>2</b>	250	<b>300</b>	<b>50</b>	Increasing
<b>3</b>	1,400	<b>1,600</b>	<b>200</b>	Increasing
<b>4N</b>	500	<b>600</b>	<b>100</b>	Increasing
<b>4S</b>	400	<b>500</b>	<b>100</b>	Increasing
<b>5</b>	1,250	<b>1,500</b>	<b>250</b>	Increasing
6	300	300	-	Stable/Increasing
<b>7</b>	2,250	<b>2,400</b>	<b>150</b>	Stable/Increasing
<b>8</b>	2,500	<b>2,600</b>	<b>100</b>	Stable/Increasing
<b>9</b>	4,800	<b>5,500</b>	<b>700</b>	Increasing
10	12,000	12,000	-	Increasing
<b>11</b>	12,000	<b>13,000</b>	<b>1,000</b>	Increasing
12	1,000	1,000	-	Stable/Increasing
13	2,700	2,700	-	Increasing
14	2,700	2,700	-	Increasing

After some questions and discussion, Vice Chair Roche moved to accept the staff’s recommendations as proposed; Secretary Booth seconded the motion. After further discussion, Vice Chair Roche amended his motion to change the numbers of permits in zones 13 and 14 to “Unlimited,” rather than the very high numbers of 2,700 permits, even though only approximately 1,200 are purchased per year, as a way to highlight the fact that the deer population is far above the state’s goals in those zones. In a further discussion, Mr. Stainbrook was asked whether it would be advantageous to have smaller set-backs for archery hunting, so that the deer population could be managed more effectively in more areas, and he agreed that it would. Vice Chair Roche retracted his amendment, while Secretary Booth retracted her second. The motion therefore reverted to an acceptance of the 2019 ADP allocations as proposed. After more discussion, the Board members agreed that the data should be presented to the public with some explanatory language, with guidance from the Director, about the reasons for the numbers of permits to be issued, to acknowledge the very high numbers of deer in those zones; the vote in favor was unanimous.

Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee Report

Dr. Larson reported that the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Advisory Committee’s May meeting heard the MassDOT presentation previously presented to the Board and a report given in part by Board member Dr. Van Roo, on the impacts of land-mounted solar panels, which is the subject of her current research.

### Set Meeting Date

Members confirmed June 18, 2019, at 2:30 p.m., for the June monthly meeting. The members also discussed dates for the July Fisheries and Wildlife Board meeting. Members selected July 17, 2019, at 1:00 p.m., at a location to be determined later by the Director and his staff.

### Member's Comments

Vice Chair Roche and Secretary Booth reported no comment.

Dr. Van Roo reported that she had participated in a recent prescribed fire refresher and that she applauded the efforts of the MassWildlife crew in general, and Prescribed Fire Program Manager Caren Caljouw in particular, to form a very inclusive and collaborative atmosphere for all the participating agencies.

Mr. Foster commented that the New England Outdoor Writers were still looking for opportunities to publish materials.

Mr. Sears thanked the Commissioner and the Director for attempting to attend the Berkshire County League banquet, which was very well-attended.

A motion was made by Vice Chair Roche to move into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing certain land acquisitions and to not return to open session. The motion was seconded by Dr. Van Roo. The motion passed unanimously.

### Executive Session

Chief of Wildlife Lands Wroblecka presented six proposed acquisitions, which were each reviewed and all unanimously approved by the Board.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonnie Booth  
Secretary

### List of documents presented to the Board in its May meeting packets

May meeting agenda

Draft March and April meeting minutes for review

Commissioner's Comments

Spreadsheet of Natural Heritage Fund taxpayer donations (1992 to 2018)

Documentation for the executive session

Handout for the Turkey Hunting public hearing

Copy of the hearing notice and the proposed regulations for the evening public hearing