

## **Deer Winter Complex/UP Habitat Workgroup Meeting**

Tuesday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017

River Rock Lanes and Banquet, Ishpeming

Attendees: J.R. Richardson, Jim Hammill, Tony Demboski, Randy Charles, Stu Boren, Bernie Hubbard, Jeff Joseph, Dennis Nezich, George Lindquist, Bill O'Neill, Terry Minzey, Lowell Larson, Gary Willis, Bob Doepker, Rick Ligman, Bill Scullon, Tim Baker, Jeff Stampfly, Micah Reuber, and Jerry Jordan

At other meetings and in various conversations, Mr. Richardson said the comments received on this Workgroup have been positive. The partnerships made have been well received. This Workgroup is helpful in many other ways in the face of the obvious, people are taking note.

Mr. Hammill has also heard unsolicited from taxidermists people know what this Workgroup is doing and there is an increased awareness to forest management.

People are aware of what we are doing, Mr. Lindquist said, and they are very positive about our impact.

### **Budget**

There is \$28K committed for 2017 from the following: \$10K – DNR Wildlife, \$5K – DNR Forest Resources (both DNR funding is through September 30<sup>th</sup>), MUCC \$2K, SFI \$2K, SFI Northwoods Chapter - \$2K, SFI Lower Peninsula - \$2K, and a private landowner with a large holding in the area donated \$5K. \$3K has been spent to-date with \$25K to be used for the new contractor.

We will begin seeking funding for next year. Our long-term view is to look for an exit strategy – how long do we need to continue? Can we get a grant to fund someone for 5-10 years to review/audit our priority lowland conifer management and the intolerant upland types? This position would be similar to the BMP audits. The person would review what is being accomplished or needs to be completed in the DWCs and report back to the Workgroup. Who would this person work for or report to? Perhaps this is an opportunity to partner with the Conservation Districts or SFI? Mr. Richardson will discuss a possibility with Scott Roberts. There is value in this position to report ground 'truthing' yet not be tied to an entity or other forestry interested organization. Mr. O'Neill discussed the American Forestry Foundation's financial opportunities. This was a trust set up through the Softwood Agreement with Canada. Tom Martin, a DNR employee, is the President. Also, The Young Forest Campaign has similar objectives to ours and Mr. O'Neill will speak with their members about a possibility of funding or seeking a person for our Workgroup.

## Goals of the Workgroup

With Mr. Boren aboard, we are moving from the planning phase to the implementation phase. Mr. Walcisak will be analyzing data with Mr. Doepker and coming up to speed where Mr. Carson was at. Mr. Doepker is working on habitat outside of the DWR.

Mr. Hammill said Goal #2 shows a strong interest in the Northern LP. Mr. Demboski asked if there is a possibility of issuing press releases of the Workgroup's efforts in what we are doing and where we are going. Mr. Richardson agreed and suggests we develop a strong communication plan and a timeline. Mr. Minzey will involve Kelly Carter the Wildlife outreach person. We could also have our Workgroup in the conversations with the Governor's Timber Advisory Panel. Mr. O'Neill will speak with the DNR Marketing division to help tell our story and get our message out. Mr. Ligman said that we should expand our target audience not only to hunters but to everyone as it is 'habitat management' rather than game species management. At a relatively low-cost, local media outlets are very interested in our story. We can encourage people to do things on their own property. According to Mr. O'Neill, FRD is marketing the 'Forestry' story in that doing something in the forest, a number of good things happen for the management of the habitat.

Could MTU be folded into the auditing process? They are researching cedar/hemlock regeneration and forest/wetland regeneration. Through monitoring and research projects they could let us know what worked and needs to be accomplished and use that knowledge to benefit the group. There are many ideas on the table and MTU is waiting for inclusion and funding to assist the Workgroup.

## Deer Population Goals

A deer movement study is being conducted Mr. Minzey said. This is a long-term, nine-year study. The study will begin in the Western UP where 150+ GPS collars will be deployed on deer from prioritized DWC areas. We will study the movements of those animals for three years. After that time, we will shift the study to the Central UP and then subsequently to the Eastern UP. This will tie in with Mr. Richardson's CWD Task Force group to surveil physical connectivity over deer groups over time and space across the landscape. From this data, we may get information to re-draw DWC boundaries or split one into two, depending on the movement of the deer. This will enable us to re-design DMUs into metapopulations. If CWD were to spark, we would mobilize in that area immediately.

