

Northeast Diamondback Terrapin Working Group
Minutes of Meeting: April 16, 2005
Old Saybrook, CT

Chuck Landry, of the New England Turtle Trust, hosted our meeting on Saturday, April 16. Russell Burke was meeting facilitator. There were 21 attendees, including guests: Their names and interests are listed below:

- Chuck Anicelli: Yale Medical School; Dept. of Immunology; concerned about diamondback terrapin conservation.
- Sal and Barbara Aresco: attending workshop at urging by son. Sal brings perspective of a member of a town planning committee
- Lisa Barrett: works on terrapin conservation on Sandy Neck, Barnstable, Cape Cod
- Barbara Brennessel; Wheaton College; terrapin research and conservation projects; partners with Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary and has written a book about terrapins: "Diamonds in the Marsh; A Natural History of the Diamondback Terrapin" available in 2006.
- Russell Burke: DBT research and conservation: Hofstra University and Chair of the Northeast DTWG. Russ and his students have been active in the terrapin research for the past 6 years.
- Mary Jaynee Chillemi: interested and learning about terrapin conservation
- George Frame: Park Biologist: Gateway National Recreational Area
- Jesse Fruchter: senior ecology major at SUNY-ESF
- Chuck Landry: New England Turtle Trust/ interested in habitat restoration projects.
- Debbie Landry: workshop logistics
- Anne McNulty: Physician with interest in herpetology and terrapin conservation
- Kathy Morgan; animal behaviorist at Wheaton College
- Judy Preston: Ecologist. Founder of a non-profit organization/ land use issues.
- Alan and Anita Salzberg: Herp.Digest
- Laura Saucier-Ecology major: interested in reptiles and conservation,
- Charlotte Sornborger: Barrington Land Conservation Trust; involved with 16 years of monitoring Rhode Island nesting colony; educational programs
- Jim Warner and spouse: Jim worked for the Nature Conservancy and for state and federal wildlife agencies to identify bog turtle habitats in Connecticut.
- Scott Weber: veterinarian at the New England Aquarium; has worked in health assessment of headstarted terrapins at Richard Stockton College in New Jersey.

Russ Burke provided background information describing the loose core of academic diamondback terrapin researchers who have met over the years to discuss their research and conservation efforts. He described the past meetings, held by the group and the formation of the Diamondback Terrapin Working Group at the Jacksonville meeting in 2004. He explained the formation of regional working groups and the attempt to be inclusive in inviting interested folks into the group. It was recognized that not all the parties that could be part of this group were present at the meeting and that we should think of ways to get the word out to others. Russ also reminded participants about the two listservs: our regional listserv and the range-wide listserv.

The group discussed a proposal to identify dbt populations in the Northeast. Russ Burke will produce a map upon which we will indicate historic and present dbt populations as well as locations that provide habitats that are possibly suited for dbts. There was some concern about ensuring that the map is not made available to the public due to fear of collection of dbts, eggs or hatchlings.

The group discussed a list of potential threats to dbts in the Northeast. With each member having up to 2 votes for what we perceived to be the major threats, the poll was as follows:

Predation (12)

Coastal development (10)

Marsh loss (7)

Environmental pollution (4)

Other factors that were identified included: disease, dredging, fishing/shell fishing, road mortality on both paved roads and beach (ORVs), recreation.

It was generally agreed that we know the least about pollution and disease but the suggestion was made that we could explore a connection with SEANET. Along with coastal bird mortality surveys, volunteers might be trained to look for and inventory dead terrapins for the purpose of necropsy.

Commercial harvest and crab pot mortality were ruled out as significant threats. Although we do not have a commercial harvest, in the Northeast, market terrapins appear in certain cities. We will attempt to assess the demand for market terrapins in locations other than NYC/ Chinatown.

Other topics of discussion included Outreach and Education.

Kathy Morgan reminded the group that volunteers such as school groups and scouts contribute to public databases that inventory flora and fauna. The data entry is standardized and this approach might be useful if volunteers participate in terrapin surveys.

Barbara informed the group that Don Lewis and Sue Nourse have developed a K-12 Curriculum project on “Turtles in the Classroom.”

A decision was made to postpone discussion of headstarting although group members offered some positive and negative opinions of the practice.

The group was reminded about the National Diamondback Terrapin Working Group website: <http://www.dtwg.org>.

Action Items:

Aside from the map of terrapin populations in the Northeast, we discussed “next steps:”

- Chuck Landry, Chuck Aneselli and Lisa Barrett agreed to work on a protocol that could be used to assess predation so that we could produce data for various nesting sites. This might be targeted at local school groups, scout troops, and other youth organizations.
- To address the coastal development issue, the group thought it might be useful to produce a document that could educate and assist town planning boards, conservation commissions and other agencies that make decisions about coastal land use. Sal Aresco emphasized the need to get information to planning boards which must abide by local development regulations. In some cases, it may be necessary for us to present compelling evidence that will lead to changes in zoning or land use policy or help to draft regulations that will somehow provide an attractive trade-off for developers. Most importantly, we must convince others why they should care about terrapins and preserving their habitat. Barbara Brennessel and Kathy Morgan will begin the process of creating a “Best Management Practices” document or handbook and will ask for help from other group members.
- (as above) Russ Burke will work with his students to come up with a map of the Northeast region, for mailing to various people that might identify where they have seen terrapins nesting, basking, swimming, and “good habitat but none seen”. Respondents will be encouraged to identify local experts.
- (as above) Russ Burke will contact the SeaNet people and see about including terrapins in their protocol, and to learn about legal issues involved with collecting specimens
- We discussed making a poster or flier or brochure for general distribution throughout the region, which could provide basic education about terrapins and conservation
- It was not decided whether we should have our own website.
- We agreed to meet again next spring. Scott Weber encouraged us to consider holding that meeting at the New England Aquarium in Boston.

