



Minutes for the April 28, 2020 meeting

RSC Representatives present: Anne Slugg-Chair (Sudbury), Emma Lord, Co-Chair (NPS), Ron Chick (Framingham-Alt), Christine Dugan (Lincoln), Bill Fadden (Framingham), Alison Field-Juma (OARS), Marlies Henderson (Billerica), Laura Mattei (SVT), Linh Phu (USFWS), Trek Reef (Billerica-Alt), Tom Sciacca (Wayland), David Witherbee (Concord)

RSC Representatives absent Mary Antes (Wayland-Alt), Elissa Brown (Concord-Alt), Ralph Hammond (Bedford), Jim Lagerbom (SVT-Alt), Joseph Piantedosi (Bedford-Alt),

Location: Zoom Video Call

7:06 pm

Ms. Phu explained that the Refuge buildings are closed due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Buildings are open only for essential services. USFWS staff are still working on projects such as piping plover nesting sites and with schools on the Blanding's turtle restoration efforts.

7:09

Ms. Slugg motioned to approve the March minutes. Edits were suggested and accepted. Mr. Chick seconded the motion which passed 10-0 with 2 abstentions.

Ms. Phu said the USFWS is moving forward with a Hunting Plan to include hunting of bear and coyotes at GMNWR and Coyotes, Fox, and Bear at the Assabet River and Oxbow NWR. The USFWS is working to align hunting Refuge regulations with state hunting regulations, when compatible and feasible. Ms. Phu is creating Plans with an emphasis on safety as well as wildlife management and protection. She is proposing limiting the expanded hunting of coyote and fox concurrent to deer season at these 3 refuges where it is being proposed, prohibiting night hunting and baiting, and limit method of take to archery for all species except for waterfowl at Great Meadows. Ms. Phu said she believed that the coyote population would recover if hunting is allowed because they are capable of compensatory reproduction when their numbers decrease and because the numbers harvested would be low due to the additional refuge regulations.

Ms. Field-Juma noted that waterfowl hunting will be expanded and wondered if that would impact recreational use. Ms. Phu said that current standards include only 2 hunting areas being open to waterfowl hunting. Most waterfowl hunting is limited hours to very early morning hunts so that most people never realize hunters have been out, and a 150-yard setback from the road. She said that there are so many safety regulations and training that hunting is one of our safest sports and the permits will be limited. Ms. Henderson asked what protection there is against poaching. Ms. Phu said that there are two Wildlife officers who patrol and enforce not just hunting regulations, but all federal wildlife laws and other Refuge Regulations (like trespassing, vandalism, illegal dumping)

Ms. Field-Juma said that the Hunting Plan ought to fall under the Refuges Comprehensive Conservation Plan but it actually falls outside. Ms. Phu said the Refuge CCP is now expired and the Service is moving towards individual Step Down Plans that would be individually updated on specific management topics

(i.e. Habitat Management Plans, Inventory and Monitoring Plans, Visitor Services Plan, Hunt Plans, etc.) making the plan more nimble. CCPs typically take 2-3 years to develop because they cover every single aspect of Refuge Management and quickly become obsolete. Ms. Field-Juma would like it noted in the Hunting Plan that the SuAsCo is Wild and Scenic River. Ms. Phu suggested she include that in a comment letter, adding that the Wild & Scenic River will probably not be referenced in the Hunting Plan. Mr. Fadden said that the rivers' ORV's will be impacted and that should be noted. Ms. Henderson said that the Concord impoundments will never be open for hunting, that is part of the deed.

Ms. Slugg suggested that she and Ms. Lord draft an RSC comment letter to be circulated among RSC representatives before it is submitted. Ms. Phu encouraged the representatives to also submit individual comment letters. Ms. Mattei said that SVT will be writing a comment letter.

Dragonfly Mercury Project

Ms. Slugg asked for comments on a letter from the Dragonfly Mercury Project asking the RSC to participate in their study of mercury in dragonfly larvae. This project utilizes citizen scientists in collecting dragonfly larvae which will be examined for the presence of mercury. The Dragonfly Project already has a site at MMNHP. Ms. Field-Juma said that a macro invertebrate study gives you an idea of the health of an ecosystem but doesn't tell you why it is healthy or unhealthy. Mr. Sciacca referenced an EPA fish study downstream of Nyanza which found mercury. Ms. Field-Juma replied that there was a difference between fish tissue samples and dragonflies, and that dragonflies could be a proxy for a fish study. She said that the EPA will likely not do another study, and the state only samples ponds, not rivers, so it is up to the RSC if we want to track mercury. Ms. Phu said we would need a state permit to collect wildlife. Ms. Slugg asked the group to think about whether we wanted to join. Ms. Phu thought that perhaps a Concord impoundment volunteer could help, but getting permits and recruiting volunteers is a much bigger ask. Also, we are not sure if the sampling will be repeated so the collection might not be that useful in management terms. Ms. Slugg said that either Ms. Lord or Ms. Field-Juma would look into this project and report back to the Council.

Ms. Lord said that the Rx portion of the RSC grant awarded to AMC for the 2019-2020 year will be completed in 2020-2021 due to the pandemic.

The Council voted unanimously to move \$1,100 from this year's Riverfest spending to supporting the Lowell fish monitoring project.

The RSC's Facebook and Instagram accounts are now linked and Ms. Henderson is posting on them. RSC representatives may post by using their individual Facebook accounts or as administrators if Ms. Lord gives them administrator status.

Riverfest

Ms. Lord said that due to the pandemic we will be sponsoring a virtual and pared down Riverfest this year. We will ask people to share photos and videos of themselves on the rivers. It is likely to be held on the originally scheduled dates. We will do what we can to celebrate the rivers without encouraging large gatherings. Mr. Chick said that he has 8-10 canoes available if we can find a way to utilize them with social distancing in mind.

Ms. Lord shared the ORV flow matrix. This helps to identify which river values are dependent on flows, such as paddling under bridges.

Ms. Henderson reported that Jug Island in Billerica was cleaned up with the help of SVT. Billerica chose to spray for mosquito control and Ms. Henderson tried to protect water bodies from it as much as she could, which primarily consisted of preventing spraying near vernal pools. Ms. Field-Juma said that many communities are subject to aerial spraying whether they want it or not and that Mass Audubon is leading an effort to get it stopped. She said that because the formula is proprietary, no one knows exactly what is in the spray.

8:22 pm

Ms. Henderson motioned to adjourn, Ms. Mattei seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Christine Dugan.