

Mid-Atlantic Diamondback Terrapin Meeting
Virginia Institute of Marine Sciences Eastern Shore Laboratory, Wachapreague, VA
9 February 2008

Submitted by Patrick Baker and Ruth Boettcher, Working Group Co-chairs

Attendees:

Patrick Baker, Swarthmore College, PA & Wetlands Institute, NJ
Ruth Boettcher, Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries, VA
Randy Chambers, College of William and Mary, VA
Pam Denmon, US Fish and Wildlife Service, Fisherman Island NWR, VA
Ilene Eberly, Wetlands Institute, NJ
Amanda Hackney, Clemson University, SC
Paula Henry, USGS/Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, MD
Dan Hernandez, Stockton College and Wetlands Institute, NJ
J.D. Kleopfer, Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries, VA
Rick Morin, Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources – Fisheries Service, MD
Holly Niederriter, Delaware Division of Fish and Wildlife, DE
Richard Roberts, State University of New York at Oswego, NY and Chincoteague, VA
Megan Rook, College of William and Mary, VA
S. Alexandra Siess, Mid-Atlantic Turtle and Tortoise Society and Chesapeake Terrapin Alliance, MD
Carissa Smith, Virginia Dept. of Game and Inland Fisheries, VA
Scott Smith, Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources – Natural Heritage Program, MD
Diane Tulipani, VA Institute of Marine Science, VA
John Wnek, Marine Academy of Technology and Environmental Science, NJ and Drexel University, PA

Welcome and introductory comments were made by Patrick and Ruth, including an overview of the meeting's focus and objectives.

Group made around-the-room introductions, offering their name, affiliation, and professional or personal involvement with terrapins.

Agenda item #1 - Group discussion on the Mid-Atlantic Working Group position paper: its purpose, target audience, and the most appropriate regional conservation issues the paper should address.

Group comments on the paper's format and content:

-Target audiences include governments and elected officials, legislators, funding sources, the general public, educational institutions, others?

-Draft one large document that covers all terrapin conservation issues the Group deems most important in a format that will allow for easy separation into discrete position papers in order to target specific audiences.

- The Mid-Atlantic position paper should be written in the context of eventually serving as template for the other regional working group position papers. Combined, the regional papers can serve as a national or rangewide position paper.
- Delete membership list from paper, but make it available on the website.
- Add an attention grabbing opening sentence in the first section of the paper entitled “purpose”.
- Add section in the beginning that describes the biology and ecology of the species with an emphasis on its low reproductive output, human-induced and natural threats, longevity, etc. to make the point that the removal of animals from the wild for personal use or consumption is bad and to effectively set the stage for subsequent position statements.
- Any management, conservation or regulatory recommendations should be offered simply as recommendations and not be presented as coming from the Group per se.
- Pet issue important and should remain in paper. Group discussed whether to combine or keep the issues of holding terrapins as pets, the pet trade, and aquaculture (i.e., breeding terrapins for sale as pets or human consumption) separate. It was decided to keep the three topics separate.
- The statement on keeping terrapins as pets should not include a “how to”, but rather should stress why it is not a good idea to keep them as pets (e.g., hard to take care for properly, terrapin longevity, captive terrapins are non-releasable in the wild, etc.). Also, it should encourage people who are serious about acquiring terrapins as pets should first check with turtle rescue programs for any non-releasable terrapins in need of a good home. Obtaining terrapins from the wild should be strongly discouraged. In some areas it is illegal while in others there are strict regulations in place meant to curtail the acquisition of terrapins as pets.

Position paper action items and assigned authors:

- Finalize the terrapin pet statement. – Dan Hernandez
- Draft strawman draft on humane transportation of terrapins across statelines and abroad – Scott Smith
- Strawman draft on aquaculture (breeding and raising terrapins for the pet–trade and human consumption) - JD Kleopfer
- Strawman draft on terrapin biology and ecology from a regulatory perspective – Ilene Eberly
- Strawman draft on the benefits of using bycatch reduction devices in crab pots and creating an attention-grabbing opening statement – Alex Siess
- Strawman draft on the critical issues pertaining to nesting and in-water habitats – Ruth Boettcher and Pam Denmon
- Strawman draft on headstarting as an educational and/or conservation tool – The Wetlands Institute
- Terrapins captured for funding raising events such as turtle races – Paula Henry (will first look into the severity of the problem to see whether it merits a position statement).

Assignment due date: **October 1, 2008.** Ruth will send a new draft of the position paper to the assigned authors that contains the easy changes recommended by the Group. The authors will use this version to complete their assignments. Authors will submit their assignments to Patrick and Ruth by October 1, 2008 who in turn will combine everything into one document and send it out to the entire Working Group for review.

Agenda item #2: Update and discussion on map and narrative of past, present and future mid-Atlantic terrapin research, management and education projects and programs.

Group comments on the project descriptions and map:

-The Group agreed that the map illustrating locations of past, current, and future projects is a good idea and should be continually updated. Chris Bennett (absent from meeting) will hopefully continue to serve as the GIS manager of the map.

