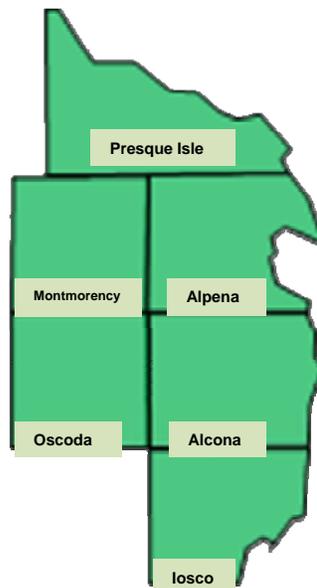


**Northeastern Lower Peninsula**  
**Agriculture and Natural Resource**  
**Stewardship Cooperative**

**Pilot Project:**

**Managing Bovine TB in the**

**DMU 487**



**Jeff Kala – Beef Cattle Producer**  
**Wayne Sitton – Turtle Lake Club**  
**Rick Ferguson – Business Owner and Sportsman**  
**Galen Schalk – Dairy Producer**  
**John Varnell – Graduate Student**  
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**Bob Kenyon – Business Owner and Sportsman**  
**Tom Banks – Crop Farmer**

We, the members of the Cooperative in DMU 487, submit the recommendations contained herein to the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA), and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

The purpose is to recommend best management practices for wild cervids, domestic livestock, forestry, and agriculture. The ultimate goal is to reduce bovine TB in DMU 487.

We ask these agencies to:

- review and critique this proposal
- work with the Cooperative to navigate any legal and policy hurdles that may exist
- implement these recommendations prior to **March 31, 2010**, and
- authorize this project (in its entirety) for a period of no less than six years.

This Cooperative will provide oversight to this project – with input from DNRE, MDA, and USDA – and reserves the right to make adjustments in the management plan based on new data or technology. The Cooperative will prepare and release an annual progress report; the results will be published by the agencies.

### **Background**

The DNRE, MDA, and USDA recognize that citizens of DMU 487 have unique viewpoints on wild cervids, domestic livestock, and agricultural practices. In particular, Bovine Tuberculosis (bTB) has created a unique challenge for both local residents and state agencies. While millions of taxpayers' dollars have been spent in an attempt to eradicate the disease, people living in the area feel that little has been accomplished.

The Cooperative realizes that without efforts by DNRE, MDA, and the USDA the bTB prevalence could have reached epidemic proportions. However, the local view of these agencies is far less than favorable. In contrast, a few, larger landowners in the area have been successful in reducing the prevalence of bTB in the heart of DMU 452. They have implemented sound management practices based on scientific principles, and continue to document a decline in bTB prevalence – despite the possible immigration of positive carriers. These documented successes began to open communication between the hunting and agricultural communities; this ultimately led to the formation of this Cooperative.

DMU 487 is comprised of a solid mix of family-owned agriculture ventures. bTB has led to great hardship for these hard-working families. The remainder of the larger land parcels remains in the hands of land stewards who manage natural resources with focus on wildlife. The reduction in bTB prevalence rates is crucial for the co-existence of these different stakeholders.

The uniqueness and success of this pilot project should be of great interest to the state and federal agencies involved. DMU 487 is comprised mostly of private lands over which the state has limited control and access and where, in most cases, it is unwelcome. Dismissing the pilot project will lead to greater deterioration of state

credibility with the landowners and the possibility of non-compliance of regulations with the potential of increased bTB prevalence rates. Unless drastic measures are implemented – and prevalence rates decrease – our communities will see the loss of farms, more fragmentation from hunting property sales, and deeper loss of revenue to local merchants.

*This Cooperative was formed at the request of state and federal agencies. The purpose is to bring together stakeholders for a common cause – to improve the natural resources with the goal of reducing bTB prevalence rates.*

The Cooperative recognizes the diverse interests of most of the citizens in the DMU 487 area. This issue will require an adaptive management approach and some of these practices could be controversial.

The Cooperative has debated and agreed on the issues and stands behind our recommendations. The Cooperative is supported by industry with the appropriate documentation attached. We would encourage the DNRE, MDA, and Natural Resources Commission (NRC) to accept this pilot proposal in its entirety and to form a working relationship with the Cooperative to implement this plan by **March 31, 2010**. Inaction by the state will have a very negative effect in DMU 487, and the result will complicate any further efforts proposed by the DNRE, MDA, USDA and other agencies.

### Vision

Our vision is to establish best management practices for wild cervids, domestic livestock, forestry, and agriculture. The ultimate goal is to reduce bTB in DMU 487. The plan will require involvement from all landowners, most stakeholders, and all industries that work in DMU 487.

