

**Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
September 17, 2025**

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

Members in attendance: Russ Furnari, Dave Jenkins, Brooke Maslo, Martha Maxwell-Doyle, Marion McClary (online), Eliot Nagele (online), Chandler Navara, Howard Reinert.

Absent: Howard Geduldig, David Mizrahi, Catherine Tredick

Staff in attendance: Jason Hearon (Assistant Director, NJFW), Kristen Meistrell (Assistant Director, NJFW), Kathy Clark (NJFW ENSP chief); Mary Monteschio (NJFW Regulatory Officer), Kim Korth (ENSP), Kashi Davis (ENSP), Emily Heiser (ENSP), Juliette Harle (NJFW), R. Somes (ENSP)

Public: Dr. Erica Miller (online), Robert Aleck (Sourland Conservancy), Virginia Osnato (Duke Farms)

The Chair convened the meeting at 10:11 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.

Introductions of those in attendance.

Approval of Minutes

D. Jenkins made a motion to approve the minutes of the July meeting, seconded by M. Maxwell-Doyle. The motion was approved unanimously.

Assistant Commissioner's Report

AC Dave Golden is away at a conference. Assistant Director J. Hearon reported on the recent submission of the NJ State Wildlife Action Plan to the USFWS. Spring and summer work seasons have transitioned into the fall season with work on wildlife management areas before hunting seasons begin.

The Fish Code revision is out for public comment and includes changes to fish rules and to snapping turtle harvest regulations. The Game Code is getting finished and is in final review; it should be published in the NJ Register very soon. The fall season is busy with deer season opening and the Bureau of Wildlife Management handling some bear-human interactions.

K. Clark provided Committee members with a copy of The Nature Conservancy magazine that features the NJ bobcat project. E. Nagele noted this article highlights the great work in NJ.

Legislative Updates

M. Monteschio noted that the Legislature is still in recess so there is no news.

Old Business

Nominations Committee

Chair R. Furnari noted the Committee still needs someone to represent ENSAC on the Wildlife Rehab Advisory Committee (WRAC). Their next meeting is October 22.

State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) – Kim Korth

K. Korth presented the progress of the State Wildlife Plan revision. We submitted the Plan to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on September 5 and were the first state in the Northeast to submit. Comments from the public numbered about 200, many of them positive. NJFW email listserv emails resulted in a high rate of email-opens and clicks. Kudos to I&E for their work sharing the news and having developed the website.

The paper SWAP we provided to members today is simply a printout of the website pages, so it doesn't make the clickable links available. But the website is still under revision to include more information (like species profiles) and the full use of the database on species, habitats, threats, and actions. It should be completed in the next two months.

Public Input, limited to 3 minutes each

None.

New Business

Presentations:

Saltmarsh Sparrow Pilot Project – E. Heiser

Saltmarsh Sparrow is a tidal marsh obligate songbird. Its breeding range is from ME to VA. Nesting occurs in sync with spring/summer tides, fitting within the 38 day lunar tide cycle. This species was proposed for federal listing under ESA, and is an Atlantic Coast Joint venture focal species. There is a Saltmarsh Sparrow conservation plan and restoration priorities specific to each state.

NJ hosts the highest proportion of breeding SALS across the range (33%); the species was upgraded to state-threatened with the list amendments in January, 2025. NJ partners have a lead role in restoring and preventing further habitat loss. In partnership with the ACJV, NJ has a guidance document on high priority marsh restoration sites.

There is monitoring underway to help evaluate different methods for saltmarsh restoration (ditch remediation, runneling, thin-layer deposition, restoring tidal flow). NJFW owns and manages important marsh habitat.

In 2025, we selected 6 sites based on restoration and known occurrences of Saltmarsh Sparrow. ENSP staff followed SHARP protocols for point counts, rapid assessment, and ARUs (Acoustic Recording Units). Results included getting 325 hours of ARU recordings to review. Point counts resulted in detections of Saltmarsh Sparrow at 3 sites and Seaside Sparrow at 4 sites. The rapid

assessments resulted in 35 birds captured, banded, and morphometric data collected on birds at 3 sites. Nesting was confirmed on two survey sites through nest searching.

