



## NORTHEAST PARTNERS IN AMPHIBIAN AND REPTILE CONSERVATION

2009 Annual Meeting  
Watkins Glen, New York  
August 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>, 2009

### 2009 NEPARC MEETING MINUTES

#### ACTION ITEMS AND WORKING GROUPS

##### **NEPARC annual herpetofauna regulatory summary 2009**

Prior to the 2009 meeting representatives from each of the Northeastern States were emailed four questions related to herpetofauna in their state. The responses provided were discussed at the 2009 meeting and are summarized below.

##### *Responses submitted by:*

Phillip deMaynadier - Maine

Lori Erb - Massachusetts

Scott Smith – Maryland

Officer First Class K. Michael Lathroum - Maryland

Michael Marchand – New Hampshire

Dave Golden – New Jersey

Al Breisch – New York

J.D. Kleopfer - Virginia

Michael Welch – West Virginia

##### **Question 1. Have there been any laws or regulations added, repealed or changed in your state pertaining to amphibians and reptiles?**

Maine: Maine was recently lobbied by local herp husbandry interests to expand its list of eligible species for importation and possession and completed a comprehensive review of the ~50 species (and/or genera) for potential inclusion on its unrestricted list – those species not requiring a permit and thus eligible for importation, possession, and/or commercial trade.

The process involved screening species using 3 primary review criteria: ecological (i.e., potential impacts to ecosystem if released/escaped), safety (i.e., potential hazards to human health), and conservation (i.e., status of species in native range). To date only conservation status has proven to be an impediment to the inclusion of some of the newly requested species – mainly due to highly ranked IUCN (critically endangered or endangered) CITES (Appendix 1) status.

Maine is also removing a popular pet trade turtle from its current unrestricted list – the red-eared slider – due to the growing potential for species introduction and establishment.



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Maryland: Yes, under Fisheries Regs, the minimum carapace length for commercial harvest of common snapping turtles was increased to 11 inches (from 9). This is actual "curved carapace length" (the way watermen measure them) and is equivalent to a 10.5 inch CL. At the same time under wildlife regs, it was clarified that snapping turtles taken on a wildlife damage control permit cannot be sold commercially.

New Hampshire: No. Most recent laws went into effect during 2007...but it has become apparent that we need further discussion here in N.H. regarding snapping turtle rules.

New Jersey: In late July 2009, the NJDEP received a formal petition from the New Jersey Builder's Association to delist the northern pine snake and remove its "threatened" status in New Jersey. NJDEP now has 60 days to defend the pine snake's status as "threatened" or to move forward with rule writing to delist the species. NJDEP plans to defend the pine snakes current status.

New York: General Depredation Permit pertaining to nuisance wildlife was amended to allow taking up to 10 each of common snapping turtles and northern water snakes.

This permit allows the collection and possession of up to five (5) individuals of NY native species of amphibian or up to two (2) individuals of NY native species of reptile, not to exceed a total of five (5) individuals. Species permitted does not include endangered, threatened or special concern species.

Amphibians or reptiles collected under this permit may be possessed until they either die in captivity or are released in suitable habitat at or near the original point of capture. Release of possessed animals is permitted only if they have been kept and housed separately from all other captive amphibians and reptiles. No animals taken pursuant to this permit shall be bought, sold, offered for sale, traded or transferred to another person or used for captive propagation.

West Virginia: Nothing official, although a multi-part proposal has been drawn up with input from game, non-game, fisheries and law enforcement personnel, and it will soon be forwarded to Charleston. This proposal outlines several different options that WVDNR might take to provide some sort of protection for selected species or for herps as a group. Options range from simple language changes in the fishing and hunting regulations booklets issued each year to a full-fledged legislation. Because of the current definitions, umbrella protection could be provided in some cases by simply changing the wording within our Natural Resources Laws ("Chapter 20") from "wild animals" to "wildlife", but opening Chapter 20 to revision might be the trickiest scenario.



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### **Question 2. Have there been any significant court decisions affecting herps in your state?**

West Virginia: Suspects were arrested this past year in Virginia for violations of the Lacey Act. The animals that they were in possession of originated in West Virginia, but a stronger case was built by allowing them to cross state lines. They have recently pled guilty and the suggestion has been put forward in this case that some of the fines collected be earmarked for the WV program specifically.

