

Eastern Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council (EUPCAC)

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, December 16, 2020

6:00-8:30pm Eastern

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Chair: Tom Buckingham Vice-Chair: Gary Gorniak Secretary: Allan Augustyn

Council Members Present

Allan Augustyn

Kristy Beyer

Tom Buckingham

Ken Collier

Jeff Cox

Grant Dewitt

AJ Downey

Al Garavaglia

Gary Gorniak

Tim Hass

Bernie Hubbard

Travis Kangas

Tom Paquin

Mark Spencer

Jack Thomas

Council Members Excused/Absent

Kevin Erickson

Angel Portice

Tony Wright

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff Liaisons & Guests

Ashley Autenrieth, Wildlife Division, Lansing

Christina Baugher, Fisheries Division, Lansing

Kristi Dahlstrom, Executive Assistant, Marquette

Paul Gaberdiel, Parks & Recreation Division-UP Trails, Newberry

Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy, Marquette

Dan Kennedy, Wildlife Division, Lansing

Cory Kovacs, Fisheries Division, Newberry

Charlie Maltby, Parks & Recreation Division, Newberry

Cody Norton, Wildlife Division, Marquette

Dave Nyberg, Natural Resources Commission

JR Richardson, Natural Resources Commission

Brian Roell, Wildlife Division, Marquette

Tom Seablom, Forest Resources Division, Marquette

Kristie Sitar, Wildlife Division, Newberry

Sgt. Calvin Smith, Law Enforcement Division, Newberry

Jon Spieles, Marketing & Outreach Division, Newberry

Michelle Zellar, Facilities & Operations Division, Newberry

Call to Order/Current Council Member Introductions

The Eastern Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council (EUPCAC) meeting began with a welcome by **Ms. Haughey**, DNR UP Field Deputy. She introduced herself and thanked Council members, guests and NRC Commissioners JR Richardson from Ontonagon and Dave Nyberg from Skandia for joining the meeting. She indicated the meeting will be guided with a powerpoint presentation and asked those attending to review a slide with virtual meeting tips. She then provided an overview of the Upper Peninsula Citizens' Advisory Councils (East and West), which are advisory groups to the DNR. She stated agenda topics such as those on this evening's agenda are developed with the Council and noted, for example, wolves have been discussed approximately 27 times in the Council's 11 years which indicates it is a very important topic and is on the agenda again for this meeting. She displayed a listing of guests who registered to attend the meeting and welcomed them.

Chair Buckingham also welcomed everyone in attendance (50 total) and officially called the meeting to order at 6:01pm. He asked Council members to introduce themselves on screen. Afterwards, he began the meeting with the adoption of the agenda.

Adoption of Agenda

Chair Buckingham asked the Council if there were any corrections or additions to the agenda; none were brought forth. **Mr. Downey motioned to adopt the agenda as presented; Mr. Cox supported the motion. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: See listing on page 1. Motion carried.**

NRC Commissioner Richardson asked for a moment of silence in remembrance of former Senator Tom Casperson who recently passed away; **Chair Buckingham** graciously agreed. A moment of silence was observed by the Council.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Chair Buckingham asked the Council if there were any corrections to the October 20, 2020 EUPCAC meeting minutes, which were emailed to the Council previously; none were brought forth. **Mr. Downey motioned to approve the minutes as submitted; Mr. Garavaglia supported the motion. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: See listing on page 1. Motion carried.**

Chair Comments

Chair Buckingham stated he will forgo any comments and move to the Public Comments portion of the agenda.

Public Comments

Chair Buckingham stated he has adjusted this section of the agenda to maximum the time needed to cover all aspects of the wolf topic with Vice Chair Gorniak first explaining a proposed resolution regarding wolf management, then allowing those public attendees who registered to speak on the topic, an overview by DNR, and finally consideration of action on the resolution by the Council.

Vice Chair Gorniak began reading from the 2015 wolf management plan, stating...*"The DNR has a public trust responsibility for the management of all wildlife species and populations. Primary legal authority for wildlife management and regulation comes from the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act, Public Act 451 of 1994."* He indicated the management plan does not state the ideal wolf population size, nor does it state the effects wolves have on wildlife. The 2015 plan only addresses problem wolves that prey on livestock and hunting dogs. He stated since wildlife is throughout the UP, he is requesting a gray wolf harvest to include the entire UP, and as a management tool, including hunting and trapping. He asked fellow Council members to support the resolution to manage wolves on an equal playing field with all wildlife. *[Shown on screen and distributed to Council members via email previously: **The EUPCAC recommends the following additions to the MDNR Wolf Management Plan: 1) expand the gray wolf harvest area to the entire U.P.; 2) add both hunting and trapping to be legal methods of take for wolf harvest; and 3) include a goal of maintaining a population of 300-400 gray wolves in the U.P.]*** He stated he understands the wolf has been listed as endangered so there is little the DNR can do until they are delisted on January 4, 2021. He further noted *"we as conservationists and the DNR as wildlife management managers have to work together to make sure all wildlife thrive."*

- 1. Registered Public Comments regarding Wolves:** **Chair Buckingham** opened the floor for those who registered to provide comments regarding this agenda topic.

