

Eastern Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council (EUPCAC)

Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, October 20, 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
Jeff Cox
Al Garavaglia

Gary Gorniak
Tim Hass
Bernie Hubbard
Travis Kangas

Glenn Moll
Tom Paquin
Tony Wright

Council Members Excused/Absent

Tom Buckingham
Ken Collier
Grant Dewitt

AJ Downey
Jim Duke
Kevin Erickson

Angel Portice
Mark Spencer
Jack Thomas

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff Liaisons

Eric Cowing, Parks & Recreation Division, Newberry
Kristi Dahlstrom, Executive Assistant, Marquette
John DePue, Wildlife Division, Baraga
Valerie Frawley, Wildlife Division, Lansing
Lt. Skip Hagy, Law Enforcement Division, Newberry
Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy, Marquette
Dave Jentoft, Wildlife Division, Sault Ste. Marie
Tom Seablom, Forest Resources Division, Marquette
Kerry Wieber, Forest Resources Division, Gaylord
Ron Yesney, Parks & Recreation Division-UP Trails, Marquette

Call to Order/Current Council Member Introductions

The Eastern Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council (EUPCAC) meeting began with a welcome by **Ms. Haughey**. She introduced herself and indicated Vice Chair Gorniak will be leading the meeting for Chair Buckingham, who is unable to attend due to an unforeseen work commitment. She stated 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), an advisory group to the DNR. She displayed a listing of current East Council members, their affiliated group or interest and UP county they represent. She stated Council members are very active and engaged in their communities in the area of natural resources, and she thanked them for their volunteer time commitment and participation. She welcomed public participants who registered for the meeting and were listed on screen, including Mr. McNamee from Sen. McBroom's office, Mr. Craig Woerpel from WYKX Radio, and Dave Johnson, President of UPSA and Council member of the WUPCAC.

Vice Chair Gorniak called the meeting to order at 6:04pm and welcomed everyone in attendance (30 total) to the meeting.

Adoption of Agenda

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

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

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

Chair Comments

Vice Chair Gorniak commented that he spoke with a few people throughout the eastern UP and most feel there aren't as many deer this year as last year and they feel it's mostly due to the abundance of predators in the area. He noted winters and habitat also have an effect on the herd and stated he hopes everyone is able to fill their tag this season regardless.

Public Comments

Vice Chair Gorniak opened the floor for public comments; none were brought forth. Ms. Dahlstrom noted there were no registrations received for comments prior to the meeting.

DNR Reports from Division Staff

Written staff reports were provided via email to Council members on October 13, 2020. The following were verbal additions to those reports:

1. **Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy:** **Ms. Haughey** informed the group that state DNR employees will continue to be on telework status until at least January 2, 2021 per administration. Some employees are able to continue with field work during this time. Staff continue to help the public in all facets and making sure projects are being covered. She referenced the activity in the division reports noting staff have been very busy.
2. **Tom Seablom, Forest Resources Division:** **Mr. Seablom** stated he did not have anything to add at this time other than it has been a busy couple of months in the division wrapping up activity and sending staff to help with fires out west. **Mr. Augustyn** asked if Mr. Seablom knew any information about the federal forest in California harvesting at only 1%; **Mr. Seablom** stated he isn't aware of any of the west coast forestry details. It was also asked how many staff are fighting fires out west. **Mr. Seablom** stated here are about 12-18 staff functioning in various capacities with 4-5 engines. Wishes of safety for them was given.
3. **Lt. Skip Hagy, Law Enforcement Division:** **Lt. Hagy** reported it has been a busy fall for officers. He also mentioned the recent press release on the poaching case in the district. **Mr. Augustyn** asked if law enforcement was satisfied with the outcome and sentencing of the case. **Lt. Hagy** stated they worked with the prosecutor on the multiple charges against the defendant and they were satisfied with the lifetime hunting revocation, fines, costs and restitution. **Mr. Augustyn** asked if there was feedback from the federal agencies and why weren't there federal charges. **Lt. Hagy** advised the case was discussed with the USFWS and it was decided to keep the entire case in state court. **Mr. Augustyn** asked what the maximum sentencing could've been. **Lt. Hagy**