Mr. Lindquist moved to make a motion that the UPHW supports this study

Mr. Charles seconded the motion

All the Workgroup was in favor, no one opposed

The motion was carried by Mr. Hammill

Mr. Minzey said the NRC supported a creation of a panel of Nationally recognized CWD experts with the goal of developing a report by year's end. This will provide good scientific which will guide future CWD response related activities. In the

country of Norway, three reindeer tested positive with CWD and the entire herd will be destroyed. They recognize the significance of this disease by why Europe went through with the Mad Cow disease.

Mr. Minzey said the following Antlerless recommendations will be submitted to the NRC in May:

Which units will be open/closed to hunting, no harvest of antlerless without an antlerless tag, and to open two more DMUs 255 and 121 with a limited quota.

Mr. Nezich asked how we balance the number of deer with the habitat and in the DWCs. How do we scientifically merge the data with the hunting numbers? The UP 2006 population goals were not formally adopted, Mr. Minzey said, but generally we have been using them. Today our current population numbers are similar to those in the late 1970's. We need to reexamine our current goals. We cannot directly answer Mr. Nezich's question but we can see forest regeneration is a priority.

Mr. Ligman asked how many warm winters do we need to see an exponential growth in population?

Our methods to analyzing the population do have drawbacks. Mr. Minzey said we thought our pellet surveys were working and it was shown by statisticians that they are not. The SFK Model is also not very accurate. We are analyzing data from the Camera Trap surveys conducted by the Predator-Prey studies. In our upcoming deer movement study, we will pilot and effort to develop deer density estimates using camera trap surveys without bait. If that process is successful, we will be able to develop density estimates using camera traps in the future. For the time being, Mr. Minzey said we should look at the trends and indicators to move forward rather than one survey to capture all the data UP-wide. Mr. Ligman said the DNR needs to know what the population is and needs to come up with something better. The sportsmen have no faith in the DNR's estimate of deer numbers. We need more indices and empirical data. Look to the sportsmen to help fund population studies to find the number of deer in a DWC and how many deer the DWC can hold that would be valuable data if we could get it; deer density based on habitat to have a reasonable expectation of what is out there.

### Goal/Deliverables

There are approximately 800K acres of private non-industrial land in the mid-high on obligate snow zone DWCs and we need to find out where it is and find out which parcels have existing management plans. Mr. Boren will meet with Gary Willis, Ernie Houghton, and the six Conservation Districts. He will also finish the GIS mapping and ensure that Mr. Walcisak is up to speed and know what tools are available. Mr. Boren will work with plan writers to incorporate DWC management guideline language and the 'Young Forest Management' prescription into their plan writing. He will go over a sample of the plans that are written in specific DWCs and review and ground truth them to come up with a report. This report will be brought to the Workgroup.

After the outreach sessions when a plan is written and then a practice is implemented, we are at least 3 - 5 years out from implementation to the point when we can truly assess the success or failure of it. We need to find ways to monitor these plans. The best written plan still needs to be implemented correctly in order to succeed. Without good sale administration there still is potential to fail.

There has been several regeneration studies conducted across the UP. We need to develop a clearing house of all of these studies conducted. Mr. Boren will work with agencies and partners to see where they were and review the results. We could give the data to MTU to review to see if the compiled data is useful to the Workgroup.

Mr. Richardson rhetorically asked what fails us time and time again, we have everything in order? Mr. Hammill said in the past we did not have a group like the UPHW and there was no cooperation from landowners across the board. We need to develop a more aggressive communication plan directed to private landowners. They want to know what they should do on their property to promote wildlife habitat. Mr. Richardson said he is asked why something is successful in one area over another. His reply - is because the successful area worked at it.

Mr. Ligman discussed the DNR's 1990's report of deer numbers showed that deer density over-laid with forestry values increased because the pulpwood market was high. Research the Qunnisec mill their operation had a significant impact on the landscape in the WUP thus on the deer population as well. Also the long-term weather data leading up to 1994 shows less snow than leading up to today. There is also a direct correlation to today as the wood is coming in from farther away.

Out of the 10M acres of land in the UP, Mr. O'Neill broke it down into 5M public and commercial forest and the other 5M in non-industrial ownership. How many of the private non-industrial owners have plans? Less than 10% do, if that many. Outreach to the private non-industrial owners is our biggest bang for the buck. Get those acres managed with a well-executed plan. We also have an opportunity to enhance the success of this Workgroup by cultivating relationships with the consultant foresters.

Mr. Minzey said he will invite Mr. Boren in the discussions in the bi-annual Wildlife/Forest Management meetings.

Mr. Richardson shared that he has a plan for his private 300 acres and could not get the timber work completed. It was not economical for a logger to do such a small job. There should be some coordination with smaller harvests on private land and loggers. Make it worth the effort for the logger and have several landowners accomplish their habitat management goals. The DNR combines access with private landowners to encourage loggers to cut on smaller parcels. The Michigan Timber Association could work with the public in coordination with loggers to have minimum number cords of both pulp and logs to make these types of private timber sales work.

