

**Diamondback Terrapin Working Group, Mid-Atlantic Region
Regional Meeting: Biden Environmental Training Center, Lewes, DE, 2 March 2007**

Attendees:

Lowell Adams, University of MD, Gemstone Program Faculty Advisor; **Patrick Baker**, Miami University; OH; Wetlands Institute, NJ; **Gail Baltazar**, University of MD, Gemstone Program; **Chris Bennett**, DE Dept. of Parks & Recreation; **Ruth Boettcher**, VA Dept of Game & Inland Fisheries; **Sally Boswell**, DE Center for the Inland Bays; **Nancy Butowski**, MD-DNR; **Dan Day**, USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, MD; **Ilene Eberly**, the Wetlands institute, NJ; **Paula Henry**, USGS Patuxent Wildlife Research Center, MD; **Roz Herlands**, Richard Stockton College; The Wetlands Institute, NJ; **Dan Hernandez**, The Wetlands Institute, NJ; **Mary Hollinger**, Secretary DTWG; The Terrapin Institute, MD; **Trish Kimmel**, MD-DNR; **Katelin Mielke**, Wildfowl Trust of North America, Inc., CBEC, MD; **Holly Niederriter**, DE Division of Fish & Wildlife/DNREC; **Jake Owens**, The Wetlands Institute, NJ; **Valerie Peckham**, Philadelphia Zoo, Conservation Program Manager; **Anna-May Quadel-Hansen**, Wildfowl Trust of North America, Inc., CBEC, MD; **Willem Roosenburg**, Co Chair, DTWG; Ohio University, OH; **Brint Spencer**, Philadelphia Zoo, Curator of Reptiles & Amphibians; **Rachel Wells**, University of MD, Gemstone Program; **Jessica White**, University of MD, Gemstone Program; **John Wnek**, Marine Acad. Tech. Environ. Science; Drexel University, PA; **Roger Wood**, Richard Stockton College; The Wetlands Institute, NJ.
Minutes recorded by Mary Hollinger.

Welcome and Introductions (Paula Henry)

Meeting began at 9:10 with a summary of past meetings and a workshop goal to define directions and strategies for future working group activities.

Progress and update on National Diamondback Terrapin Working Group (Willem Roosenburg)

We have a logo and letterhead. The by-laws and letters of incorporation are submitted and we now have legal status. Application for 501-3C status (non profit) was submitted and may come through by this summer. Because of this status, membership dues will be collected, and are projected at \$20-\$25, and \$10 for students. DTWG website (www.dtwg.gov) was updated. Bibliography continues to be updated, and earlier articles are being scanned and uploaded. Eventually access to the bibliography may be password protected.

DTWG officers are being rotated out of their 3-year term this year. Joe Butler & Willem Roosenburg will be the Senior co-chairs for next cycle, leaving an open Junior Chair – Russ Burke's name is the only one submitted so far. Mary Hollinger is the current secretary and Brian Mealy is the current treasurer.

Update on the 4th Symposium of the DBTWG to be held August 10-12 at Arlington Echo Outdoor Educational Center in Millersville, MD. Dorm facilities, accommodating up to 100 people, will be available. \$6300 has been raised so far in corporate sponsorship, for this symposium.

The Symposium's keynote speaker will be Dr. Justin Congdon, retired ecologist with the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory, and Professor Emeritus at University of Georgia.

Baltimore Aquarium has offered a field trip for the afternoon of the 10th to include a behind-the-scenes tour of the facility. The field trip has space for 25-30 people only. Sign up early!

Update on State fisheries closures: Meg Hoyle working in SC; TX is making progress; Nancy Butowski of the MD DNR was invited and will report on the status in MD.

Question posed to Willem: how similar/different are the functions of the various regional groups?

Willem: Issues differ in the different regions. With respect to coordinating research or other activities, we haven't made as much progress as we might like. Katrina really hampered Gulf of Mexico work. Maybe we can work on some standardization at the business meeting in August.

Round table introductions. Handouts were provided listing attendees and a brief description of their work.

Update on regulations and management program in MD (Nancy Butowski)

Review of laws, back to the 1800's – size limits, season & prohibition on possession of eggs. 1973: license required to harvest; 1975: limit of three for pets; 1970's-1990's: changes to season and size; BRD's required in recreational crab pots in 1999.

2006: change season/size/permit; 9 month closure: DNR was required to prepare a management plan and to implement regulations in accordance with the 2001 Terrapin Task Force. This was effective August 2006
Purpose of permit system: improve harvest information. Only fishermen with commercial Conch, Turtles, and lobster (CTL) or an unlimited tidal fish license (TFL) were allowed permits; separate permits had to be obtained for each month; 84 monthly permits issued.