- *Mr. Steve Dey, Moran:* Mr. Dey indicated he is a member of the Straits Area Sportsman's Club on their board of directors and has hunted and fished in the eastern UP for over 20 years. He stated he supports the wolf resolution being discussed and applauds the US Fish and Wildlife Service for removing the gray wolves from the endangered species list and turning over management of them to the individual states. He provided five top reasons he supports the resolution: 5) Being followed by wolves while bird hunting with his dog. 4) A dramatic increase in wolf population from 2018 to the most recent survey of 695 wolves and 143 packs, which was before more pups dropped in the spring of 2019. He stated the 1997 wolf recovery management plan defined the ideal population as 200 animals for five consecutive years before removal from the endangered species list and wolf populations have met or exceeded that goal for more than 20 years. 3) Managed hunting seasons, including trapping, across the UP are the only way to maintain a long-range goal of 300-400 animals. 2) Local wolves have lost their fear of humans as seen in his area sleeping on porches, running through streets and following pets and people. 1) He stated the #1 reason he is in favor of the resolution is the effect wolves have had on the area deer herd and other wildlife, especially when it is documented that each wolf kills 40-50 deer each year causing a tremendous stressor on the deer herd. In closing he stated the population will continue to grow without a good sound management plan that includes hunting and trapping seasons.
- *Mr. Jamie Massey, St. Ignace:* Mr. Massey indicated he is a member of the Sault Ste. Marie tribe and owns a local commercial fish company. He provided some background of his extensive outdoor background hunting, trapping and fishing, stating he hopes there is an opportunity for the DNR to take a more serious look at indigenous environmental knowledge. He spoke about his unique perspective of animal populations and understands the DNR has been unable to move forward with wolf management until they are delisted. He feels wildlife in the UP as well as human outdoor habits have been dramatically and negatively affected by wolves and stated the population is at least double than current estimates. He stated wolves have wiped out the deer populations in the eastern UP and has left a big hole in the heritage and economy of the UP. He has not been able to run dogs in Mackinac County because of wolf packs. He stated he is in support of a hunting and trapping season for wolves in the entire UP.
- *Mr. Louie Bennett, Newberry:* Mr. Bennett indicated he has lived in Luce County his entire life and has enjoyed hunting, trapping and other outdoor activities. He stated his camp is a natural deer yard area and he has fed between 200-250 deer each year there. He noticed 6-7 years ago a huge decline in the deer herd coming back. He spoke with Ms. Sitar and together she determined there were probably 5 wolf packs coming into his camp area. In 2019, he didn't have one deer return, only wolves. He said wolves have destroyed everything he has lived for in the UP, for his grandkids, and has affected the real estate in the area. He stated he doesn't have the answer on how to fix the problem, but something has to be done.
- *Mr. Rob Bauer, Kawkawlin:* No comment (absent).
- *Mr. George Lindquist, Marquette:* Mr. Lindquist stated he appreciates listening to everyone's comments on this topic and is a strong supporter of the proposed Council resolution. He indicated the Michigan United Conservation Clubs passed a similar resolution last September with over 75% in support, which shows support across the state for it. He said the original wolf management plan focused primarily on farms and livestock, which there is few of in the UP. He spoke about the declining deer herd where he hunts and the increase in wolf activity. He stated

the DNR ought to be able to manage wolves just like managing other wildlife and resources. He indicated he went to the original meetings for the wolf management plan and the biggest concern he heard from the DNR was that they would need to be managed or the population will get out of control and the public wouldn't be happy and that time is now. He added according to the predatory prey study that was done, wolves and coyotes were the primary predator to deer. He also believes wolves have had an impact on the UP moose population. **Chair Buckingham** deferred Mr. Lindquist's comments on deer regulations to later in the agenda.