### **Question 3. Have there been any arrests/convictions for cases involving illegal possession of herps?**

Maine: There have been confiscations of unpermitted exotic animals by the Warden Service but to our knowledge these have been only incidental to other poaching/hunting/firearm violations and probably have not led to any arrests or convictions.

Maryland: Yes, there was a bust of the primary snapping turtle butcher for the mid-Atlantic who lives in MD - apparently snappers from other states were purportedly being "laundered" through him - they got him on Lacey Act violations. Court case is pending.

New Hampshire: There have been numerous "take" and/or "sale" violations of T&E herps but not sure whether any of these have resulted in arrests or convictions.

New Jersey: There have actually been quite a few arrests and seizures of herps (many turtles) that were being illegally held over the past year. The largest occurred in central NJ and led to confiscation of the following turtles:

Wood Turtles - 20+  
Spotted Turtles - 70  
Box Turtles - 20+  
Terrapins - 300+  
Blandings - 5-7

Charges are still pending in this case. The question of "What to do with these confiscated animals" led the Division to draft a policy on "releasable and non-releasable wildlife."

New York: Operation Shellshock was major action. Lt Thomas will give summary later in the meeting.

Virginia: No major cases, just the usual 3-4 pet stores trying to sell red-eared sliders. We have also investigated several on-line sales of native reptiles, including red-eared sliders, eastern box turtles and various species of frog and toad tadpoles.



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### Question 4. Have there been any acquisitions to protect herp habitats?

Maine: Several focus areas of high biodiversity value have been designated statewide by Maine's Beginning with Habitat Program, some largely or solely because of the occurrence of rare turtle or snake populations. Information on the focus areas is shared with land trusts and towns helping (we hope) to fuel slow but incremental progress toward habitat preservation.

Maryland: DNR purchased the largest remaining private (single owner) tract of land in the state of MD this past year - the Foster tract - 4541 acres in Worcester County - the site is a mixture of headwater wetlands, seasonally wet flatwoods, dry sand ridges, floodplain forest, and vernal pools/Delmarva bays. We have just begun detailed survey work but so far have discovered a population of Carpenter Frogs. We expect to find red-bellied watersnakes and possibly Eastern Narrow-mouthed Toads. This area has habitat for northern pinesnakes, which possibly occurred in MD (I believe they did, some experts disagree). It has a good diversity of more common species (which may be regionally important): for example, Cope's Gray Treefrog and NJ Chorus Frog. This property links up with large areas of TNC lands (Nassawango Creek Preserve) as well as DNR forest lands (Chesapeake Forest, Pocomoke State Forest) making this purchase a key part of an ecosystem protection effort between DNR & TNC, which includes habitats for many herp species.

Massachusetts: Yes

New Hampshire: All of our known listed herps (E, T, SC) are used in prioritizing land protection efforts.

New Jersey: A conservation group has currently has a small 13-acres parcel that contains Eastern Tiger Salamander breeding habitat under contract. This site represents 1 of only 14 locations in New Jersey where this state endangered species in know to breeding. The transaction on this property is expected to go through in November 2009.

New York: Acquisition by TNC of parcels in Saratoga County to protect the Blanding's turtle.

Virginia: 1) Big Woods (5,000ac) was originally purchases by TNC and then sold to the VDGIF and VDOF. The primary goal of this site is for the restoration of longleaf pine habitat. Big Woods is adjacent to the 5000ac TNC Piney Grove site, which is habitat to the northern-most population of red-cockaded woodpeckers, 2) Florida Rocks (1,800ac) contains numerous Coastal Plain species of herps. The Mattiponi River runs through it and 2 oxbow lakes are present. The purchase was made possible through various grants including a DoD program to protect buffer lands so to avoid encroachment of development around Fort A.P.Hill., 3) Short Hills (4,200ac) is a mostly ridge top habitat located in the Blue Ridge Mountains. Contains several timber rattlesnake den sites. All of these purchases were part of Gov. Tim Kaine's land protection initiative.



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### Working Groups

Below is an alphabetical list of all NEPARC working groups and a summary of their activities and plans.

