

**Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
May 14, 2025**

**Assunpink Central Region Office
1 Eldridge Road, Robbinsville, NJ**

Members in attendance: Russ Furnari (Chair), Howard Geduldig, Brooke Maslo, Eliot Nagele, Chandler Navara, Catherine Tredick.

Absent: Martha Maxwell-Doyle, Marion McClary, David Mizrahi, Howard Reinert

Staff in attendance: David Golden (Assistant Commissioner), Jason Hearon (Assistant Director, NJFW), Kristen Meistrell (Assistant Director, NJFW), Kathy Clark (NJFW ENSP chief); Mary Monteschio (NJFW Regulatory Officer), Kim Korth (ENSP), Robert Somes (ENSP), Alex Kisurin (ENSP); Jake Ducey (NJFW), Juliette Harle (NJFW), Kris Schantz (ENSP, online), Jeff Brust (NJFW Marine Fisheries, online)

Public: Newly retired ENSAC members Dr. Rick Lathrop and Dr. Erica Miller (online), Dave Jenkins, Nina Jochnowitz

The Chair convened the meeting at 10:10 AM.

The public notice for this meeting was read by K. Clark. The meeting agenda was provided to the New Jersey Secretary of State's Office and two NJ newspapers.

Introductions of those in attendance.

Approval of Minutes

H. Geduldig made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 12 meeting, seconded by C. Tredick. The motion was approved unanimously.

Assistant Commissioner's Report

AC Golden discussed these topics: The president's proposed budget zeroed out funds for SWG (State Wildlife Grants) and ESA Section 6, which constitute about one-third of ENSP's budget. There's support from AFWA (Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies) to work with Congress reps to restore and keep SWG funding stable. A report by USFWS last year discusses the excise tax on sporting equipment (under Pittman-Robertson [PR]) that generally funds state conservation programs. For NJ Fish & Wildlife, about one-third of the budget comes from federal hunting-related funding, another one-third from federal fishing-related funding. The funding model is unsustainable for overall wildlife conservation. PR funding (from excise taxes is limited to use on birds and mammals, and in NJ, PR funding is used for nongame birds and mammals, and this year for the first time, a marine mammal project.

Other impacts of federal actions are expected from the loss of federal employees who administer grants to the states.

NJFW is beginning to work with Parks & Forestry to do more habitat stewardship on state-owned lands, which total about 800,000 acres. There is great potential to focus species recovery on state lands. NJFW is taking the lead by identifying larger scale projects on state lands, with the use of Corporate Business Tax (CBT) funding that is allocated to the agencies for both acquisition and stewardship/maintenance. The CBT funding is allocated via percentage for stewardship and capital improvements, and stewardship can be up to 44% but F&W is using only about 1% now. With good projects, it may be possible to allocate more funds for habitat management projects.

Legislative Updates

M. Monteschio reported there is no May report because the NJ Legislature is working on the budget. An amendment to the federal IRS code via H.R. 1494/S1649 would close a loophole for those who avoid excise taxes on hunting/fishing equipment when they sell online. H.R. 1897 would amend the federal Endangered Species Act, generally weakening its protections for wildlife and habitat. A proposal to the federal regulation is currently open, with a 30-day public comment period, that proposes to rescind the definition of “harm” in the ESA. This amendment would remove habitat protection the ESA provides for federally endangered species. The public comment period closes on May 19.

Old Business

Nominations Committee

H. Geduldig reported that there are two members, M. Maxwell-Doyle and M. McClary, who volunteered to serve on the Nominations Committee. Chair R. Furnari appointed them both to that Committee.

H. Geduldig said one member (D. Mizrahi) has a term ending in 2026, and two members (M. McClary and M. Maxwell-Doyle) are up for reappointment in 2026. Members should consider possible candidates for the Non-profit Organization seat in 2026.

ENSAC members voted by email to nominate D. Jenkins for the open seat in the Public-at-Large category. **H. Geduldig made a motion to formalize that nomination, seconded by C. Tredick. There was no discussion. The vote was unanimous to nominate D. Jenkins to the Commissioner.**

H. Geduldig also asked that NJFW requests the Commissioner formally appoint R. Furnari to be ENSAC chair.

H. Geduldig explained the process that the Nominations Committee uses to find candidates: applicants may submit a letter of interest and resume to the Committee (via email to ensac-applications@dep.nj.gov) and the Nominations Committee reviews and presents candidates to the ENSAC.

The ENSAC also needs to appoint a new representative for the Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee (WRAC). The purpose of WRAC includes reviewing regulations, and currently, the exotic/nongame regs are in review for changes. The WRAC meets quarterly. Next WRAC meeting is 10/27.

Request for candidates for Horseshoe Crab Advisory Panel

Quick update: D. Mizrahi is a candidate for this Panel to represent non-traditional (that is, not commercial or biomedical) constituents of the fishery. The Board postponed a vote on his application and another (traditional) candidate pending additional solicitation of new members, but David has support from the NJ representative.

State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) – Kim Korth

K. Korth presented on the progress of the State Wildlife Plan revision that is due to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in September.

Staff have scheduled two in-person meetings to review priority actions with staff and the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) members. A southern regional meeting will be on 5/21 at the Wetlands Institute, and a central meeting at Assunpink on 5/27. These meetings are important because we need additional review of the chosen priority actions and editing them to add metrics and partners. Those priority actions will be highest priority to deliver to Plan users. Staff are also meeting with USFWS staff on 5/15 to review progress and methods for pre-approval.