- *Mr. Dick Pershinske, Engadine:* Mr. Pershinske, former Chair of the EUPCAC, noted it was a pleasure to be back before the group again. He said he has been involved in wolf issues for the last 25 years, having previously served on the Michigan Wolf Management Roundtable. He provided a brief history of what he believes is one of the first experiences with wolf depredation in the UP on a farm near his property in which the feds sent in a team to eradicate the pack and the alpha wolf was killed on his property. From that, it forced into a plan by the DNR to put together a taskforce to develop a management plan and he was asked by the Michigan Farm Bureau to be their rep on the taskforce with 19 other folks including the Sierra Club, tribal members, wolf advocates, bear houndsmen, etc. When they met for the first time, they were told a plan would be developed and it would be agreed to not by majority but by consensus. No one thought it could be done, but it did, and it took 6 months. He stated he realizes there has been a lot of criticism of the plan and there has been a couple of modifications. Another update was due this year. The plan has points each did not like but it was based on a consensus and it was the best plan at that time. Other states felt it was one of the best management plans for any species that had been done. If a resolution was to be proposed, he discouraged using a sustainable population of 300 wolves when recommending how many should be removed from the environment as it will not be tolerated. He also recommended the resolution be positive in nature.
- *Mr. John Rickley, St. Ignace:* Mr. Rickley indicated he was born and raised in the Sault Tribe of Chippewa Indians. He stated he grew up with a passion for the outdoors and it has dictated his career choices, family life, residency and spends every available opportunity outdoors being a steward for wildlife and proper predator management. He described the hours he spends in the woods and on the landscape documenting and monitoring deer and wolf sightings, including wolf behavior, dispersal dynamics, travel tendencies, pack interactions, and the impact on other wildlife, which is information critical to his ability to safely run his hounds. Over the last five years, he stated he has had to go to the lower peninsula to run his hounds due to fear of wolf depredation. He stated in documented accounts with the DNR, it is no secret wolves are the reason for the reduced effort amongst houndsmen in the UP. He went on to describe the negative impact wolves have had on deer in the eastern UP and the need for proper management of them that includes efficient and effective harvest methods and a UP-wide hunt and trapping season in 2021 would be a great start. He offered the opportunity for any DNR staff to join him on a ride to see first-hand what he is seeing on the landscape and to get a better assessment of the situation.

2. **DNR Update on Wolf Delisting:** **Chair Buckingham** turned the floor to Mr. Cody Norton and Ms Haughey.

- **Mr. Norton** introduced himself as a wildlife biologist and large carnivore specialist for the Michigan DNR and stated he was asked to provide a bit of clarification regarding the proposed

resolution the Council is considering so that everyone has the same information and to understand the current management plan in its current form. In reference to expanding the harvest area to the entire UP and a goal of maintaining a population of 300-400 gray wolves in the UP in the resolution, the current management plan was written/developed to provide strategic higher-level guidance. It is very similar to how the current bear management plan is written as well as other species' management plans. Typically, harvest quotas, management units, license numbers, etc. are details that the DNR considers operational in nature. Those operational details are specified within an adaptive management framework, meaning those specific management methods are going to be routinely evaluated, when any changes in population size, distribution, habitat, human density, and other factors occur. For example, the previous wolf management units that were established for the 2013 wolf hunting season are not anywhere within the current wolf management plan as they were set through a normal regulations process written into a wildlife conservation order so that they could be revisited routinely, rather than put into place in a more long-term plan. Similarly, he stated, a population goal is not included in the plan for the same reason. There is nothing that says operational details cannot be included in management plans, but he stated he wanted to explain and clarify what is currently in the plan and how the DNR typically writes and implements management plans for game species in Michigan. He stated if the resolution is approved, the DNR will take it into consideration as they go through the plan updating process.

- **Ms. Haughey** referenced the 2008 and 2015 wolf management plans which some have read in depth and others may not be aware of and stated it is very important to this discussion in highlighting the work that was done to develop the initial plan. Between both plans, the DNR received over 4,500 comments not including all meetings that occurred, and all input was evaluated and considered. She noted the hours spent by the taskforce as well, citing the plan was not thrown together, but rather it was a thoughtful process with a lot of time and years spent gathering information from a lot of different viewpoints. She also referenced the Michigan Predator Prey Study that was a collaboration with the DNR and several universities and organizations which provided valuable information. She emphasized a letter (shown on screen) the DNR Director wrote in July 2019 expressing his support of the delisting and that the DNR is ready to take back management of wolves in the state. She next explained the layers of authority, noting wildlife biologists cannot decide these matters. For example, she displayed a letter from the Michigan Attorney General who lists three reasons why she feels the attempt to delist the gray wolf is unlawful. Also displayed was an excerpt of a letter of intent to file legal claims from several groups. She explained the DNR Director, at a previous Natural Resources Commission meeting, identified the next steps in this matter for the DNR which is to have the legal status more permanently settled given past challenges and legal history, consult with federally recognized tribal governments, and update the DNR's wolf management plan upon completion of a public attitude study in 2021. She noted, based on questions, that Wisconsin who has already declared a hunt in 2021 pending the delisting, has a very difficult structure and layer of authority requiring that state by law to have a hunt. She stressed the high importance of the steps mentioned which includes a good amount of public interaction and input. She stated the DNR is listening to the public sentiment.

