

JOINT DEER WINTER COMPLEX AND CFA PARTNERS MEETING

Tuesday June 23, 2015

Red Rock Lanes and Banquet Center
Ishpeming, Michigan

Members Present:

JR Richardson, Jim Hammill, Randy Charles, Tim Baker, Eric Stier, Warren Suchovsky, George Lindquist, Tony Demboski, Steve Carson, Jeff Joseph, Bernie Hubbard, Terry Minzey, and Russ Mason

CFA Partners Present:

Shawn Hagan, The Forestland Group; Gary Willis, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) – CF and Private Forest Specialist; Charlie Becker, Plum Creek; Todd Wieringa, Molpus Woodlands Group; and Bill Scullon, DNR – WUP-Field Operations Manager

Guests:

Jeff Stampfly, DNR – EUP District Supervisor; Don Mankee, DNR – WUP District Supervisor; Bob Doepker, DNR – Natural Resources Manager; Lowell Larson, landowner; Alan Ettenhofer, UP Whitetails Association; Rory Mattson, Delta County Conservation District; G. Dale McNamee, representing Senator Casperson; and Stacy Haughey, DNR – UP Regional Coordinator

Introduction and general discussion

Jim Hammill gave a quick history of the workgroup, citing the need to address deer concerns due to weather conditions of the past three years and the catastrophic decline in the UP population. The group is comprised of 13 members, 11 of who are professionals in wildlife or forestry and two who are heavily involved in sportsmen's groups. Habitat work is being done across all land ownerships. NRCS has funding for private non-industrial lands. \$2M is on CFR land. Today's meeting has key people from the CFA partners, is there any room for winter deer yard management opportunities on your lands? This is educational nothing is mandated we would like to put into practice where it is economic and feasible management plans in the 57 Deer Winter Complexes. We are not here to tell anyone how to do anything, just to identify problems and work with landowners to create any opportunities for deer management. We are creating management plans for each of the 57 DWC. Steve Carson has been recruited to be the lead on the management plans. His position is currently a half-time position 50% funded by the Wildlife division with additional funding from the Safari Club International to make Mr. Carson's position full-time for a year. Terry Minzey thanked the CFA member for joining the meeting today.

Mr. Hammill reviewed the CFA letter (attached) from Forest Resources Division Chief Bill O'Neill. Eric Stier said there were no differences in how GMO manages their lands, Jeff Joseph and Shawn Hagan agreed, Mr. Hagan added that it is a win-win situation. Gary Willis offered the following information on CFA lands – there is a lot of flexibility silvicultural-wise. The \$1.25/ac is a tax break in order to grow product, without the product, the townships are losing in terms of jobs. On State land, there is a retention schedule for white oak, cherry, cedar and other species. On the non-industrial lands, the tax incentive requires owners to have a management plan for product.

A big concern for the consultants working with individual CFA landowners is how to balance making money selling timber and having land set aside for hunting. According to the Act, there has to be a management plan in place covering the entire ownership.

In some of these ownerships there are non-commercial trees – in the stands with hardwood and hemlock. What is the economic impact of harvesting the oversized-non merchantable hemlock trees or deferring or delaying treatment? Is getting the pulpwood to the market important vs. deferring an over-mature hemlock?

Warren Suchovsky suggested patch cuts; leave money in the stands. It is not top dollar stumpage, but the value is more in the deer habitat than product. 10 – 20% of the people he works with have management plans.

JR Richardson posed a hypothetical scenario. Lands in QF/CFA with a deer management plan can get \$8K for their product, at the same time without a plan they can get \$10K. It seems to be a matter of conservational attitude to make informed decisions.

Russ Mason pointed out that lands in CFA are based on productivity, not habitat driven. These plans can help meet the objective for deer habitat, but the overall management plan absolutely must meet the protocols of the Act. Yes, this is what the forest management plan says, but this is also what we can do for the habitat. The consultants can help write a plan that satisfies both the Act and habitat management.

