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## **UP Habitat Workgroup Meeting**

Tuesday April 12, 2016

Red Rock Lanes and Banquet, Ishpeming

9:30 am – 1:30 pm

Attendees – Jim Hammill, Randy Charles, Warren Suchovsky, Eric Stier, J.R. Richardson, George Lindquist, Jeff Joseph, Tony Demboski, Steve Carson, Matt Watkeys, Don Mankee, Terry Minzey, Jon Spieles, Rick Ligman, Gary Willis, Lowell Larson, Bryan Reynolds, Richard Schwenke, Joe Sommers, Paula Schwenke, Stu Boren, Dale McNamee, Allan Ettenhofer, Jeff Stampfly, and Bill Scullon

### Updates/Input from members

Mr. Watkeys discussed a recent newspaper article regarding DNR wildlife habitat grant awards. Alger County was awarded grants that include work related specifically to DWCs. There were 27 applicants seeking \$300K out of the \$100K available. Mr. Scullon explained the reason why there are more applications this time is due to promotion of this grant and people find this grant easier to complete than other types of DNR wildlife grants. Another reason for the increase is the efforts done by this workgroup to promote winter range management. We have tried other options to have more applications, including grant writing workshops and utilizing NMU students. The drawback of having students write the grants is the grant booklet is produced after the class graduates. With other groups using a consultant to write the grant and factoring in that cost, we are taking dollars away from planting trees. The grant process should be made easier.

Mr. Larson demonstrated an acorn planter ‘The Squirrel’ he designed. With his planter, he can plant 300 nuts per hour at the correct spacing and depth. Mr. Watkeys said the Conservation Districts could purchase the planter and rent to land owners to replace the hard mast that is being lost, especially due to Beech bark disease in Alger County.

Mr. Lindquist presented a UP habitat slide show to MUCC and they devoted \$2K toward Mr. Carson’s salary.

Mr. Charles stated that the workgroup’s efforts are having an impact with the Federal government, in particular the Ottawa NF. Grants were secured for additional DWC projects. There is an agreement with The Nature Conservancy to

plant 400K white pine and riparian area we are planting of hemlock, tamarack, white pine and oak.

Consultants are receiving phone calls from interested landowners in response to the outreach letters sent by Mr. Willis.

Mr. Hammill will be interviewed on a Detroit station on what the workgroup is doing, what are the plans, and where the future lies. Word is getting out and we are seeing the effects of our work.

### DWC Plan Development and Update

Mr. Carson went over the workgroup mission statement, the incorporation of individual DWC plans into the over-arching document. We are about half way through the DWC plan writing process, the WUP plants are completed. The Porkies DWC was interesting and we had to make alterations due to the fact that most of the land is not actively managed. This is the only hemlock based DWC to meet the 50/50 food/shelter ratio. Cusino, Whitefish, and the Garden are the next plans to be drafted. The Garden plan presents a unique challenge in that it has conditional range winter severity and a large amount of agriculture with deer crop damage concerns.

Overview of the eastern DWCs:

- Cedar dominated
- shelter/food ratio > 60% shelter
- Approximately 10% shelter is in spruce/fir either in spruce/fir or mixed along the cedar transitions
- Presents an opportunity to incorporate a larger food component
- May want to alter the lowland conifer and spruce/fir pages in the DWCs to reflect this opportunity

On the DNR Open Data page ([gis/mdnr.opendata.arcgis.com](https://gis/mdnr.opendata.arcgis.com) in the page search type in 'deer') the DWC was added. We can add plan links and names.

Mr. Hammill asked that a subgroup be formed to discuss experimental cuts in lowland conifers with the goals of preserving as much cedar during the harvest and determining if harvesting all the merchantable trees is economically feasible. Members include: Warren Suchovsky, Bernie Hubbard, Stu Warren, Eric Stier, Jeff Joseph, Jeff Stampfly, Bill Scullon, Dave Fehringer from the Forestland Group, Kirt Harmon or Bill Brisson from Alger County White Tails, and the new

faculty member, Matt K. with the Forestry department at MTU, might provide possible research opportunities.

### DNR Wintering Deer Survey Results

The 2016 wintering deer survey revealed over 2K deer observations/signs along 1,100 miles driven. Results are similar to the survey three years ago showing that deer are concentrating in the DWC area. Using this data, we can alter the polygons in some areas. Going forward we can improve the mapping of polygons and ultimately make changes to individual plans as needed.