### Objective

*The pilot project's main objective is to ultimately lower bTB rates. Healthy, sustainable resource management will be the focus.*

This pilot project's main objective is to ultimately lower bTB rates. This will be accomplished by implementing sound and proven management techniques over a broader landscape.

Healthy, sustainable resource management will be the focus. While public opinion and social acceptance were considered, scientific practices were given preference.

The Cooperative will recommend the needed tools that must be readily available to property owners and managers.

### **Pilot Project Recommendations**

#### **Location: DMU 487**

We recommend that six counties – comprised of Presque Isle, Montmorency, Alpena, Alcona, Iosco, and Oscoda – be a stand-alone management unit for the duration of this project.

### **TB Hotspots**

#### **What is the threshold to be a hot-spot?**

Known concentrations of bTB positive deer have been identified by the DNRE and MDA. Many of these “hotspots” are on private lands that cannot be regulated, managed, or controlled. DNRE’s current strategy has been to ban feeding and baiting in the northeastern Lower Peninsula in order to reduce artificial concentrations of deer and to reduce the deer herd by liberalizing the availability of antlerless deer licenses. However, some parcels of land still harbor infected populations of deer that continue to spill over into surrounding areas.

#### **Recommendations**

- We recommend these bTB spatially-clustered “hotspots” be identified in greater detail and that specific management recommendations be made to target such areas, currently and in the future.
- We also recommend that all heads from deer located within “hotspots” be turned in for bTB testing.
- We recommend that a detailed report be available annually to the Cooperative and the public.

We support the use of USDA Wildlife Services to remove wildlife from infected livestock operations and liberal issuance of disease control permits be made to infected livestock operations.

#### **Rationale**

We recognize that wildlife diseases can occur randomly, clustered, or both spatially in a population. We recognize that previous bTB efforts have identified spatially-clustered cases of bTB in wildlife and domestic livestock. Only when these animals can be targeted will we break the cycle of transmission to wildlife and livestock.

## Data Collection

It has been taken into consideration that the DNRE currently records data on deer harvested in Michigan. However, the number of deer-check stations was significantly reduced in 2009 and previous data are not specifically targeted towards deer management.

### Recommendations

- We recommend the following data be collected on all cervid in the new management unit.
- We also recommend that a trained biologist record the associated data on individual animals (at least the age, lactation status, and antler score.)
  - *Dressed weight* – Weight of a harvested cervic where all offal is removed.
  - *Age* – Age of white-tailed deer by tooth wear and eruption suggested by Severinghaus 1949, elk by cementum annuli. *Age Classes* : 0.5, 1.5, 2.5, 3.5, 4.5, 5.5, 6.5+
  - *Lactation Status* – Determination of whether the individual female is in milk or not.
  - *Boone and Crockett score* – Standardized antler measuring system.
  - *Location* – Location of harvest specific to County, Township, Range, and Section.
  - *Disease presence or suspicion* – Reporting of any suspicious growths or abnormalities suggestive of wildlife disease present.

### Rationale

We realize that aging deer by tooth wear and eruption is a subjective measure. Biologists are right 50% to the exact age, but are very accurate +/- one year by this method. However, it is a national standardized measurement, and we recommend that it be used; it provides demographics on the herd, which we feel holds more relevance than the exact age of any one deer.

*Cementum annuli* procedure removes a cross-section of the tooth where the age is determined under the microscope by counting the number of growth rings. This procedure has a higher degree of accuracy to specific age (83% Hamlin et al. 2000.) We are not recommending *cementum annuli* work for white-tail deer; the associated costs of the procedure do not outweigh the landscape level management goals in the perspective.

With associated costs considered, we do recommend *cementum annuli* work to determine age of elk, whereby fewer elk are harvested.

Lactation measures are a good means of determining reproductive status of the cervid herd.

Boone and Crockett scoring system will standardize antler measurement procedures.

Harvest location will provide the number of individual deer harvested in a given area, and pinpoint disease issues currently and in the future.

## Data Collection – How are we going to do it?

### Recommendations

- We recommend that DNRE develop, promote, and operate a voluntary online check-in system for hunters, whereby hunters fill in required data for their harvest within 48 hours of the end of the season.
- We recommend the DNRE continue running and operating deer check-in stations in this management unit.
- We recommend a mandatory check-in process during the rifle season only in this management unit.
- We recommend that DNRE accept Certified Private Cooperatives' data. Non-Certified Private Cooperatives must check deer into state deer check-in stations during the rifle season.

### Rationale

We recognize compliance issues are the focus of discussion for deer check-in procedures. Present technology eliminates the issues of previous online procedures – hunters would be able to check-in deer from their cell phones. Mandatory check-in for hunters during the rifle season would allow DNRE staff to collect data on 70% of deer harvested in this management unit (DNRE Wildlife Report No. 3499.) This would allow for reduction of DNRE budget, by shortening open check-in station times and allowing for two weeks of DNRE-manned check-in stations to be open for hunter easement and proper data collection.