George Lindquist asked if leaving a certain amount of trees for wildlife, larger hemlock for forest certification and BMPs criteria. CFA lands are not tied to forest certification and the larger landowners are following BMP guidelines.

Steve Carson – website update

http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-65134_72500---,00.html

This is where landowners and plan writers can obtain information. The DWC are listed by county and a plan is in place for an interactive map with links to the specific plans and other pertinent information. Sections of the website include – About the Upper Peninsula Habitat Workgroup, Upper Peninsula Deer Winter Range, and Managing Upper Peninsula Deer Winter Ranges with general management plans and a landowner guide to white tail deer.

Mr. Minzey suggested including a bullet point to describe some of the mechanisms to help fund their project and which would be the most appropriate fund. Also, describe the WHG links and a general discussion for grants and DHIPI programs outlining the minimum and maximum.

Mr. Richardson asked how we can communicate this information. Email forest consultants and conservation districts. Have Michigan Outdoors and TV6 do stories. Subscribe to the DNR communications/updates for this specific topic. For the landowners who would not want to access information directly from the DNR website, have the conservation districts and sportsmen's groups create a write up on their site with a hot link directly to the DNR website.

Direct website suggestions to Mr. Carson.

Deer biology – in brief

Mr. Hammill stated that when woody diet with green growth is not available, then the health of the deer is on a slow decline. These deer have lower percentages of body fat. The deer that are able to browse in winter have a stable body fat composition.

Utility corridors

These corridors transect DWR out of the 1,800 miles of utility/transmission lines, 400 miles are through DWR. Semco was not listed as they mainly are in urban areas and along the highways. ATC is a key owner of the utility corridor. Their contact in Marquette is very interested in helping and improving the corridor for wintering deer. Great Lakes is also a willing partner. The companies are on a 5 to 10 year herbicide and mowing maintenance schedule, in fact it is closer to every 10 years. Could the corridor be disk seeded with clover and be mown yearly in August? It is a cost concern for the companies. There are discussions for test projects based on cost and feasibility. What sportsmen's groups could participate in these types of projects? Are there possibilities between Plum Creek and the corridors which intersect with DWC? Investigate the possibilities. Great Lakes offer grants for additional work on their corridors, is there a cost share? Alan Ettenhofer was in Plum Creek's office discussing projects to identify and look

at 7.5 miles of corridor through their land. They are discussing access issues and will put in for a grant to see if any projects are feasible. Mr. Ettenhofer will also be in contact with ATC.

Lowell Larson brought up the issue of cost sharing with county inmates. Marquette Conservation District utilized inmates on a project. For each day worked, two days are deducted from their sentence. Mr. Minzey said inmates from the Cusino prison camp were able to conduct opening maintenance at a cost of \$1.27 per acre. Maintaining the same opening would have cost \$27.00 per acre. This option can save money and possibly used as an in kind match for grant purposes.

With corridor projects is the plan to begin to spread the deer out of the complexes and concentrate along the entire corridor? For right now, we need to concentrate on the corridors in the winter ranges. There definitely is future potential for interest in projects along the entire corridor.

Mr. Willis brought up the idea of increased productivity in the corridor which would again be something considered as future potential.

Deer yard land acquisition

Acquiring more State land is politically sensitive. People are economically depressed and forced to harvest deer winter shelter. There is an area with 2K acres of good cedar that has a forest management plan. The plan encourages cutting 30 blocks of cedar across the ownership which would lower the quality deer cover in that area. The owner either has to sell off the property or cut. Can the State purchase this land? It is in a deer winter area with high quality cedar. If it is cut it most likely will not regenerate. The habitat will be lost. This workgroup has not had a strong statement on acquisitions. The State buys lands for different purposes. In general can Wildlife or the DNR pick up land in a deer year? Mr. Richardson said we shouldn't put constraints on the workgroup; the workgroup is not against conservation easements, trades, or purchase.