#### Box Turtle Working Group

The Box Turtle Working Group was formed at the 2005 NEPARC meeting. Since then the group has compiled and developed educational materials that will help efforts to conserve the eastern box turtle. Project examples include producing a postcard encouraging people to leave box turtles in the wild, developing an informational webpage to direct people to existing educational materials, and compiling a list of veterinarians and wildlife rehabilitators that work on turtles. For 2010 the group will be working on box turtle release guidelines for native wild turtles temporarily held in captivity (e.g. for rehabilitation) and a box turtle identification and comparison key.

#### Emerging Diseases Working Group

The purpose of the emerging diseases working group is to establish protocols for monitoring baseline health and disease prevalence in reptile and amphibian populations in the northeast region. We are preparing descriptions of the key features and monitoring approaches for the amphibians chytrid fungus *Batrachochytridium dendrobatidis* as well as the *Ranavirus*, species which infect amphibians, eastern box turtles, and fish. In addition, we are preparing protocols to avoid transfer of these infectious diseases between different sites. This information will be posted on the NEPARC website.

#### Important Herp Areas Working Group

Reptiles and amphibians are experiencing exceptional declines among North American vertebrates with habitat loss and fragmentation among the leading threats to both groups. The goal of an Important Herp Area (IHA) system is to identify valuable habitat for priority herpetofauna throughout the U.S. using a system informed by scientific criteria and expert review. Important Herp Areas are not designed to compete with other state biodiversity priorities but rather to complement them – providing an additional landscape layer for consideration when implementing statewide conservation planning initiatives. To this end, the National Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) IHA Task Team has produced a draft set of model criteria and associated implementation plans for potential designation of IHAs in each state. Model criteria draw on the concepts of species rarity, regional species richness, and landscape integrity to shape the boundaries of IHA candidate sites.

A presentation of the National PARC's IHA implementation plan was provided by Phillip deMaynadier (Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife) to the NEPARC Chapter meeting in Watkins Glen, NY in August 2009 and was favorably received. Chapter members provided constructive feedback on the IHA concept plan and suggested potential modifications to IHA nominating criteria to better fit northeastern faunal priorities. Other tasks identified by the NEPARC Working Group included:



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- Exploration of grant opportunities to hire a landscape ecologist/GIS specialist to spearhead candidate IHA site analyses for all northeastern states under supervision of the NEPARC IHA Working Group.
- Incorporation of NEPARC SGCN priority species into the eligible nominating criteria for IHAs. Specifically need to work with the Wildlife Action Plan Working Group on procedures for folding species of regional conservation concern and/or regional responsibility into the IHA rarity criteria.
- Finalization of the membership of the NEPARC regional IHA Working Group (interested new members see contact below).
- Nomination of 2-3 candidate names to the National PARC IHA Task Team as recommendations for a potential name change for "Important Herp Areas".

### Land Use Guidelines Working Group

A goal of this group is to better link the land use planning and herpetology communities by providing useful information for both. Products developed to date include a list of relevant biodiversity conservation and planning literature, which is posted on the NEPARC website.

#### Action Items:

- Prepare 2-3 template PowerPoint presentations for planning conferences (including value of herps)
- Update 9 Rules for Biodiversity Friendly Residential Development to provide to planning boards and communities.
- Distribute & Update the Checklist of Reptiles and Amphibians of the NEPARC region to listserv, eventually distribute to Permit Planners?

### Roads Working Groups

Roads and road traffic negatively impact reptiles and amphibians directly via road mortality and reduced population connectivity, and indirectly by causing habitat loss, habitat degradation, and increased access to populations. The Roads Working Group was formed at the 2007 NEPARC meeting. This is the regional component of the national PARC Roads Task Force. The goal is to create a document on "How Roads Impact Herps in the Northeast". This document will include a set of recommendations for the planning process in road construction to help make roads more herp-friendly from the beginning (rather than expensive retrofitting), and will identify appropriate measures for mitigation and maintenance on existing roads.

### Road Salt Working Groups

The Road Salt working group did not meet at the 2009 meeting.

### Snake Education Working Groups

The Snake Education Working Group was formed at the 2007 NEPARC meeting. This year the group worked on compiling photos and choosing photos for its upcoming pamphlet, which will focus on helping people to differentiate between venomous and non-venomous snakes. A timeline was developed for completing this pamphlet over the next year.