Historically, terrapin harvest amounts varied greatly. Some years there were no reports at all. Dealer/ buyer reports differed from watermen's reports.

2006 permit card results– over 10,000 terrapins harvested:

- 14 participants, only 3 had previously reported harvesting in the previous 2 years
- 2 reported >2000 lbs; 9 reported 100-1000 lbs; 3 reported <100 lbs
- Jan-Apr (May-July closed) relied on dealer reports; Aug-Oct, used permit cards; season is closed Nov-Dec.
- Total harvest in 2006 was 19,000 lbs, or 11,000 terrapins!
- Most were from the Eastern Shore: Eastern Bay, Fishing bay, Nanticoke & Pocomoke Sound
- These data are for the Chesapeake Bay, not coastal bays. Need to check the wording –should say “Maryland waters” so that all waters are covered.
- 2006 harvest was 2.5 x higher than in the past, and it was realized that the restriction of the harvest didn't work as planned
- 2007 management: Moratorium legislative bill in the works
- DNR prefers regulatory process; worried about setting a dangerous precedent if done legislatively (if done for this species, then it could be done for any other species DNR manages, as well)
- Public scoping meeting held on Wednesday, Feb 28 was especially contentious.
- Drafting a management plan – more comprehensive approach to address habitat issues, and by-catch issues. There are ~1000 TFL's, so theoretically, it could have been much, much worse.
- DNR recognizes that prohibition on harvest is not enough to protect the terrapin.

Willem expressed concern that with a moratorium, DNR could reopen the fishery at any time the population was considered “sustainable”; that we would have to be constantly watching over our shoulder for fear that a group of watermen could walk in to DNR and say “there are plenty of turtles now!” Nancy explained that there is no intention to re-open the fishery, and that ‘moratorium’ is standard wording. For the fisheries to be re-opened, there would have to be data provided to justify this, and she doesn't see it ever happening. As examples, the shad moratorium has been in place since 1980 and the sturgeon moratorium for at least 40 years.

Ruth Boettcher will look into VA's regulations for terrapin. [Note: No legal commercial terrapin harvest in VA]

In response to the problem with tracking data in MD, Willem noted that there is a law in OH that makes it a felony to lie on a State form. MD should consider similar legislation, to get more accurate landing reports.

Consolidating State information on regulations and activities (Paula Henry)

During the General meeting in 2004 it was agreed to keep current the summaries of State regulations that had been generated by Christina Watters of The Wetlands Institute. To accomplish this, volunteers are needed to retrieve and consolidate the information, the format and extent of information to be included needs to be resolved. For example, in addition to harvesting regulations, should there be included State restrictions on fishing gear to control by-catch, laws governing pet trade, and efforts in clearing derelict pots etc.

There is a link to this regulation summary on www.dtwg.org. Ilene Eberly has agreed to be the contact and coordinate updates. Willem will notify Regional chairs to send along the information for us to add to this list.

Roger Wood: NJ regulated by two different Departments, resulting in regulation as a fishery, as a non-game species, and some rather bizarre regs. Roger suggested that the WG invite as many State legislative representatives as possible to the August meetings so they can talk to each other and compare notes on some of these issues.

Willem Roosenburg introduced a small discussion on Department of Transportation regulations: turtles need to be individually and humanely packaged. Most of the shipping of terrapins is almost certainly illegal.

Holly Niederriter and others raised the issue of the DT working groups developing a list of suggested/proposed regulations and preparing position papers on terrapin biology, ecological needs, and specific activities related to their conservation. These reports, prepared by the Diamondback Terrapin Working Group, could be distributed for reference to the State representatives and Resource managers. Willem announced that Joe Butler, George Heinrich and he have been working on a document of proposed legislative issues. A draft of this document should be ready to present and open to suggestions at the General Meeting in August. P. Henry suggested that other members of the DTWG could assist if needed.

One issue discussed was the position on owning terrapins as pets. The consensus was it should be made illegal to possess terrapins. Once the pet turtle grows out of the manageable hatchling stage many pet owners release their turtles to the field where their pet has little chance of surviving on its own, and may potentially expose other wildlife to disease. Ruth Boettcher will draft a position paper on turtles as pets. Another issue was related to promoting terrapin aquaculture. Although it can be argued that aquaculture takes the pressure off of wild stock, there is no easy and quick method to distinguish individuals originating from a captive stock or trapped from the field. Despite the distinction between ranch operations that replenish with wild stock, and farms that sell only animals bred and raised in captivity, there were concerns that, because of the delay in reproduction, terrapin farming operations nearly "always come back to ranching." Additionally the overall economic benefit to the US of exporting turtles was questioned. Katelin Mielke presented the watermen's position and suggested the need to explain more fully how reproductive rates of the terrapin may not be high enough to support an aquaculture effort.