stated he doesn't have any of those details and he did not know what the maximum sentencing entailed. **Mr. Augustyn** stated he is asking these questions as those who listen to his radio show were upset the sentencing wasn't stronger and more severe and think restitution won't be paid. **Lt. Hagy** stated he didn't have direct involvement in the plea agreement of the case, but restitution will be required. He encouraged sportsmen to voice their concerns to the court system or prosecuting attorneys if they would like more stringent sentencing on cases like these. On a separate matter, **Mr. Augustyn** asked if there is a penalty in Michigan to recreationally feed bear with no intent to hunt. **Lt. Hagy** stated it may depend on the circumstance and whether it would be considered establishing bait. **Mr. Augustyn** thanked the Law Enforcement Division for bringing this case to fruition. **Mr. Hass** added, as a former attorney, sentencing guidelines were set up in Michigan years ago and judges are required to follow those guidelines regardless if in the public's view they should be stronger. He added there are several factors judges must consider when going through a sentencing and it is difficult for the public to judge the case without knowing those details. **Lt. Hagy** advised there are mandatory sentencing guidelines in many cases which are rarely followed in some courts. For example, an illegal deer carries a mandatory minimum of 5 days in jail to a maximum of 90 days; however, jail time is rarely imposed in some courts. He said this is area where sportsmen organizations need to voice their concerns. **Ms. Haughey** thanked everyone for discussing the matter and noted there have been several recent legislative movements to lessen the penalties imposed on violators.

4. Mr. Eric Cowing, Parks & Recreation Division: **Mr. Cowing** reported most of the summer staff are done for the season, despite the parks still seeing rather large crowds at a number of facilities. Buildings will begin to be winterized which will slow things down, but there continues to be a lot of calls from people looking for places to stay with wifi for homeschooling while camping. **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked how busy the parks were compared to last year. **Mr. Cowing** stated car counters at the Upper Tahquamenon Falls showed day use was up 4% in June, 12% in July, 20% in August, and 59% in September. By October 12th, they had already doubled their numbers compared to all of October in 2019. He stated at one point, they were up 20% in state forest campgrounds. He added when they opened on June 22nd, a 20% decrease in the budget was projected, but due to the large increase of activity since then, it will be more like a 5% decrease.
5. Ron Yesney, Parks & Recreation Division-Eastern UP Trails: **Mr. Yesney** highlighted the construction on Dody Bridge, in partnership with the US Forest Service, currently taking place; it may be finished by December 1 in time for snowmobile season. He also discussed the reroute needed for the snowmobile trail off H-58 in Alger County which requires a bridge over the Miner's River south of H-58. He stated they have permission from the landowner; however, the property is protected by a conservation easement that prohibits structures. Staff are in the process of determining options and working hard to find a solution. He indicated Alger County will be resurfacing H-58 very soon and are not likely going to allow snowmobiles to utilize that route. He mentioned snowmobile clubs are currently out getting ready by signing and brushing trails before hunting season. There is also additional mileage of equestrian trail north of Newberry that is going well. He added there is a committee within the Michigan Trails Advisory Council that is working on developing a mechanism to fund maintenance on non-motorized trails, which currently doesn't exist. **Mr. Garavaglia** stated there is a deep hole hazard on a trail that comes out of Garnet Lake Campground in Hendricks Township which has caused a few

side-by-side tip overs this past spring and he'd like to see what recourse there is to fix it. **Mr. Yesney** indicated he will look into the issue to see what can be done. **Mr. Augustyn** asked what the distance is snowmobiles would ride on H-58; **Mr. Yesney** replied it's about a mile and further discussed the easement issue.

6. *Dave Jentoft, Wildlife Division:* **Mr. Jentoft** stated he reported in the division report that bear harvest had been up and that continues to be the case, with an uptick for the Newberry Unit compared to last year. The season ends next Monday at which final results will be tabulated. He also noted the GEMS areas, which had maintenance done in the pre-season, has seen high use. Lastly, he mentioned the deer camp survey will move forward this year and materials will be sent out soon. **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked what the bear harvest numbers were for the Newberry Unit; **Mr. Jentoft** replied he did not have that information yet.