## QDM and Antler Restrictions

### Recommendations

- We recommend that male deer be tagged with an “Antlered Buck Tag” if it has a hardened antler that measures at least one inch protruding from the base of the Pedicle/Burr.
- We recommend that the following antler restrictions be implemented for the entire management unit with the exception of the “Youth Season” where any buck may be harvested.

**First Buck Tag** – has an inside spread of twelve (12) inches or at least three (3) points on one side.

**Second Buck Tag** – has an inside spread of twelve (12) inches or at least four (4) points on one side.

- We recommend that only one “Antlered Buck Tag” be used per season (archery, firearm, or primitive firearm) with a maximum of two per year.

## **Rationale**

Tagging all male deer will increase our knowledge of the buck harvest in the management unit, and will reduce the number of yearling bucks harvested. Antler restrictions and tag limitation by season will significantly reduce the number of 1.5 and 2.5 year old bucks harvested annually.

### **Antlerless Deer**

#### **Recommendations**

- We recommend “Antlerless Deer Tag” to be used for female deer and/or nubbin bucks, and male deer with less than one inch of antler protruding from the base of the Pedicle/Burr.
- We recommend all male deer harvested and tagged with “Antlerless Deer Permits” to be reported as bucks in their age classes.
- We recommend that an “Antlerless Deer License” accompany every buck tag purchased.

#### **Rationale**

These proposed actions will improve biological data for *previously termed antlerless* deer, which included female deer, and male deer having three inches or less of antler protruding from the base of the Pedicle/Burr. Data will now be reported in proper sex and age class. Promotion of antlerless harvest and having sportspeople carrying antlerless tags should encourage hunters to harvest female deer.

### **Wildlife Risk-A-Syst**

#### **Recommendations**

- We recommend that livestock producers will be expected to take reasonable precautions, based on biologic, economic, and sociologic practices, to prevent the transmission of bovine TB from wildlife to livestock. Wildlife risk mitigation should be specific, yet flexible, to each farm and the farm’s proximity to known TB infected wildlife or livestock operations.
- We recommend the WILDLIFE RISK\*A\*SYST program be used as the guide for producers to become Wildlife Risk Mitigated (certified.)
- All risk reduction plans should address the following areas:
  - Feeding cattle safely
  - Storing cattle feed safely
  - Watering cattle safely

- Producers will become Wildlife Risk Mitigated by:
  - Completing the Wildlife Risk\*A\*Syst assessment tool
  - Committing to a Wildlife Risk Mitigation action plan for their farm
  - Implementing the plan
  - Having the MDA verify the plan as having been implemented
- We support tying state and federal indemnity payments to the development and implementation of a WRMP on every farm in the Modified Accredited TB Zone.
- We recommend research into a herd buyout program for cattle producers in DMU 452 with emphasis on proximity to TB hotspots.

### **Rationale**

Wildlife Risk Mitigation is prevention. Because TB positive cattle herds continue to be discovered, producers should take precautions to reduce contact of livestock to wildlife and wildlife to livestock feed and water. Producers should implement any disease prevention measure that is effective, practical, and realistic. Livestock producers that take reasonable precautions to protect their herd will help maintain customer confidence and market access.

### **Available Tools**

- We recommend that involved agencies be cooperative in providing stakeholders with the needed tools to accomplish goals of the Cooperative.
  - Disease Control Permits
  - Crop Damage Permits
  - Consulting
  - Fencing
  - Watering Systems
  - Feed Storage and Containment
  - Other tools as needed or become available

### **Crop Production Practices**

- We recommend:
  - Cull products spread at agronomic rates
  - Harvesting of field crops at reasonable times
  - Responsible storage of commodities
  - Harvested hay removed from fields by November 15<sup>th</sup> of harvest year
  - We recommend inspections and complaint investigations be conducted by the appropriate agency in a timely manner according to the operation

## Permits

- We recommend that no disease control permits be issued unless landowner is a certified land for hunters, and no permits be issued to farmers/producers unless their farm is Wildlife Risk\*A\*Syst certified or in the process of implementing a plan.

### **Rationale**

Sport hunting versus defending livelihood.

Sportsmen are concerned with abuse of disease control permits for the purpose of shooting deer, and especially bucks, out of season. However, consideration must be given to understand the importance of protecting a livestock operation and livelihood from possible transmission of bTB from wildlife to livestock.

