



# DIVISION OF FISHERIES & WILDLIFE

## Southeast District Activities – June 2018

**Wildlife** – District staff scouted potential goose banding sites and completed annual goose banding in Bristol, Plymouth and Barnstable Counties, reaching or surpassing our goals in each area.

District staff collected spring turkey check station materials from traditional check stations and delivered the materials and any associated harvest records to Westborough. District staff also completed all annual ruffed grouse and woodcock survey routes.

District staff assisted with or ran common eider survey and banding efforts on a number of coastal islands from Boston Harbor to the Elizabeth Island chain, partially in conjunction with the coastal waterbird census mentioned below. This work provides data on nesting activity, as well as allows the collection of important movement and survival trends through the recapture or observation of banded birds.

District staff provided technical assistance and, in many cases, conducted field site visits to address concerns from the public regarding aggressive hawks. In most cases, the hawks were identified to be either red-shouldered hawks or broad-winged hawks that had a nest in very close proximity to residential areas and had young that were at or close to fledging stage. Our priority in every case is to suggest tolerance and taking some minor safety measures as it is typically a short time period when the adults will be aggressive protecting their fledging young that are vulnerable. However, we also will often offer to climb the nest tree and remove the nest and cut a supporting limb to discourage future nesting attempts in the area. In some extreme cases, we have to climb to the nest and remove the chicks and have them fostered into another known nest away from residential areas with the assistance of Norman Smith at the Blue Hills Trailside Museum.

**Fisheries** – The District Fisheries Biologist participated in the Massachusetts Maritime Academy student poster session.

A site visit was conducted at the Santuit River with the United States Geological Survey to continue to evaluate issues/stressors to the system.

All District staff involved in fisheries work attended the annual stream survey meeting at the Westborough HQ and brought back the information needed to plan out summer stream surveys. To date, stream surveys have been completed in the Copicut area and in Scituate.

Passive Integrated Transponder (PIT) tagging efforts and ongoing monitoring of tagged fish and stream temperatures continued in June and into July at the Quashnet River, Mashpee River, Red Brook and the Childs River. The lower Quashnet antenna was dislodged during a major rain event and was repaired and replaced at its proper location.

District staff completed another phase of the Red Brook restoration project by installing biodegradable coconut fiber erosion matting on sensitive slopes along the new stream channel and planted 340 trees and shrubs by hand along several sections of the channel to help shade the stream to keep it cool and also to assist with preventing avian predation of trout and migrating river herring.

District staff continued to monitor the ongoing restoration project at the Coonamesset River.

**Natural Heritage** – Bald eagle banding continued in late May and into June with staff banding chicks at Bristol Agricultural High School on the Taunton River, Halfway Pond in Plymouth, Billington Sea in Plymouth and Silver Lake in Pembroke, as well as traveling to the Northeast District and assisting with banding at a nest in Waltham and in Amesbury. Staff continued to investigate leads on possible new nests, particularly on Cape Cod with possible locations at Lake Wequaket, Mashpee-Wakeby Pond and Sheep Pond, but have yet to confirm an actual nest.

Colonial waterbird surveys were completed in May and June, with District staff covering all areas in southeastern MA, as well as some sites in Boston Harbor area. These surveys consist of often tricky boat landings on coastal islands and include direct counts of nests, eggs and hatched chicks for a variety of species including gulls, herons, egrets and cormorants, as well as any waterfowl species observed. To provide an idea of the tedious nature of this work, on one island alone our staff counted over 2,200 individual nests on one island surveyed!

An ongoing project to continue to survey and monitor an important Blandings Turtle population on our Hockomock Swamp WMA continued very successfully in late May and into June with staff capturing and tagging over ten adult Blandings and beginning to collect valuable habitat use, nesting and movement data.

District staff again supported the annual Red-bellied Cooter release event at our Burrage Pond WMA by mowing the access road and parking area and attending the event to help assist the public in getting into the release location.

District staff continued to monitor and protect nesting shorebirds at a number of sites including the Elizabeth Islands, Strawberry Point, Angelica Point and the South Shore Marshes WMA. Staff also participated in the annual census periods for several species including piping plovers, terns and American oystercatchers.

District staff visited a number of WMAs and other sites to monitor coastal plain pond plants communities and survey for rare marshbirds as part of ongoing coordination with NHESP to update records that are getting older.

