

**Endangered and Nongame Species Advisory Committee
Meeting Minutes
November 13, 2019
Assunpink Wildlife Management Area, Robbinsville, NJ**

Members in attendance: Rick Lathrop (Chair), Jim Applegate, Joanna Burger, Emile DeVito, Jane Morton-Galetto, Howard Geduldig, Erica Miller.

Absent: Barbara Brummer, David Mizrahi, Howard Reinert, James Shissias

Staff in Attendance: David Golden, John Heilferty, Kathy Clark, Kashi Davis.

Guests: Russ Furnari, Dr. Henry John-Alder and three students from Rutgers University's Cook College.

Meeting was called to order by Chair R. Lathrop at 10:05 am. The public notice for this meeting was confirmed by J. Heilferty.

Status of Action Items

There are two memos (on the topics of predator abatement to benefit endangered species, and limiting illegal off road vehicle use) that are complete for sending to the Commissioner.

J. Heilferty will get a copy of the NJ Forest Service's Powerpoint presentation on the State Forestry Plan. The draft letter regarding forest management will be modified to include NJ Forest Service items and will be in review before next meeting.

J. Galetto requested an update on use of Avitrol. E. Miller responded that it remains licensed for use in starlings, blackbirds, crows (limited species). One notable change is that it is now labeled as toxic to both birds and mammals. Secondary poisoning is common when a poisoned bird shows distress and becomes prey to either bird or mammal, and the undigested Avitrol toxin remains available in the gut. Its use requires a pesticide applicator license but is not otherwise restricted.

Other news

Sad news was received last week: Clive Minton passed away in a car accident in Australia. Clive is well known for his huge contribution to Delaware Bay shorebird research. J. Applegate offered this to serve as ENSAC's acknowledgement of Clive's contributions to conservation in New Jersey and elsewhere:

ENSAC marks with great sadness the passing of Dr. Clive Minton on November 6, 2019, in Australia. Clive was one of the international scientific leaders of our efforts on behalf of migratory shorebirds on the Delaware Bay. His annual visits to New Jersey, bringing his tireless energy, contagious enthusiasm, and infectious good humor, will be sorely missed. He leaves a vacuum in our conservation program and in our hearts that will not be filled.

Approval of Minutes

After the arrival of J. Galetto to meet the quorum, a motion to approve the minutes of the 9/27/2019 meeting was made by E. DeVito and seconded by J. Applegate. Several items were recommended for correction, including the recommendation that minutes be made available within two weeks after the meeting, and to correct some spelling errors. Unanimously approved.

Director's Report

D. Golden reminded members that NJ is hosting the 2020 NE AFWA that includes regional leaders and biologists. Dates: April 19-21 in Long Branch. The symposia will include wildlife health, illegal wildlife trade, pollinators, connectivity, and climate change. One of the sponsors is the Non-Lead Partnership, and D. Golden requested they come out a day early for a demonstration for the councils; tentative date is April 17 or 18. There was discussion about the status of non-lead ammunition in hunting.

The locavore movement will be a workshop topic as part of 3R (Recruitment, Retention and Reactivation) in the bureau of Information & Education. This also relates to Division "relevancy" (the "fourth R") amidst changes in attitudes in NJ. With a general shift away from traditional hunting, there is attention to develop better relevancy.

NJ Conservation Leadership Program: the first residency training was held in early October. Participants came from DEP, non-profits, and federal government. The results were very positive and are important for the future of NJ conservation.

Invited presentation by Rutgers students:

Rutgers professor Dr. Henry John-Alder attended with three of his students: Connor Anderson, Hailey Conrad, and Adam Yawdoszyn. They are three honors students majoring in Ecology and Natural Resources at Rutgers.

Their presentation covered aspects of their research on fence lizards and levels of infestation by chigger mites, conducted on Colliers Mills WMA. Chiggers have 100% prevalence on fence lizards by late June, they tend to concentrate in mite pockets, and mite numbers range from 10's to 100s.

Home range study: population of 160 fence lizards in a 4ha area. This site has been part of a long term study of fence lizards with concurrent habitat management. Lizards generally selected for lower density of pines and canopy. The physiological cost of chigger mites was difficult to measure, but body weight was affected by mite intensity. The preferred habitat: oak dominated forest with open patches. Beneficial management actions included removal of pitch pine saplings, controlled burns, and removal of feral cats.

ENSAC members thanked the students for their good work and informative presentations.

