

**Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
January 22, 2025**

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

Members in attendance: Rick Lathrop (online), Russ Furnari, Martha Maxwell-Doyle, Erica Miller, David Mizrahi (online), Catherine Tredick.

Absent: Ty Gould-Jacinto, Howard Geduldig, Marion McClary, Eliot Nagele, Howard Reinert

Staff in attendance: Dave Golden (Assistant Commissioner), Jason Hearon (Assistant Director, NJFW), Kristen Meistrell (Assistant Director, NJFW, online), Kathy Clark (ENSP chief); Kim Korth (ENSP, online), Gretchen Fowles (ENSP), Mary Monteschio (NJFW Regulatory Officer), Robert Somes (ENSP), Alex Kisurin (ENSP)

Public: Emile DeVito, Virginia Osnatu (Duke Farms, online) Andrew Burnett, Luke Butler (online), Keith Clayton (online), Jim Wright (online)

Chair convened the meeting at 10:12 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**

M. Maxwell-Doyle made a motion to approve the minutes of the November 22 meeting, seconded by E. Miller. Motion was approved unanimously.

**Report by Assistant Commissioner Dave Golden**

AC Golden gave a regulatory update, including the Shore Protection Rule that is open for public comment until February 13.

The Game Code will have many amendments, and that proposal and adoption will be delayed until 2026-2027.

The state is under a hiring freeze that will affect ability to hire and promote agency staff, after having a good period that allowed Fish & Wildlife to improve staffing levels.

For Council and Committee meetings, public comments are now allowed both online and in person, however, technology limitations may affect quality of, and ability for, online comments. R. Lathrop announced that to be consistent with other councils, the ENSAC public comment limit will be 3 minutes, the same as the Fish and Game Council.

## Legislative Updates

M. Monteschio reported that federal bills expired at the end of last year, and the new Congress in early January will start anew. The NJ S1029 Invasive Species bill was re-written and we will be watching that bill's progress. R. Furnari noted the bill got through the Senate Environment Committee and has yet to go through the House.

## Old Business

### Nominations Committee

R. Furnari noted that two seats will become open with the April term limits on Dr. Lathrop's and Dr. Miller's positions. Four applications were received by the Nominations Committee, and two candidates were put forward for Committee action for the academic and public/vet health: Dr. Brooke Maslo of Rutgers University, and Dr. Chandler Navara, veterinarian.

**A motion to approve the recommendation to appoint Dr. Brooke Maslo in the academic seat and Dr. Chandler Navara in the public health/veterinary seat was made by E. Miller, seconded by C. Tredick.** The motion was approved unanimously. The Committee will request these ENSAC nominations be approved by the DEP Commissioner as of April 1. The ENSAC chair also serves on the Fish & Game Council, and the public health/vet also serves on the NJ Wildlife Rehabilitators Advisory Committee. At the March meeting, ENSAC members can vote on chair.

### State Wildlife Action Plan (SWAP) – Kim Korth

K. Korth gave a brief presentation as an update on Plan revision progress.

- The revised SGCN list is complete.
- Habitat: habitat types and regions are completed; the description of key habitat areas will use mapping with CHANJ and Rowan's Conservation Blueprint.
- Statewide and Regional Priority threats are complete.
- Actions: priority actions for Level 3 regional threats are complete; prioritization of those actions is underway (due 1/27); statewide actions are being worked on now.
- Dynamic Website Build: this is ongoing. Our review deadline is 5/1 with a public launch 7/15.
- Public Comment: review by DEP and F&W staff, the Technical Advisory Group, technical partners, and the public will be announced 5/1. Targeting a draft to USFWS 5/1 with submission to USFWS 7/15.

### Fish Code amendments

K. Clark noted that NJFW Fish Code will be amended in 2025. ENSP staff worked with Bureau of Freshwater Fisheries, which administers these rules, to write changes that will curtail the harvest of snapping turtles. The amendment will 1) limit new commercial entry; 2) institute daily limit of 10 and annual limit of 250 per commercial permittee; 3) reduce the harvest period to better avoid the entire nesting season; 4) increase the minimum size carapace from 12" to 13".

AC Golden noted this is on schedule to adopt by early 2026. AD K. Meistrell noted there were some positive comments during the recent stakeholder hearing.