K. Korth presented the progress made on the website development, including a video that showed the click-through views from home page to species pages. She also showed mock-ups of the species profile pages showing abbreviated and expanded views.

Recognition of Service to retiring members

Chair R. Furnari presented retirement gifts to Dr. Rick Lathrop for his 27 years of service, and to Dr. Erica Miller for her 17 years of service to the ENSAC. The staff and Committee are immensely grateful for their service to New Jersey's wildlife conservation.

Public Input, limited to 3 minutes each

Nina Jochnowitz (a licensed rehabilitator) asked for the email address to apply for ENSAC openings. Also relayed that a friend called a number at 4:45 on a Friday and the respondent was not polite. AC Golden asked her to share that information for follow-up.

Lunch Break 12:00-12:30

New Business

Snake funding request – Kris Schantz

ENSP requests ENSAC approval to ask NJ Natural Lands Trust (NJNLT) to release remainder of Tennessee Gas Pipeline mitigation funds to NJFW-ENSP. The funds will be used to support personnel and contractor work to fulfill the objectives and actions in the management plan for timber rattlesnakes and eastern copperhead populations. K. Schantz explained the background and that ENSAC has previously approved this kind of funds transfer from NJNLT to NJFW-ENSP. She explained some of the job tasks associated with the project.

Motion to approve this request by E. Nagle, seconded by C. Tredick. Approved unanimously.

Diamondback Terrapin BRD project update – B. Zarate, J. Brust

The diamondback terrapin was designated as a nongame wildlife species in 2016 by Governor Christie and in January 2025 was designated with special concern status. ENSP is working with the Bureau of Marine Fisheries to improve Bycatch Reduction Devices (also known as terrapin excluder devices, TEDs). The current regulation requires BRDs on crab pots in waters less than 150' wide at mean low tide or in any manmade lagoon. BRDs must be no larger than 2"x6" inside each funnel entrance.

The recommendations by ENSP were to require excluders on all commercial style pots (which are used by commercial and recreational crabbers) in all areas. Current size of BRD is 5x15cm (2"x6") in waters <150' wide at low tide; proposed size is 4.5x12 cm in all waters.

Other states in the mid-Atlantic generally use the 4.5x12 cm size, and some states require them on recreational pots. Consistency in size of BRDs would have benefits to manufacturers of crab traps for recreational use.

There are crab harvester concerns that BRDs reduce catch of number and the largest size of crabs. Based on various sizes and the studies available, NJFW staff have proposed some other BRD sizes to test. In 2024, Marine Fisheries staff ran field trials testing 5.15, 4.5x12, and 5.1x7.3 (used in SC). Their results showed a reduction in legal crab catch and the SC design was slightly better than NJ design. Based on these results, Dr. John Wnek ran trials using captive terrapins with the 5x9 size and the SC size, plus changing placements of BRDs in traps.

The NJ Innovation Institute (NJIT) was able to produce four BRD sizes by 3-D printing: the SC design, 5x9, 6x8 and 6.5x8 novel sizes that are going into field trials this month. Next steps: conduct summer field trials; continue tank trials using same BRD sizes as field; work on cooperative research design with industry; begin drafting regulations.

In October, NJ will host the 10th workshop on the status, conservation and ecology of the Diamondback Terrapin, in Cape May.

Discussion followed on possible regulatory options to make improvements in terrapin impacts while investigating the best BRD size and other regulatory options. In 2024, NJFW sold 12,000 recreational crab pot permits and 300 commercial permits of which about half are active.

Box Turtle project, year 2 update – Brian Zarate, Dr. Patrick Connelly

The box turtle repatriation project is important for turtle conservation in the context of improving the outcome of turtles illegally held and recovered by law enforcement. In 2024, ENSP worked with rehabilitators to evaluate and release box turtles to the wild. Sixty-eight turtles were released, and 58 were still active as of November 2024.

Prior work on bog turtle health research has informed staff on the prevalence of mycoplasma, herpesvirus, adenovirus, and ranavirus. The health checks of the released box turtles were done pre-release and post-release. There were 7 mortalities after release, and 6 of those animals showed ranavirus, which they got either from the landscape, or it was undetected pre-release. There has been an increase in mycoplasma (48% prevalence) and ranavirus (4.8%).

58 of the 69 released were alive in November 2025, and in April-May, three more died, and health sampling will continue in May. Overall, health assessments have shown that most turtles are in good health and thriving. Dr. Connelly determined causes of mortality: 6 of 7 had ranavirus, and cause is yet to be determined for the 4 dead turtles this spring.

Work in this field includes the need to continue telemetry tracking to learn how repatriated turtles adapt to the new landscape, and the need to reinforce focus on biosecurity when site visits and tracking resume.

Next steps:

- Complete spring health samples.
- Consider capacity to monitor a subset of these turtles past 2026.
- Explore use of aquatic eDNA pathogen sampling, in addition to turtle/amphibian screenings, for futures releases and on-site.
- Publications/white papers.

The Committee thanked the presenters.

July 16 will be the next regular meeting of the ENSAC.

Meeting was adjourned at 2:30 pm.

Summary of Action Items

- Provide the Committee with the DEP response on the rodenticide issue when it's available.
- Advance the Committee's request regarding appointments to the Commissioner.