Old Business

1. *Chronic Wasting Disease Updates:* **Ms. Haughey** stated this is a standing agenda item at the request of the Council. She indicated information on the check stations and CWD testing for this upcoming season was shared previously via email. She indicated testing will be very focused in the areas where there has been a positive case and noted that one fourth of all CWD testing in the US had been done in Michigan so there has already been a high level of testing done. More on the check stations will be covered later on in the agenda.
2. *Review of Resolution Response: Increase Education of Lead Ammunition Effects on Wildlife:* **Ms. Haughey** reviewed the DNR's response to the Council's resolution approved at the last meeting which recommended including in hunter education curriculums and hunting guides information on the effects of lead poisoning on wildlife and the availability of non-toxic copper ammunition:

The Michigan Hunting Digest and the Michigan Elk Digest contains information about lead in wild game, specifically that lead can be harmful to humans and wildlife, even in very low amounts. The Department will continue to provide information in other big game digests, such as black bear and turkey, and will also consider including information about lead in raptors and scavenging birds. The Wildlife Division is currently working on a report on Lead and Lead Poisoning in Humans and Wildlife. Once the report is finalized, the Department will provide a link to this report in the digests. The report contains information on lead exposure in humans, plants and wildlife, and the environment. It also explains the different types of toxic and non-toxic ammunition.

The Department encourages Hunter Safety classes to use the information provided in this report to create awareness of toxic and non-toxic ammunition and the effects it has on humans and wildlife. The Department encourages the voluntary use of non-toxic alternatives by creating awareness of the effects of lead poisoning on humans and wildlife and offering information on the pros and cons of non-toxic ammunition.

Mr. Augustyn asked if there will be any changes in the future to hunting guides as he didn't interpret the response to indicate there would be. **Ms. Haughey** replied she feels the response is indicating that current information is being reviewed, new information is forthcoming and will be added, additional digests will be included, and encouragement for further education was made. She asked if there was something more specific that he was referring to; **Mr. Augustyn** stated no and thanked Ms. Haughey for the clarification.

New Business

1. *Update of the Land Strategy:* **Ms. Wieber** introduced herself as well as Ms. Valerie Frawley, stating both of them have been working on the update of the land strategy as part of a

department team. **Ms. Wieber** started her presentation with a background and history of Michigan's public lands.

- *State Land Overview:* DNR manages 4.6 million acres of public lands and 6.4 million acres of mineral rights on behalf of the residents of Michigan, most of which are in the state forest system (3.85 million acres). The remainder for the most part is made up of state park and recreation areas (363,000 acres) and state game and wildlife areas (364,000 acres). There are also smaller acreages that comprise of fish hatcheries, facilities, boating access sites or public water access sites.
- *How State Land was Acquired:* The majority of land came to the DNR through the tax reversion process (52% or 2.4 million acres) during the Depression Era in the 1920's mostly due to nonpayment of taxes. A lot of the land was clear cut before it came to the state and a significant acreage actually tax reverted multiple times when the state would sell it and it would end up tax reverting again, which is when the Department of Conservation decided to use that as the backbone of the state forest system and is where it is today in addition to new land acquired through tax reversion. 26% of the land base was purchased through a variety of funding sources, some with restrictions attached to them, and nearly 20% of acreage was acquired through land exchanges (about 170,000 acres). Smaller amounts of land were gifted or federal government land transfers.
- *Public Land Strategy:* The strategy was required under Public Act 240 of 2012. The DNR sought a lot of input from stakeholders and an advisory council and submitted a proposed land strategy to the legislature for review and approval in July 2013, a year earlier than required. It was in legislature for about 5 years before it was approved and adopted by the Governor in 2018. The strategy provides the framework for DNR-managed public lands ownership. The current strategy (submitted in 2013) is required to be updated and submitted to the legislature by July 1, 2021 for their review and approval.
- *2013 Land Strategy Implementation:* There are two main components to the implementation with the first being a project boundary review. This includes boundaries around state forests, state game and wildlife areas and state parks and recreation areas. The purpose of those boundaries is to identify the areas that the DNR believes should be in public ownership and managed by the DNR. They have not been reviewed since 2004 and it's a good idea since land patterns change and private property gets subdivided and may no longer be a priority for the DNR. These boundaries include not only state ownership, but also privately-owned lands the state would like to acquire, which is why the 2013 strategy called for a reduction of privately held inholdings by 1 million acres (not state land). The internal review is in the final stages now and it is anticipated there will be an opportunity for the public and stakeholder review to occur in November. The DNR Director's review and decision on those boundaries are anticipated in December. The second component is a state land review. About 240,000 acres will be reviewed to determine classification as follows: retain, offer to local units of government or other conservation owner, offer for land exchange, or dispose. These are lands that are 200 acres or less in size and are blocks of land that due to an irregular shape in DNR ownership have a very extensive private public boundary interface making it difficult to be managed. State managed trails, access sites and facilities have been removed. Groups of 10 counties will be reviewed at a time with the first group going through an internal review last month. An external review for the first group of counties is expected in early 2021. This process will take a few years to complete because it is so intensive.