-Patrick recommended an online geo-portal where general spatial information (i.e., geo-spatial data layers) can be shared. The Group expressed concern about posting sensitive information on a public site, but Patrick said this site will simply serve as source for GIS layers the Group can download and add individual project information.

-After considerable discussion, it was decided to forego the project description narrative and enter everything into an Excel table. Paula has already one she developed so it's just a matter of updating it. The spreadsheet is "limited" in terms of contact person, type of work, and State so that it can be easily sorted.

-In comments Paula provided during her review of the minutes, she stated that the working group needs to be clear on the purpose for the project descriptions, what the information will be used for, and who will have access to these data and plans.

-Project questionnaire form will go out to group again to capture new projects or those missed in previous requests. The new form will ask for GPS coordinates for research and monitoring projects.

Project description action items, assignments and due dates:

-Provide a written overview and instructions on use of the online geo-portal (www.conservationmaps.org) - Patrick Baker, ASAP

-Send out project form to Group to capture new and missed projects with instructions on submitting completed forms– Ruth Boettcher, ASAP

-Modify and add project descriptions to existing Excel project table – Paula Henry, Holly Niederriter, Patrick Baker and Ruth Boettcher, October 1, 2008.

Agenda item #3: Group discussion on terrapin nest predation and predator management.

Ruth began the discussion by stating that many states are have initiated or are taking steps to engage in mammalian and avian predator management for the benefit of beach nesting shorebirds and seabirds. Such efforts can definitely benefit nesting terrapins, especially on beaches where no terrapin monitoring or management is occurring. Ruth also presented some preliminary terrapin nesting data following mammalian predator removal efforts at her study site, which suggested that predator mangt. can benefit terrapins. Ruth asked the Group if they were

willing to help support or piggyback on proposals seeking funding for predator management put forth by coastal bird biologists. The Group responded positively to this suggestion, but expressed some concern over submitting funding proposals that focus specifically on terrapins because of concerns about the implications of a conservation-minded organization advocating for killing of other animals. Others expressed some concern that removing one predator will stimulate populations of others.

Agenda item #4: Discussion on crab pot mortality and initiating a mid-Atlantic effort to promote the use of BRD's and developing ghost crab pot clean-up programs.

Group comments on ghost crab clean up programs:

-There have been several derelict crab pot studies done in the Chesapeake Bay watershed (i.e., 2005 - NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office and VA Institute of Marine Sciences (VIMS) used side-scan sonar to identify, locate and quantify derelict crab pots; 2006 – VIMS study which focused on estimating mortality rates of blue crabs captured in derelict pots, determining the affect of derelict crab pot age on crab mortality rates, and estimating escape probability in relation to the age of the captured crabs; 2007 – VIMS study examining the ratio of derelict crab pots to actively fished pots as well the impacts of ghost crab pots on recreational boating activity and fish and shellfish populations). None of these studies have focused specifically on terrapins.

-Ruth proposed the possibility of the Group of submitting a multi-state National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant under its Marine Debris Removal Program, which funded some of the studies mentioned above, to initiate derelict crab pot studies within the mid-Atlantic region to determine impacts on terrapins. The pre-proposal application due date is May 18, 2008.

-Rick Morin informed the Group of an upcoming public meeting hosted jointly by Maryland DNR and the NOAA Chesapeake Bay office that he will be attending. The purpose of the meeting is to convey information on current studies being done to assess the impacts of ghost crab pots on the Chesapeake Bay's living resources and to discuss issues surrounding the recovery of derelict pots. Rick will provide a summary of what was discussed at this meeting.

-Randy Chamber volunteered to contact the principal investigators of aforementioned VIMS studies on derelict crab pots to get specifics on study findings and bring up the possibility of incorporating terrapins in future studies and expanding the geographic scope to include the seaside of Virginia's Eastern Shore.

-Before embarking on a major effort to put together a NFWF proposal this year, the Group decided to wait for Rick and Randy's summaries to help decide the best course of action to take for next year.

-New Jersey has a crab pot removal program when the commercial crabbing season is closed and when all traps are required to be out of the water. No one is allowed to touch another crabber's pots during the fishing season. BRD's are required on all commercial-style crab pots that are set in waters with shoreline to shoreline less than 150 feet across at mean low water.

-MD requires the use of BRD's in recreational pots set in the Bay's tributaries. BRD's are required in commercial pots set in NJ, and BRD's are required in recreational pots set in DE. VA has BRD requirements of any kind.

-Crabbers are setting more pots in shallow waters because of better catch rates.

-Work done by the Wetlands Institute showed that terrapins can survive 4-5 hours underwater in the summer.

-A study being conducted in New Jersey looking at the potential for using bio-degradable ligatures as way to minimize impacts of derelict pots. Alex volunteered to provide the Group a summary of the study's findings.

