

Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
January 20, 2021
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 Ginger Kopkash, Mary Monteschio, biologists Kathy Clark, Amanda Dey, Jeff Brust, Joe Cimino, Linda Barry, Samantha MacQuesten.

Guests and Public: Russ Furnari, Barbara Sachau

Meeting was called to order by R. Lathrop at 9:00 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 November 18 minutes made by J. Shissias, seconded by H. Reinert. Minutes were approved unanimously.

Director's Report

Director Dave Golden reports a busy start to 2021. DEP Commissioner Catherine McCabe retired as of Jan. 15 and was replaced by her previous chief of staff, Shawn LaTourette. There has been no movement on the long-awaited Committee appointments despite pushing by the DFW managers.

The Commissioner did approve the Habitat Supporter Program, a donation program to support management of wildlife management areas (WMAs). DFW will be hiring a marketing firm to roll out the program in the next two months. The funding will go to enforcement, land/habitat management, and endangered species habitat work.

A professional website developer is being hired to revamp the DFW website, for a new look and clear messaging.

Investment in office facilities: new northern regional office is being designed for the site of the previously proposed archery park in Mansfield Twp (not far from the current Clinton office). Renovations of the Brian Parent Center building at the Holly Farm are being pursued to house a new southern regional office. Also at the Holly Farm, there will be walking trails as well as habitat management designed as a demonstration area.

Legislative Updates

M. Monteschio provided a brief on recent work. State bills S-441 A-4810 bills concerning government efficiency will require oversight on all proposed regulations, which may cause more delays in getting rule changes completed.

All Corporate Business Tax (CBT) bills passed, which provide funding for facilities and habitat management. The state passed the \$58 million body camera legislation for police officers. Federal Recovering America's Wildlife Act (RAWA) legislation will need to start over with a new session of Congress.

J. Galetto asked about Trap-Neuter-Release proposals. M. Monteschio has not seen any movement on that topic.

Update on regulations: the Multi-species Menhaden regulation will implement NJ statutory laws. Staff are working on changes to regulations on Conserve Wildlife Matching Grants, possession rules that govern exotic wildlife, and regulations on activities allowed on WMAs.

In the DEP: rules to enact PACT (Protecting Against Climate Threats) are coming out (5 air rules, 2 land-use rules, perhaps more); and environmental justice (there is a GIS map online showing which towns/counties are affected). C1 category streams could be updated this year.

Public Input

B. Sashau expressed concern over the way that ENSAC members are chosen, concerned that people who believe all animals have a right to life cannot get appointed to any governing committee or council. She is against farmers allowed to farm portions of WMAs, and against any logging on WMAs. She asserts that wildlife watchers are the majority of NJ citizens and their interests should surpass those of hunters.

Status of Action Items

It was noted that the status of pending ENSAC nominations was discussed during the Director's Report.

New Business:

Presentation by Mandy Dey on 2020 Migratory Shorebird season

M. Dey covered the history of red knot counts on Delaware Bay stopover. In 2020 one aerial survey on May 24 counted 19,397 knots (the ENSP uses both single peak count and a population model that uses mark-resight data as markers of population size). Horseshoe crab egg density in beach samples has averaged roughly 10,000 eggs/m²; in Delaware beaches, egg density tends to be higher. In 2020, storms kept the Bay water cool, which delayed horseshoe crab spawning until late May. The late egg availability likely caused a lower percentage of knots reaching ideal takeoff weight by end of May.

Atlantic Coast benthic trawl survey of horseshoe crabs shows levels of female and male crabs that have not improved significantly in recent years. Horseshoe crab reported harvest for bait remains about the same for the last 10 years, biomedical harvest increased in 2019.

The Benchmark Stock Horseshoe Crab assessment: the ARM model now includes consideration of other sources of mortality: bycatch, biomedical, and bait. Recommends: Cease trawl and dredge fishing in the Shuster Reserve; cease biomedical harvest in Shuster Reserve; disallow sale of bait crabs outside region of landing; institute all male bait harvest in all regions.

Jeff Brust reported there is little to no scallop fishing in the Shuster Reserve, and there is no scallop fishing in Delaware Bay. Regarding confidentiality in harvest reporting by fishermen, all fishery harvest records are protected under federal law (Magnuson-Stevens Act), and confidentiality is not a prerogative of states or others. With regard to selling crabs between states, NJ conch fishermen rely on buying horseshoe crabs from other states because of the NJ moratorium on horseshoe crab harvest.

J. Brust noted the ASMFC shows the horseshoe crab population above target biomass and a substantial increase over the last decade. M. Dey agreed that there's been an increase in the last 10 years but not compared to earlier years; and a management objective should focus on crabs needed to restore the red knot population.

D. Mizrahi rejoined the call and discussion. J. Brust acknowledged points made by D. Mizrahi but notes the VA Tech trawl survey is just one source of data, but all three crab surveys show an increase in adult female (ASMFC Stock Assessment, figure 116) from an estimated 4 mill to 10 mill in 15 years.

D. Mizrahi presented on the horseshoe crab recovery coalition with these goals: manage HSC bait harvest to meet the needs of other species; encourage pharmaceutical companies to adopt synthetic alternatives; policies that reform bleeding industry to reduce mortality; raise awareness of HSC with volunteer involvement.

D. Mizrahi echoed concerns expressed by M. Dey about the issue of peregrine falcons harassing shorebirds during the spring stopover. J. Heilferty responded that ENSP is aware of the issue and will be further investigating this coming spring 2021 as to whether the falcons in question are nearby nesting pairs or roaming immatures.

R. Lathrop requests ENSP staff consider drafting a memo related to release of 2020 biomedical harvest data. DFW staff will discuss this recommendation internally and update the Committee on its decision/approach at the March 2021 meeting.

Motion to adjourn by J. Galetto, seconded by E. Miller. Meeting was adjourned at 11:25 AM.

Upcoming:

The March 17, 2021 meeting will be online, likely with a 9:00 AM start.

Action Items

- Updated bylaws are in review. Once approved, staff will make them available on the ENSAC portal.
- R. Lathrop requests ENSP staff consider drafting a memo related to release of 2020 biomedical harvest data.

Suggested agenda items

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