Mr. Minzey shared some examples of land transactions with the Graymont agreement. 830 acres in the UP will be a direct land exchange. Monies from the sale of 1,700 acres will be placed in a State-wide fund to purchase other lands. The criteria to purchase the land will be based on the following: is the land in a deer winter habitat, is it within the boundary of the 1836 Treaty, or inside forest unit boundaries. There is a WLD wish list including a 480 acre parcel in Hulbert with prime cedar and uplands. Plum Creek properties, is there an opportunity to swap and divest? There are two parcels in Gulliver that meet the ceded 1836 Treaty criteria. Vega and Menge Creek are also areas of interest. FIS is interested in obtaining a parcel in the Harlow Lake area. All of the interested parcels are in a DWC except for 10 acres in the AuTrain refuge area.

Is there too much public land? Mr. Carson and Ms. Haughey will look into what acquisitions/ purchases mean to Baraga County and the townships in terms of land ownership and tax incentives. \$2.50/ac in CF lands vs. \$4/ac in PILT. Clarify what the townships receive from State, Federal and other revenues. Do we need a 'white paper' to the legislature? According to a meeting attended by Ms. Haughey, there will be a small increase of tribal lands. There is about 6% in current ownership.

A high priority for the workgroup is to clarify what we need to acquire and why. As in the previously mentioned case of the 2K acres of high quality deer habitat that might be clear cut in order to make a profit for the owner. Mr. Mason did state that the singular priority for WLD is winter deer yards in the UP. There was discussion regarding the State ownership land-cap. We can't secure them all. The workgroup has created a sub-group to identify and prioritize DWR acquisitions. The discussions will include how large of a summer range it would encompass, obligate vs. conditional, and areas of high importance.

The sub-group members are: Terry Minzey, Dennis Nezich, Bob Doepker, Steve Carson, Jeff Joseph, Eric Stier, Bernie Hubbard, and Warren Suchovsky.

Lake Gogebic DWC Management

The draft plan was discussed. The goals and objectives of the stands are to enhance deer habitat on the winter range, not much in terms of silvicultural aspects. It is not an end-all silvicultural guideline, more of a management suggestion. Randy Charles said the Ottawa can work with the plan, it helps define the goals. Mr. Stier with GMO said this is now starting to hit home, a good place to start. The hardwood component is fine. Does this DWC need to be this big? Some of the stands in the deer yard do not fit in the 50/50 cover/food resources. It is a move 'toward' the optimal 50/50 rather than 'achieve'. Todd Wieringa from Molpus Woodlands Group noticed there was no mention of regeneration or any cedar/hemlock goals. Mr. Charles said there has not been good cedar or hemlock regen in this area. We focus more on White pine regen/planting.

General discussion

Mr. Lindquist brought up leaving the tops during winter harvest and the issue of driving over the tops, leaving less food available. It was noted that it is more of an operational issue rather than a management objective. Charlie Becker said that there is about a 10-week window to harvest lowlands in the winter, now we are adding restrictions on upland areas. Warren Suchovsky said driving over the tops in winter is more for aesthetics, to crush down the big piles also helps with rutting and soil compaction issues. The deer are still feeding on the tops.

There was discussion on the wording of 'shelterwood with reserves' (page 10, second bullet) is 70% canopy closure more of a selection with a b.a. 130 in the hemlock? This was to illustrate a harvest technique between a clear cut and selection. Hopefully with this in between harvest, some regen will occur while leaving some shelter. Will lack of or inability to regen conflict with forest certification or CFA?

We will need to engage with the landowners before moving forward ensuring this plan fits in with the corporate policies of GMO and Keweenaw Lands.

Put utility contact information on the website for private landowners who have a utility corridor through their land.

Have the sportsmen's clubs give a plug to the workgroup on their websites. Expose people to what the purpose of the workgroup is, what is available and link to the DWC website for more information.

Do we wait until the DWC templates are available or do we get basic information out to people now?

We can address non-forest management on smaller private tracts of land with the private land owner guide that is on the website.

What hard mast species do we plant? Mr. Minzey brought up concerns of white vs. red oak and the effects of climate change.

Mr. Charles said Enbridge is working on a 100 foot wide corridor right now. What are they planting?