- *Land Strategy Update Process:* As mentioned previously, the 2013 strategy (approved in 2018) is currently being implemented, and now the land strategy must be updated. The DNR Director appointed a sprint team representing all divisions. They are charged with meeting the requirements of PA 240 of 2018 by creating an updated strategic plan by July 1, 2021. The team has completed an assessment of all the components of the 2013 strategy for effectiveness and have evaluated the specific goals, strategies and measurable objectives to determine which to keep, modify or remove and why. This assessment is forming the foundation for developing the updated strategy for 2021. The sprint team spent quite a bit of time reviewing constitutional language, the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act and other legislation to make sure this strategy is really focused on what the DNR is supposed to be doing. Draft components of the updated land strategy are being developed now based on the outcome of the assessment. A lot of engagement will occur through this entire process, both internally and externally, with stakeholders as well as members of the public.
- *Updated Land Strategy Focus:* The focus of the updated land strategy is to highlight the value of a robust public land base and to provide regional and statewide measurable goals, strategies and objectives. The DNR wants to inform and make sure there is good understanding both by the public and stakeholders on the insight of DNR land ownership and what the key actions will be for the next six years. Updated goals include protecting natural and cultural resources, providing access to outdoor public recreation opportunities and promoting responsible natural resource management. Each of these goals have specific strategies and measurable objectives under them and they will all be available for the public to review.
- *Opportunities for 2021 Strategy:* Items being focused on that weren't included in the 2013 strategy are addressing climate resilience, adaptation and mitigation; incorporating diversity, equity and inclusion to ensure that people of all backgrounds feel welcome on public lands and want to use them and have the ability to use them; including higher level outcomes such as healthy natural resources, healthy people and a strong economy; and engaging new partners and participants in the process.
- *Process Timeline:* September/October 2020 are months of engagement: draft outline and land strategy components posted to www.michigan.gov/publiclands, virtual public meetings, regional facilitated stakeholder sessions, presentations at identified council and board meetings. November/December 2020-feedback and input incorporated and draft 2021 land strategy update developed. Comments are being accepted on the components that are posted now until October 31. In January/February 2021, the draft updated land strategy will be posted to www.michigan.gov/publiclands, final public and stakeholder input/review sessions will be held, and the last input will be incorporated into the final land strategy draft. In March/April 2021, final internal reviews will be conducted, and the land strategy update will be finalized. By May 1, the updated land strategy will be provided to relevant legislative committees and then by July 1, the updated land strategy and reports will be formally submitted to the legislature for their review.
- *Engagement Efforts:* The team has focused on public and stakeholder engagement throughout the process with email notifications, press releases, social media, a dedicated website (www.michigan.gov/publiclands) and email address (DNR-LandStrategy@michigan.gov), and facilitating sessions, virtual meetings and presentations to receive comments and feedback, which will be accepted through October 31. This

deadline is for comments that may be incorporated into the draft which will be prepared in November and December.