**Land Management/Stewardship** – Preparation of fire breaks continued this past month at several properties including the Southeast Pine Barrens WMA, Frances A. Crane WMA and the Camp Cachalot WCE. At these sites, extensive cutting of snag trees within a certain distance of fire breaks also was completed.

Prescribed fires were attended by District staff at Frances A. Crane WMA, Camp Edwards, Leyden WMA and Muddy Brook WMA in support of our Habitat Management Program and ongoing maintenance of fire adapted communities on our lands.

District staff assisted with the damaged tree removal project at Frances A. Crane WMA by conducted required Eastern box turtle sweeps within planned treatment units in advance of machinery being allowed into those areas. This serves to protect as many turtles as possible, by temporarily moving them out of the unit, while still allowing an important habitat project to move forward. Further, many of the trees harvested from these units were being trucked to the Coonamesset River restoration project site to serve as large woody debris in the restored stream channel and riparian corridor.

Several meetings and site visits were held in support of the ongoing restoration project at our Mill Brook Bogs WMA. The Division is working closely with the NRCS and Division of Ecological Restoration to design and complete a large, whole site restoration project that will concurrently restore the former bogs into valuable wetland/wildlife habitat and restore important upland habitats including oak heathlands, oak-hickory forest and sandplain grasslands adjacent to the former bog complex. Ground penetrating radar data has already been collected in the former bogs and foresters from the Habitat Program have cruised the site and are beginning to prepare a site plan for the uplands. Further, water level loggers have been installed and all former flume boards have been removed from the former bogs to begin to understand the natural flow regime through the site, which will aid in restoration planning/design.

Several ongoing dam safety related issues continue to be evaluated and addressed with the assistance of contracted engineers including the main dam at our Burrage Pond WMA, the White Island Pond dam and the Nye Pond dam at our Old Sandwich Game Farm WMA.

Boundary marking, both by District staff and by contractors directly supervised by District staff continued through May and June including Bakers Pond in Orleans, Maple Springs WMA, Atwood Reservoir WMA, Taunton River WMA and Copicut WMA.

District staff worked on several hazard tree issues in May and June, resulting from winter storms, and began to solicit quotes from vendors on statewide contract in anticipation of completing the work in early FY19. Several of the hazard trees are located at our District HQ and the other issues were identified at Mashpee Pine Barrens WMA and the Tispaquin Pond Boat Ramp.

District staff was pleased to see the contractors start work on the Burrage Pond WMA access roadway restoration and parking area maintenance project. Staff have been routinely monitoring the project and have met with all abutters to the project site to ensure that the project goes smoothly and does not negatively impact neighbors. We anticipate the project to be completed by the end of the first week in August.

The District Stewardship Biologist continued to successfully operate our remote sensing camera equipment on a portion of our Taunton River WMA where we have been having major ATV trespass issues from an abutting property. The images and data have been provided to the Environmental Police to aid in enforcement efforts.

As is always the case in the summer months, trash dumping is a major issue at many MassWildlife lands in the Southeast District. Staff have been very active and successful in keeping on top of the dumping issues, filling our 30 yard dumpster at least once already since the beginning of June.

**Outreach/Notable Meetings** – All District staff involved in the fire program have attended and completed their annual fireline safety refresher training, either at our Westborough HQ or at the Cape Cod National Seashore, and have completed their annual work capacity/pack test in compliance with our Prescribed Fire Policy. All staff also completed a required online training on cyber security. The District Manager and Land Agent attended a meeting with the Cape Cod Cranberry Growers to discuss various pathways for any cranberry farmers that are looking to get out of the business and would like to see their land go into Conservation. We discussed various methods, including fee acquisition, WCE acquisition and/or NRCS easement followed by underlying fee acquisition. We also discussed the option of continued cranberry agriculture under either a lease or WCE agreement.

Two notable/recurring land access issues have again arisen this summer at the Popponesset Beach Fishing Access site in Mashpee and the Bakers Pond Fishing and Boating Access site in Orleans. Both of these issues essentially revolve around the use of these two access areas for other than their intended purpose in accordance with the OFBA regulations. Essentially, the Popponesset Beach Access parking area, limited to 6 spaces for saltwater anglers only, will get filled up by general beach goers, restricting access for anglers. MassWildlife is working closely with OLE, OFBA and the Popponesset Beach Association (who holds an MOU with OFBA) to attempt to resolve the issue through more targeted enforcement. The Bakers Pond issue is similar, in that general beach goers/swimmers are using the site. In this case, we are also working closely with OLE and OFBA to resolve the issue.