Mapping information and activity survey (Holly Niederriter)

Summarized proposal from 3rd symposium to map areas of terrapin research and monitoring activities and survey developed for 2005 regional meeting. Send in either shape files electronically, the area(s) drawn on a map downloaded, or a list of geographic coordinates to Chris Bennett. He agreed to map locations for the entire DTWG. Ruth Boettcher will assist in defining attributes from paper survey information. Both maps and surveys should be sent to Chris Bennett DE Division of Parks and Recreation, 89 Kings Highway, Dover DE 19901, phone 302.739.9239. Plans are to present this map at August symposium.

PIT tag injection demonstration (Ilene Eberly) A very informative demonstration was provided.

Future direction and strategy for Mid Atlantic DTWG (Paula Henry)

The question was raised on coordinating working group activities on a national level. Willem and Paula suggested that regional representatives and officers get together annually, face to face or via conference call to discuss activities and ways in which they can be integrated across regions.

Bringing together representatives from each state's natural resource agency to inform them of enforcement and regulation problems and conservation management needs was discussed. NJ was the only State with no DNR representative present. Suggestions included DTWG members getting on various Commission agendas; inviting representatives to the August general meeting; and planning a special session for government agency representatives. The agenda may be full but Willem Roosenburg will check what may be available.

Field monitoring and research protocols (Paula Henry)

As a follow-up of the 2006 conference calls addressing specific field research and monitoring methods, does the DTWG want to formalize protocols/methods of research? If so, on what topics?

Group consensus is that consistency in monitoring data collection would benefit regulatory efforts. When sending the research/survey area shape files to Chris, information on techniques used should be included. From that comprehensive list, we can generate what data can and should be cross-compared and methods that should be "standardized". Questionnaires from 2005 should be completed and sent to Chris Bennett by June 15th to allow time to compile the information before the August Symposium.

Other protocols not previously addressed:

- Habitat creation
- Handling of derelict fishing gear (ghost pots)
- Establish a clearinghouse for identifying tagged terrapins and their location. A more centralized location would assist nature centers who deal with the public, law enforcement, researchers and others who come across a tagged terrapin. One possibility is to post on the DTWG webpage ongoing and previous projects, tagging methods used, and contact information.
- Establish a terrapin DNA database.

Educational programs (Paula Henry)

The Philadelphia Zoo is working with The Wetlands Institute. Twelve zoos are part of a coalition. They started the program with terrapins, since all of the zoos had them in their collections. They created portable "Terrapin Station" units, and have a table-top version, with crab pots, nest protectors, etc, to address all of the issues surrounding terrapin survival. Informational handouts include suggestions about what people can do. Excluder devices are also given away. Collectively, the 12 zoos have an audience of about 5.23 million people and 9-12 million total visitors at AZA zoos in the Mid Atlantic region. They will bring the display to the summer meeting.

University of MD Gemstone Program is an undergraduate honors program. In the first year, students pick a topic of study. This group selected the terrapin. In the second year, they identify a specific research topic. A draft a proposal is prepared in the Fall, and a final proposal is due in the Spring. This group will focus on predation, and they will be collecting field data this summer. In their senior year, they will write up their thesis. The University also houses the Fear the Turtle Fund. A portion of the proceeds from the sale of Fear the Turtle merchandise goes to the Fear the Turtle Fund for terrapin conservation. Last summer the Fund supported two University of Maryland interns. One worked with Dr. Willem Roosenburg of Ohio University and one with Dr. Paula Henry of Patuxent Wildlife Research Center.

Delaware Nature Center does an interpretive program. There are signs in all of their pull-off sites to get people thinking about terrapins, and asking questions. These have proved very effective, and people often stop by the Center to get more information. One of the tools is a postcard with an attention-grabbing terrapin photo on the front, and terp information on the back. The cards are also placed in restaurants, hotels, etc and have been extremely popular. The terrapin is also an effective hook for getting volunteers. Visitors to this park are, by and large, recreational types, with no particular interest in the nature surrounding them. There has been a noticeable difference in interest with the terrapin effort.

The Wetlands Institute has no clear distinction between research, environment and conservation. Interns for a week or a summer will shadow their college students. International students have come to learn how the Institute does things, and to learn about the terrapins. There is a website terrapiinconservation.org to which anyone here may contribute information. They go to various fairs and festivals to do outreach.

Closing business:

Next regional meeting will be in August at the General meeting.

Paula Henry is stepping down as Chair of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Working Group, and Willem Roosenburg nominated Holly Niederriter and Ruth Boettcher as Co-chairs.

Meeting adjourned at 4:10.

Attendees were invited to view 2 sites created as nesting habitat. Site visits were organized by Holly Niederriter and Chris Bennett.