- **Public Input:** An interactive map was created to encourage public participation asking people to “drop a tree” on the public lands they valued most. They were then asked to take a brief, 3-question survey to share why public lands matter to them. It was very non-scientific and used more as an engagement tool to get people interested in the project and in public lands. 718 people participated and it showed some good results. Three charts were shown listing results of the 3 questions. Access for recreational opportunities was the winner in what was valued most about public lands. Over 86% of respondents indicated Michigan’s public lands are extremely important to their quality of life and recreational activities. When asked what limitation prevented them from enjoying public land to the fullest extent possible, just over 40% (the highest answer) stated nothing limited them. This informal survey provided good insight for the update. **Ms. Wieber** encouraged Council members to go to the website and review what is posted and to provide public comment and feedback before October 31.
- **Questions:** **Ms. Wieber** opened the floor for Council questions.
 - **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked if enhancing wildlife habitat is taken into account during the review process. He also thought the 14% response in valuing public lands to promote management of timber, wildlife and fisheries habitat is quite low. **Ms. Wieber** stated the survey was very non-scientific and used more as an engagement tool. She urged everyone to look at some of the draft components of the strategy on information included to protecting natural resources. Also, she stated that because division strategic plans are more tactical and specific to wildlife habitat, they didn’t want to focus much on work that was already being done. Those divisions participate in the process as well.
 - **Mr. Wright** asked if the DNR makes PILT payments similar to the Forest Service for public lands. **Ms. Wieber** explained the swamp tax which the state pays on tax reverted lands and ad valorem taxes paid for purchased lands. **Mr. Wright** also asked if the state owns a fair amount of public land where the landowner owns the surface and the state owns the mineral rights. **Ms. Wieber** stated yes, indicating the state currently owns more mineral rights than surface rights. She further explained and added that property owners can apply to purchase mineral rights.
 - **Mr. Augustyn** asked if the informal survey/interactive app was by invitation only and over a certain period. **Ms. Wieber** indicated it was advertised through a press release, the website, and with a massive email to over 400 stakeholders the end of June and it ran through August. **Mr. Augustyn** stated he wanted to echo what Vice Chair Gorniak mentioned in keeping whitetail areas or deer wintering complexes at the front and center of the DNR during something like the land strategy update. **Ms. Wieber** stated it is a constant focus of the DNR and is routinely brought up. She indicated in the draft components, the first strategy is to sustainably manage and protect fish and wildlife habitat and exemplary natural communities and the first measurable objective under that is to use divisional assessment management strategic plans to guide and prioritize habitat projects, reinforcing the efforts that are already underway. **Mr. Augustyn** asked if a certain percentage of land acquired comes from the Natural Resources Trust Fund. **Ms. Wieber** stated yes, with those lands falling under the purchased category. She stated she didn’t have that figure with her; **Ms. Haughey** indicated she can look it up and provide it to Mr. Augustyn. **Ms. Frawley** added in regards to the deer wintering

complexes, there is a Wildlife Division acquisition strategy and those areas are very high on the priority list.

- **Ms. Haughey and Vice Chair Gorniak** thanked Ms. Wieber and Ms. Frawley for the presentation.

2. *Status of White Nose Syndrome (WNS) in the UP:* **Mr. DePue** introduced himself and provided the following update/presentation on bats and White Nose Syndrome.

- *What is WNS:* WNS (*Pseudogymnoascus destructans*) is a fungus that causes energy depletion (by eating away at a bat's wing membrane and organs) and impacts a whole suite of cave bat species such as little brown, northern long-eared, tri-colored and big brown bats. First discovered in dead bats in the winter of 2006 in New York. The name WNS comes from a white substance on the bat's nose and wings. Bats typically get their last meals around October to last them through the end of March or April. They hibernate in mines in Michigan because it's cold and damp. Cold temperatures suppress their physiology and they can go long periods without food. With WNS, however, they get irritated and come out of hibernation frequently, which ramps up their energy so that by January/February, they run out of fat stores.
- *Impact of WNS:* 90-100% mortality when WNS infects a hibernation site. WNS is the cause of northern long-eared bat (NLEB), little brown bat and tri-colored bat declines, US Fish & Wildlife Service has listed the NLEB as a threatened species. These are all winter hibernating bats in Michigan. The little brown bat is the most abundant bat in North America.
- *WNS in Michigan:* Michigan is in its 7th year of infection. It took from the discovery in 2006 in New York to it being discovered in Michigan in 2014. A map was shown of all the counties with WNS in Michigan. The disease has spread throughout all of North America. All hibernacula have presence of WNS, samples are not even sent to labs anymore. Bats provide farmers \$3.7 billion of pest control services annually, which comes out to \$74 per farm acre here in Michigan. The effects on the timber industry as well as the impact of disease carrying insects not being consumed/removed by bats have not been quantified. The last estimate of the bats killed by the disease is around 9 million.
- *WNS Impacts in Michigan:* 34 hibernacula were surveyed in 2019/2020 and survey data indicates an 89% decline of the sites surveyed post-WNS infection. Colder hibernacula continue to have a higher survival rate so there has been some decline in Michigan's abandoned mines.
- *Michigan DNR Combating WNS:* Statewide bat monitoring (disease, acoustic) was explained and how protection of critical hibernacula is of utmost importance (pictures shown). WNS treatment trials are conducted in collaboration with universities. Outreach/education, like this presentation at a Council meeting, is provided frequently. The Bat Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) is also a program Michigan is involved in.
- *Hibernacula Climate Manipulation:* An effort is taking place to conduct trials to reduce internal temperatures of an abandoned mine to 36-38 degrees since there tends to be higher survival rates in colder temperatures. Staff worked with a mine ventilation class at MTU to set up a system to near the Porkies to see it could have an effect.
- *Outreach/Education:* Programs include the Michigan Bat Festival and educational programs for teachers, for example.
- *Lake States HCP:* The Bat Habitat Conservation Plan includes Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota with Michigan being the lead state. It is a plan that needs to be approved by the

