

Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
May 20, 2020
Remote meeting via GoToMeeting

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

Absent: David Mizrahi

Staff in Attendance: Dave Golden, John Heilferty, Kathy Clark, Kris Schantz, Peter Winkler

Guests: Russ Furnari, Barbara Sachau

Meeting was called to order by R. Lathrop at 10:00 am. The public notice for this meeting was confirmed by J. Heilferty.

Approval of minutes

There was a motion to approve the March minutes made by J. Shissias, seconded by J. Burger. Minutes approved; B. Brummer, J. Burger, and H. Reinert abstained.

Director's Report

Director Dave Golden reports that all Division staff are working remotely for 11 weeks now. Assistant director Paulette Nelson retired end of April and J. Heilferty took over some of her previous supervisory duties. Lisa Barno, who was chief of Freshwater Fisheries, has been appointed as Acting Assistant Director of Operations to replace P. Nelson.

Staff are back in the field doing the seasonally essential work, and any work that can be done solo with minimal social interactions. DFW is working on a re-opening plan for returning to field offices.

DFW Marine Fisheries administration is receiving \$11 million in relief funding to be distributed to private marine fisheries industries.

Director Golden has worked with the DEP Commissioner on several initiatives. Noting a projected budget deficit, the DFW is considering how to institute a WMA stamp to support DFW lands management. A regional facilities plan was also discussed that would establish four regional offices and improve other, smaller offices; the new northern region office is already approved and a scope of work is out to bid for design/construction.

There was discussion on a number of these topics. The Committee members expressed great appreciation for the appointment of L. Barno.

Public Input

B. Sachau asked three questions: 1) where is the reported fire on a wildlife management area; 2) what is source of funding for land purchases, and criticizes WMA management as too focused on hunting wildlife; 3) regarding the survey that 41% of WMA users do not purchase licenses that support WMA land management.

Director Golden responded that no WMA users were “kicked off” WMAs even though public usage was especially high when state parks and forests were closed temporarily. The fire in Winslow WMA started yesterday and fire fighters were struggling to control it due to high winds. Regarding new northern office, the facility would include all staff of the DFW, not limited to hunting/fishing staff. Director Golden explained how the day-to-day operations of WMAs are primarily supported through Pittman-Robertson funding (i.e., hunting/fishing licenses and gear/supplies) and the DFW is looking to broaden the base of financial support to encompass all the users.

E. DeVito reported that conditions have been prime for wildfire, but Pinelands region habitat is adapted for such fires.

R. Lathrop and E. DeVito responded that the NJ Forest Fire Service investigates all fires to identify causes.

Update from the Nominating Committee

Subcommittee Chair J. Shissias notes the prospective nominee is willing to serve.

The memo regarding reappointments, staggered terms, and filling the vacancy originally made in May 2019, is now revised. A final memo needs to be drafted by J. Heilferty to be sent to the Commissioner.

Status of Action Items

New Business:

Presentation by Dr. Howard Reinert on Corn Snake Research

H. Reinert presented his work with Bob Zappalorti and John Bunnell in the Pine Barrens. Objectives included 1) efficiency of drift fence trapping, 2) corn snake ecology, 3) viability of corn snake head starting, 4) king snake ecology.

- Limited range and spotted populations within that range
- Corn snake sexually mature at 2.5-3 years; mature size is just under 3-ft long
- Corn snake den typically has 2-4 corn snakes (shallow dens, allows them to respond to temperature; i.e., warm spells in winter draw the snakes out to bask)
- Corn snake ecology: preliminary analysis indicates:
 - Predation of corn snakes is upwards of 25% (by comparison, timber rattlesnakes was 5-10% annually)
 - Activity range is the same area annually (no significant shifting)
 - Dispersal from the collective dens is random directions; snakes from a single den may leave that den in a random direction, or snakes from 1 den *could* follow each other (i.e., moving in same direction) but so far, this is not evident
 - Average activity range is 25 ha (62 ac); average range length = 850 m (0.5 miles); maximum distance (average) from dens = 715 m
- Corn snake headstarting
 - Headstarted snakes are approximately twice as heavy and 40-50% longer than non-headstarted snakes.
 - Headstarting may assist snakes in avoiding some predators

- Sacrifices are: 1) they are not learning how to catch their own food, 2) they are not finding the overwintering sites by scent-trailing adults
- King snake ecology: preliminary data
 - Activity range (1 male) = 223.5 ac

Update by Kris Schantz on ENSP Snake Research

Discussed various partnerships and ENSP/Kris's role, habitat management efforts, and venomous snake response team during COVID-19 "no volunteers" restriction.

Other Business

J. Heilferty asked J. Burger if she had anything to add regarding her snake research. J. Burger mentioned continuing with pine snake research during the shutdown was difficult, and on-going problems with off-road vehicles.

J. Heilferty thanked snake researchers for their work and patience during COVID-19 access difficulties.

J. Applegate asked for an update on this year's migratory shorebird work. J. Burger replied that a small crew is working and has made a number of changes to meet COVID-19 safety needs. There is concern regarding cool water temps that delayed horseshoe crabs coming to shore to spawn (food limits), concerned the birds will travel further north in search of alternate food resources.

J. Shissias mentioned speaking to Emily Heiser who is monitoring some American oystercatcher nests, which have been generally safer with fewer beach goers.

J. Heilferty noted the beach-nesting bird project is also hurt by our inability to use volunteers, so E. Heiser and C. Davis are doing more monitoring and somewhat less management.

R. Furnari added that some of the NGOs are reaching out to neighborhoods, encouraging them to report flora/fauna seen; may want to reach out to these groups and see if there's any data we would want.

Upcoming:

The July 15 meeting is scheduled to be at the Sedge House at Island Beach State Park.

J. Heilferty will find out if an in-person meeting at Sedge House will be acceptable in July, both from the administrative viewpoint and whether ENSAC members would be comfortable. As the date approaches, R. Lathrop will poll members.

R. Lathrop mentioned that the Millville Holly Farm is a possible future meeting location once the facility has been opened.

Meeting adjourned at 12:32.

Suggested agenda items

J. Burger to present on N. pine snake research.

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

Action Items

- A final memo summarizing the appointments, staggered terms, and filling B. Brummer vacancy to be drafted by J. Heilferty and sent to the Commissioner.
- Staff will see about getting the ENSAC updated Bylaws available on the ENSAC portal.

GoToMeeting Info:

ENSAC Meeting: Wed, May 20, 2020 10:00 AM - 2:30 PM (EDT)

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