Contact with private landowners was made in all the counties. Mr. Scullon talked about the three outreach meetings in the EUP. Skandia had 87 attendees, Manistique 105, and Kinross 35. About a third had the outreach letter and was there specifically for habitat management. Many discussed their options with the Conservation District foresters and Ernie Houghton talked about the State programs available. On a side note, in the past a landowner sold a parcel to the State. Now the person would like to donate another parcel. This shows how important our work is as a group. People are passionate about wildlife and want to know what they can do to improve the habitat. It was noted that Kinross and Skandia were far away from the DWC in their areas. Most of the people in Manistique were from Escanaba, it seems we missed an opportunity to reach landowners in the DWC. We could perhaps have more meetings in the future. On an up note, we have had over 500 landowners in the room with 1,000 letters sent. There are others who have done things on their own without us knowing. Outreach is definitely the key to the success of this Workgroup's goals.

#### Wildlife Management Concepts on Private Non-industrial Lands

Mr. Willis, John DePue – DNR Wildlife, and Pam Nankervis – USFS had a meeting featuring Black bear habitat. This was to introduce people to the idea of having a plan written to provide habitat on their property. Using a high profile species and a well-known speaker encourages people to attend. Over 150 attended to learn how to increase wildlife on their land by careful implementation through a well-written plan. These meetings mirror the “Forestry through Wildlife” initiative. We should have a boiler-plate plan for consultants who could tailor it toward the individual owner. Since landowners want more information, we should think about having a permanent outreach forum for future meetings.

Is there a way to prepare a piece of land and have people look at what management practices are employed? That is fairly easy for the DNR to do as there are compartment reviews, wildlife projects, and wildlife maintenance.

Perhaps a simple, single page flow-chart could be created of who to contact for what you want to accomplish.

#### Habitat Modelling for Ruffed Grouse

If this model were used, we would see a 60% increase in the population. With our aspen resources, we need to find out what to do and how to schedule tailored cuts. Mr. Hammill is trying to make this model available as an app on the computer. All land managers can use this as an additional tool to manage for Ruffed grouse. With a few modifications it can also be used for Woodcock management as well. Mr. Minzey said this model is the basis for the GEMS management.

Mr. Joseph said this winter, Weyerhaeuser cut 300 ac of 37 year-old aspen stands. With the more modern equipment we can utilize the younger aspen and get 60tons/acre.

Mr. Lindquist said the Predator-Prey study showed that hinge cuttings provides horizontal hiding cover which gives fawns a better chance for survival. Leaving the tops and not driving over them provides a food source. We should also try to get this message out to the consultants to include in the plans.

Mr. Hammill ran into timber consultant Mike Touchinski who said that there is more wood coming off private non-industrial land. He is seeing an increase of timber flow directly related to the efforts of this Workgroup. QFA is benefiting as well.

Mr. O'Neill gave a brief summary of the Good Neighbor Authority timber sales with the USFS. We have over 1,300 acres and another 2K scheduled for next year. This is a great working partnership and we now have a better relationship. This is a successful program as both agencies are doing better on the ground.

FRD is creating a marketing strategy similar to the Wildlife Council, Mr. O'Neill said. Why is forestry important, what is the societal impact of forestry products, why is public land important – through these questions we can elevate peoples understanding. People want to make sound environmental choices; choosing wood over other products is a wise choice from the earth's standpoint. We need to get the word out that cutting trees is not a bad thing.

Mr. O'Neill discussed land acquisitions from the various funds. Lots of parcels are nominated each year and each fund has different goals/objectives. We have to prioritize the parcels we want. The DNR biologists and foresters define critical habitat. What can we do to enhance our nominations? We need a champion to push for property. There are conversations that there is too much public land. How much is too much? The UP is leading these conversations. This Workgroup has to carry the ball, which properties do we want to nominate, which are the highest priority? We need to put in good applications and get some strong support. PILT is mandated. The DNR pays taxes on the property we purchase. The word is out, we cannot buy our way out of this mess – that is why this Workgroup's efforts are even more important against the opposition. The MNTF is capped out; however the DNR still has a big share of the funds. The Graymont deal was completed with both a cash payment and a land trade. It is difficult to purchase land because the DNR, Graymont, and landowner have to agree on the terms. We are in negotiations with Weyerhaeuser and Graymont for three parcels in Marquette County - Craig Lake area, Kewaydin Lake area, and Wetmore Pond.