

**Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
March 8, 2023**

**Assunpink Conservation Center
Robbinsville, NJ**

Members in attendance: Rick Lathrop (chair), Emile DeVito, Russ Furnari, Erica Miller, Catherine Tredick. Online: Jane Morton Galetto, Marion McClary, David Mizrahi, Howard Reinert.

Absent: Howard Geduldig, Robin Dougherty.

Staff in attendance: Lisa Barno (Assistant Director), Kathy Clark (Acting Chief ENSP), Gretchen Fowles (ENSP), Brian Zarate (ENSP), Rhea Rajpal (ENSP), Robert Somes (ENSP), Mary Monteschio (NJFW), Jeff Brust (Bureau of Marine Fisheries).

Public: none observed in the initial online GoToMeeting initiation (approx. 10:00 to 10:20 AM)

Meeting via Teams called to order at 10:40 AM; the late start was due to Internet outage.

The public notice for this meeting was read by K. Clark.

Introductions of those in attendance.

Approval of Minutes

E. Miller made a motion to approve the minutes from the November meeting, seconded by R. Furnari. There was no discussion and the minutes were approved unanimously (JMG abstained).

Report by Assistant Commissioner Dave Golden

Assistant Commissioner D. Golden is attending the N. Bobwhite Quail meeting so he could not be here. Assistant Director L. Barno provided this report. ENSP Chief John Heilferty retired as of 3/1, and is replaced by K. Clark as acting chief.

There have been a number of reports of whales washing up along the coastline; necropsies indicate trauma consistent with vehicle strikes. Juvenile whales are believed to be following prey closer into shore, into active boating lanes. NOAA has proposed regulations for a 10 knot speed restriction for travel lanes within some distance of shore, and applicable to more boat size classes, when N. Right Whales are spotted. Twenty-three whales have washed up along Atlantic coast in NJ and other coastal states.

E. DeVito commented that C. Safina's book describes sperm whale life history; suggests that more research is needed on the effects of sonar mapping on whales. R. Furnari said there is

required monitoring during sonar use, and thought the likelihood of current sonar mapping causing whale deaths is low.

The DEP Pollinator Standards document for BPU solar installations is completed with minor revisions remaining to be made.

Staff held a rule launch meeting with Office of Legal Affairs to move forward with proposing the tidal areas restrictions, as discussed at the January meeting.

Legislative Updates

M. Monteschio had provided the legislation list as of 3/1/23.

Public Input

None

Updates

Diamondback Terrapin – Brian Zarate, ENSP

Diamondback terrapin was designated a nongame species in 2016 and is a candidate for Special Concern. ENSP has investigated threats and management actions, and one of the most significant sources of mortality is bycatch associated with blue crab fishery (i.e., crab pots that also catch terrapins, which can drown in the pots). ENSP staff brought this issue to the NJFW Marine Resources Administration (MRA) and developed a white paper last year that we presented to ENSAC in May 2022. After a number of internal and external meetings, we narrowed the action recommendations to address bycatch down to two.

1. Require the use of excluders (Bycatch Reduction Devices, aka, BRDs) on all commercial and recreational crab pots.
2. Change the size of excluders to 4.5x12 cm size to make them consistent with those used in surrounding states.

B. Zarate and K. Clark attended the Marine Fisheries Council's Blue Crab committee in February to present the problem and NJFW recommendations. Received feedback from the representatives on the Blue Crab committee, including concerns that recreational pots are a bigger problem than commercial; there is no population estimate; BRDs don't exclude smaller terrapins; consider zoned regulations and distance from shoreline; require cull rings; and distribute an industry survey for more feedback. DEP next steps to address these concerns: provide BRD literature to the committee; work with partners to explore trend analysis for multiple populations; expand summaries of other threats; reassess DEP recommendations.

There was discussion with members: It is important to remove ghost pots to reduce that source of mortality. Desire for analysis of data from partners for population analyses. "Take" is prohibited regardless of population data availability. B. Zarate added there is a 2016 regional conservation strategy report that framed many of the issues. J. Brust agreed that the 2016 report included valuable trend information that might be updated with additional partner data. Recreational crabbing may represent about half the total crab pots (varies regionally, but

commercial and rec are similar in number of traps). Regulations would be published in the marine administrative code, minimum of 12 months due to publishing guidelines, public comment, responding to comments, and adoption; however, the Marine Fisheries Council has a veto option for any proposed regulation, which would kill a regulation that didn't have their support.

E. DeVito made a motion to support the concept that NJFW pursues aligning NJ with BRD use in adjacent states for recreational crab pots, and continue to work on recommendations for commercial crab restrictions. Second by R. Furnari. Vote: motion passed unanimously.

State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) – Kathy Clark, ENSP

ENSP has contracted with Strategic Stewardship Partnership to help us as we start the process of revising the SWAP due to the US Fish and Wildlife Service by September 2025. We hired a new person in a planning position, who is Kim Korth (returning now that she returned to NJ); we are awaiting her start date.

Break for lunch

New Business

NJ Wildlife Tracker – Gretchen Fowles, ENSP

Presentation by Gretchen Fowles and Rhea Rajpal, starting with a description of the NJ Biotics database, which is the method we use to meet the legislative requirement to track data on rare species. ENSP receives about 2,500 records/year from staff, consultant surveys, and public. There are many uses of Biotics data. In recent years we have relied on temporary employees as data managers and have had high turnover, which has impeded progress. Since 2019 we have lost two full-time employees to another program and five temporary employees who resigned to take full-time jobs elsewhere. Despite that, we have overhauled the data management program to move toward an all-digital system. NJ Wildlife Tracker is the culmination of development and the “face” of that new system. It was first rolled out for use by ENSP in 2020-21, and more work was done to get it to 2022 soft release and 2023 full release. There are many benefits of the digital system: more user-friendly; large reduction in paper and staff action steps; a review dashboard for real-time access by biologists; expandable for species-specific surveys; can capture on-road records for all species. Road-kill data can inform planning for wildlife passage infrastructure.

Looking forward to formalizing our relationship with NJDOT. Staff developed and is offering training on habitat connectivity and road mitigation: CHANJ trainings to DOT; presentations to professional groups (like engineering companies) and conferences. In 2023, we will work with TNC on a Habitats and Highways training program.

Discussion on this topic, the benefits of collecting data; possibility of having Bioblitz days that use NJWT; extracting iNaturalist data for NJ Wildlife Tracker; signage at trailheads for NJ Wildlife Tracker; signage on highways demarcating CHANJ areas and wildlife passages.

2022 Bald Eagle Project report – K. Clark, ENSP
This topic was postponed to a future meeting.

Other Business

Next regular ENSAC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, May 17. It will be an in-person meeting. ENSAC meetings in 2023 will be in-person unless otherwise arranged.

R. Furnari made a motion to adjourn, meeting adjourned 1:50 PM.

Summary of Action Items

- 1) Future topics include a presentation on freshwater fish proposed for addition to the endangered and nongame wildlife lists; report from the nominations subcommittee.
- 2) (Continuing item) Identify a longer-term strategy for ENSAC involvement in ASMFC's actions.