3. **Council Consideration of Resolution:** **Chair Buckingham** thanked Mr. Norton and Ms. Haughey for the overview. Referring to the two tribal members who spoke during public comment, he stated perhaps the tribal concerns are changing as the landscape has certainly changed. He said the wolf

management plan was written for addressing problematic animals and this situation is much deeper and much broader, and the sportsmen of this state who travel to the UP to hunt are relying on all of us to do what is right and to manage this resource because that is what the DNR and the NRC are supposed to be doing. He stated the Council is bringing feedback from the field to share with staff and there is an obligation to have serious discussions to scientifically manage both wolves and deer. He stated he appreciates the two tribal members for stepping forward and having the courage to stand before everyone and support the passing of the resolution.

Mr. Cox asked for clarification on whether or not there is a wolf management plan to go into action once the delisting is in effect January 4, 2021 and if the DNR is moving slowly because its looking like the delisting won't survive the impending legal challenges. **Mr. Gorniak** stated the 2015 plan is the most current and is active, but there are areas that need to change and items that need to be included. **Ms. Haughey** indicated it's a matter of going through the process the right way and in consideration of all the different dynamics 8 years later as it is not the same as the hunt in 2013. She added the authority rests with the Natural Resources Commission. **Mr. Gorniak** stated a lot has changed since the 2015 plan and everyone is noticing a lot more wolves on the landscape and the effects of those wolves on the landscape, and he thinks the plan needs to be updated quickly and not wait for any legal settlements. **Mr. Kennedy** stated they don't expect a lawsuit to go in any particular direction as it hasn't been filed yet. The DNR is well aware of the long history of the wolf being delisted and relisted through federal court decisions and it is an unknown at this point. **Mr. Cox** responded that he would like to see the DNR prepared to initiate a hunting season as soon as a final decision is made. **Mr. Kennedy** stated there is significance in updating the wolf management plan and due to a variety of factors in 2020, the process will kick off in 2021. **Mr. Roell** clarified the current plan is a guiding principle for wolf management and a hunting season is outlined in the plan steps, whether its for conflict resolution or recreation. Season structures and quotas do not go into a management plan, but rather into a wildlife conservation order.

NRC Commissioner Nyberg concurred with Mr. Roell, stating the current management plan that was updated 2015 does outline options for a recreational harvest for wolves. Statute calls for the wolf management plan to be updated every five years, which was due to start in 2020. He stated additional litigation is anticipated but regardless, in his role as an NRC Commissioner, it is prudent that the wolf management plan be updated. He feels the wildlife biologists and conservation partners did a very good job in drafting a good document. It does need to be updated, as per statute, and will again include sound science for state-based management which may include a recreational harvest. He believes DNR staff are acknowledging and being very upfront with the litigation outlook, having gone through it many times before. He also believes in the notion that we need to be prepared and, in sync with Mr. Gorniak's opening comment on the resolution, we all need to work together and work towards science-based management of wildlife in Michigan and that includes our managers, volunteers, NRC Commissioners and all of our partners in conservation. Updating the plan involves steps that need to take place under other agreements in state law consultation with tribal governments whenever the state is making a decision that impacts tribal interests and that's reciprocal. He stated what triggers that consultation could be a number of things such as a notice to update the plan, commission action, etc. He reiterated there is a process to this, the DNR has outlined the process, and he thinks everyone is raising good questions and appreciates the opportunity to listen to them.

NRC Commissioner Richardson indicated he was the NRC Chairman when the last delisting effort took place, so he is well aware of the process. He stated he looks forward to the resolution and he has been keeping up on the management plan updating process. He noted the NRC Commissioners are listening and he expects more input over the next few NRC meetings. He stated he is proud of the CACs as it brings a great amount of transparency to the DNR and it helps to work through issues, listen, and move forward.

Chair Buckingham thanked the Commissioners and staff for their comments and asked if there was any further discussion on the resolution before the Council. **Mr. Augustyn** asked if there was a sunset in the 2015 wolf management plan; **Mr. Gorniak** answered the plan is to be reviewed and updated every 5 years, so no sunset. **Mr. Augustyn** asked who is the authority that directs the DNR in this particular plan and what is the DNR being asked to do other than update the plan. **Ms. Haughey** stated the first level of authority is the legal hurdles as was mentioned previously. Ultimately, this isn't a decision the DNR makes alone. **Mr. Kennedy** clarified that it is expected a lawsuit will be filed but added the state would maintain management control until/unless a stay or injunction is declared which would then pause any delisting decision. **Mr. Augustyn** stated he feels the real issue is whether the state will follow through on what the DNR recommends. He added that wolves cannot be successfully managed without trapping being a component.

