

Upper Peninsula Habitat Workgroup
Meeting Minutes
February 3, 2022
Marquette Township Community Center – Marquette

Attendees: In person voting members included: Dave Johnson (Upper Peninsula Sportsmen Alliance), Sara Kelso (Marquette County Conservation District), Amber Oja (Lyme Great Lakes Timberlands), Stacy Welling Haughey (Michigan DNR), Dave Nyberg (NRC Commissioner), Bill Scullon (Michigan DNR), Tom Seablom (Michigan DNR), Jim Hammill (Safari Club International), and George Lindquist (Michigan United Conservation Clubs). In person guest attendees included: Bob Doepker, Michael Paling (American Bird Conservancy), Lowell Larson, Kristi Dahlstrom (Michigan DNR), and Sarah Janda (Michigan DNR)

Virtual voting members included: Dave Anthony (NRC Commissioner), Bernie Hubbard (Michigan Timbermen Association), Paul Thompson (Hiawatha National Forest), and Pam Nankervis (Ottawa National Forest). Virtual guest attendees included: Al Ettenhoffer, Kathleen Henry (Superior Watershed Partnership), Jerry Jordan (Hiawatha National Forest), Jake Walcisak (Sustainable Resources Institute), Gary Willis (Michigan DNR), and Kari Divine (Sustainable Resources Institute). Jim Hammill welcomed the group. He said it is the group's first meeting since last September and it is an important one as it tells us what we've done and where the group is going.

Review/Approval of Minutes: There was a motion by George Lindquist, supported by Dave Johnson, to accept the minutes as presented. Motion carried.

Personnel Changes/Updates: Jim Hammill shared as it was indicated earlier that as of September, JR Richardson is no longer on the NRC Commission. With regards to grant writing assistance, Don Peterson who was an employee of Sustainable Resources Institute (SRI) passed away. Stu Boren is not with us today as he is home recovering from hip replacement surgery.

Members Comments: Commissioner Nyberg asked whether the goals of the DNR timber advisory committee, which some UPHWG members are a part of, interface with the work group and whether in the absence of Commissioner Richardson the two groups can work together on accomplishing mutual objectives. Tom Seablom said the original impetus was to involve the private landowners as they were the tie in for the group. Jim Hammill asked whether it would make sense for the work group to talk in front of the timber advisory council and Nyberg said it would be good for him, Hammill, and Commissioner Anthony to present an overview of the work group and how it interfaces with the goals of the timber advisory committee.

Hammill said postcards were sent out via the DNR camp survey. As a result, 21 additional landowners reached out for assistance. Currently, there is approximately 60 landowners that require follow up. Hammill provided a list of landowners which spans the distance of Drummond Island to Ironwood. As small projects can be too costly to get involved in, the goal is to implement larger scale projects that are 40-80 acres in size.

UP Habitat Workgroup Mission Revisited: Hammill said the mission is something the group went over at the last meeting. The background of the committee can be found at the bottom of the agenda as it is a good reminder to the group's purpose.

Annual Review of Performance: It was agreed the purpose of an annual review would be to make sure the group is in alignment with the requirements of the memorandum of understanding (MOU). Dave Johnson said he would like to see before and after pictures or go to one of the work sites and see it explained and how the goals have been met. Bill Scullon said the current MOU expired last year and was several years old. Hammill suggested the group reestablish its relationship with the MOU and possibly have a meeting where we can discuss our accomplishments and highlight one of the project areas. Bob Doepker said it's important to revisit project sites to see if what we said we're going to do was accomplished and that it'll take up to three years for it to be established.

Grant Status 2018-2019 and 2021: Kari Divine provided work group members with a grant status update. She spoke about the USDA Forest Service landscape scale restoration grant and how it provides a good education and outreach component. The Michigan DNR Wildlife Habitat grant is also accepting applications with the deadline being sooner than normal. Jim Hammill stressed the importance of bigger projects as it means lower administrative costs. Pam Nankervis, who later joined the meeting via Zoom, said the landscape scale restoration grant is beneficial as it improves ruffed grouse habitat, targets hemlock release, and provides connectivity between deer yards. She said the Ottawa National Forest is open to working with landowners who surround the project area.

2022 Application Deadline: As stated earlier, Jim said the application deadline for the Michigan DNR Wildlife Habitat grant is March 15, 2022.

Superior Watershed Partnership Presentation: Kathleen Henry, Special Events Coordinator with the Superior Watershed Partnership (SWP) joined via Zoom and introduced the SWP and its goals, objectives, and outreach methods. The purpose of her joining was to talk about the Great Lakes Climate Core (GLCC). Jim Hammill said one of the areas he feels the two groups can work cooperatively is in tree reforestation. Henry said that coordination of tree planting crews and site monitoring is a possible partnership. Hammill asked about drone documentation and said it could be useful when judging thermal cover. Sara Kelso said there are also tree planting opportunities through the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Conservation Districts. Pam said they utilize the GLCC every year for various projects on the landscape and she highly recommends them. Jim concluded by thanking Kathleen for joining the meeting and expressing how the group should take advantage of these coordinated efforts.

2021 Deer Season Status Report: Unofficially, hunter visits at check stations were up about 10-12% but down in the core CWD area. It is speculated that a shift in public attitude could be a contributing factor. With respect to CWD, a continued effort to test approximately 1,400 more deer in the core area continues. Dave Johnson speculated the reason public attitude has shifted is because baiting was taken away and hasn't been given back to hunters after three years. The idea of getting the CWD task force group back together again was mentioned.

Regulation Changes for 2022: An official update was not provided as regulation changes are still being finalized.

Winter Conditions: Bill Scullon reported the 2021-2022 winter conditions are now reported through a digitized system that is updated live. On average, there is 12 inches of snow across the entire UP, with more in some of the snow belt regions. The concern for deer survival grows upon hitting 100 days combined with cold temperatures.

Next Meeting Date: The next meeting date of the UP Habitat Workgroup is Tuesday, May 10, 2022, at the Marquette Township Community Center.

There was a motion by Dave Johnson, supported by George Lindquist, to adjourn the meeting. Motion carried.

Upper Peninsula Habitat Workgroup Background:

The Upper Peninsula (UP) experiences high snowfall that requires deer to seek conifer shelter to survive typical winters. Deer Winter Range (DWR) comprises landscapes in which forested stands are present in sufficient quantity, quality, and spatial arrangement to provide food and shelter to mitigate the effects of winter weather conditions and are occupied by deer in winter. The workgroup, comprised of natural resource professionals, private landowners, and sportsmen's groups, and was formed in partnership with Safari Club International, is focused on improving and conserving this critical UP winter deer habitat.

The UP Habitat Workgroup has developed detailed deer winter range habitat strategies, including management plans for individual deer wintering complexes.