Next steps: continue monitoring at current study locations, and possibly expand use of ARUs. Discussion followed on saltmarsh restoration benefits to both Saltmarsh Sparrow and Black Rail.

Beach-nesting Bird population status and trends – Christina (Kashi) Davis

Kashi presented background information on the project and the four focal species plus two other species: Piping Plover, Black Skimmer, Least Tern, American Oystercatcher, Common Tern, and Royal Tern.

American Oystercatcher: It's a "beach ambassador" for beach nesting species. They have been monitored on beaches since 2003 when they seem to have increased their use of beaches over marsh. They have increased to 207 pairs (from 52 in 2003) on Atlantic Coast and Delaware Bay beaches. They are a bit more adaptable than other beachnesting birds.

Black Skimmer: This is a colonial nester that feeds on fish. Since 2005 the population has remained fairly consistent, but number of colonies has declined to just three this year. They have shifted their nesting colonies from marsh to beach.

Least Tern: This is another colonial nesting species; adults bring in fish to chicks. The population has remained fairly stable but number of colonies has declined since 2022 (to about 17 sites) that may be the result of declining productivity.

Piping Plover: They are solitary nesters; chicks are fully precocial so they must walk to areas to feed themselves. Food is limited to worms and insects that are not as fatty as the other birds' diets. The population is especially concerning in the last few years, with productivity declining badly, resulting in declining number of pairs, from a long-term average of about 118 pairs to 76 pairs this year. The distribution has changed, too. Over half the pairs nest at Holgate (40), and outside Gateway National Recreation Area – Sandy Hook, there were 0 pairs in Monmouth Co this year.

Overall, the Atlantic Coast Piping Plover population is increasing in New England; NY-NJ has been steady but only because of an increase in NY. Southeast U.S. and eastern Canada have had major declines.

These data are draft, but sites managed by NJFW (i.e., non-federal sites) had 24 pairs and productivity of 1.42 young/nest, while all of NJ was 76 and 0.84 young/nest. It is important to note the Barnegat Light restoration site fledged 2.83, which was best in the state, vs Holgate, where 40 pairs fledged 0.28 young/nest.

Threats:

Human disturbance is managed directly with fencing, posting, education, and partnerships. Beach Management Plans are linked to federal-state beach replenishment and set protections for beachnesting birds. The new Shore Intertidal Protection Rule to be adopted will allow for enforceable regulations in the intertidal zone.

Habitat modification/loss is a threat to habitat because stabilization of beaches does not usually result in good beachnesting bird habitat. Habitat restoration and management, like at Barnegat Light is the best way to improve sites for piping plovers.

Primary predators include avian (gull, raptor, crow), mammals (fox, coyote, raccoon, mink), and ghost crabs. Nest enclosures are one of the methods to protect plover nests from predators. In some cases, the enclosure makes the nesting adults vulnerable, so staff have developed different designs and early results are positive. Fladry is a system of flagging that we install around colonies or solitary nesters to deter mammals like fox and coyote.

Floods & Severe Weather: increasing extreme weather in May-June nesting season is destructive to nesting birds. One option is providing chick shelters that provide shelter from sun and heavy rain.

Takeaways

- Some of NJ beach-nesting birds, especially Piping Plovers, are in concerning declines.
- The NJ coastline changes in predictable and unpredictable ways.
- These are complex problems requiring solutions of all shapes and sizes. The only way to accomplish our goals of recovery is to continue to work with partners in NJ, (USFWS, National Park Service, Conserve Wildlife Foundation of NJ, The Nature Conservancy, The Wetlands Institute, The Little Egg Foundation, US Army Corps of Engineers, Rutgers University).