US Fish Wildlife Service and provides states some protection from litigation so that forestry management practices can continue while providing conservation for federally listed bat species. All the chapters of the document have been drafted, comments were sought from stakeholders and now those comments are being reviewed for incorporation into the document. It is hoped that by early 2021, a draft of the plan will be submitted to USFWS and by the summer of 2021, it will be offered for public comment by the USFWS.

▪ *Questions:*

- **Mr. Wright** asked if the DNR or another agency has an abandoned mine program and if there is a process to closing/protecting a mine site. **Mr. DePue** stated there are several facets to this including mineral and land ownership as well as involvement from county mine inspectors and local elected officials in working with a mine site.
- **Mr. Augustyn** asked if a certain species of bats, perhaps in the eastern US, are developing an immunity to the fungus. **Mr. DePue** stated it is being investigated on the reasonings for the slight increase in bat populations where it had severely declined in the eastern US. It is not known why, but it is being looked at. **Mr. Augustyn** also asked about the mines that are in operation or those that people tend to get into despite the gates. **Mr. DePue** stated commercial operators are still able to function, which is mostly in the summer when bats aren't there. As for gates, people still tend to find ways to get in and they deal with that on a case-by-case basis.
- **Mr. Noah Yacks** from the audience asked if there is still a negative perception towards bats or has the education and outreach improved the perception. **Mr. DePue** stated WNS has brought attention to the importance of bats ecologically and people are surprisingly less skeptical and have more interest in learning about them.
- **Mr. Johnson** asked about the HCP in relation to the 4D lawsuit. **Mr. DePue** stated he isn't involved in the drafting of the HCP and explained what the HCP is trying to accomplish. He stated it is being written to allow individual private and commercial landowners along with timber companies to participate in the program and follow the criteria.

3. *Wildlife Division Updates:* **Mr. Jentoft** provided updates on the following topics:

- *Hunting Season Projections:* A brief background of information used to help with forecasts was provided. The buck harvest has rebounded from a 20+ year low of approximately 17,000 bucks in 2015. From the 2017 to 2019 seasons, the annual buck harvest estimate for the UP was back up to between 26,000 to 30,000. Low harvest trends generally follow winter severity with a lower harvest following harsher winters. Recent winters have been average or a little harsher than average but appeared to be limiting population growth rather than necessarily causing a deep decline. Few mortalities were reported this past spring. Although spring surveys were cancelled this year, this spring and summer provided a decent growing season for fawns. Across the UP, we're anticipating observations to be similar to 2019. It will vary by area, such as the northern or snowbelt areas will have more impact. Reports have been varied depending on area, with some not seeing much and others seeing decent numbers. Generally, staff are anticipating a similar season to last year. There have been some new regulation changes this season as well. Antlerless deer can be taken during archery season with a deer license or a deer combination license with both the regular or restricted tag. There are six western UP DMU's that are closed to "doe with a bow". Youth (mentored and junior) hunters and apprentice license holders are exempt

from antler point restrictions for all DMU's in all seasons and under all licenses. There were a number of other changes, but most of them pertained to the lower peninsula.

