

**Upper Peninsula Habitat Workgroup
Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, January 17, 2024
Marquette Township Community Center, 1000 Commerce Drive
Marquette MI**

Welcome

Jim Hammill welcomed all those attending virtually and in person. He said Commissioners David Nyberg and David Anthony are present and he appreciates them being at the meeting.

Brief Introductions

Introductions were shared around the table and included: Misa Cady, Marquette County Conservation District/Natural Resources Conservation Service/American Bird Conservancy; Clark Cedarburg, Lyme Great Lakes Timberlands; Stu Boren, Safari Club International Foundation; Bill Scullon, Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), Wildlife Division; David Anthony, MDNR, NRC Commissioner; David Nyberg, MDNR NRC Commissioner; Jim Hammill, Safari Club International; Dave Johnson, Upper Peninsula Sportsmen Alliance; George Lindquist, UP Whitetails of Marquette County/Michigan United Conservation Club; Jason Caron, MDNR, Forest Resources Division; Tom Seablom, MDNR, Forest Resources Division; Scott Lakosky, MDNR, Forest Resources Division; Al Ettenhoffer, UP Whitetails Association; Stacy Welling Haughey, MDNR, Executive Division; Attending virtually included: Eric Stier, American Forest Management; Dave Cozad, MDNR, NRC Commissioner; Dave Lemmien, MDNR, Wildlife Division; Todd Johnson, National Deer Association; Rick Ligman, retired; Kari Divine, Sustainable Resources Institute; John Pepin, MDNR, Marketing and Outreach Division, Sara Thompson, MDNR, Wildlife Division; Robin Clark, MDNR, NRC Commissioner; Chad Stewart, MDNR, Wildlife Division; Gary Willis, MDNR, Forest Resources Division, Kristi Dahlstrom, MDNR, Executive Division, Amber Marshal, Lyme Great Lakes Timberlands; and Jerry Jordan, Hiawatha National Forest.

Deer Management Initiative (DMI)

Before leaving for another meeting, Chad Stewart was introduced by Commissioner Anthony who said Michigan faces significant challenges regarding deer management. The NRC Commission has authority over the regulation of the take of game and sportfish but has no say in its management so it's important to have a good working relationship with the Department. In his observation, there are way too many deer downstate while UP deer face severe winter swings. The hope is to put together a process where deer management can be reevaluated using NRC regulatory and DNR management techniques to deal with challenges in a more comprehensive fashion.

Chad Stewart talked about the DMI process. There will be a press release going out soon soliciting members via an application process. There will be two separate groups, one in the Upper Peninsula and one in the Lower Peninsula as each group has its own set of challenges. There will be 20 individuals in each group. Members will come from groups we have relationships with but is also open to unaffiliated members who can provide a unique perspective. The time frame to finalize the groups is early February. A subgroup will be developed that will work with a MSU soil scientist to develop a questionnaire on deer management. The plan is to have an in-person meeting at the end of February or early March with draft recommendations made to the NRC in June or July.

Upper Peninsula Habitat Workgroup Charge

Following the DMI introduction and comments, Stacy Haughey led by sharing she is running a power point presentation locally while Kristi is operating the Zoom portion of the meeting remotely. There will be a break at noon for lunch which is being provided courtesy donations made at the UP NRC dinner last fall. Stacy took a moment to identify the charge and history of the group. The group's overall charge is habitat enhancement and forest planning. This effort has focused on identifying important deer wintering complexes, their boundaries, and ownerships and the exploration of cooperative conservation and harvest strategies that optimize benefits for both wildlife and timber production on private lands with complex boundaries. She indicated subsequent slides speak to the actual tangible work that's been done through the UPHWG which were shared in a slideshow presentation to the NRC in the fall of 2022.

Habitat Grant Funding

Stacy introduced information about the UP Deer Habitat Improvement Initiative, which is a competitive grant program focused on cooperative projects that enhance deer habitats on private lands in the Upper Peninsula. The DNR has spent nearly \$1.5 million with approximately \$800K in matching funds with 132 projects completed. Bill Scullon said this is the 16th year of the grant. There is \$100K available for Upper Peninsula habitat improvement projects on non-state land in 2024. The request for proposals will go live on January 29 and close on March 18. Successful applicants will be notified Friday, April 5. The projects run the gambit from scarification to tree plantings and wildlife openings. Bill said the whole idea is to do on the ground habitat work that leads to greater partnership opportunities.

After a ten minute break, Jim Hammill led discussion about the future of the work group. He said between the deer management initiative prompted by the NRC, some of the wildlife habitat improvement work, and the large grants and private grants available, now more than ever people are paying attention regarding habitat, deer, and use of this habitat. The question, he said, is whether we can synchronize efforts to make good things happen for all of us.

Deer Winter Range Acquisition

Bill Scullon spoke about the evolution of the deer range improvement project (DRIP) funds, a fund which collects \$1.50 from the sale of every deer hunting license. In 2000, there was a surplus of \$6 million in DRIP funding and there was concern that it would be reallocated. To prevent that from happening, the winter deer habitat acquisition was created and ran until 2011 and, together with Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grants, were able to purchase approximately 14,090 acres of deer wintering complex in the Upper and Northern Lower Peninsulas. At the same time as this funding source, the UP Habitat Work Group was created which some of you are the original members. Change in leadership within the Agency and amongst the Trust Fund board members, shifted the focus of the acquisitions to the Lower Peninsula. There hasn't been a purchase of any large tracts of land since 2011. There was a consensus amongst the group that the upcoming Deer Management Initiative could look at the acquisition of important deer wintering complexes where it allows access to wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

UP Habitat Workgroup Charge:

Deer winter habitat is a critical component of a healthy, sustainable deer herd in the Upper Peninsula. In most cases, deer yard complexes span across multiple ownerships. More than 80% of the existing complexes occur on private and federal land. For this reason, accurate mapping of complex boundaries, the development of cooperative management strategies that span ownerships and communications to the landowners involved are key.

The Upper Peninsula Habitat Work Group membership comprised of DNR wildlife and forestry employees, federal forest managers, members of the Natural Resources Commissions, and wildlife and forestry interests.

The group's overall charge is habitat enhancement and forest planning. This effort has focused on identifying important deer wintering complexes, their boundaries, and ownerships. It has also involved the cooperative conservation and harvest strategies that optimize benefits for both wildlife and timber production on private lands within complex boundaries.