South Cape May Meadows Beachnesting Bird management – K. Davis presenting info from Damon Noe of The Nature Conservancy

K. Davis talked about the beach restoration that was done in the early aughts as an ecological restoration at South Cape May Meadows. That project stabilized the beach and created corridors to ponds for bird foraging. But then the elevation grew too high to support beachnesting bird species. The Army Corps of Engineers, DEP, and TNC worked together on a backpass effort, to reduce vegetation and elevation at the site, while providing sand to nearby areas that needed it. This first took place in 2021-22 and worked well, but some adaptive management was needed to prevent in-season flooding from being too impactful. TNC recommended removing a sand lip and adding nesting islands and this occurred during the second backpass in 2023-24, resulting in increased productivity of Least Terns and oystercatchers. TNC also installed fence to prevent coyote and fox predation. These are two large areas securely fenced that have improved ability to protect nesting birds from flooding and predators, with good results.

The Committee thanked the presenters.

Proposal to require Turtle Exclusion Devices (TEDs) on blue crab traps – Mary Monteschio

Amendments to N.J.A.C. 7:25-14

Regulations to the Crab & Lobster Management; the Blue Crab Fishery.

- Crab Pots are regulated by user type:
 - Commercial licensees: up to 400 commercial style pots (600 in DE Bay). Currently

about 300 commercial licensees.

- Noncommercial licensees: up to 2 commercial style pots. Currently about 12,000 licensees.
- Recreational crabbers: unlimited number of recreational pots. Unknown number of users because they are unlicensed.
- Commercial Crab Pots: cube or rectangular in shape no more than 30 inches on a side. When placed in any waterbody less than 150 ft wide at mean low water or in any man-made lagoon, each entrance funnel must have a terrapin excluder device.
- Recreational crab pots are used recreationally and are unregulated.

Diamond-backed Terrapins:

- Live in brackish water.
- Females are larger than males and reach sexual maturity at 8–10 years old.
- Unlike crabs, DBTs need to surface to breathe.
- DBTs are attracted to crab pots due to the bait.
- Crab pots can soak for days.
- Pots can become unmoored and become ghost pots.
- DBTs can drown in as little as 2–4 hours if the water is 68 degrees or warmer.
- DBTs were listed as Special Concern in January due to this and other mortality factors.

Proposed Amendments:

1. Definitions:

- Noncommercial licensee – a person licensed under N.J.A.C. 7:25-14.5 and who can only have up to 2 commercial style pots. All entrance funnels in the commercial pots must have terrapin excluder devices rectangular in shape with an opening of no more than 6 inches by 2 inches high (current excluder size).
- Recreational crab pot – pot that is not a commercial style pot and has one or more entrance funnels. All entrance funnels must have a terrapin excluder device.

2. The requirement is to have excluder devices in all noncommercial licensees' commercial style pots and rec pots regardless of the water body they are placed in (most are in shallower water - waterbodies less than 150 ft wide at mean low water or in any man-made lagoon, etc.).

3. Expansion of a rule: Current rule states pots must be staked or buoyed or marked with identification. Rule expanded to require identification must be placed on all pots. This helps with returning ghost pots to owners and law enforcement knowing who to charge if a pot does not have excluders.

4. New violation: Possession of a commercial style crab pot without excluders and without a commercial license or possession of a recreational crab pot with entrance funnels without excluders is a violation.

5. Small fixes: correct conflicting rule language, typos, etc.

The anticipated proposal date is early January, 2026.

Other news

The Joint meeting with the Fish & Game Council will be here on October 21. November 19 will be the next regular meeting of the ENSAC.

Motion to adjourn by M. Maxwell Doyle and seconded by D. Jenkins. Meeting was adjourned at 12:30 pm.

Lunch Break 12:30-12:50

Summary of Action Items

- Provide the Committee with the DEP response on the rodenticide issue when it's available.
- Request a presentation from NJFW permits unit regarding nongame wildlife permits and rules.