- **Check Station Details:** Check station information, such as location and hours of operation, is available and current on the DNR website: www.michigan.gov/deercheck. There is a reduction in deer check station availability due to the pandemic. Many of the UP stations will be open on November 15-18. Only the Escanaba and Norway offices will have additional dates and hours. Drop boxes will also be available November 2 through December 4 at the Escanaba, Norway and Stephenson DNR offices, as well as two additional areas in the core CWD location. A successful deer hunter patch will only be available for hunters who present their deer or deer head during those check station times (Nov 15-18). The public is encouraged to check the website before heading to any check station for current information. **Mr. Cox** asked if the Council might suggest that licensing vendors be trained in checking deer due to the limited options not allowing many hunters easy access to get their deer checked. **Mr. Jentoft** said he appreciated the comment and stated in consideration of many recent changes and staffing capacity issues, he would suggest waiting on that request. He noted it is fortunate that staff can offer what limited options are available this year in light of the pandemic. He continued with an update on CWD surveillance testing for this season, directing those interested to the website: www.michigan.gov/cwd for more information. Surveillance is being refined this year. Hunters harvesting a deer the UP core CWD area are encouraged to bring their deer to a check station or submit a head to a drop box for testing (available only from Nov 2-Dec 4 in certain locations). Hunters harvesting a deer in Dickinson County may bring their deer to a check station for testing from Nov 15-18 only. For all other areas, hunters who wish to have their deer tested can contact a private lab for the service (instructions on the CWD website). There will be no samples taken in the eastern UP.
- **Wolf Study:** The wolf population has remained relatively stable over the past several years. The most recent survey was completed this past winter and the estimates derived from that survey indicate there was a minimum of 695 wolves distributed amongst 143 packs across the UP. Prior to the winter of 2007, the DNR attempted to count wolves throughout the entire UP. However, as the wolf population increased, it became more difficult and time consuming to separate adjacent packs. As a result, a sampling scheme was developed and evaluated to reduce the search area and allow more time to accurately count wolves in adjacent territories. This approach provides a geographic stratification to produce an unbiased estimate of total wolf abundance in the UP. Since 2012, the minimum winter wolf population survey has been conducted every other winter. **Vice Chair Gorniak** indicated he's been critical because he hears from biologists that there aren't that many wolves in the eastern UP. However, he disagrees as he sees them all the time and he appreciates seeing the map (on screen) that shows a lot of the eastern UP being surveyed. He believes wolf mortality on deer is a big problem in the eastern UP. **Mr. Jentoft** stated that some areas of the eastern UP tends to have a lower density of wolves due to fairly open land vs. forest. The eastern UP also tends to have a lower density overall than the western UP because wolves migrated in along the border from Wisconsin and tend not to travel as far as the eastern UP. He stated he's not indicating there are no wolves, but rather there are areas where the habitat is not as favorable for them. **Vice Chair Gorniak** added he feels the deer herd has not come back in the eastern UP due to the number of wolves present on the landscape. Discussion ensued between **Mr. Jentoft** and **Vice Chair Gorniak** regarding winter severity.

- *Deer Movement Study Update:* The study, in partnership with the researchers at the University of New York's Campfire Program and wildlife conservation, has been taking place in the western UP to study the migratory behavior of deer, particularly with wintering complexes. The study is winding down; however, statistics on the results of the study are still available online (search for UP deer movement study). Deer were not collared this past winter although there is still information being gathered. Winter mortality for adult deer during 2020 was similar to 2019 and less than 2018. Average winter home ranges were similar across years and there have been limited past deer movement from some wintering complexes into Wisconsin. It is unclear at this time if the study would be conducted in the eastern UP. It was started in the western UP initially due to CWD concerns. **Mr. Augustyn** asked if the DNR would consider re-establishing DMU boundaries and what level of management would determine that, stating there is a huge discrepancy between the eastern UP and western UP. **Mr. Jentoft** stated he is unable to answer that question, noting the request would begin at the supervisory level. He mentioned creating smaller DMUs and subdividing deer wintering complexes would need to be considered.

4. *Additional Agenda Items Added by Council:* There were no additional items brought forth.

Subcommittee Reports

1. *Fisheries Subcommittee Report:* **Vice Chair Gorniak** stated he does not have any additional information on the cormorant issue at this time. He also spoke about the recent planting of 7,000 fall walleyes by the Bay de Noc Great Lake Sport Fisherman Club.
2. *Policy Impact Subcommittee Report:* **Mr. Hass** reported the subcommittee reviewed three House bills 4567, 4568 and 4569 regarding commercial fishing regulations and initially there was some disagreement with the bills but after clarifications by the DNR that legislation from years ago gave the Director the power to establish applicable standards and regulations governing commercial fisheries, it is the recommendation of the subcommittee that these bills be supported by the Council. He noted these House bills have been several years in the works between the DNR, commercial fisheries and interested parties. He briefly reviewed 12 points on the bills he prepared for the Council (on screen). **Mr. Augustyn** asked if the subcommittee knew how many commercial fishermen were in Michigan, stating there are 13, and asked if the subcommittee looked at the species that could be harvested by commercial fishing operations. **Mr. Hass** stated the subcommittee only looked at it to the extent of what was in, if at all, the various bills that were proposed and felt the one provision they had an issue with should not stop the otherwise good things that were in these bills. He noted the intent of these three bills were not to regulate the number of commercial fishers in the state. **Ms. Haughey** added according to the website there are 50 state issued commercial fishing licenses; **Mr. Augustyn** disagreed.