## Poaching and Law Enforcement

The face of the poacher in the state of Michigan has changed dramatically over the years. Violations of wildlife laws in the past could frequently be attributed to attempts to put "food on the table." Today's violations are often the result of a very different motivation. Today we routinely see cases of commercialization of the state's wildlife. The end result of this theft of Michigan's wildlife robs the state's economy of valuable resources. An example of the kind of poaching we see today is the criminal who targets a particular trophy white-tailed deer. One ring of poachers in northeast lower Michigan make a habit of driving around until a trophy animal is located, then work together to sneak onto land (trespass) and kill the buck. Often, only the head or antlers are removed and the rest of the animal is left to waste.

Legal sportsmen can go a lifetime hoping for the opportunity to harvest a trophy animal. We strongly feel that mature bucks have a direct impact on property values and local and state economies. We feel that the illegal harvest of our resources also hinders the ability to recruit and retain Michigan hunters.

We ask that the DNRE, NRD, and State Legislators take action to increase fines and enforcement of these violations in order to show that these actions will no longer be tolerated.

We make the following recommendation in an attempt to stop illegal poaching. These recommendations are not intended to be directed at sportsmen who make honest mistakes during legal hunter hours and seasons.

### **Recommendations**

- We recommend that fines for poaching white-tailed deer and elk be implemented using the standard Boone and Crocket scoring method. Scoring will be conducted using a one-quarter inch wide steel tape, and measurement will be taken to the nearest one-eighth inch. Antlers will be measured at the earliest convenience after the arrest and no drying time will be required.

- We recommend the following fines:
  - Antlerless white-tailed deer - \$250.00
  - Antlered white-tailed deer, regardless of size, will be fined \$240.00 plus \$12.50 per inch Boone and Crocket Score.

**Example**

60" Boone and Crocket score illegally killed buck: \$250.00 base fine + (60" x \$12.50) = \$1,000.00

- We further support the right of seizure and loss of vehicle, weapons, and equipment used in the violation, and in addition to:
  - Upon conviction of holding, taking, buying, selling, or possessing an animal in violation of this recommendation, the wildlife chief shall revoke, until payment of the restitution is made, each hunting license, fishing license, fur harvester's license, turkey license, or hunting stamp and any combination thereof issued to this violator. No fee paid for such licenses or permits will be refunded or returned to the person.
  - Upon revoking a person's license(s), the chief, or their designee, will immediately send a notice of the action by certified mail to the last known address of the person. The notice shall state the action taken, order the person to surrender the revoked license or licenses, and state that the DNRE will not afford a hearing.
  - The wildlife chief or authorized representative will have the authority to bring suit and pursue civil action to recover the possession and restitution value of any wild animal held, taken, bought, sold, or possessed in violation.

**Baiting and Feeding**

We support the State of Michigan's baiting and feeding ban. We are encouraged that actions have been taken in order to reduce artificial concentrations of deer, thus reducing the possible spread of contagious diseases as a result of "bait" or "feeding" sites. We encourage the state to maintain the ban and encourage property owners to manage and enhance their properties for wildlife and recreational opportunities.

Despite a ban of artificial feeding and baiting, this practice continues with alarming regularity. Enforcement of this ban is difficult and, at times, nearly impossible. Often, even though an individual is cited, a local prosecutor or judge dismisses the case or a negligible fine is issued.

**Recommendations**

- We recommend that the DNRE work with state legislators to implement a standard fine for baiting or feeding.
- We recommend that baiting and feeding be a civil infraction where convicted persons be responsible for court fines and costs associated with the violation.

- We support a fine of \$250 for any baiting or feeding violation, and \$250 per day when a baiting or feeding site is not cleaned up, or for subsequent violations.
- We recommend that anyone harvesting a deer over an illegal bait pile be charged with poaching. Persons caught harvesting a deer over bait would be fined \$250 for baiting and fined and punished accordingly for the poaching infraction, as stated previously in the Poaching and Law Enforcement section.

### Conclusion

We thank you for considering our proposal to assist in further reducing bTB rates in northeast lower Michigan. Given the timeline, the millions of taxpayer dollars spent, and the loss of economic prosperity to our area, we hope you consider our new plan to help bridge the divide and combat the dark cloud of bovine tuberculosis which has split our communities and is holding our region back.

We encourage the DNRE, MDA, and Natural Resources Commission (NRC) to accept this pilot proposal in its entirety and to form a working relationship with the Cooperative.

We ask these agencies to:

- Review and critique this proposal
- Work with the Cooperative to navigate any legal and policy hurdles that may exist
- Implement these recommendations prior to **March 31, 2010**, and authorize this project in its entirety for a period of no less than six years.

Thank you.

Jeff Kala	Wayne Sitton
Rick Ferguson	Galen Schalk
John Varnell	Bob Kenyon
Tom Banks	