

NJ Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee

Meeting Minutes

March 17, 2010

Assunpink Wildlife Management Area

ATTENDEES

COMMITTEE: Barbara Brummer (Chair), James Applegate, Emile DeVito, Jane Galetto, Rick Lathrop, Erica Miller, David Mizrahi, James Shissias, Dale Schweitzer.

Absent: Joanna Burger, Howard Geduldig

STAFF: Dave Jenkins (Chief), Kathy Clark, Amanda Dey, Amy Wells, Pete Winkler, Pat Woerner

GUESTS: Fred Akers (GEHWA), Jeff Brust (DFW-MF), Larry Niles (CWFNJ), Annette Scherer (USFWS), Jeanette Vreeland (DFW-FGC), Tim Dillingham (ALS), Rick Dutko (NJDEP-DPF), Faith Zerbe (Del. RiverKeeper), Nellie Tsipourg (NJ Audubon), Tim Lyons (USFWS-Patuxent), Jim Nichols (USGS-Patuxent), Conor McGowan (USGS-Patuxent), Kirk Moore (Asbury Park Press)

The meeting was called to order at 10:05 a.m. Notice of the meeting date and location were filed with and posted at the Office of the Secretary of State on January 25, 2010.

Introductions of members and public were conducted.

Minutes

A motion was made by J. Shissias, seconded by E. DeVito, to approve the minutes for January 20, 2010. All in favor, none opposed, the minutes were approved.

Lead in Wildlife

Dr. Erica Miller gave a presentation on the issue of lead in wildlife. The information included a summary of avenues of contamination in wildlife via the consumption of paint, fishing sinkers, and used gun shot ammunition. The issue is of concern to all types of birds. Predator species (such as raptors) become contaminated through the ingestion of contaminated carcasses and entrails; songbirds, waterfowl and upland gamebirds through sand and gravel. The toxin impacts the central nervous system; symptoms include wing drop, crop impaction, paralysis and diarrhea. The effects may appear in days or weeks after consumption. Increased observations of effected wildlife are often noted near heavily used hunting areas or firearm ranges. Birds are more vulnerable during periods of increases stress such as egg laying and/or migration. Diagnostics include blood tests and radiographs. Dr. Miller provided an overview of legislative actions currently underway throughout the nation, including areas that have placed a ban on the use of lead for fishing equipment, and countries/regions that have banned the use of all lead products for hunting and fishing. Discussions continued noting the differences between lead and steel

shot, costs, effectiveness of lead versus alternatives, potential for damage to the firearm and hunting preferences. A copy of the Dr. Miller's presentation, The Wildlife Society's position on lead and the National Park Service lead reduction efforts will be distributed to the members for review. The Wildlife Society's position on lead and the National Park Service lead reduction efforts will be distributed to the members prior to comment.

Landscape Project

Pete Winkler, ENSP GIS specialist, provided an updated overview of the Landscape Project (LP) and corresponding peer review process to which the DEP Transition Team referred in the Transition Report to Governor Christie.

Mr. Winkler explained the LP acts as a planning tool to help biologists plan wildlife management efforts and prioritize the acquisition, protection, and/or development of various habitats throughout the state. The program utilizes multiple GIS layering of documented occurrences of endangered, threatened and special concern species with Land Use Land Cover information. Habitat is then ranked on a scale of 1-5 based upon the conservation status of the documented wildlife. The program is science based and subject to a peer review process.

Discussions noted the Commissioner is aware of the need to protect endangered, threatened and special concern species and noted the need to provide the Commissioner with a description as to how and why the program was developed, as well as the transition from utilizing LP as a planning tool to its use in the regulatory process. Discussions also acknowledged differences in how ENSP uses the program versus how the project is utilized by others (including municipalities, builders, and members of the public); Members noted many state planning efforts are, or are becoming, regulatory and use of the LP maps has been defended successfully in court.

The Committee made several suggestions including an initiative to hold a separate meeting with the stakeholders to clarify LP development and are extending an invitation to consultants and members of the public to attend an ENSAC meeting to provide comment on the Landscape Project.

Comments from the public noted counties and municipalities depend upon DEP as a partner in land use planning that helps conserve species. Others expressed the view that this issue exists as an informal challenge to the LP process and LP maps are an important tool in this partnership.

Delphi Status Review Process

Kathy Clark received additional comments on the drafted outline for the Delphi Species Status Review Process. ENSP staff will incorporate the revisions and work on developing the full descriptive methodology for the final SOP. Staff will present the final SOP when it is completed. Ms. Clark provided an overview of the Delphi review panel selection process and processes designed to maintain the anonymity of members.

Delaware Bay Shorebirds & Adaptive Resource Model (ARM)

Annette Scherer (USFWS) explained the federal government separates wildlife activities by research and regulations. USGS conducts research; regulatory efforts are under USFWS.

Decision Making Processes - James Nichols, a research scientist with the USGS delivered a presentation on the elements of informed decision making processes.

Dr. Nichols explained structured decision making processes are adaptive and are used to determine the weight of various selected decisions. Models focus on uncertainties, simplification and reduction of uncertainty over time.

The purpose of Horseshoe Crab Adaptive Harvest Management is to find actions that best achieve the objectives. Steps include 1) selection of a management action; 2) impose the action; 3) compare the estimated and predicted information; 4) return to step 1.

Adaptive Resource Management (ARM) modeling effort - Conor McGowan, USGS, gave a presentation on the ARM model and how it is utilized for structured decision making processes (SDM). Current decisions are based on the goal of maximizing the harvest of horseshoe crabs in the DE Bay while also maintaining ecosystem integrity and providing adequate food resources in the form of horseshoe crab eggs for migratory shorebirds. Dr. McGowan reviewed principal model inputs, including abundances of female horseshoe crabs and red knots that will value female crab harvest (i.e., female crab utility function), the spawning sex ratio of crabs that will value male harvest (male crab utility function).

Concerns included:

- Basing the model on maximizing the number of horseshoe crabs while maintaining a questionably low number of red knots (i.e.: utilizing the current number of birds rather than the historical levels prior to the overall population decline).
- Using the total number of birds rather than the percentage of birds that are expected to survive because they have achieved the minimum goal of 180 grams prior to departure.
- Differences in managing for 100% of the current population versus managing with the goal of red knot population recovery.
- No accounting for the variability in the amount of arctic snow and how that may play a role in survival rate of birds.
- Managing wildlife for commercial interests versus sustainability.

Recommendations included:

- Establish the red knot population estimate through mark-recapture methods of population estimation (via resightings of marked birds).
- Continue the Atlantic coast (Virginia Tech) horseshoe crab trawl survey and spawning survey.
- Initiate changes to current resightings survey methods to develop mark-recapture population estimate.

Dave Jenkins noted the role of ENSAC pursuant to the horseshoe crab moratorium legislation is to evaluate whether the criteria for ending the moratorium are being met.

After much discussion, ENSAC members collectively embraced the concerns raised by Drs. Burger, Niles and Dey and will write a letter to the ASMFC Joint Committee noting such.

A motion was made by E. DeVito, seconded by J. Galetto, approved by the Committee to adjourn the meeting at 4:05 p.m.