Chair Buckingham asked the Council to consider the resolution presented regarding the need for additions to the current wolf management plan. **Mr. Downey** motioned to approve the resolution as presented; **Mr. Augustyn** supported the motion. No further discussion was brought forth. A verbal vote was conducted through Zoom, visible to all in attendance. All in favor: All. Oppose: No verbal responses given. Motion carried unanimously. **Chair Buckingham** thanked those providing public comments and sharing their views as well as DNR staff and NRC Commissioners for their thoughts as well.

New Business

1. ***Fish Tales: A Review of the Fisheries Division's Priorities for Aquatic Invasive Species***: **Ms. Christina Baugher** thanked the Council for inviting her to speak and introduced herself as an aquatic invasive species biologist working jointly for the Fisheries and Parks & Recreation Divisions. She presented the following slides:
 - ***Michigan Invasive Species Program (Est. 2010)***: The species mentioned in this presentation are not only a priority for the Fisheries Division but also the entire DNR and the Michigan Invasive Species Program, which is a collaboration of three Michigan quality of life departments: the DNR, Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy (EGLE), and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD). Although the Department of Transportation did not sign on to the invasive species charter, they are very important to the group. The program has developed state management plans for both aquatic and terrestrial invasive species in the state of Michigan. Those plans are followed when setting priorities for the state. Overall, there are about 50 or more staff between those three departments that work on invasive species, either full-time or part-time and participate in core teams and workgroups. There is an annual report published yearly and can be found on the website.
 - ***Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMA)***: There are several partners that work with the program and one important partner are CISMAs, who are regional partners composed of federal, state, and local government agencies, nonprofits, universities, and private landowners who work together to prevent, detect and manage invasive species within their geographical area.

A color-coded map was shown of the different regional groups throughout the state. These groups are relied upon heavily to contributing and completing some of the objectives within the management plans.

- *Photo Collage of Invasive Species:* There are several lists of invasive species and two of those lists are prohibited and restricted species which are illegal to possess or have in the state. There are 56 species between those two lists. There is also a “watch” list that is developed by biologists in the field who want to bring awareness to certain species that either are not in Michigan yet or are in limited geographical areas and there are 31 species on that list. A photo of 5 of those species discussed next was shown.
- *Invasive Carp:* Big head carp and silver carp are two species in the Mississippi River Basin now that are making their way through the Chicago area waterway system and are about 50 miles from the Lake Michigan shoreline. Michigan technically has no jurisdiction over where these species are currently found. The DNR and Fisheries Division have taken the lead in providing partnership and collaboration essential to protecting the Great Lakes, resulting in the federal America’s Water Infrastructure Act, making the reduction of the spread of these carp or eradication a priority for the federal government. Grass carp are currently in the Great Lakes found most exclusively in Lake Erie and occasionally in one of the other Great Lakes. She described partners involved in a project to remove, trap, and sometimes tag and re-release grass carp, as well as a project to prevent spawning. She encouraged those interested to view a webinar series called Not MISpecies that discusses grass carp.
- *Red Swamp Crayfish:* These are native to the states, mostly the Gulf Coast states, and have been managed to the best extent possible in Michigan since 2017. They are the worst invaders worldwide. They outcompete Michigan’s native species and create an extensive burrowing system that leads to erosion problems along riverbanks and shorelines. She described the methods used to manage this species which are found in 30 different locations in southern Michigan and are illegal to possess. There is a webinar series on this species as well.
- *European Frog-bit:* This causes huge mats found along shorelines and in still water. It arrived in Michigan in the mid-1990s from Lake Erie to Lake Huron and was found in the St. Mary’s river in 2010. In a coordinated project, over 20,000 pounds of frog-bit were removed from the St. Mary’s river system in the eastern UP, notably in popular duck hunting locations so hunters may be unaware they are moving and spreading it.
- *Flowering Rush:* This is widespread throughout Michigan, but it is rare in the UP, with the only known location in Alger County. She described the qualities and where it can be found along the shoreline or just under the water. A chemical treatment is planned for this upcoming year and it is hopeful the spread can be contained before it heads towards Lake Superior.
- *Starry Stonewort:* This is another submerged plant that the Fisheries Division has spent some time on and there are no known detections in the UP but it is becoming more widespread in the lower peninsula. She described the species, how it is difficult to control, treatment methods and new permanent restrictions on the use of a copper treatment during spawning periods.
- *Hemlock Woolly Adelgid:* This terrestrial invasive species, first detected in Michigan in 2015, is a tiny insect that attaches itself to hemlock trees killing them in less than four years. A current mapping project is aimed to survey and treat hemlock trees along the Lake Michigan and Lake Huron shorelines. If the hemlock resource died along the shorelines, it could increase the temperature of important spawning streams.
- *Resources:* Several resources were provided for additional information on invasive species: Michigan Invasive Species Program (www.michigan.gov/invasivespecies), Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMA) (www.michiganinvasives.org), Not MI Species Webinars

(www.michigan.gov/EGLEvents), Midwest Invasive Species Information Network (www.misin.msu.edu) or Christina Baugher, DNR Fisheries & Parks and Recreation Division, baugherc@michigan.gov or 517-582-3245.

