

FINAL MINUTES

Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Advisory Committee (NHESAC)

1/12/2023

DFW Field Headquarters, Southwest Meeting Room #103

1 Rabbit Hill Road, Westborough, MA 01581

Meeting held virtually via Zoom

MEMBERS:

Present: Mark Mello, Kevin Powers, David Small, Tim Flanagan, Bill Brumback, Matthew Sisk, Wayne Petersen

Absent: None

ASSOCIATE MEMBERS:

Present: Andy Finton, Russ Hopping

Absent: None

AGENCY STAFF:

Present: Eve Schlüter

OTHERS:

Present: Peter Severance, Jay Cordeiro

– The meeting was called to order at 1:38 P.M.
in the temporary absence of Mark Mellow until his arrival at 1:55 pm. –

1. Approval of Minutes from the October Meeting

Members voted unanimously to accept the October 13, 2022, minutes, Dave Small seconded, and members voted unanimously to approve with the minor exception of the misspelling of Wayne Petersen's (Peterson) last name.

2. Chair's Comments – Mark Mello

No comments

3. Board Member's Comments – Matthew Sisk

- Matthew's comments included the fact that the Fisheries & Wildlife Board was very pleased with the current excellence of the NHESP and its operation.
- The most significant votes at the most recent Board meeting pertained to several administrative changes in dog field trial protocols taking place on WMAs, and also the fact that Mass Wildlife staff can now oversee such trials in place of the American Kennel Club's oversight.

4. NHESP Report & Assistant Director's Report – Eve Schlüter

- Eve reported on the very successful and enthusiastic release of the new BioMap.
- On Jan 18, there will be a webinar featuring the use of BioMap, which already has 180 people registered for the event.
- Two new employees have been hired to facilitate the release and oversight of the recent increase in the new BioMap activity.
- The NHESP has received two very generous grants, one from the *America the Beautiful* legislation for \$5 million to focus on improving grassland and pine barren habitats as well as coastal plain pond shoreline habitats, both in southeastern Massachusetts.
- The second major grant was from the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) for \$800,000 to apply toward work on Massachusetts saltmarsh restoration.
- Two new employees have been hired to help fill voids left by the departures of two staff. Tim McGuire is the new DOT liaison; the other is Ryan Williams who is the new conservation data specialist.
- March 3 is the date by which new state wildlife and botanical listing proposals (external to NHESP) need to be submitted to the NHESP, and the committee will receive the list of proposals at the April 13 meeting.
- In 2022, Massachusetts executed 33 prescribed habitat burns which amounted to 1,300 acres of successful habitat management. This was considered a very positive total acreage.
- In Sep 2022, a Green Turtle track was noted on east Nantucket Island as possible nesting activity.

5. *MassWildlife's Role in Coastal Waterbird Conservation* – Carolyn Mostello, Coastal Waterbird Biologist

Carolyn Mostello gave an informative and well-illustrated overview and history of MassWildlife's successful coastal waterbird program. The emphasis of her presentation was on the management of Piping Plovers and terns, most notably the Federally Endangered Roseate Tern, the Federally Threatened Piping Plover, and the state-listed Common Tern listed as Special Concern. The success of the Piping Plover restoration efforts in MA have been especially successful, with the number of nesting pairs going from approximately 125 pairs in 1985 to approximately 1,000 pairs in 2021. Roseate Tern numbers have not been as dramatic, but Massachusetts currently hosts two of the three largest colonies of Roseate Terns in North America. The most notable colonies are two in Buzzards Bay; one on Bird Island in Marion and the other on Ram Island in Fairhaven. The third Roseate Tern colony is on Great Gull Island in NY. A \$6 million restoration on Bird Island was very successful, and Carolyn had excellent visuals to describe this major engineering effort. Similar plans are in the works to do comparable work on Ram Island. The fact that 90% of the North American population of the Roseate Tern is in Massachusetts makes this an exceptionally important species from the perspective of coastal waterbird protection. Everyone at the meeting was most favorably impressed by Carolyn's work on behalf of these three species, and MassWildlife's conservation work with coastal waterbirds has been widely heralded as outstanding at the national level.

6. Member's and Associate Member's Comments

Russ Hopping – Reported on an unusual sighting of a Long-tailed Skipper in his Essex County yard earlier this fall. This was not the only sighting this fall, so this may have represented something of an incursion of this widespread southern species in Massachusetts this year.

Dave Small – Shared the fact that despite significant forest management cutbacks at the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) this year, it does not seem that this is the case at Mass Wildlife.

Tim Flanagan – Reported that he has recently retired from academia but has no plans to retire from the Advisory Committee. The other committee members were visibly pleased by this announcement by Tim from every perspective.

Andy Finton – Expressed how pleased he was with the positive interest expressed by the release of the new BioMap since he was one of several principal architects of this outstanding newly released conservation tool.

Kevin Powers – Described the recent most northerly occurrence of a Green Turtle nesting attempt earlier this season on Long Island, New York. This information generated some discussion on the implications of this event in light of increasing sea water temperatures in the Gulf of Maine and beyond. Kevin also shared some recent information that there were 10-11 newborn Atlantic Right Whales this year which can only be described as great news for this beleaguered species.

Wayne Petersen – Reported the presence of at least 5+ Right Whales feeding off Duck Harbor in Wellfleet in Cape Cod Bay during a Christmas Bird Count in the Truro area in late December. This is not necessarily good news, but certainly not bad news either.

– The meeting adjourned at 3:40 P.M. –

Drafted by: Wayne Petersen
Submitted by: Kevin Powers