Mr. Dan McNamee from Senator McBroom's office provided a brief update on the status of these bills which are now in the Senate Natural Resources Committee as they were passed by the House. Senator McBroom, who leads the Natural Resources Committee, held hearings over the summer and proceeded to hold workgroup meetings on the bills with all interested stakeholders, the DNR, commercial fishermen and in the very near future, a workgroup report will be released clarifying the findings on some contentious portions of the bills. They feel that the two industries (recreational and commercial) can co-exist. To answer Mr. Augustyn, **Mr.**

McNamee stated there are 51 commercial fishing licenses in the state but currently, only 16 commercial fishermen reported a harvest in 2019 with 13 fishermen making a primary income and living off commercial fishing, noting the discrepancy previously mentioned. **Mr. Augustyn** stated these bills are tie barred, meaning either all three bills pass or all three don't. He addressed Vice Chair Gorniak stating he will oppose the resolution as he feels it's premature for the Council to support this legislation when the Senate Natural Resources Committee hasn't finished their review. **Vice Chair Gorniak** stated this is why the Council is having the discussion. **Mr. Hass** stated the role of the subcommittee was to review the bills and further elaborated on the subcommittee's evaluation which was to only address the current status of the House bills as they existed at the time of review. **Mr. Augustyn** stated his point was why support bills that may change. **Vice Chair Gorniak** stated the subcommittee is only asking for support of the House bill; **Mr. Hass** agreed. **Mr. Dave Johnson** from the audience stated UPSA supports the bills and the primary reason, after much discussion amongst the UPSA's fisheries committees and fish biologists, is that game fish remain game fish and they're not available for commercial catch. **Mr. Augustyn** stated his additional concern with access to certain fish species. **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked for further input from Mr. McNamee. **Mr. McNamee** provided an overview of the areas that Senator McBroom has issues with and agreed the bills are very complex. He reviewed the groups involved in the workgroup hearings and indicated there will be another Senate Natural Resources Committee meeting to continue to discuss the issues. He noted it is moving in a productive direction and is looking forward to releasing the workgroup report.

Vice Chair Gorniak determined the Council will consider the resolution presented and motioned to approve the resolution as presented; Mr. Garavaglia supported the motion. A vote was conducted by an online Zoom poll visible to all in attendance. Results: Yes-8, No-3. Absent: See Page 1. Motion carried by majority.

Next Meeting

1. **Next EUPCAC Meeting:** **Vice Chair Gorniak** indicated the next regular meeting of the EUPCAC will be on Wednesday, December 16th at 6:00pm virtually.
2. **Items for Next Meeting Agenda:** **Vice Chair Gorniak** 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 to place on the next agenda, please email them to Chair Buckingham, Ms. Haughey or Ms. Dahlstrom.

Public Comments

Vice Chair Gorniak opened the floor for additional public comments.

1. **Mr. Dave Johnson of UPSA & WUPCAC** thanked the Council for letting him attend as it has been a fun time to sit and listen. **Vice Chair Gorniak** thanked him for attending.

Closing Comments from the Council

Vice Chair Gorniak opened the floor for closing comments from the Council.

1. **Mr. Augustyn** mentioned the Council should be aware of the proposed changes to the Natural Resources Trust Fund that is included on the ballot for election day. He suggested those interested should review the changes and explained a few of them. He also stated at the last Council meeting he called out Commissioner Richardson regarding his request to open only

certain western DMUs to antlerless hunting, which the NRC accommodated against the wishes of a lot of groups and the wishes of the DNR biologists from what he has been told. He feels there's no scientific management being applied in changing just a few DMUs at the commissioners' requests.

Adjourn

There being no further business, **Vice Chair Gorniak** thanked everyone for attending, wished all a good hunting season and adjourned the meeting at 8:41pm Eastern.

Approved 12/16/2020