Chair Buckingham thanked Ms. Baugher for her very informative presentation.

- Deer Season Recap-East UP (to date):* **Ms. Sitar** stated most UP DNR offices were only open for deer check for the first four days of firearm season due to the pandemic, with the exception of the Escanaba and Norway offices which were open throughout the regular firearm season. To compare the first four days of this year to the first four days of last year will be difficult as the weather in the east UP was quite different than in the west UP. In the east UP, it was cold with pouring rain, so fewer deer were checked on opening day in Newberry as in previous years. Overall, the Newberry office was down about 41% on those first four days compared to last year. Escanaba and Norway, who were open most of the firearm season, were down 20-25% on average. She stated several factors contributed to a decline in deer being brought into check stations across the UP and include opening day being on a Sunday, wet and cold weather for the opener, and the pandemic issue with hunters not wanting to congregate and staying home. She indicated she is not discounting the deer populations in general with this past not-so-easy winter coupled with two previous bad winters, it can obviously impact deer numbers. One bad winter can easily cause the loss of an entire age class of deer and consecutive bad winters can cause losses in multiple age classes.

Mr. Thomas mentioned he reviewed the Mackinac Bridge counts and in the 63 years that the count has been done, in the last 5 out of 6 years, the count was less than 3,000 deer, with only 4 other years previously having been that low. The average number has been around 8,000 deer. He stated he spoke with locals who hunt as hard as anyone and they weren't seeing deer and business owners, like motels, were running empty because hunters aren't coming because there are no deer. He realizes there are multiple factors but there are additional ones to consider. **Ms. Sitar** replied that biologists do look at bridge counts every year and the count this year decreased 32%, which is not far off from the entire UP figure of 20-25% she provided earlier. She acknowledged that deer numbers are low right now in the eastern UP and biologists are aware of the decline in hunter numbers and are talking with hunters (along with conservation officers) and hearing the same things that others have mentioned such as bait not being touched, etc. There are multiple factors affecting the deer population in the eastern UP. Mr. Chords from the audience asked about the number of deer last winter in a deer yard in Hulbert near Trout Lake. **Ms. Sitar** stated she has visited that location which is a regular deer winter complex (same term for deer yard) and noticed fewer deer than in previous times, but it should be recognized that the two previous winters were partial causes. Mr. Chords asked what will get the deer population back up to encourage hunters to come back. **Ms. Sitar** stated it has been discussed multiple times here at the EUPCAC meetings with slides that showed the trajectories of deer population, wolf population numbers and winter severity over years, and although it's not a popular response and not a new concept, winter severity has a huge regulatory impact on deer. She explained the work staff have done in maintaining deer yards and providing adequate cover in those areas by focusing on different habitat practices and harvesting deer yards in a sustainable way. **Mr. Gorniak** stated he doesn't believe the severity of winter is the only cause of the deer decline. **Ms. Sitar** indicated she didn't say it was the only factor, but rather it was just one factor amongst others. She stated the backside of winter is truly what affects deer the most when they've lost all their fat reserves. She reviewed the snow melt history and consecutive winter factors briefly from the last three winters. **Mr. Augustyn** asked for clarification on which winters were being discussed; **Ms. Sitar** responded. **Mr. Augustyn** stated winters cannot be controlled, but one thing that

more people need to focus on is deer habitat, which is one way to protect deer from severe winters. **Mr. Gorniak** compared areas in the Lower Peninsula like Gaylord which receives a lot of snow, but their deer numbers are stable. **Mr. Augustyn** stated the landscape is different in that area. **Ms. Sitar** concurred, stating that area has less of a forested landscape and more of an agricultural landscape and none of the lower peninsula is an obligate deer yard. It is not the same winter in the lower peninsula. **Mr. Hubbard** commented on his forestry background that included deer management and stated that lower peninsula winters are a month shorter than those in the UP and it makes a big difference. There are a lot of factors affecting deer populations, including weather and science, and it may need more review. **Mr. Thomas** also spoke of his 40 years of deer hunting and he agrees that good habitat is disappearing and is a primary factor in the decrease in deer population. **Ms. Sitar** spoke of the deer populations back in the 80's when deer habitat funding was robust and stated deer habitat is still very important in growing the number of deer.

