

NJ Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
August 14, 2019
Northern Region Office
NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife

WRAC Purpose: The purpose of the WRAC is to provide advice and assistance to the Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to improve the wildlife rehabilitation program and the care that is provided to injured and orphaned wildlife.

Committee Members Present: Phil Brodhecker, Giselle Chazotte-Smisko, Tracy Leaver, Heather Freeman, Diane Nickerson, Dr. Jennifer Norton, Michael O'Malley

Committee Members Absent: Carol Dragland, Dr. Erica Miller

Division Employees: Krista Laws, Paulette Nelson, Katherine Szostak

Members of the Public: Heidi O'Brien, Jean Parker

Meeting called to order at 10:35AM.

- P. Nelson called M. Monteschio using a cell phone and briefly put her on speaker phone. M. Monteschio is a lawyer for the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife and was unable to attend the meeting as originally planned.
 - Wildlife Conservation Corps (WCC) volunteers who passed the exam for the Wildlife Capture and Transport Course in March 2014 are currently covered under WCC liability for transportation of wildlife when that transportation is under the Division's direction. The question was raised of whether this transportation can be expanded to include transport from other places to rehabilitators. K. Laws suggested having volunteers send an email for approval. T. Leaver suggested having a blanket statement of direction instead of requiring approval for each individual trip. M. Monteschio advised that she will consult with the Office of Risk Management to determine if this is possible.
 - The question was raised of how Nosey's Law affects wildlife rehabilitators. The Virginia opossum is a marsupial. Any rehabilitator possessing a Virginia opossum under an Animal Exhibitor Permit is affected by Nosey's Law. Nosey's Law did not define "bona fide educational purposes" so the Division needs to determine a definition.
 - WRAC was approached by NJAWR about the following bills. M. Monteschio gave feedback on the bills.
 - S3829 – provides immunity to caring for wildlife without license under certain circumstances. This bill has not yet gone through a committee. The Division will make its comments for the bill, and individuals are also able to make comments. There is already a 24 hour allowance for emergency possession of wildlife for the public. That allowance is increased to 48 hours for veterinarians. WRAC will follow the progression of this bill.

- H. Freeman discussed wildlife rehabilitation animal groupings. There is an old list of groupings that was given to wildlife rehabilitators the year it was created. H. Freeman suggested changes including more detail for apprenticeship information and more consistent language throughout each group. The Division currently issues permits based on a hybrid of this list and the new regulations. D. Nickerson suggested that everyone send comments to H. Freeman about the groupings before the next meeting.
- Expired WRAC terms were addressed. K. Laws will send out request for nominations. Nominations must include a letter of interest and resume. Expired positions are as follows:
 - Avian Rehabilitator Representative (G. Chazotte-Smisko)
 - Mammal Rehabilitator Representative (T. Leaver)
 - ENSAC Representative (Dr. E. Miller)
 - Veterinarian Representative (Dr. J. Norton)
 - Chair Position (D. Nickerson)
- K. Laws advised of an inquiry regarding WRAC received by the Division in July.
 - The inquiry requested annual reports detailing goals and accomplishments, reports on what has been done to increase the number of wildlife rehabilitators in New Jersey, position statements on issues related to hunting practices, and position statements on issues related to pest control activities. None of these items exist, and these topics are outside of purview of WRAC as a strictly advisory committee on wildlife rehabilitation.
 - The Division's response on July 8, 2019 included the following information, noting that this information was unrelated to WRAC:
 - There were 62 apprentices with start dates ranging from March 27, 2011 to May 28, 2019, with 18 of those apprentices being newly listed in 2019. As the permitting biologist, K. Laws contacted 24 apprentices who had been listed for longer than the one year minimum requirement in June 2018 and urged them to apply for their permits. None of those people applied to become a wildlife rehabilitator.
 - Four new rehabilitators were added in 2018, although none of them established their own facilities (i.e. they became secondary, tertiary, etc. permittees at existing facilities). One rehabilitator in 2018 completed an apprenticeship to add waterfowl to her permit.
 - One new rehabilitator was added in 2019. One rehabilitator completed an apprenticeship to add beavers to her permit.
- Discussion ensued on the number of rehabilitators both in New Jersey and nationwide. Pennsylvania has 28 facilities with 12 additional individuals for a total of 40 permittees. New Jersey is significantly smaller than Pennsylvania but has 22 facilities with an additional 15 individuals for a total of 37 permittees. Increasing the number of rehabilitators in New Jersey is not part of WRAC's statement of purpose. It was suggested that NJAWR may do a questionnaire to determine why people are not applying for wildlife rehabilitation permits, which is a nationwide trend. One major reason for this is the cost of rehabilitating wildlife. Succession planning (adding secondary, tertiary, etc. permittees at existing facilities) is one solution currently utilized by rehabilitators.
- Public comment period:

- H. O'Brien, an apprentice, commented that she believes the general public does not know about wildlife rehabilitation permits or requirements until they receive a proper referral. She herself was referred to a rehabilitator by a veterinarian when she found a squirrel.
- J. Parker asked about a letter being sent to veterinarians on behalf of WRAC. K. Laws advised that the letter had been updated and sent to Dr. Manuel Tamassia along with a new Frequently Asked Questions sheet to be presented at the Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners meeting in July 2018. J. Parker suggested that the letter be circulated to rehabilitators. K. Laws agreed to send the information to wildlife rehabilitators, and Dr. J. Norton advised that she had email addresses for veterinarians to resend the information directly to them.
- H. Freeman and T. Leaver informed the room that Woodlands had recently admitted a young raccoon still requiring maternal care. The raccoon was doing fine for five weeks, and then took a turn and ultimately tested positive for rabies. This year there have been multiple instances of longer-than-usual rabies virus incubation periods, so there are concerns about exposure. Suggestions to raise public awareness about exposure included a social media post or a notice from NJAWR.
- K. Laws reported that there had been inquiries recently about the rehabilitation of house sparrows and European starlings. Wildlife rehabilitators may choose whether or not to accept these invasive bird species. Regarding members of the public caring for these birds, the Bureau of Law Enforcement was consulted. There is no regulation prohibiting members of the public from caring for house sparrows and European starlings, but it is illegal for them to release the birds. Only a permitted wildlife rehabilitator is legally allowed to release house sparrows and European starlings.
- The next meeting is scheduled for 10:30AM on October 23 at the Division's Central Region Office Conservation Center.
- A motion was made by P. Brodhecker and seconded by Dr. J. Norton to adjourn the meeting. A vote was taken with all in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 12:37PM.