Ghost crab clean up program action items, assignments and due dates:

-Rick and Randy will provide summaries of derelict crab pot studies conducted in the Chesapeake Bay. Due date: At their earliest convenience, but before the conference call scheduled for late July.

-Alex will provide a summary of the New Jersey study looking at the potential use of bio-degradable ligature in crab pots. At her earliest convenience, but before the conference call scheduled for late July.

Group comments on promoting the use of BRDs:

-Alex showed the Group a plastic orange colored BRD (dimensions=4.5cm x 12 cm, as recommended in Butler and Heinrich 2007) that is easy to install (vertical orientation is best) and very visible. The company that makes these is called Top-me Products located in Topsham, ME. To make a new template of this type of BRD costs \$5,000.

-The Group discussed ways to the BRD readily available to both recreational and commercial crabbers. Various ideas were brought up: sell them in gift shops, sell pots with BRD's already installed, promote their use at public events, *other ideas?*

-John Wnek said the EZ Trap Co. in NY is willing to sell pots with BRD's installed in states that require them.

-MD DNR is seeking funding from the Chesapeake Bay Trust to purchase and promote the use of BRD's in recreational pots.

Agenda item #5: Review of current terrapin legislation in the mid-Atlantic by state.

After several minutes of discussion on the best way to update mid-Atlantic regulations pertaining to terrapins, Amanda Hackney, a brilliant grad student saved the day by stating that she is in the process of putting together a list terrapin regulations by state and has offered to send the group her list for our review. The Group in turn agreed to provide Amanda with updates or changes as needed, including Wildlife Action Plan ranking in states where terrapins are considered a species of greatest conservation need. Group will send updates to Amanda by **April 1, 2008.**

Amanda will provide the group with the updated list of mid-Atlantic regulations and turn it over to the other regional chairs and national chairs. *Amanda, are you OK with this?*

Agenda item #6: Group discussion on the conservation of this species in the mid-Atlantic and brainstorm ways to encourage states to adopt more effective conservation plans.

After several minutes of discussion, the Group decided the best course of action to take is to try on get funding to draft a mid-Atlantic terrapin conservation plan either through State Wildlife Grants or other sources.

Holly brought up the possibility of obtaining funding from the Northeast Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (NEAFWA) for conservation planning. She agreed to provide the Group with information on multi-state funding opportunities through NEAFWA.

Ruth mentioned that species with a conservation plan already written ranks high with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) which has significant funds available for wildlife conservation. She cited the American Oystercatcher as being one of the top focal species selected by NFWF because there is an Oystercatcher working group in place and a conservation plan was written for the species. NFWF requires that proposals be in the form of business plan with realistic conservation goals, return on investment analysis, etc. If allowed by the oystercatcher working group, Ruth will provide the terrapin working group with a copy of the draft oystercatcher business plan. She will also send the Oystercatcher conservation plan to use as template for the terrapin conservation plan.

The Group agreed that developing a regional conservation plan is a good idea and should be pursued.

Agenda item #7: Terrapin education and the need to use current research to develop lessons for schools and public outreach.

John Wnek took the lead on this discussion and presented a classroom-based educational activity he developed through the Marine Academy of Technology and Environmental Science, NJ (the activity is available online at <http://dra.stirk.org/Terrapin.php>). This exercise was based on data collected at Sedge Island State Park which has a predator removal program in place that has had positive benefits on nesting terrapins. He suggested retrofitting John's project with local data. He asked that the Group help distribute this exercise to schools and other educational outlets. He has a second publication with new classroom exercises that is ready for our review.

He also requested actual terrapin data from the Group that could be used in math and science classes so that students in Maryland can use data collected in Maryland, etc. This makes the activities more meaningful to students. Please send data directly to John. His email address is: jwnek@mail.ocvts.org.

John brought up the powerpoint presentation on terrapins to take to schools that was presented at the national meeting in August 2007– still a work in progress according to Russ Burke. John will check with Russ to find out the status of the presentation.

A publishing company in Princeton has published an educational piece focusing on a variety of statistical analyses using terrapin data for computer applications. John will supply a contact for this publication.

Other projects, programs, ideas: Terrapin Jeopardy, terrapin education classes on the internet, teacher link on the Diamondback Terrapin Working Group website (Ruth and Patrick will discuss this idea with other chairs, *others*?)

2009 MID-ATLANTIC DIAMONDBACK TERRAPIN WORKING GROUP MEETING

Location: The Wetlands Institute in New Jersey

Tentative dates: Jan./Feb. 2009. Will pick a date that does not overlap with other working group meetings – Patrick will offer Group dates to select from as time draws near.

Other Topics:

Group decided to hold regular conference calls on a quarterly basis to maintain communication among members and get updates on assignments.

Fist one is scheduled for late July 2008. All are invited to participate, but those individuals that have assigned tasks are strongly encouraged to participate.

Can use the USGS conference call center – max. number of participants is 22. Paula will look into setting up the call.

Meeting adjourned at 3:30 PM.