

Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
November 18, 2020
Remote meeting via GoToMeeting

Members in attendance: Rick Lathrop (Chair), Jim Applegate, Joanna Burger, Emile DeVito, Jane Morton Galetto, Howard Geduldig, Erica Miller, David Mizrahi, Howard Reinert, James Shissias.

Absent: Barbara Brummer (resigned)

Staff in Attendance: Director Dave Golden, ENSP Chief John Heilferty, Assistant Director Lisa Barno, biologists Kathy Clark, Kris Schantz, Michelle Smith (I&E), Tyler Kinney (BLM)

Guests and Public: Russ Furnari, Barbara Sachau

Meeting was called to order by R. Lathrop at 9:35 am. The public notice for this meeting was confirmed by J. Heilferty.

Introductions of staff and guests were made.

Approval of minutes

There was a motion to approve the September 16 minutes made by J. Morton Galetto, seconded by J. Burger. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Director's Report

Director Dave Golden noted that the Corporate Stewardship Council (CSC) meeting happening this morning included a talk by DEP Commissioner C. McCabe who highlighted the Division of Fish and Wildlife's (DFW) work to create pollinator habitat. The DFW is working on habitat especially for monarch butterflies. The CSC is designating 2021 as the year of the pollinator. NJ Audubon and PSE&G (R. Furnari) are both members of the CSC and working on improving corporate property habitat.

The WMA farm-lease program has been under revision. The DFW is moving ~500 acres into a pilot project for organic farming, which will remove the threat of pesticides to pollinators. Partnering with the Northeast Organic Farming Association to apply for a NRCS grant that will help get farmers started here. E. DeVito added that there is a market now for organic grain farming, which may be less labor-intensive than some other crops.

Bobwhite quail habitat restoration is ongoing across south Jersey. The DFW decided not to proceed with bobwhite reintroduction at this time, and instead take time to learn from PA's reintroduction project. Management to enhance quail habitat has benefits to many other species, so that will be ongoing.

Rule amendments that the DFW is pursuing:

1. Readoption of the Conserve Wildlife Matching Grants rules (expiring in Feb 2021) that provide small grants (\$3,500) from the conserve wildlife license plate renewal fee. J. Heilferty added that following readoption the Division intends to further amend the regulations to increase both the maximum size of each grant award and the duration allowed for project implementation. This would result in larger projects with increased conservation value, while also increasing the efficiency of managing the grant program.
2. Game Code holds all the regulations for the seasons and methods of hunting and trapping wildlife. This includes the black bear policy. A current pending revision would separate the black bear policy from the Game Code; regs are in the Game Code while policy requires the Commissioner's signature. Readoption of all DFW regulations is due in 2021, and failure to readopt would mean all wildlife regulations would lapse. Separating the policy from the Game Code would allow the negotiation over policy separate from all other wildlife regulations.

Legislative Updates

A.D. Lisa Barno provided an update on the amendments to the Fish Code, to update trout season dates. Also, three species of fish (Alabama/spotted bass, blue catfish, and round goby) are to be categorized as dangerous wildlife due to their invasive nature in the landscape.

J. Heilferty reported that the DEP's NJPACT (NJ Protecting Against Climate Threats) initiative will review land use and coastal zone management regulations to address threats like sea level rise and other effects of climate change. The DEP is also rolling out new environmental justice regulations early in 2021.

H. Geduldig added that Colorado had a ballot initiative that approved the reintroduction of wolves.

Public Input

B. Sachau criticized the lack of a roll call to start this meeting. She took issue with the existence of farm leases on WMAs, that they do not belong on wildlife areas. She took offense that animal rights advocates are not invited to be on wildlife-related committees.

Status of Action Items

J. Heilferty provided members with last meeting's PowerPoint presentation, and with the working list of organizations developed during the NJ Wildlife Action Plan, for members' input.

Old Business:

J. Heilferty requested an update on the status of committee appointments. His request is still in the commissioner's office, no news yet.

ENSAC member ethics course (and briefing) requirements are pending as per J. Heilferty's email last week. The ENSP chief must maintain these records pertaining to all committee members.

New Business:

J. Heilferty provided these proposed dates for 2021 ENSAC meetings. J. Heilferty will follow up in writing and schedule the Assunpink meeting room in case meetings can be held in person.

January 20
March 17
May 19
July 21
September 15
November 17

Presentation by Michelle Smith: The Division’s Wildlife Habitat Supporter Program

The Wildlife Habitat Supporter Program is a new, voluntary donation program for those who use wildlife management areas and who want to support the Division’s wildlife conservation work. This was developed after the 2018 Stockton University survey that identified a large variety of users of WMAs.

The donations are voluntary, and based on the 2018 survey of willingness to pay, a \$20 donation is reasonable and would provide a donor gift of a window static decal. The decal design would change each year to encourage continued support.

All donations will go into a special account to support the wildlife management areas system. Marketing will be done by a commercial firm and target non-license buyers and those who use WMAs. The plan is Planning to launch the program in December.

Presentation by Tyler Kinney: The DFW land acquisition boundary process

This is a habitat project first. There are many small parcels that the DFW manages, and maintenance (trash pickup) on small parcels takes time away from habitat management. Staff classified WMAs as large/core and small/steppingstone areas. They buffered all parcels to identify potential acquisition areas. They then prioritized those buffers using the CHANJ mapping to identify important corridors: highest priority is tier 1 areas that would improve cores and link high priority areas. Tier 2 priority are mostly high quality habitats and make important links. Tier 3 are smaller edges that may or may not be good habitat.

Other priorities considered access, and exceptional areas such as Raritan Bay and lower Cape May peninsula. Tyler showed maps of north, central, and south that reflected before and after the acquisition planning process.

D. Golden noted that this process helps the DFW visualize the future development of WMA lands, and make decisions on land offered by Green Acres. Discussion followed on the design and intent of this planning effort.

D. Golden noted that Fish & Wildlife’s 357,000 acres plus Parks & Forestry’s 450,000 acres = roughly 20% of the state’s acreage in open space. Of NJ’s 5 million acres, about half is developed. The open space of almost 900,000 acres is a large percentage of the undeveloped land area.

L. Barno noted that Green Acres’ use of this mapping means they can consider tier 1 and tier 2 parcels as a “yes” for the DFW. Other parcels that come available can be judged on their merits for wildlife.

R. Lathrop asked how this mapping lines up with the Conservation Blueprint. E. DeVito briefly presented the map on the conservation blueprint website that shows the parcel-level data on all land in public or conservation ownership.

D. Golden responded to J. Galetto's question on public access to the Holly Farm. It is open but the building is off-limits.

The Committee thanked the two presenters for their contributions.

Other Business

No other business.

Motion to adjourn by J. Burger, seconded by E. Miller. Meeting was adjourned at 11:30 AM.

Upcoming:

The January 20, 2021 meeting will be online, likely with a 9:30 AM start.

Action Items

- All members need to take the Ethics training required by the State; J. Heilferty will provide the online links.
- Updated bylaws are in review. Once approved, staff will make them available on the ENSAC portal.

Suggested agenda items

Update on horseshoe crab conservation initiative.

DFW forester presentation regarding forest stewardship?

Robert Somes re: ENSP insect work.

NJ Conservation Blueprint by either NJDEP or NGO partner, or John Hasse of Rowan