WMA lands and agriculture

Director Golden introduced the topic of agricultural uses of WMAs: there are 3,500 acres (of total 350,000 WMA acres) in agricultural leases. DFW also plants a small amount of acreage

with sorghum or pollinator plants, but most farmed acreage is farmed by lease farmers. Most of these leases originated from land purchases that were existing agriculture. Farm leases on WMA lands are auctioned by DFW at 5 year terms with option to continue for 5 year renewal with same terms. In 2020, 3,400 acres in lease will be up for bid, and thus DFW has the chance to review the lease conditions. DFW already has in-house practices that include no use of neonicotinoid seeds. Farm leases are paid in cash or in-kind services, and new leases could incorporate these practices where in-kind services may be planting beneficial plants. Possible lease changes: increase riparian buffers; remove some good farmland to put into pollinator acreage in exchange for invasive-laden land that could be improved by farming; 500 of the 3,500 acres for organic farming to promote the practice for wildlife; and new requirement for winter cover crop.

There are many benefits of the WMA ag program: good public relations, keeping land in early succession and non-invasive vegetation, and some, minimal, revenue. The organic farming portion of the leases will have multiple benefits to citizens and habitats, and could also qualify for RGGI carbon sequestration credit.

Members suggested that many groups will be interested in these changes, and that communication will be needed. The Division of Parks and Forestry (parks) also oversees a farm-lease program and also faces lease renewals in 2020-2021, so ideally Parks will also be involved.

J. Burger moved to create a letter to the Commissioner, supporting these changes to the farm-lease program; seconded by E. DeVito. Discussion followed. J. Heilferty will provide E. DeVito and R. Furnari with some background info to prepare a draft letter. Motion passed unanimously. Draft will be circulated in a few weeks with goal to complete prior to the January meeting.

Break for lunch 12:15-12:35

Black Rail presentation by ENSP biologist

ENSP biologist Kashi Davis gave a presentation on Black Rail (BLRA). Marshbird surveys by the Saltmarsh Habitat & Avian Research Program (SHARP) began in 2011 but their timing did not specifically target BLRA. ENSP surveys that targeted BLRA began in 2015. GIS habitat mapping helped identify suitable habitat for the first targeted surveys. Surveys were done by boat, road, and remote acoustic recording units and New Jersey Audubon and Conserved Wildlife Foundation of NJ contributed to 2015-2017 efforts. In 2015 there were 5 detections at 264 surveyed points. In 2016 there were detections at 6 road points and 13 boat points (213 total points surveyed). In 2017, 75 road points yielded no detections. The 2017 “marsh zone map” by SHARP was released and helped to identify 2018 survey points. In 2018 there were zero detections at 40 boat points; a cold, wet spring may have contributed to poor results. In 2019, a dedicated technician resulted in 25 water-based points, 27 troll lines and 19 road points, plus 16 ARU (acoustic recording unit) locations; there were no detections.

At the regional scale, there is a status assessment report that includes all current knowledge. The USFWS has proposed federal listing and a decision by the federal government is due in December 2019. The ACJV (Atlantic Coast Joint Venture) BLRA working group has objectives and a draft conservation plan for recovery. Total population loss for the Eastern Black Rail since the 1980s is >90%. The regional view considers NJ a population center, with others in NC, SC and most in FL. The ACJV population objectives are to stabilize the population at >300 pairs across four population centers by 2025, and grow the population to 2,500 pairs with at least five viable population centers by 2055. The habitat goal is to achieve 17,500 acres of high quality habitat (enough to support 2,500 pairs).

Upcoming: There is a potential ACJV meeting in NJ in 2020, and a Rutgers habitat mapping project to better identify black rail habitats (and site ownership) in NJ. There is a need to develop pilot projects and management projects to improve habitat. Additional surveys are planned.

January meeting: January 15, 2020.

Action Items

- J. Heilferty will provide a list of potential meeting dates for ENSAC in 2020 for review and comment.
- J. Heilferty will post a copy of the NJ Forest Service's Powerpoint presentation on the State Forestry Plan.
- The draft letter regarding forest management will be in review before next meeting (JH).
- The letter regarding predator abatement will be finalized and sent.
- J. Heilferty will provide E. DeVito and R. Furnari with some background info to prepare a letter supporting changes to the Division's farm-lease program.
- Potential agenda items for January meeting: J. Burger with Pine Snake update.

Meeting adjourned at 1:35 PM.