### Harlow Lake DWC

Mr. Minzey discussed the history and what currently is being discussed in the area. In 1979 Cleveland Cliffs traded 2,800 acres in the Harlow Lake/Little Presque Isle area for 8,500 acres in Palmer. The 'purchased land' area was designated along the shoreline. A recreational plan was created in the 1990's. Mr. Mankee added that in 2011 Forest Management Division was reorganized and forest recreation, State forest campgrounds, ORV, Snowmobile, and pathways were transferred to Parks and Recreation Division. Mr. Minzey went on to say that over time, non-sanctioned trails were developed. A recently proposed effort was put forth to get trails signed and designated. Local DNR staff, Brian Roell – WLD, Tom Seablom – FRD, and Doug Barry – PRD is in the process of writing a plan for a late June public hearing. We are taking into consideration the many different interests including: recreation, forestry, deer winter habitat, and forest certification.

The deer yard is State forest land with four compartments reviewed in different years. Mr. Minzey said we are looking for possible opportunities for stakeholder objectives to be considered before decisions are made at the compartment review level and prescriptive plans are in place.

Mr. Reynolds stated that the objective of this group for the DWC in the area is deer winter habitat. Is there an opportunity to swap the purchased land for purchased land in a different area so we can do habitat work here? Mr. Minzey stated that the purchase land issue is a separate one altogether, requiring Fish and Wildlife involvement.

### Landowner Meetings

During the meeting in Marinesco, one of the questions from the forest industry was – when is enough, enough? Mr. Minzey said there are regional management plans from the Statewide wildlife plan a regional deer operational plan. We are

developing a suite of indices to monitor and figure out where the population is at. Possible ways to index the deer population include: buck kills, deer sighted by hunter by day, fawn-to-doe ratio, adult-to-juvenile coming out in spring ratio, buck-to doe ratio, etc. We could possibly also utilize the camera survey results from the Predator-Prey study Phase II. There is nothing to quantify the browse survey as we tried with the forest certification team to find the right way to measure and interpret the data. We would institute changes if there is a collective movement in the indices, rather than relying on only one index. Multiple indices changing in the same direction would be the trigger point to generate a decision.

### Outreach DWC Landowner Letter

The letters were sent by FRD to Gogebic and Ontonagon County landowners with 20+ acres within 1 mile of a DWC. The letter includes general background information and who to contact along with what the individual landowner can do on their property. We are approaching landowners by county as time and funding allows. We are timing the mailings with DWC plan completions.

Mr. Willis gave a brief overview of the presentation he gave at the Marinesco meeting. Of the 90% of calls he receives people are interested in wildlife: deer, bear, and grouse. This is an opportunity to give landowners information and team them up with a resource professional to develop a management plan for their land. The plans are created by the forest consultant meeting the goals and objectives of the landowner by using sound science. The consultant produces a quality cover type map of the planned practices. In planning for wildlife habitat, the landowner needs to practice proper forest management by planning and laying out timber harvests which accomplishes both silvicultural and wildlife habitat enhancement. By encouraging clear-cuts in the transitional types and selectively harvesting marked hardwoods this type of plan can be successful. The work planned by the forest professional will ensure legacy of stewardship.

One take away from the landowner meeting noted by Mr. Charles was the many positive comments from the attendees. Mr. Scullon said it was a profitable adventure watching this all come together, we are writing the plans with the partners implementing them. We could also incorporate grant information into these meetings as well.

### Winter Range Acquisition Possibilities

Mr. Charles mentioned the Land and Water Conservation funding. These grants are under-utilized by the State of Michigan. Possible reasons, we aren't pursuing these funds and we don't have the same types of political ties as they do in the western states.

Mr. Suchovsky discussed the Forest Legacy Program saying that Michigan is utilizing funds from this grant all across the state. One caveat of the grant is the private land is opened to public access.

### Future Direction of the UPHW

Mr. Hammill acknowledged the \$2K gifted toward Mr. Carson's salary. We need to secure additional silvicultural/white-tailed deer habitat funding. This work needs to happen on the landscape. The efforts of the workgroup are a year or two out from moving forward on its own accord. Mr. Minzey said the DNR recognizes a legacy on this project. The agency is committed to being a partner in this process along with private individuals, industry, and the Federal government – moving together as a uniform group. We should encourage private landowners to enroll in the QF/QA programs.

The success of future landowner meetings will be putting people in touch with the resource professionals.

Where are we going to be next year?

Are we going to walk away in December?

Our goal is to create a self-sustaining mechanism that drives itself so in ten years down the road this process will be going and we can then focus on other issues.

June 3<sup>rd</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> is the SCI foundation meeting. We should schedule our workgroup meeting soon after to discuss what was presented at the SCI meeting.

Next meeting – in June date to be determined.