

**Upper Peninsula Habitat Workgroup
Meeting Minutes
September 22, 2021
River Rock Lanes and Banquet Center - Ishpeming**

Attendees: Stacy Welling Haughey, Stu Boren, Commissioner JR Richardson, Kari Divine, Hunter Peterson, Dave Johnson, Matt Watkeys, Sara Kelso, George Lindquist, Bill Scullon, Bernie Hubbard, Deputy Shannon Lott, Jared Duquette, Russ Mason, Pam Nankervis, Paul Thompson, John Pepin, Jim Hammill, Brian Reynolds, Lowell Larson, Jake Walcisak, and Sarah Janda

Brief overview of workgroup creation & history: Commissioner Richardson thanked everyone for coming. The work group was created with the goal of looking at all the deer yard habitats, where they were, and who owned them so the group could provide education on how to maintain or enhance those areas. Invitations were made to the Forest and Wildlife Divisions of the DNR and various state and private land representatives. The group's goal is to be transparent and open. The focus and efforts are to improve the habitat for deer management.

Administrative discussion: Jim Hammill said there were lots of questions that came up from the group in the last six months. To reaffirm, the focus of the work group is to preserve, improve, and manage deer winter range in the UP. Jim said grant opportunities may also exist in the lower peninsula of Michigan. Bill Scullon said should grant work be explored downstate that Sustainable Resources Institute (SRI) reach out to Rex Ainsley, Wildlife Division in the northern lower Michigan to see if there is a congruence in goals. Bill commented that perhaps the best way to describe the work group is as a forum of conversations and opportunity that are not binding but mutual goals of all the groups involved. Deputy Lott said she'd like to see this group serve as a boots on the ground operational group. It was suggested the habitat work group conduct an annual meeting to outline goals and deliverables, primary funders, and completed projects.

Grant administration and new opportunities: Jim introduced Kari Divine of SRI who is responsible for grant administration and exploring new grant opportunities. SRI works more on the operational side and assists with getting work done on the ground with respect to UPHWG goals. Kari said there was 70 acres worth of habitat projects that just wrapped up in Mackinac, Ontonagon, and Baraga counties due to funding from the 2018-20 MDNR wildlife habitat grant. SRI was also awarded a 2019-21 MDNR wildlife habitat grant to conduct 12 projects on 180 acres across the UP. Kari said SRI was also awarded a 2021-23 MDNR wildlife habitat grant earlier this month for \$31,000 that will go towards improving 643 acres of winter deer range. Hunter Peterson of SRI shared pictures of the 2018 completed projects which included forest openings, expansions of openings, forestry mulching to promote herbaceous forage, opening restoration, and site prep for seeding. Stu said there are some projects occurring this week in the Delta County area which is all work that can be tracked which gives more opportunity when applying for more grants. Stu concluded by saying it is important that we continue to reach out to the private forest community.

Deer winter complex pilot project update: Deputy Lott provided an update on the deer winter complex pilot project, an effort to bridge the gap with what foresters and biologists are seeing on the ground. A pilot project is being conducted on both ends of the UP with a ten year outlook on cedar sustainability. The goal of the project is to diversify the age class distribution. The narratives of these plans have been created with anticipation of having the data by November and the plans finalized in February. Bill Scullon and Tom Seablom have been charged to get the work done with the appropriate staff.

Next meeting date: The work group will try to reconvene in early December.

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.