### Rodenticides

K. Clark and E. Miller noted the Massachusetts legislature introduced a bill, *An Act Restricting the use of Rodenticides in the Environment* filed in the House by Rep. Hawkins [HD.1721](#) and Senate by Sen. Moore [SD.1447](#). These bills would phase out the use of Second Generation Anticoagulant Rodenticides (SGARs) in Massachusetts. A statewide coalition has been supporting this movement and the introduced legislation.

M. Maxwell-Doyle asked for an update on HPAI. K. Meistrell replied that NJFW is working with USDA-APHIS to respond to die-offs in waterfowl, especially snow geese. The highest report was about 60 dead snow geese at Merrill Creek Reservoir (presumed positive HPAI). Staff are working on triage and response plans plus sample testing, and monitoring what's happening in surrounding states. A joint press release went out last week to provide guidance to the public.

### **Public Input**

Andrew Burnett congratulated ENSAC and the agency for the recovery of bald eagle and osprey. He noted the eagle report acknowledges over 150 people and agencies.

Jim Wright appreciates the action last month to support a ban on rodenticides; can anything be done by DEP? AC Golden responded that it's presently unknown if the DEP can take regulatory action, but it cannot pursue legislation. Staff would need to look into possible means.

Emile DeVito (NJCF) followed up on the rodenticide issue, suggesting this requires a legislative sponsor. He asked if the species status changes are effective and is that reflected on the website. The answer is yes.

### **New Business**

K. Clark shared an inquiry from Marine Fisheries Administrator J. Cimino regarding the Horseshoe Crab Advisory Panel (AP). The Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission's (ASMFC) Horseshoe Crab Board will be reviewing the current composition of the AP from a stakeholder and geographical participation perspective. If the Board is interested in adding seats to the panel for additional non-traditional stakeholders (i.e., environmental NGOs), one option is adding non-traditional stakeholders via an open solicitation and review process by the Board, or on a regional basis by the established region groups.

This topic will be discussed at the upcoming Horseshoe Crab Board meeting in February where staff will be looking for Board guidance on how to move forward. NJFW Joe Cimino is the sitting president of ASMFC and he has asked for ENSAC participation in these decisions. There was discussion on this with the conclusion that the AP composition needs to represent non-profit/conservation interests and in regions that have horseshoe crab concentrations.

NJFW staff will work with J. Cimino to recommend engaging ENSAC in the selection process for NJ representation. Will revisit this at the March meeting after the Horseshoe Crab Board meeting in February.

### **NJ Bobcat Project Update – Gretchen Fowles, ENSP**

G. Fowles presentation started with the history of bobcat population; the population began declining due to clearing of forests, and by the 1970s was thought to be extirpated from NJ. In

1978-82, 24 bobcats were relocated from Maine into northern NJ. In 1991 the bobcat was listed as endangered due to little change in numbers and distribution since the restoration effort. From 2015 to the present, there's been an increase in sighting reports and in some other indices. In January, 2025, the bobcat conservation status was improved from endangered to threatened.

**Population abundance indices:** road-killed bobcats (reported by the agency and public) and incidentally trapped bobcats (reporting mandatory in 2016). Bobcat observations received from the public on NJ Wildlife Tracker (NJWT) although that trend is similar to the increasing number of NJWT reports because of promotion of the reporting tool.

Population abundance and density estimates: ENSP has run a project since 2007 based on DNA to individually identify sample bobcats that is used in a Bayesian Spatial Capture-Recapture framework to estimate population abundance and density. The Bureau of Wildlife Management ran a 1-year survey in 2019 using baited hair snares with cameras and an Occupancy Modeling framework to estimate population abundance and density. They are very different survey methodologies and statistical analyses – ENSP's 2007-2022 work has resulted in population estimates with relatively narrow confidence intervals, whereas the BWM survey resulted in one estimate with a broader confidence interval. The two surveys were run in northern NJ, but the BWM study came from the most northern area above Rt. 80, the main bobcat range.

The distribution of bobcats is confirmed mainly above Rt. 78, with, now, 15 sightings south of Rt. 78 since 2014. Detection dog surveys have been done south of Rt. 78 (76 transects – 3 bobcat scats) as well as north of Rt 78 (99 transects resulted in 194 bobcat scats). The bobcat habitat suitability model developed by a University of Delaware Master's Degree student shows that good habitat exists statewide, but that there are connectivity pinch points in the central NJ region, in concurrence with the CHANJ mapping, likely limiting dispersal to southern NJ.