Can sportsmen's groups speak with them now to make suggestions?

Ms. Haughey and Mr. Lindquist will explore the issues of trail development and recreational use at the Harlow Lake area.

Return comments to Mr. Carson on the Lake Gogebic Plan by July 10th for incorporation. Adoption of the Plan will be at the end of July for committee endorsement.

North Perkins and the Sturgeon River draft plans will be completed next. A request was made for a plan in the east, perhaps #25. Mr. Charles said that when the Sturgeon River DWC is completed, Mary Rasmussen can write their plan in the Ottawa and start the project.

Mr. Suchovsky asked that the workgroup make a recommendation to the legislature to move the dates forward a year in order for small CFA landowners can get out of the Act and enter into the QFP without penalty. Mr. Richardson agreed that a recommendation would fit in with the goals of the workgroup. As chairman of the workgroup, Mr. Hammill will submit a recommendation letter from the group.

Invitations for suggested speakers at the next meeting: Chris Hoving, Climate change biologist and Bob Heyd, Forest health specialist to discuss Spruce budworm.

Next meeting at the end of August, details to follow.



RICK SNYDER
GOVERNOR

STATE OF MICHIGAN
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES
LANSING



KEITH CREAGH
DIRECTOR

May 29, 2015

VIA EMAIL

Dear Jim:

Thank you for contacting the Michigan Department of Natural Resource (MDNR) regarding Commercial Forest (CF) compliance as it relates to management for winter deer habitat. Based on a cursory GIS analysis, we estimate that over 300,000 acres of CF land occurs within the Deer Wintering Complexes (DWC) identified by the MDNR. There are over 400 private ownerships including industrial ownership, other large land holders, and over 300 private individuals with small acreage holdings less than 100 acres in size.

As you know, the primary purpose of the CF property tax incentive is to support the timber industry in Michigan. Although enhancing wildlife habitat is a benefit from forest management, the CF landowners' primary management goal must be timber production. The statute requires that management plans "optimize production, regeneration, and utilization of the forest resources". In addition, the statute requires that the land produce "tree species that have economic and commercial value", and produce "a commercial stand of timber within a reasonable period of time". The good news is that there is nothing within these constraints that prevents landowners from selecting a management plan that both conforms to the purposes of CF AND benefits deer.

The essential requirement is that every productive forest stand, including cedar and hemlock stands have a harvest schedule that conforms to accepted silvicultural practices.

Commercial Forest land is not legally subject to water quality Best Management Practices (BMPs), which are voluntary in Michigan, nor to Forest Certification standards. However, the MDNR continues to encourage sustainable forestry management and compliance with water quality BMPs on CF land.

With regard to within stand retention of white cedar and hemlock, recommended silvicultural practices include the retention of cedar or hemlock trees for the purpose of reforestation; or for greater volume production on the trees that remain; or for retaining stand biodiversity (primarily in locations where cedar or hemlock cannot be regenerated and when cedar retention does not interfere with regeneration of other species.)

A landowner's decision to follow deer winter habitat management recommendations on already enrolled property may require an amendment to the landowner's forest management plan if there is a significant change in prescription. The landowner would

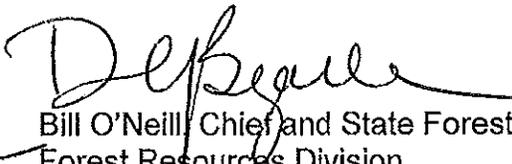
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also need to submit a new Plan Certification that references the amended plan. Plan amendments become mandatory for the landowner to follow.

We are looking forward to continued work with the Deer Habitat Workgroup developing habitat strategies that work for both objectives.

If you have any further questions on the CF program, please feel free to contact Ms. Shirley Businski, Commercial Forest Program Leader, Forest Resources Division, at 517-284-5849; or DNR-FRD, 525 West Allegan, P.O. Box 30452, Lansing, Michigan 48909-4952; or you may contact me.

Sincerely,


for Bill O'Neill, Chief and State Forester
Forest Resources Division
517-284-5876