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### State Wildlife Action Plans Working Groups

The State Wildlife Action Plan Working Group met and reviewed Species Threat X Responsibility Matrix that was created by this working group over the last year. Information relative to federal funds in Northeast (RCN) and National competitive SWG were also discussed.

#### Action Items:

- Revise Methods section to include other uses of the Matrix.
  - HMG's for landowners
  - Tool for identifying IHA
- Request review of current documents from Editorial Board to be posted on NEPARC website .
- Propose RCN topic for 2011 RFP. Mike will draft and submit to Lori and co-chairs. RCN topic will be general enough to include potential interest from wood turtle working group, disease group and IHA group. NEPARC Co-chairs will submit comments to Holly N. or Northeast Diversity Committee by 9/22/09. Also, NEPARC co-chairs will encourage all state NEPARC reps to discuss the proposed RCN topic with their state's voting representative on the Diversity Technical Committee.
- Review Wildlife Action Plans for High Priority Species (all species listed in Red except those federally listed as T&E). Will include Habitat, Threats, Actions, and Partners.

### Vernal Pool Working Group

The vernal pool working group was initiated in 2009 to address the growing concern for species in the Northeast that use these intermittent wetlands for breeding. Vernal pools are small, isolated wetlands that dry up periodically. As a result, they are difficult to locate and identify, and are especially vulnerable to filling, draining, and other alteration. Recent changes to Federal wetland protections left most vernal pools unprotected, further exacerbating the potential for amphibian habitat loss. The working group plans to analyze the status and protection of vernal pools by different States in the Northeast region and summarize pool mapping efforts and methods. Through conference symposia, a list-serve, and web-based resource lists, the group also aims to support and connect conservation professionals working on vernal pool conservation.

### Wood Turtle

At the 2009 NEPARC meeting, the Wood Turtle Working Group was formed to create a forum to discuss the conservation issues surrounding the wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*). Over 20 people attended this inaugural meeting. State, federal, nonprofit, academia and private interests were all represented. Five issues emerged as priorities for the group to address: state by state status, NatureServe ranking, monitoring protocols, integrating Canada and MWPARC and the role of non-profit organizations. Of these issues, the following tasks to be completed over the next year were identified: contact Canadian representatives, investigate the feasibility of a *Wood Turtle Status Assessment*, identify point person from each state, develop monitoring protocols, identify NGOs that may be of assistance and develop an educational brochure.



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### NEPARC Business

#### Nominations and election of new co-chair

Co-chairs represent NEPARC at PARC meetings and conference calls, help to organize the annual meeting and facilitate the monthly NEPARC steering committee conference calls. This year Mary Beth Kolozsvary was voted in at the new NEPARC Co-Chair.

#### NEPARC Steering Committee

See the "About" section of the NEPARC website for committee membership details. The 2009 Steering committee will include:

- Isaac Chellman (Vermont Cooperative Fish & Wildlife Research Unit)
- Phillip deMaynadier (2010 meeting host, Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife)
- Jay Drasher (Aqua-Terra Environmental Ltd)
- Lori Erb (Massachusetts DFW - Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program)
- Dave Golden (NEPARC co-chair, New Jersey Division of Fish & Wildlife )
- Shelly Grow (Association of Zoos and Aquariums)
- Glenn Johnson (SUNY Potsdam)
- John Kleopfer (Virginia Dept. of Game & Inland Fisheries)
- Mary Beth Kolozsvary (NEPARC co-chair, New York State Biodiversity Research Institute)
- Peter Rosenbaum (SUNY Oswego)
- Scott Schlueter (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service)
- Scott Smith (Maryland Department of Natural Resources)
- Chris Titus (SUNY Brockport)
- Valorie Titus (Binghamton University)
- Linda Weir (USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center)

#### Special Recognition

Special recognition was given to Al Breisch for his 10 years of dedication and contributions to NEPARC. At this year's banquet Al was awarded with a special plaque in honor of his many years of service to NEPARC.

#### NEPARC Sponsors:

We thank all our generous contributors for donating items to the NEPARC silent auction. We also thank the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the New York State Chapter of the Wildlife Society for their financial contributions to the meeting.

#### Silent Auction

Participants were invited to contribute items for a silent auction to raise money to allow NEPARC to reduce registration fees for students who presented. Auction items included herp t-shirts, posters, books, beverages, and other items. The auction raised \$646.00. Thanks to all who donated items!