3. *Proposed 2021 Deer Regulations Recommendations & Timeline:* **Ms. Haughey** indicated Ms. Ashley Autenrieth, the DNR's statewide deer specialist, is also attending the meeting and will provide commentary on this topic as well. **Ms. Haughey** provided information on the 2021 Phase II Deer Regulation Recommendations that were formally introduced to the NRC on November 12th. The NRC discussed them at their November and December meetings and could vote on them at their January 14, 2021 meeting. However, there are two commissioners whose terms are expiring in December and they may choose to postpone a vote until February when new commissioners are on board; it is not known that this time what they will do. The recommendations were displayed on screen for the Council's review: Deer Harvest Registration, Standardized Antlerless License, Remove of Hunter's Choice, Allowance of Crossbows During the Late Archery Season, and Changes to Supplemental and Recreational Feeding. **Ms. Autenrieth** added the UP has lost 45% of its hunters since the peak in the late 90's and it is projected that another 25% will be lost in the next 10 years. Unlike winter severity which cannot be controlled, she stated regulation recommendations were driven by two factors that could allow some sort of modicum of control: hunter satisfaction and new hunters. Those hunters who are highly satisfied tend to purchase licenses in the future and the recommendations were designed to allow hunters opportunities to be successful. One barrier for new hunters is complex regulations. She stated the overall intent is to allow opportunity and to simplify regulations. **Mr. Augustyn** indicated that a winter severity index, which he stated he has been talking about for years, and mandatory registration will be critical to DNR biologists for helping to understand the movement and what is happening in the UP. He stated he remembers being clearly told years ago that it made sense for the DNR to have regulation changes every three years versus radical changes year to year and he has seen radical changes for 2020 and now for 2021 throughout the state. **Ms. Haughey** replied the normal regulation cycle is every three years. **Ms. Autenrieth** further explained normally, a regulation package would be proposed in the spring, be approved by the NRC, and take place in the fall and be in place for three years. However, she stated, there were going to be some regulatory changes for 2021 due to the new registration system, with 2021 being voluntary and 2022 being mandatory. Because of these changes, staff were asked to take a deeper look into simplifying regulations, and this is why it seems like an unusual timeline. She indicated the goal will be to hold regulations for at least three years. **Ms. Haughey** added if there is a disease concern, the three-year regulation cycle may be disregarded to control the disease. **Commissioner Richardson** pointed out the value of the UP Wildlife Habitat Workgroup and the continued monitoring of habitat, cedar cuts, etc. and he recommended anyone that wishes to become involved in that group to do so.

Discussion continued in length between **Mr. Gorniak** and **Ms. Autenrieth** regarding standardizing the antlerless permit system in the UP, lack of confidence to realistically do deer population modeling counts, the goal of creating opportunity for hunters, current lack of hunter population level impact on the deer herd, and the need to manage the resources available to increase the deer herd.

Chair Buckingham allowed Mr. Lindquist to offer his public comment regarding the deer regulations, which was deferred earlier in the meeting. Mr. Lindquist stated the Marquette County UP Whitetails has serious concerns about three of the regulation changes having a huge impact on the UP deer herd. He stated there are numerous reasons why the number of deer hunters are decreasing, but the main ones are lack of deer and lack of success. He also spoke against the use of crossbows in the late archery season as he feels it would decimate the herd during their migration period.

4. Additional Agenda Items Added by Council: **Chair Buckingham** deferred any additional items at this time due to time constraints.

Old Business

1. Follow-Up from October Meeting:

- Percentage of State Land Acquired with MNRTF: **Ms. Haughey** indicated this topic was a request from Mr. Augustyn at the last meeting. She presented several slides on how state land was acquired (purchase, exchange, gift, tax reverted, other) as well as the number of acres acquired with trust fund dollars going back to 1981. **Mr. Augustyn** indicated it was exactly what he was looking for.
- Bear Harvest Numbers for Newberry Unit: **Ms. Sitar**, in response to Vice Chair Gorniak's question at the last meeting, stated 288 bears were harvested in the Newberry bear management unit this year, which is a 20% increase from 2019 harvest numbers and a 5% increase over the three-year average. The average bear size at check stations is approximately 150 pounds which is typical, and hunter satisfaction was good. The quotas established continue to allow the bear population to increase while still providing the same amount of opportunity.

2. Chronic Wasting Disease Updates: **Ms. Haughey** stated this is a standing agenda item at the request of the Council. She provided updated CWD testing numbers from Dr. Kelly Straka, DNR veterinarian: 293 have been tested in the UP CWD core surveillance area with no positives reported through December 11, 2020. **Mr. Augustyn** asked how long the baiting and feeding ban will continue in the core surveillance area with no additional positives reported. **Ms. Haughey** indicated it is a good question for the NRC commissioners and that she is not aware of any plan to change it at this time. **Ms. Sitar** concurred, stating she is not aware of a defined amount of time for the ban. **Mr. Augustyn** stated he did not understand why the ban is still on when no positives have been found for some time now. **Ms. Haughey** stated 293 tested is still a long way from the target goal of 1927. **Ms. Sitar** noted getting closer to the target goal will provide greater confidence there is not a disease issue.

