

**UP Habitat Work Group  
Meeting Minutes  
Tuesday, September 8, 2020  
Zoom Conference Call**

**Attendees:** Jim Hammill, Commissioner Louise Klarr, Tony Demboski, Commissioner JR Richardson, Tom Seablom, Bernie Hubbard, Bill Scullon, David Johnson, Bob Doepker, Commissioner David Nyberg, Eric Stier, Gary Willis, George Lindquist, Jake Walcisak, Jerry Jordan, John Pepin, Matt Watkeys, Stacy Welling Haughey, Stu Boren, Kari Divine, Tim Baker, and Warren Suchovsky

**Welcome/Introductions:** Jim Hammill began by welcoming everyone who was participating on the meeting via Zoom. He indicated this is our first time meeting since December and wanted to give each commissioner and Stacy an opportunity to make some comments. Commissioner Richardson started by saying he would like new items to be added to the bottom of the agenda. Richardson thanked everyone and said he appreciates everyone getting on the call, especially the other commissioners. He went to say how much the workgroup has meant to us in the UP. It has done some very wonderful things and put the group in a position to get some strong funding and prove we could put the boots on the ground and make a difference. And without this group that simply would not have happened. He concluded his comments by thanking the group. Commissioner Nyberg led by thanking everyone for the opportunity to be here. He said with JR recently terming off and the chair also terming off it left a leadership void on several of the committees of the Commission. Six months later, there is now a full commission and they are delighted that JR has been appointed again and that he is now back on the Commission. He went on to say we now have a new NRC Chair, Carol Rose, who was appointed by Governor Whitmer last week. He concluded by commending the partnerships amongst all the stakeholders and helping them make decisions informed by science. Commissioner Klarr addressed the group and said she attended the December meeting which was a very well run meeting with lots of in depth habitat work discussion. She said she was pleased SCI received money for the workgroup and how it looks at the big picture of the importance of quality habitat as well as the dynamics of deer migration in the UP and she would like to learn more about that. Stacy Welling-Haughey welcomed participants and shared that Deputy PIO John Pepin joined the meeting to get information for a press released urged by Jim and Commissioner Richardson. She concluded her remarks by saying good things are happening.

**Personnel/Ownership changes:** Jim listed the turnover in personnel that has occurred in the last few months. First, JR's position on the Commission termed last fall but now he is back on. Russ Mason is no longer the Chief for Wildlife Division. Deb Begalle is no longer Chief for Forest Resources Division. Dennis Nezich retired, and he's been replaced by Tom Seablom. And Terry Minzey retired in March. Jeff Joseph who worked for Weyerhaeuser is now retired from UP forest operations but is now working part time on the Wisconsin Lyme holdings in Florence County. Weyerhaeuser is now Lyme Timber Company LP which has a different approach to land management. Jim said despite the amount of change occurring, the importance of the mission remains the same.

**Bylaws of the workgroup:** Jim said we are asking for input on the workgroup's bylaws. One of the main things he wants to encourage is broadening the group's approach to include the northern part of the Lower Peninsula. The bylaws, which were sent via email, and any feedback on them can be sent to Jim.

**Name change:** Jim said with respect to the workgroup and any changes to the bylaws, one thing he'd like to suggest is the workgroup's name be changed from a UP focus to calling themselves the Northern

Michigan Wildlife Habitat Group. Reasons why to call themselves that is because the group's critical seed money comes to the workgroup every year comes through SCI and SCI Foundation chapters across the state of Michigan. George Lindquist asked whether the workgroup would limit itself to twelve members and whether we would want representation from northern lower Michigan too. Commissioner Nyberg said he is pleased to advocate for UPHWG but he'd like to know whether the group is an official committee of the Commission or as a function of the Commission. It was indicated by Stacy that with the new Chair there is going to be some broader conversation about committees.

**Status of ongoing efforts:** Jim said he is hearing continued broad support of the workgroup's efforts and thinks there is a lot of hope that what they are doing is going to turn out to be a positive thing not only for deer but for forest management in the Upper Peninsula in general. The workgroup has received two large grants through DNR's Wildlife Division which, because of the COVID shutdown, has not allowed for a lot of on the ground progress yet. A more effective public outreach campaign would be beneficial so Jim and JR are hoping PIO Officer John Pepin could help with suggestions.

**Un-pausing of grants:** Kari Divine said they lost a field season and were unable to do some of the groundwork because the State required no grant funds be spent from March until just recent. She worked with the DNR staff to extend the 2018 for one year which allows for the wrapping up of two remaining projects under that grant. Work from the second grant fell behind due to COVID and she is hoping much of that will get done in the 2021 field season. Jim asked Kari of the two grants, what is the amount dedicated for on the ground work and she said approximately \$181-184K. Dave Johnson asked whether Kari could get a summary of what the group has done so far and she said she can provide a report to the group similar to what she's done in the past. Bill Scullon said the DNR is preparing for another grant cycle though it all depends on the State budget for the next fiscal year.

**Seed money available:** Jim said one cannot use grant money to develop a grant request so that's why seed money from stakeholder organizations is very important. In the past, Safari Club International Michigan Chapter has supported as well as the Safari Club Foundation, the UP Sportsmen Alliance, U.P. Whitetails, and grants from MDNR's Wildlife and Forest Resources Divisions. Currently, there is \$34K of seed money in the account which helps pay for fieldwork, project development, and all the administrative paperwork that goes into putting together a grant request. Commissioner Richardson asked whether any type of thank you has been sent to each stakeholder organization as expressing thanks for that support is important.

**Backlog of landowners to contact:** Jim shared that last November a postcard was sent to several hundred camp owners asking if they would like to have assistance in the management of lands in deer winter range which received a fair amount of response. Stu Boren reiterated that 28 landowners responded to the postcard resulting in 4500 acres of potential land to use for deer winter range management. Efforts to reach out to camp owners have been put on hold until after this year's deer hunting season. Discussion continued about the merit of bundling/grouping of smaller projects into fewer larger projects for better per acre cost effectiveness and administrative efficiencies.

**SUP habitat guidelines:** Jim reminded the group of previous discussion that involved the southern UP habitat, the area which mainly represents two-thirds of Menominee County, and debated the importance of conifers in the southern UP. Bob Doepker spent a lot of time putting together the southern UP guidelines for deer which were ran past the DNR for their support and approval. In the meantime, a resolution also needs to be reached with the forest industry whose management strategies are not advantageous to wildlife. Commissioner Nyberg asked whether the guidelines were presented to

the Commission or to the Department and Jim indicated they were reviewed by the Department. Dave Johnson spoke with respect to the increasing amount of cedar that's been harvested by the State over the past ten years and in respect to the harvesting of cedar and how that is important deer range habitat that has been lost either by cover type change or no regeneration at all. Jim agreed and stated that almost half of the entire UP buck harvest comes from that area and while it's an important deer area it's also an important timber harvesting area so it will be important to find a common ground amongst all the different industries and stakeholders.

**2020 Deer Season Outreach:** Jim mentioned the upcoming deer camp survey which gets mailed out in late October or early November. In this mailing the MDNR has agreed to allow the UPHWG include a postcard asking individuals if they would be interested in habitat work. The UPHWG is very appreciative of this and it is a good example of a partnership effort. The language on the card has been updated to clearly identify whom the card is coming from and to where it is being sent. It was agreed by Bill Scullon that he will have David Jentoft reach out to Stu Boren and together they can start working on this year's outreach effort.

**Press Release:** Public Outreach Officer John Pepin will get with Jim, Stu, Kari, and Commissioner Richardson for information to develop a press release.

**Next Meeting Date:** To be determined for December.