**Stressors:** habitat fragmentation, road mortality, trapping, disease/rodenticides

The habitat fragmentation stressor is identifiable by the telemetry work we have done, plus the results of genetic work that show clusters of populations in northern NJ, NY, PA and ME. NJ bobcats are more genetically similar to NY than to PA. In general, genetic connectivity is impeded by human infrastructure/roads for 7 of 10 mammal species based on genetic analysis, including bobcats in northern NJ.

Road mortality is highest in Sussex, followed by Warren and Morris counties.

Trapping/incidental captures: the trend is slightly increasing, with most trapped animals in the lower age range of 1 to 4 years.

Rodenticide exposure has been measured since 2014 in liver samples available via necropsies done by Dr. E. Miller. The trend is increasing, with 68% average exposure in the last 4 years. E. Miller added that the sublethal effects of rodenticides are not well understood but can affect immune response, reproduction, behavior, etc., forming an underlying condition leading to lower survival.

Disease – there are a few diseases, including H5N1 avian influenza that affect bobcats.

**Management to reduce stressors:**

Rodenticides & disease: At this time, we are primarily monitoring toxins and diseases by recording all data possible during encounters of individuals and in the course of necropsies.

Trapping: NJFW has trapper response that is immediate and includes chemical immobilization to release from trap, assess condition, insert ear tags, take ear punch for DNA, transport to nearest wildlife rehab to confirm healthy and recover from immobilization drugs, and generally release within 24-48 hours. ENSP and BWM plan to ensure trapper education includes national Best Management Practices.

CHANJ (*Connecting Habitat Across New Jersey*): This project is the management response to habitat fragmentation and road mortality. CHANJ goals are to make the landscape more permeable, allowing bobcats to move and expand to their statewide range. The tools of CHANJ include a Web Viewer of habitats that are “cores” and “corridors,” linked to a guidance document to provide information on best habitat management. Road segments are identified as a first filter for targeting improvements for wildlife passage.

Preserved land and the NAACC culvert inventory are mapped to identify terrestrial passability. Culverts are the available sites for passage or potential passage if properly built, making the culvert inventory essential to the CHANJ project.

Collaboration with NJDOT and University of Delaware: The current project includes 80 cameras at major highway crossings (culverts). In the last six months, the grad student has confirmed bobcats at 11 of 40 sites, including two culverts under Rt. 78. This suggests places to focus management to improve functional connectivity. More wildlife passage projects are being done now because Flood Hazard Area Control Act rules were amended in 2016 to require terrestrial passage under some permit circumstances.

Addressing the habitat fragmentation and road mortality stressor is necessary to recover bobcats to statewide distribution. Collaboration to increase landscape permeability is happening: NJDOT (Roads & Wildlife Working Group), Green Acres acquisition priorities; Garden State Preservation Trust is funding a central NJ road mitigation feasibility study; Metropolitan Planning Organizations in NJ are becoming more engaged in CHANJ priority crossing projects. In the Northeast region, states collaborated on a Habitat & Highways training video due for release in early 2025. Data collection will help gauge progress on these mitigation and restoration projects.

In 2025-26, a University of DE Postdoc will prioritize central NJ crossings for mitigation/restoration, update and expand the model of bobcat recolonization into southern NJ, and co-author a NJ bobcat status assessment and recovery plan.

Discussion followed: R. Lathrop asked, once road segments are prioritized, how can that be relayed to partners for mitigation? G. Fowles: we will share that information with CHANJ partners and possibly add that information as a new layer in CHANJ mapping. A. Burnette

asked, how many bobcats have been ear-tagged and how many recaptured? One was recaptured in PA indicating it crossed the Delaware River. G. Fowles: those numbers not available at the moment. A. Burnette asked about data gaps in bobcat ecology? G. Fowles: Fecundity is measured in necropsies but not in other ways, however we can refer to other states' data on that. Also, recaptures are available via DNA data at the individual level.

### **Other Business**

March 12 will be the next regular meeting of the ENSAC. However, K. Clark will poll members in case there is a better date for maximum attendance.

Discussion on meeting dates to maximize attendance. Suggestion to have that discussion at the November meeting.

**M. Maxwell-Doyle motioned to adjourn, seconded by E. Miller, and the meeting adjourned at 12:15 PM.**

### **Summary of Action Items**

- Provide the Committee with the DEP response on the rodenticide issue when it's available.
- Provide a letter to the DEP Commissioner on the Committee's recommendations for new member appointments.

***Lunch, 12:15 – 12:30***