3. Update on Proposed ORV Seasonal Land Use Order: **Mr. Gaberdiel** indicated the proposal for ORV seasonal restrictions has gained some traction and is being reviewed at higher levels of the DNR. He noted there is also parallel action occurring on a legislative bill.

DNR Reports from Division Staff

Written staff reports were provided via email to Council members on December 9, 2020. Due to time constraints, only those divisions with additions were asked to report.

1. Cory Kovacs, Fisheries Division: **Mr. Kovacs** reported last week, the 2000 consent decree has been extended to June 30, 2021. **Mr. Augustyn** commented that he had reached out to Mr. Kovacs and Ms. Haughey regarding commercial fishing regulation changes and they were able to get back to him very quickly with information regarding tribal fishing; he appreciated the *quick response and thanked both of them*.
2. Paul Gaberdiel, Parks & Recreation Division-Eastern UP Trails: **Mr. Gaberdiel** added the Doti Bridge is now open and a ribbon cutting ceremony occurred this past weekend.

Subcommittee Reports

1. Fisheries Subcommittee Report: **Vice Chair Gorniak** noted beginning the first of the year, the DNR has to apply for another cormorant depredation permit and wanted to mention it to make sure it will be done.
2. Policy Impact Subcommittee Report: **Mr. Hass** stated he did not have anything to report.

Next Meeting

1. Approval of Proposed 2021 Meeting Dates: **Chair Buckingham** asked the Council to review the proposed 2021 meeting dates, indicating the first meeting of February 9th would be held via Zoom. **Mr. Thomas motioned to approve the 2021 meeting dates as submitted; Mr. Cox supported the motion. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: See listing on page 1. Motion carried.**
2. Next EUPCAC Meeting: **Chair Buckingham** indicated the next meeting of the EUPCAC will be on Tuesday, February 9, 2021 at 6:00pm virtually via Zoom.
3. Items for Next Meeting Agenda: **Chair Buckingham** opened the floor for suggestions on agenda topics for the next meeting; none were immediately brought forth. He stated if there are any items of interest for the next agenda, please email them to him, Ms. Haughey or Ms. Dahlstrom.

Public Comments

Chair Buckingham opened the floor for additional public comments.

1. *Mr. David Cords, Paradise*, commented about the terrible deer season for the third year in a row that he's had in the eastern UP. He stated there has been cougar and bear sightings both of which are not good for deer. He also relayed his dismay in the earlier discussion about additional opportunities being recommended for deer hunting. He feels there aren't enough deer to hunt in the eastern up and something should be done get the herd back. He offered additional comments and indicated he does not support many of the recommendations being considered. **Ms. Haughey** clarified the confusion caused by an earlier press release incorrectly stating a recommendation for supplemental feeding when it was actually for recreational feeding.
2. *Mr. Craig Lukomski, South Lyon*: Mr. Lukomski stated Ms. Sitar answered most of the questions he was going to ask about deer wintering complexes earlier in the meeting. He stated he will reach out to her for additional questions afterwards. He added he appreciated the opportunity to attend this meeting virtually.

Closing Comments from the Council

Chair Buckingham opened the floor for closing comments from the Council.

1. **Mr. Gorniak** stated although everyone says hunter numbers are going down, most of the hunters he knows stopped buying the combo license and only buy the single license and he is sure the DNR keeps track of license sales rather than actual hunter numbers. He feels there is more to it.
2. **Mr. Thomas** made note of Ms. Sitar's work and thanked her for the continuity she has provided for the area in the last 18 years.
3. **Mr. Hubbard** spoke about his involvement in the deer winter habitat group and how important the work of that group has become in developing management plans for wintering complexes.
4. **Mr. Augustyn** stated deer wintering complexes have to be protected at all costs. Habitat will be critical to the long-term survivability of the herd.
5. **Chair Buckingham** shared a personal experience with wolves decimating in a week a good size herd of deer that has wintered for years near where he hunts. He feels the establishment of a wolf hunt would extend an olive branch to many sportsmen across the UP who are spending a lot of money and having no deer to hunt.
6. **Mr. Augustyn** added the need to carefully manage the DMU's carefully in the UP as the northern, eastern, western, and southern UP are entirely different situations where deer are concerned and the entire UP should not be managed the same.

Adjourn

There being no further business, **Chair Buckingham** thanked everyone for attending, wished all a blessed holiday season and adjourned the meeting at 8:59pm Eastern.

Approved 2/9/21